

Lawn & Landscape

**THE SMALL
BUSINESS ISSUE**

**Setting Up
Systems**

**Financing
Growth**

**Service
Pricing**

**Ray Bradley,
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THE **SMALL BUSINESS** ISSUE

COVER STORY

When Reputation Matters

Ray Bradley isn't interested in being the biggest contractor around, but he wants to be considered one of the best.

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Basic Training

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Been There, Done That

Five successful contractors share their insights and experiences on growing a business and getting ahead in the green industry.

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Editor's Focus

"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have mastered, you will never grow."

— C.R. Lawton

Getting Better & Bigger

A survey we recently conducted indicated that 89 percent of the professional lawn care and landscape companies in the country generate less than \$1 million in annual sales. In fact, about 80 percent of the companies comprising this industry bring in less than \$500,000 in annual revenue.

Those findings shouldn't shock anyone. We all know this is an industry of entrepreneurs and "mom-and-pop" business people.

However, this research should remind everyone of the integral role the smaller companies play in the industry. This group's significance is reinforced to us regularly as readers encourage us to profile smaller contractors and continue writing about issues of importance to the companies working to establish themselves as legitimate businesses.

These conversations resulted in the addition of our Minding Your Business department last year. This month we dedicated an entire magazine to issues small contractors must address in order to succeed — financing growth, setting up systems and structuring the business for efficiency, to name a few.

Also, the coming months bring some of our largest issues of the year, which means more information for you. One way we will take advantage of this opportunity is by seeking out more progressive, successful businesses to profile. We'll continue to present you with a look at some of the larger, well-established companies in the industry because they're the ones who have found solutions to many of the obstacles in a company's growth path. But we'll also introduce you to the green industry's next wave of leaders who are starting to make a name for themselves as well.

At the same time, we're launching a monthly department called Labor Solutions, which is a self-explanatory title if ever there was one. There's clearly no greater challenge for contractors today than hiring and retaining quality labor, so we're going to offer ideas and programs that have proven successful for others in the industry.

These efforts are all part of our commitment to delivering the best magazine to you each month. If you have suggestions relating to these topics or other articles you would like to read, or if you're involved in a business that generated less than \$1 million in average sales last year and would make a good profile subject, please contact me at 800/456-0707, ext. 239 or at bwest@gie.net.

Bob West

Lawn & Landscape

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Market Trends

IN THE NEWS

Syngenta to Phase Out Diazinon

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) won the removal of another pesticide from the lawn and landscape contractor control arsenal as part of its compliance with the Food Quality Protection Act of 1996 (FQPA).

Syngenta Crop Protection, recently created from the merger of Novartis Crop Protection and Astra Zeneca, coordinated its voluntary phase-out of the diazinon insecticide business with the EPA. Under this agreement, diazinon will be banned for indoor use and will be phased out over a four-year period for outdoor lawn and garden applications to allow for a smooth transition from that market. In July 2000, Novartis Crop Protection voluntarily discontinued support of indoor uses for diazinon in an effort to allocate more funds to protect outdoor uses of the product.

Syngenta maintains that diazinon poses no health threat with normal application rates as instructed on product packages, and the EPA, which considers it less risky than other banned organophosphate-classed products, will continue to allow some commercial crop uses. But Syngenta officials said they couldn't justify paying for extensive tests needed

(continued on page 10)

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) is forecasting slower growth for shipments of commercial walk-behind and riding mowers. In fact, OPEI's research expects shipments of commercial walk-behind mowers to drop 0.1 percent in 2001 – 48,546 units vs. 48,605 units in 2000. While the number of commercial riding mowers built next year is supposed to be down

from previous years, the 2001 count should still represent a 10.7 percent growth over the 2000 number – 117,045 vs. 105,735 units. This growth of nearly 11 percent in the riding mower category still is down from 20.3 percent in 2000 and 35.1 percent in 1999.

OPEI's forecasts for 2002 call for increases in the growth rate for both walk-behind and commercial mowers – 3.7 percent for walk-behind units and 13.9 percent in the riding mower category.

Growth SLOW DOWN

	COMMERCIAL INTERMEDIATE WALK- BEHIND MOWERS	COMMERCIAL RIDING MOWERS
1994	48,339	45,820
1995	50,883	45,923
1996	53,321	50,178
1997	48,300	52,400
1998	49,700	65,100
1999	49,947	87,921
2000	48,605	105,735
FORECAST		
2001	48,546	117,045
2002	50,319	133,269

Source: OPEI

ON THE WEB

Grub Control Tips LIVE

Two industry entomologists shared their expertise on present and future grub control strategies during a live Web cast at www.grubfree.com.

CyberSummit 2000, sponsored by MACH 2, Lawn & Landscape and Golf Course News, was an hour-long televised seminar that included 15-minute presentations by Dan Potter, University of Kentucky, and David Shetlar, The Ohio State University, and a question-and-answer segment that allowed online viewers to ask specific questions about grub control strategies and solutions.

More than 70 individuals logged on for the live event, and the program, which can be seen through Feb. 13 at www.grubfree.com, has been watched by more than 210 people via the Web site as of press time.

Contractors with specific questions pertaining to grub control that were not answered during the live show received personal answers via e-mail from Shetlar or Potter, and additional questions still can be submitted though the February deadline. E-mail responses will be sent within two to four weeks of the query.

A video of Cleveland, Ohio-based lawn care operator Phil Fogarty's marketing strategies for grub control services accompanies the rebroadcast of the seminar.

A link to CyberSummit 2000 is also available via www.lawnandlandscape.com.



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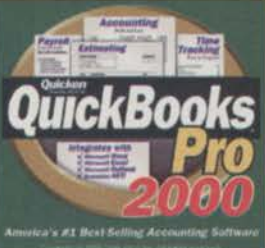
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Market Trends

(continued from page 6)

to prove the product safe under FQPA, so they agreed to phase-out the product.

The extended nature of the EPA's phase-out agreement for diazinon "confirms the value and safety of this product," Syngenta's Eileen Watson said.

Diazinon is the last widely used insect-control product made from the organophosphate chemical class, which is linked to health risks for children, according to the EPA. Diazinon is commonly found under the trade names Ortho, Spectracide and Real-Kill. The process affecting diazinon also affected chlorpyrifos (Dursban) in June 2000 with the discontinuation of most of that product's uses.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Toro Buys Goossen, Announces Earnings

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. — The Toro Co. continued rounding out its product line with the December acquisition of Goossen Industries,

(continued on page 12)

People

Mark Fields joined Harmony Products as its southeast regional sales manager.

Valley Crest, the landscape division of Environmental Industries, hired **Stephen Titus** to serve as its Arizona branch manager.

Craig Filley, director, strategic development, will spearhead efforts to expand Tyler Enterprises' fertilizer partnership and distribution network.

Pacific Sod acquired two new territory managers. **Larry Kaiser** will oversee the Santa Rosa and East Bay markets in California and **Steve Whitehead** will manage the Southern Nevada and Western Arizona markets.

George Freas joined Ball Seed's team of sales representatives in western Texas and southern New Mexico.

Anthony Friesl joined Environmental Care's national account team and will work on the East Coast. Environmental Care appointed **Brian Storm** to vice president and member of its leadership team and hired Mark Frederick to serve as the Denver, Colo., branch manager.

Bertel Da Silva joined North American Green as Latin American regional sales manager.

Megan Prine will serve as a sales/customer service representative for Roberts Seed Company.



Frederick (top),
Filley (bottom)

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Market Trends

(continued from page 10)

Beatrice, Neb. The acquisition provides Toro with a debris management product line, such as sweepers, vacuums, chippers and blowers.

Goossen's 64,000-square-foot Nebraska manufacturing plant is adjacent to the Toro-owned Exmark Manufacturing production facilities, and the facility now will be used to expand Exmark's production capabilities.

Toro also announced record sales and profits for its fiscal year 2000, which ended Oct. 31, 2000. The company finished the year with sales of more than \$1.3 billion (up nearly 5 percent from fiscal year 1999) and earnings of \$45.3 million. "Overall, most of our markets had a good year for sales and profitability, and we are taking aggressive action to fix those areas that struggled," noted Ken Melrose, Toro's chairman and chief executive officer.

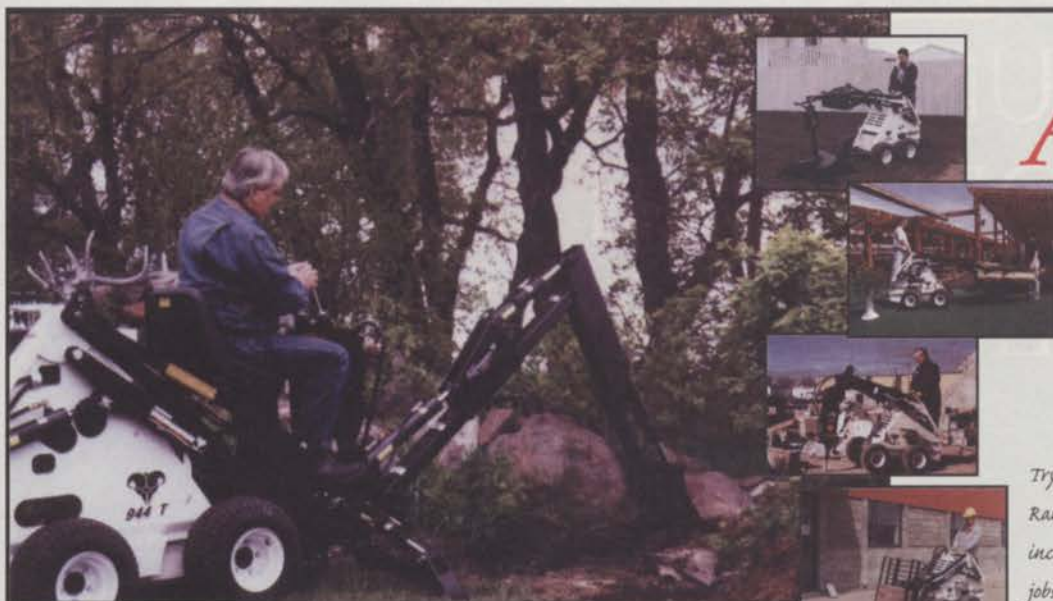
The professional portion of Toro's business provided much of its sales growth, increasing by 7.6 percent in 2000, although this area of business was 12 percent off 1999's earnings. "The landscaping, golf and grounds

Calendar of Events

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that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to
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4012 Bridge Ave.,
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- JAN. 22-25** Professional Horticulture Conference of Virginia and Trade Show, Virginia Beach, Va. Contact: 757/523-4734.
- JAN. 22-24** Central Environmental Nursery Trade Show, Columbus, Ohio. Contact: 800/825-5062.
- JAN. 22-23** Missouri Landscape and Nursery Association Nuts and Bolts Employee Short Course, St. Louis, Mo. Contact: 816/233-1481.
- JAN. 23-25** Mid-America Green Industry Council Convention, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/561-5323.
- JAN. 24-25** Maryland Turfgrass Council's Turfgrass 2001 Conference and Trade Show, Timonium, Md. Contact: 301/403-4234.
- JAN. 25-27** The Gulf States Horticultural Expo, Mobile, Ala. Contact: 334/502-7777.
- JAN. 25** Northeastern Pennsylvania Turf School & Trade Show, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Contact: 814/863-1368.
- JAN. 29-30** Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Foremanship Training Workshop, Willowbrook, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.
- JAN. 29-30** Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association Winter Conference and Trade Show, Omaha, Neb. Contact: 816/233-1481.
- JAN. 29-31** Iowa Turfgrass Conference and Trade Show, Des Moines, Iowa. Contact: 800/605-0420.



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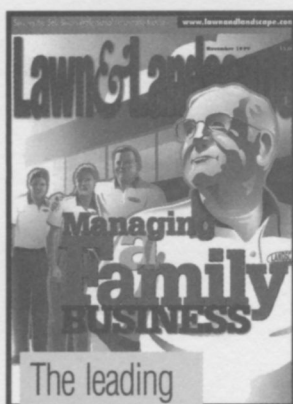
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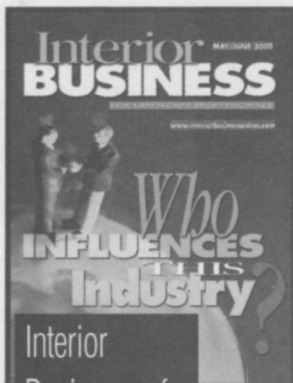
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☐ 6. Grower
☐ 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- ☐ 8. Dealer ☐ 9. Distributor
☐ 10. Formulator ☐ 11. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

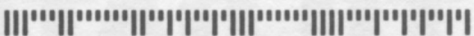
- ☐ 12. School, College, University
☐ 13. Trade Association, Library
☐ 14. Others (please describe) _____

2. What best describes your title?

- ☐ Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
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Market Trends

JAN. 31 Sacramento Landscape and Nursery Expo, Sacramento, Calif. Contact: 530/458-3189.

JAN. 31-FEB. 2 Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Landscape Selling Seminar, Willowbrook Holiday Inn, Willowbrook, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.

FEB. 1-2 Iowa Nursery & Landscape Association Convention and Trade Show, Des Moines, Iowa. Contact: 816/233-1481.

FEB. 1-4 Associated Landscape Contractors of America Executive Forum, Tucson, Ariz. Contact: 800/395-2522.

FEB. 1-4 Professional Lawn Care Association of America Management Conference Cruise to the Bahamas. Contact: 800/458-3466.

FEB. 1-4 Associated Nursery & Landscape Association's Management Clinic: 2001 The Education Odyssey, Louisville, Ky. Contact: www.anla.org.

FEB. 1-4 IPM International Trade Fair, Messe Essen, Essen, Germany. Contact: 212/974-8457.

FEB. 2-3 Arkansas Professional Landscape and Nursery Trade Show, Little Rock, Ark. Contact: 501/225-0029.

FEB. 6-8 Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Conference, University Park, Pa. Contact: 814/865-8301.

FEB. 7-11 Northwest Flower & Garden Show, Seattle, Wash. Contact: 206/789-5333.

FEB. 7-9 Turfgrass Producers International Summer Convention, Albuquerque, N.M. Contact: www.turfgrasssod.org.

FEB. 8-10 South Carolina Nursery and Landscape Association trade show and seminar, Myrtle Beach, S.C. Contact: 864/592-3868.

markets continue to be robust for equipment sales," the company noted. "[For 2001], Toro expects to achieve revenue growth in the range of 8 to 10 percent."

While Melrose reported that profitability was up for the company, "lower sales levels of irrigation's higher product lines" held overall profitability down somewhat.

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Consolidation Trend Continues

In addition to recent manufacturer unions, including the purchase of Goossen by Toro (page 10) and Great Dane by John Deere (page 19), several other industry players recently announced acquisitions:

- Environmental Industries Inc., Calabasas, Calif., acquired North Haven Gardens, a Dallas, Texas-based, \$17 million, full-service landscape company. The merger follows the February 2000 EII acquisition of STM Landscape Services, Oakton, Va., which increased EII's presence in the Mid-Atlantic region.



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USE READER SERVICE #13

USE READER SERVICE #14

Market Trends

• Simplicity Manufacturing, Port Washington, Wis., acquired Giant-Vac just one year after purchasing Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y., to increase its presence and sales in outdoor power equipment.

The purchase of Connecticut-based Giant-Vac adds commercial and residential outdoor debris management equipment to Simplicity's product line.

• e-Greenbiz.com, Boulder, Colo., and

Growzone, Englewood, Colo., became the first two "dot-com" companies to consolidate in the industry's cyberspace segment when they signed a letter of intent to merge their assets.

Under the proposed agreement, eGreenbiz.com will provide technology and customer relationship management for both companies and will integrate existing Growzone customers into its site.

IN THE NEWS

ServiceMaster Earnings Slip

DOWNERS GROVE, Ill. - ServiceMaster, the parent company for TruGreen-ChemLawn and TruGreen LandCare, reported third quarter revenues that were 3 percent higher than in the third quarter of 1999, although operating income was down 19 percent in 2000 and margins dropped from 8.4 to 6.8 percent.

The company places much of the responsibility for the declining performance on the shoulders of its landscape business, and it noted that operating income in the Consumer and Commercial Services division, which includes the TruGreen companies, fell 11 percent for the quarter. This decrease reflects "the integration issues in the landscape operations and higher fuel and other labor-related costs in most of its business units. TruGreen-ChemLawn ... reported modest revenue increases reflecting higher customer counts, increased productivity and price in-

(continued on page 18)

On the WEB

Lawn Service Information Resources - www.lawnservicing.com

Southern Nurserymen's Association - www.sna.org

Briggs & Stratton - www.briggsandstratton.com

Michigan Nursery & Landscape Association - www.mnla.org

Alpha-Omega Landscaping - www.nebsnow.com/alpha-omegalandscaping

EZRain Sprinkler - www.EZRain.com

Hercules Environmental - www.HerculesEnvironmental.com

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Market Trends

(continued from page 16)

creases with slightly reduced profitability resulting from higher labor-related costs."

"We are beginning to see some improvement in the operations of our landscape business," noted C. William Pollard, ServiceMaster chairman and chief executive officer. "The leadership and major organizational changes have been implemented. The system conversion issues should be behind us."

Pollard also announced a new initiative to pursue high-end residential landscape customers. Introducing landscape services to the many TruGreen-ChemLawn customers seems logical, but the company focused its acquisition attention on landscape companies serving the commercial market.

"The integration of our lawn care business with our landscape business ... will enhance our sales effort for a combined lawn care and landscape offering to our growing commercial customer base," Pollard added. "Bringing these two businesses together into one organization is taking more time than we anticipated, but it is the right step."

IN THE NEWS

NTEP Announces Good News

BELTSVILLE, Md. – Turfgrass users and suppliers should be excited to hear that the 2001 Agriculture Appropriations Bill includes a significant increase in federal funding for the turf seed industry. The bill even provides the dollars needed to create a new turfgrass scientist position within the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) this year, which will represent the first full-time USDA turfgrass research position since 1988.

According to Kevin Morris, executive director of the National Turfgrass Evaluation Program (NTEP), the new scientist will work on improving genetic stocks of new

and promising turfgrass species as well as currently utilized species. This scientist will conduct long-term research to find unique plants with improved heat, cold, insect, disease and wear tolerance, Morris explained.

Although Morris said end users of turfgrass aren't likely to enjoy benefits of this new position for seven to 10 years, he expects a number of turf seed suppliers to introduce improved varieties as a result of this research. "More important will be the contribution of unique germplasm that will be incorporated into other public and private plant breeding systems," he noted. "I believe this is what is needed to solve problems such as brown patch on tall fescue, gray leaf spot in perennial ryegrass and compaction tolerance in many grasses."

Corrections

There were two misspellings in a GreenDex ad appearing for page 49 of the November 2000 issue of *Lawn & Landscape*. The correct spellings are "what's" and "materials."

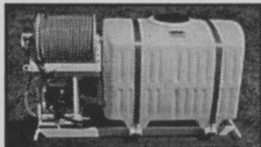
The horsepower listed for the Ferris IS 4000Z mower engine was incorrect in the December 2000 *Green Industry Products & Services Buyers' Guide*. The correct engine for that mower is a 31-hp LC Daihatsu.

The photo submitted by Woods Equipment Co. for the December 2000 *Green Industry Products & Services Buyers' Guide* cover was incorrect. The decals on Woods' mid-mount M-Series Mow'n Machine were changed in 2000.



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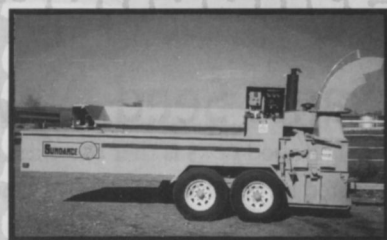
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USE READER SERVICE #16

USE READER SERVICE #17

Breaking News

MERGERS & ACQUISITIONS

Deere Makes Acquisitions

RALEIGH, N.C. – John Deere announced its most aggressive effort to establish itself as a legitimate player in the commercial mower industry with the purchase of Great Dane Power Equipment, Sellersburg, Ind., from Dane Scag.

In a surprising move, Deere also announced the acquisition of McGinnis Farms, an Atlanta-Ga., based supplier of plant material, irrigation products and pesticides throughout the southern portion of the country. Additional details on this deal were not available at press time.

By acquiring Scag's \$23-million mower company, Deere added a lineup of innovative mowers to its offerings.

"The obvious answer to why we made this acquisition is that we think the Super Surfer mower is a very unique product that is on the verge of making a very strong showing in this

market," explained Greg Doherty, general manager of John Deere Turf Care.

The acquisition represents a big step for Deere in the ultra-competitive market for mid-size mowers. "We have increased our presence in this market in the last few years, and we've got some new products that we'll be talking about later this year," he commented. "We think we're on the verge of being a real player in this market."

Deere is going to use a dual-brand strategy to take the mowers to market. "We want to support the Great Dane brand," Doherty noted. "That name has a lot of meaning and equity in the marketplace, and we want to continue building that equity. Over time, you'll see some of the Great Dane products modified and "Deere-ized" so there will be some differentiation in the products and there are opportunities for both dealer networks."

Scag, himself, will continue to work with the company, focusing his efforts in research and development. Doherty is confident that Scag and his creativity will benefit Deere for years to come. "It's a real plus that we've got Dane Scag working with us to design products for the future," he noted. "That should show everyone how serious we are about this market." – Bob West

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USE READER SERVICE #18

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Raid Recovery

Kevin Kowitz recalls April 29, 1999, with remarkable clarity.

His description of this turning point resuscitates a surreal scene, unraveling a series of plot twists that fit the formula for a Hollywood action movie: confrontation, commotion and consequence.

At 7:15 a.m., about 25 Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agents raided R.A.R. Landscaping, Baltimore, Md., and detained 54 Hispanic employees, leaving the 20-year-old, full-service commercial lawn and landscape maintenance business in a state of labor emergency.

"They closed our gates and interrogated about 99 percent of the people that were working at our company – Hispanic, white, purple, blue, green – interrogated them to whet their whistle," noted Kowitz, human resources manager.

"It was chaos. The agents came out, they had their hands on their guns, they announced themselves and there was chaos," he remarked. "People running, agents running after the guys that were running, people jumping over fences – but the majority of our guys stayed calm."

INS agents handcuffed R.A.R.'s foreign national employees, largely from Mexico, Honduras and Ecuador, ages ranging from 16 to 35, and requested the company's I-9 forms – mandatory employment documents that verify an applicant's nationality.

After assessing the forms, INS agents issued the company a list of employees who could not return to work, and R.A.R.'s employee roster belly-flopped from 85 workers to 31, splintering company operations.

"We were pretty much devastated by the entire process," Kowitz confessed. "We didn't know how we were going to maintain our commercial properties, we didn't know what step to take next."

What Kowitz needed was labor. In a booming economy with a tight labor market, R.A.R. knew that this employment loss would be challenging, if not impossible, to replace, Kowitz noted. R.A.R. needed a resolution to this unexpected circumstance.

FILLING THE GAP. R.A.R. started the season with a sparse staff and a full schedule. Workdays often started and ended in the dark and employee turnover circulated 100 workers through the company – 20 people lasted. It was

R.A.R. Landscaping holds an annual field day where it trains employees. Since the raid, R.A.R. has also educated new employees with mid-season sessions. Photos: R.A.R. Landscaping



two months before the company stabilized its work force. Still, R.A.R. finished the season without losing a single account, Kowitz noted.

"We developed a reputation for helping the community, helping people solve problems and helping people overcome problems, and that has made our company extremely successful," he said.

Through working extra hours, recruiting, training, advertising and informing customers, R.A.R.'s company vision and positive attitude led the company through the labor crisis, Kowitz said.

"I think that with the raid, the guys really had something to prove to themselves, to the company and to the INS," Kowitz said. "We, as a group and a family, said to ourselves, 'We're not going to let these guys close our doors.'"

R.A.R. canvassed the community for employees, advertising with newspapers, churches, job corps and local labor companies. Foremen shouldered a bulk of the recruiting efforts, Kowitz said. "We combed the area for employees," he said. "After the raid, we decided to really make sure that we built a work force that would never succumb to this type of incident again."

Honduran churches proved to be successful recruiting locations, and R.A.R. agreed to assist Honduran immigrants with the paperwork necessary to gain legal status if they joined the company.

An emotional angle often remains buried beneath business logistics and red tape. This dimension surfaces with images of the INS raid, and expressions frozen on many of the Hispanic workers' faces remind Kowitz of the importance of employee relations – sensitivity and understanding. R.A.R. also researched and applied for seasonal workers through the federal H2B program, which supplies visas for foreign national employees for 10 months at a time in the U.S.

"We still to this day don't know why we were targeted," Kowitz admitted. But, R.A.R. turned its labor trauma into a turning point. – Kristen Hampshire





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USE READER SERVICE #110

In Minor's League

How important is budgeting in a landscape business and how can I budget more efficiently?

A budget is the single most important financial tool you can use when managing your business. Think about it this way. When you go on a trip to an unfamiliar location, what is the one thing that you need? You need a map. The same is true for your business.

When you are making plans for the coming year, that map is your budget and plan. The budget tells you where you are going to go, how you are going to get there and gives you a vehicle to monitor your progress.

Where does budget planning begin? First, create a detailed chart of accounts. I would strongly encourage using one consistent with other contractors, that way you can benchmark against your peers. Trade associations have good sample models.

Next, break down the budget into different areas. First,
(continued on page 24)

Editor's

NOTE



In addition to serving the industry as a consultant and speaker, David Minor is the William M. Dickey Entrepreneur in Residence and director of the James A. Ryffel Center for Entrepreneurial Studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, Texas. Prior to joining TCU,

David was the president of Minor's Landscape Services, a \$12 million, former INC. 500 award-winning company he founded in 1978 and sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998. Readers with questions they would like to ask Minor can fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com.

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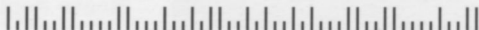
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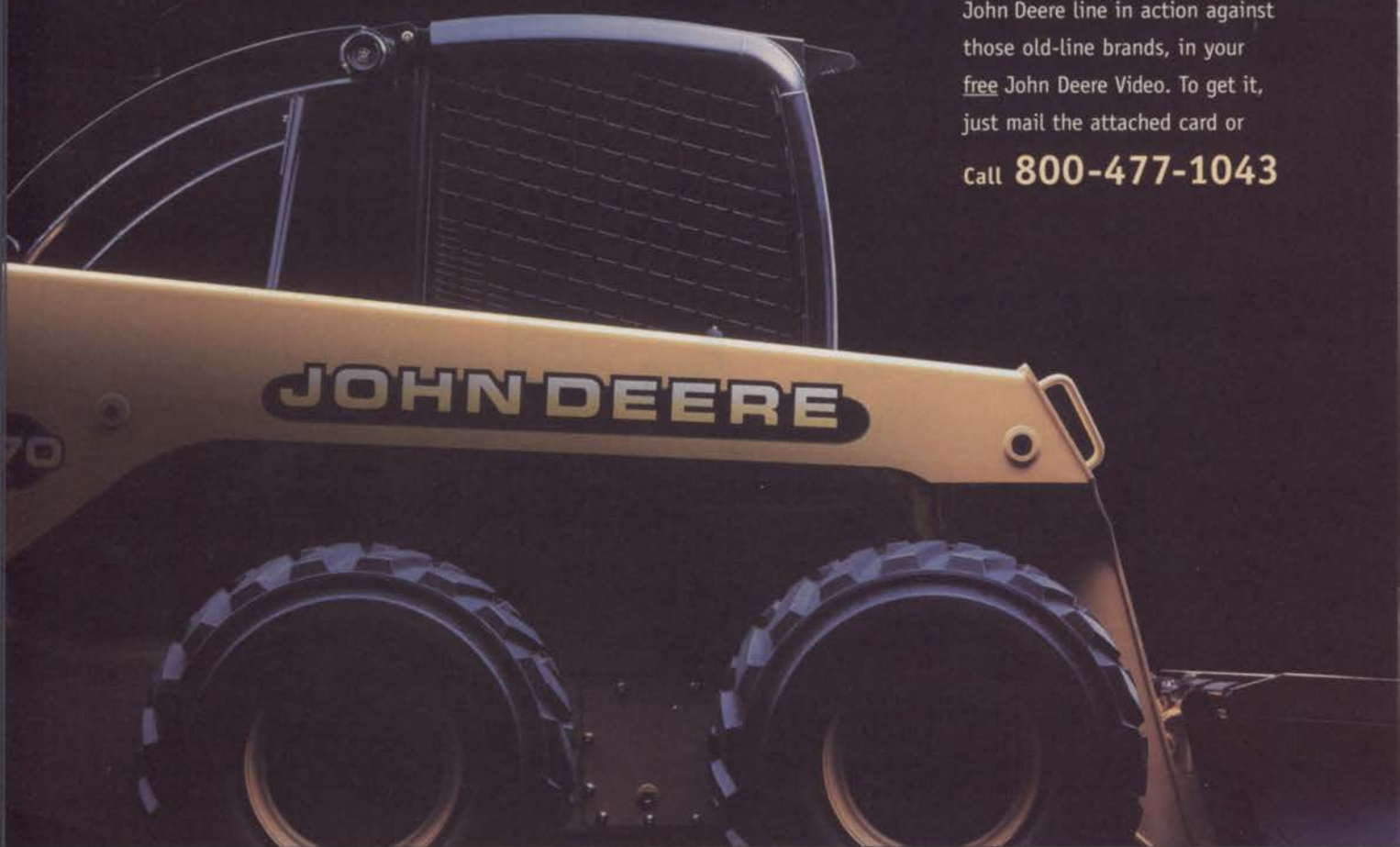
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In Minor's League

(continued from page 22)

code revenue by department, and any department that generates more than 25 percent of the company's revenue should be tracked to the bottom line.

The next area is direct costs (labor and materials). The difference between revenue and direct costs is gross margins. These should be actual numbers categorized by department.

Then, you have variable costs, fixed costs

and operating profit before tax. Other income and expenses, like insurance, rebates and interest income, should be below the operating profit line to avoid skewing the numbers. This is because expenses are tracked as they relate to core business.

To make these numbers into a budget, begin gathering data approximately three months before the end of your fiscal year. You should have actual financial statements

for your first nine months. Then add adjusted projections for the final three months to come up with projected year-end figures. This is your benchmark.

Next, collect the past two years of actual numbers so you can reference some historical figures.

Analyze past sales, but recognize that precision is impossible. This is probably the most difficult area to work through. Evaluate annual sales by product line, location, services rendered or sales people. Add any known adjustments to the contracts along with current anticipated contracts.

Clearly, having historical sales information is beneficial. But don't forget to take into consideration the economy, competitors, price increases, new lines, markets, growth strategies to pursue, number of sales people and their quotas, and historical cancellations. These factors can change from year to year, so you need to know how next year may differ from last year in order to produce an accurate budget.

Lastly, determine what you want to achieve sales-wise in the coming year. My experience has shown that if you set a goal, you often will hit that goal.

When determining direct costs, the best method is to get a sense of direct costs as a percent of sales historically. Don't forget to consider changes in compensation, materials and service delivery strategies. Also, make sure you accrue any bonus on incentive plans.

When you get into forecasting variable expenses, again, historical percentages and changes based on sales are important. When forecasting where expenses are concerned, use historical information for comparisons only and try to lock in your actual expenses in advance of the year.

The budgeting process can take up to six weeks and should involve all of your key managers. Question every line item in your budget. Don't assume just because an expense was incurred in previous years that it needs to be incurred in the future. Ask these questions: Do you really need this expense? What can be done to improve or eliminate this expense?

Also, be sure to update your budget throughout the year. When managing by the budget, reviewing the company's financial performance and comparing this to the original budget as soon as possible each month is important.

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PEST CLASSIFICATION

Common White Grubs

White grubs are the larvae of many species of beetles, mainly belonging to one family – the scarabs. Adults differ in color markings, habits and life cycles, but grubs are similar in appearance. Fully grown larvae are ½- to ¾-inch long, white to grayish, with brown heads and six distinct legs. They usually assume a C-shaped position in the soil. Severe infestations feeding in the soil-thatch interface of turf can destroy most of the roots, causing the turf to turn brown and die. Moles, birds, raccoons, skunks and armadillos actively feed on grubs, and in the process, tear up the turf as they search for them.

LIFE CYCLES. The life cycles of grubs can be classified according to the time required for completion of the cycle from



Grub pests of turf (left to right): May/June beetle, European chafer, masked chafer, Japanese beetle, Oriental beetle, Asiatic garden beetle and black turfgrass ateniuss. *Insect I.D.* features excerpts from *Destructive Turf Insects* by Harry Niemczyk and David Shetlar. For information on the book, call 800/456-0707.

egg to adult, namely:

1. Less than one year
2. One year
3. Two years or more

Among those requiring two to five years to complete a cycle are some species of May beetles or "Junebugs," often seen around lights on warm spring nights. These beetles

(continued on page 28)

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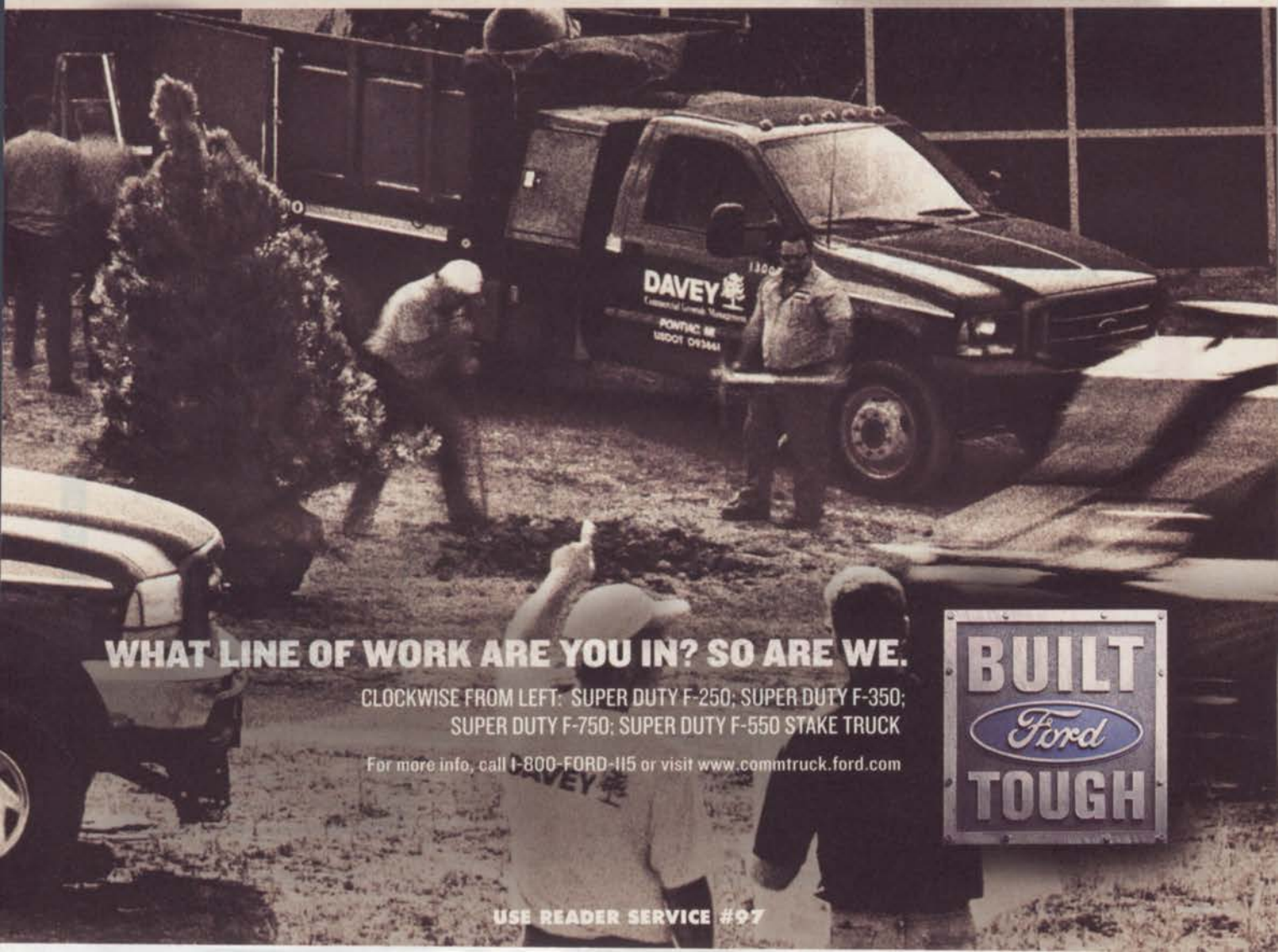


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USE READER SERVICE #97

Insect I.D.

(continued from page 25)

generally are large, hard-bodied, and vary in color from tan to brown to black. Some species feed on the foliage of trees and shrubs at night, others do not feed at all. Feeding, flight, mating and egg laying occur at night.

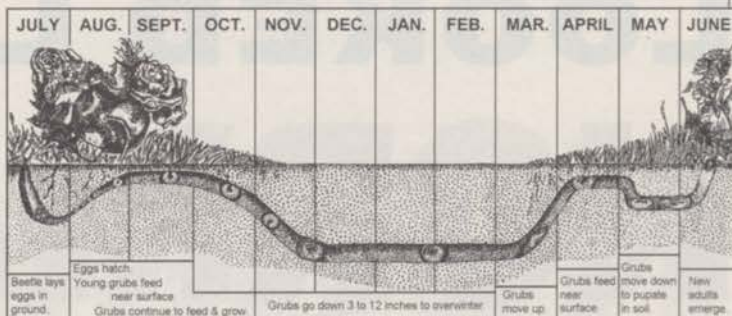
Masked chafers, Oriental beetles, Asiatic garden beetle, European chafer and green June beetle are examples of grub species that generally complete their life cycle in one year. The common Japanese beetle is perhaps the best known example of this group.

The black turfgrass ataeinus grub often has two generations per year, especially in the southern part of its range.

GRUB DIAGNOSIS. Evidence of annual white grub damage includes patches of wilted, dead or dying turf visible during spring (April and May) and fall (September to November). The black turfgrass ataeinus may cause similar symptoms in late June, July or August. During these periods, the presence of the grubs is often made evident

Grub control efforts can be enhanced by understanding how the time of year impacts the insects' behavior, as illustrated here.

Photo: Destructive Turfgrass Insects



by the feeding activity of skunks and other mammals which tear up the turf in search of grubs. Large flocks of various black birds (e.g., crows, starlings, grackles) often feed on grubs in heavily infested areas.

Ground mole activity may also indicate white grub problems, though moles also feed on earthworms or other insects.

The sure way to detect white grubs is to cut into the turf in four or five locations and examine the root zone and first 3 inches of soil carefully. A standard golf course cup cutter can be used for this purpose. The sample can be examined and replaced in the

hole without complete destruction. Pouring water on the replaced sample helps survival of the disturbed turf.

GRUB IDENTIFICATION. There are many species of white grubs, and identification is based primarily on the pattern of spines found on the underside of the tip of the abdomen. This area is called the raster. A 10- to 15-power hand lens is adequate for examining the raster pattern of most white grubs. If the grubs are very small, a dissecting microscope with 20- to 40-power magnification may be needed.

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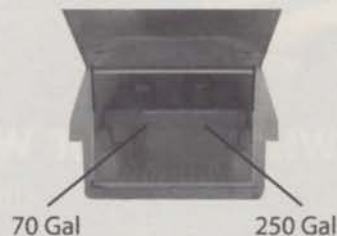
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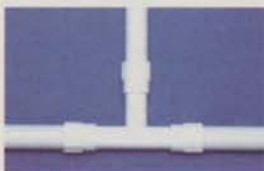
CREATIVE MANAGEMENT MEASURES. Has an employee complained he can't make ends meet? While you can't provide an advance, you can assist employees with financial challenges in other ways – by helping them budget, for example. In one case, we had an employee who committed to a budget for end-of-the-month billing. He signed documents to allow us to withhold a certain percentage of funds out of his bi-weekly paychecks. These funds were released at the end of the month for monthly rent and utilities that otherwise might not get paid.



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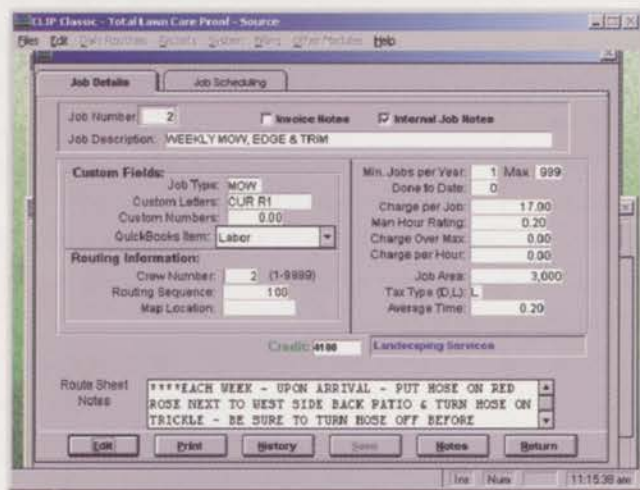
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USE READER SERVICE #26

USE READER SERVICE #27

A Software SOLUTION

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Clip software has helped thousands of lawn and landscapes professionals take their businesses to the next level.

DAVE TUCKER KNOWS the lawn and landscape industry. When he decided to get involved in the computer software industry 13 years ago, Tucker helped build an accounting software package for a lawn maintenance company. This software was then marketed to other contractors starting the next year by Tucker and his brother-in-law, Bill Wright, under the name Clip. In 1993, Tucker purchased Sensible Software Inc. from Wright, who decided he wanted to focus more energies on his mower manufacturing company, Wright Manufacturing. To date, more than 7,000 copies of the software have been sold.

"I went the software route because I have a talent for computers and could always understand them," Tucker explained. "But this is about more than software. My whole life has been centered on creating tools to help people attain their dreams. The software was one way to do that."

While software for the landscape industry continues to become more prevalent, Tucker said many contractors still don't appreciate the real value of products like Clip. "Software is so integral to business management and systems," he emphasized. "Your software runs your business. It's the system that runs everything else. People tend to think software is an add-on to their business, but I think it's more important than, say, buying the fastest lawn mower. Software contributes more than that, so you have to work smarter, not harder. Companies can still go under with the fastest mower if their pricing isn't right."

FACTS & FIGURES

The CLIP Line-Up

- **Clip Lite** — A scaled-down version of Clip that allows the small operator to start right. This product is perfect for the contractor with 80 properties or fewer than nine crews.
- **QuickClip** — This product works very closely with QuickBooks as it uses the same customer list and lets contractors add jobs, schedules, pricing, countdowns and more to those QuickBooks customers. All of the operations — route sheets, bid sheets, job costing, etc. — will be handled in Clip while all of the financial transactions take place in QuickBooks. This product is ideal for small-to medium-sized companies already using QuickBooks but still managing operations on calendars, white boards and customer cards.
- **Clip Classic** — This version of Clip does all routing, scheduling, job costing and billing for the medium to large contractor. Clip Classic is perfect for the company looking to systematize its operations for greater efficiency. Clip Classic comes in multi-user versions and includes security and other functions necessary for an accounting system used by more than one person.
- **Clip Pro** — This is the flagship product, featuring many options requested by Clip customers over the years. Clip Pro is ideal for companies looking to maximize profits through the efficient use of information tools.

A Software SOLUTION

THE CLIP COLLECTION. Undoubtedly, one of the keys to Clip is that it grew out of a real-life system in a landscape company. But Tucker said the real key to the software is what it can do for companies and their managers.

"Clip creates a system whereby the owner can start removing himself from the day-to-day operations and thinking and working *on* his business instead of working *in* his business," he commented. "The other thing it does is remove the huge barrier to growth that a landscape contractor has to overcome. A company starts to mushroom out of his control as it grows, but a contractor can expand to 100 crews with this software without any problem. Not to mention the fact that once you start using it and using it correctly profit margins can really skyrocket."

Today, Clip includes four different program options (see The Clip Lineup) and a series of additional modules for contractors to choose from.

A key to Clip's functionality in so many offices is that the software works with a number of other popular software programs, such as Microsoft Word and Excel, Streets Plus (mapping software), PRO Landscape and DIG. In addition, there are also a number of add-on modules available from Sensible Software to further enhance a particular package's functionality, including:

- **Projects** – Projects is an extensive application that helps manage design/build contracts from the point of the initial estimate forward.
- **MORS** – Developed in conjunction with the highly respected Vander Kooi & Associates, this module helps landscape construction companies manage overhead and thoroughly understand pricing through a series of customized formulas for their businesses.
- **BidRight** – This is a bidding and estimating module available to non-CLIP companies to help them quickly and accurately bid installation jobs.

"Clip is a software package that is custom built for the green industry," explained Tucker. "It grew out of the green industry, and it serves the lawn and landscape contractor's business."

In particular, Clip aids contractors with the ever-challenging accounting area, which includes billing, collections and customer communication, as well as operations ranging from scheduling and routing to crew assignments, material requirements and product tracking. "Handling this broad range of tasks is what really sets Clip apart from other 'horizontal' software packages sold to this industry," Tucker added.

Tucker went on to explain that Clip is designed

CASE STUDY

The **LAWN CARE** Company

Richard Penn has been in the lawn care business for 20 years and his company serves 1,800 customers, so he has "a pretty good handle on the business." In 1993, his company, Lincoln, Neb.-based Lawncare Lawn & Tree Care, was losing its customized software package because of legal problems the software developer encountered.

"The No. 1 thing I was looking for in my software was that it be stable and from a stable company," Penn explained, recalling the process that led him to originally purchase Sensible Software's Clip 3.4. "That's critical for a small business like me. I don't care how it works, but I want the software to do what it should do when it should do it and not be crashing all the time."

Today, Lawncare runs Clip Pro, which is the network-ready version of the program, and uses it primarily for managing receivables and scheduling. "I've looked at other software to see what else is on the market, but nothing else does what Clip does," Penn commented, adding that Clip has enabled him to reduce his office staff from two people to one individual. "The folks at Clip have a real unique perspective on the industry since they were in the business once. That means they know what we're looking for."

While Penn isn't interested in receiving an array of daily reports, he does use the software for a regular company status report, which provides him a count of active customers and a snapshot of his receivables. "I also like the fact that we can create lists where we set the fields based on particular criteria," Penn noted. "The software's search capability lets me generate reports such as which customers were sprayed a week ago Thursday."

While stability is all Penn was initially looking for when he bought the software, he now credits the entire Sensible Software organization for its commitment to its clients. "I've attended the Clip Users' Conference every year since 1993, and we don't go to learn about the software any more," he explained. "Now, the conference is about networking and rubbing elbows with people who have different ideas about how to do things."

In addition, the conferences give Clip users such as Penn the opportunity to make suggestions directly to the software programmers. "In the past, I told them I wanted to see expanded scheduling and more customized fields, and now we've got that," he noted.

to be so integral to a contractor's business that the software goes to work as soon as a new customer is signed up. "Clip starts the process of business by printing out route sheets or work orders for all of the jobs and projects that your company needs to accomplish that day," he commented. "These forms are organized by crew and then routed for that day in correct geographical order. This makes the distribution of work extremely easy for management. And each job has all of the pertinent notes associated with it, making sure that the crews accomplish the job in the manner prescribed by management and the customer."

In addition to simplifying the process of getting the crews started each day, the software also eases the pain associated with employee turnover. "Since the notes for each job for each customer are on the route sheet, even a new employee can perform the job to the customer's satisfaction," Tucker pointed out. "And since the jobs are routed in the most

efficient order, the employee does not need to have extensive knowledge of the area to be efficient on his or her first day."

While much of Clip's functionality is organized around route crews for purposes such as landscape maintenance, the software's newest capabilities cater to landscape installation companies in the form of its Projects Module. Equipped with this update, the software produces complete work orders and load lists so crews are aware of everything that should be on the truck. Other modules that incorporate the bidding and estimating guidelines of industry consultants have also been developed to help contractors price their installation jobs.

"Clip started out as maintenance software because we were a maintenance company, but we have gone into installation because so many maintenance companies do installation," Tucker explained. "But, to do this and do this correctly, we used a lot of input from our customers and we partnered with

A Software SOLUTION

industry consultants like Vander Kooi & Associates, Jim Huston and Frank Ross to help us make sure we did it correctly."

Something contractors should recognize about Sensible Software is that Tucker and the company views themselves as more than just a software company. Nothing demonstrates this better than its ongoing community-building efforts, including the annual Clip Users' Conference (which drew more than 400 attendees to Maryland for a three-day educational session), Clip newsletters and the online Clip Forum.

"I think part of the reason why our company does so much more than just software is that our goal really is to help people be more profitable at work," Tucker noted. "We started the conferences to help people be more profitable, and now we've got E-forums as a way of getting people together to share profitable ideas."

An area of education emphasis for Tucker is helping contractors better understand their pricing systems, the profitability associated with their current customers and how they can operate their businesses more profitably. While Tucker often

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Job # **2-4**
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Total Hours **1.00**

Job # **2-10**
Job Name **Mow & Trim**
Job Location **10017 Greenway Road**
Customer **Sanable Software, Inc.**
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Email **info@sanable.com**

Start Time **09:00** End Time **10:00**
Total Hours **1.00**

Job # **2-13**
Job Name **Mow & Trim**
Job Location **10017 Greenway Road**
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Start Time **10:00** End Time **11:00**
Total Hours **1.00**

writes articles or gives speeches about these ideas, he also makes sure the Clip programs provide users with the information they need to make profit-enhancing decisions.

"Each job in Clip is tracked in man hours," he explained. "This gives a crew a target to shoot for in

Clip's route sheets provide employees all of the information they need to manage their clients every day, while Clip users benefit from the opportunity to learn from some of the best minds in the industry, such as GreenZebra's Bruce Wilson (below) at the annual Clip Users' Conference.

terms of completing the job on time. By having a target, not only are the crews more efficient but they also have a standard to measure up to. One crew can be compared to another one to see what the best practices are for each and every job, thus making the company more efficient."

Such job-by-job tracking also results in reports that identify profitable and unprofitable accounts, which is a must for any contractor. "Each job has a billing charge assigned to it, and this gives the software the ability to compare all of your custom-

CASE STUDY

The BIG, FULL-SERVICE Company

Carver's Lawn & Landscape, New Castle, Del., has four divisions and nearly 60 employees in peak season. Back in 1994, Rick Carver, president of the company, felt the organization was getting overwhelmed with paperwork and needed to automate some of its operations. As a result, he bought Clip Classic.

"In the mowing division alone, we saved 25 hours a week with the software because there were three sets of hands on scheduling, verification and timing, and Clip does all of that now," he pointed out. "If we're billing \$40 an hour for 26 weeks a year, that's a lot of money we've saved."

After a year or two, however, the company encountered challenges running invoices. Carver called Sensible Software for assistance, and the company sent a programmer to his offices to work through the obstacles with Carver's employees.

"When I called them back to thank them, I asked Dave Tucker (president of Sensible Software) if he would be interested in doing some work for me on a contract basis because I had drawn up a new management system that I wanted to implement. This new system was going to require that I have certain reports at the moment any estimate was completed," Carver recalled. "I explained what I wanted to do to Dave, and he told me I should visit him and see what Sensible Software was working on before I hired anyone to do this for me."

"So I went to see them, and they were in the middle of programming their new Projects Module," Carver explained. "I was so impressed with the program that I

bought it and paid for it before I left their offices even though it wasn't going to be completed for a few months."

The Projects Module focuses on the landscape installation portion of the industry and provides reports from the minute that an estimate is generated. "This report gives me the projected net profit, gross profit, labor hours and everything else before we even sign a contract," Carver related. "This helps us with our negotiating and lets me see where our estimators are at every day."

The software also generates a load list and work order that indicates what materials need to go on a truck for each job. "Now, everyone in the company knows what everyone else is doing, and that has created a whole new culture within the company," Carver added.

While he recognizes that his company is larger than the typical landscape firm, Carver said the various Clip software packages are certain to include an option for any business. "The neatest thing about this software is that it's priced so affordably that any company can buy it," he noted. "I know contractors spend a lot of time looking at numbers and expenses like new purchases, but they should really look at their software as an investment. Buying Clip was really the best decision I ever made."



A *Software* **SOLUTION**

ers to each other based on dollars per man hour," Tucker explained. "That way users can see exactly how much they are grossing in dollars per man hour for each customer, which means they can keep the customers that provide the most profit and get rid of those that are unprofitable."

As he looks to the future, Tucker is aware of the technology advancements being introduced regularly that may shape future versions of Clip. One new technology available with the software is handheld computers for data collection in the field.

The idea behind these units is that information can be gathered more accurately and more efficiently using these computers in the field instead of relying on a pen and paper in the crew's truck and the data-entry skills of the office personnel.

"Again, the idea is that you're working smarter instead of working harder by reducing data input and putting more accurate information into the system," Tucker related. "We're doing whatever we can to keep up with the technology so we can do whatever possible to make contractors more productive and more profitable."

CASE STUDY*The* **SMALL** Operator

Ed Bartz, president, ECO-SCAPES, Bend, Ore., loves numbers. "I use Clip to do all of our routing, scheduling, accounts receivables, billing, forecasting and data analysis," Bartz enthused. "Those numbers are what business is all about. You need to find out how long everyone spends on a property, how much time they spent driving to and from the property and so on.

"I can push a button to see how much each customer makes me each hour, and that's what matters," he continued, pointing out how this insight improved his pricing. "I charged \$25 an hour the first three years I was in business," he recalled with a laugh. "Since then, I've gone to the Clip Users' Conference to learn about pricing and I've got better information thanks to the software. Now, I'm charging \$71 an hour because I understand what everything costs."

Bartz didn't always have such an in-depth handle on his business, however. "I bought the basic Clip software in 1995 when I only had 12 customers because I wanted to integrate the software in my business and then just be able to add customers to it as I grew," he recalled. Over the last few years, he upgraded his software twice so that he's now running Clip Pro, which allows him to manage more customers. "I've lost my employees in August of each of the last two years, and if I hadn't been so organized I wouldn't have gotten the work done, and I owe that organization to Clip," he related. "I really wonder how people operate without any software."

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Along the same lines, an employer may inadvertently be pulled into a family drama, such as dealing with garnishments for child support and so on. We've seen "job-hoppers" who bounce from place to place in order to avoid the court system. An employee who is worth the extra effort should receive counseling about payment schedules. Offer to help him find legal representation if need be and allow him the time off of work to meet with an attorney or make court hearings.

Make it clear that the situation will never change unless the problem is dealt with, and that you are willing to help if requested. Helping employees be more responsible in their private lives will create more responsible crew members who will represent your company in a positive manner.

REACHING OUT. Hispanics are some of the most dedicated and loyal employees you can hire, but they are often hampered by a language and cultural barrier. One way to help them overcome this is to take them to a local bank and introduce them to tellers and bank officials. This may seem extreme, but your Hispanic employees are often people who are unsure of the system. An introduction to American banks will ease their fears and help them manage their money. In our metropolitan Washington, D.C. area, finding tellers who speak Spanish and will be available to help them is easy. The employees see such actions as evidence that you care about their welfare, which creates loyalty worth its weight in gold.

Another way to help employees is by functioning as a negotiator. In our case, one Hispanic employee was unable to explain to his landlord that his refrigerator was not working. So, with his permission, we called

the landlord on his behalf and got him a new refrigerator within a day. This valuable employee will not easily forget that his boss went to bat for him and will return season after season.

Employee turnover can be an expensive proposition. Once a team has been established and is running smoothly, you are reluctant to replace those employees with a new hire – an unknown and increasingly rare commodity. With this uncertainty, a smaller contractor may make the decision that a little personal attention, such as the examples given above, can save a valuable employee. Workers will remember these acts of kindness when making future employment decisions. – Mike McCarron **LI**

The author is president of Image Works, P.O. Box 2564, Springfield, Va., 22152. He can be reached at 703/451-0297 or e-mail mccarron@aol.com

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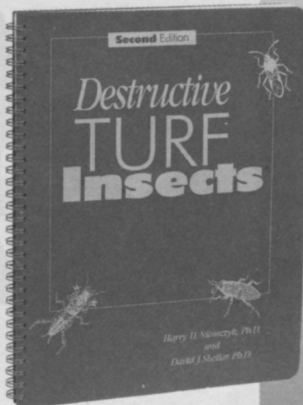
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Cover Story

by Bob West

RAYMOW ENTERPRISES

FOUNDED: 1985

HEADQUARTERS: Oldsmar, Fla.

2000 REVENUE: \$3.3 million

2001 ESTIMATED REVENUE:

\$4 million

SERVICE MIX: 85 percent of the company's revenue is from commercial/industrial work, while 15 percent is from residential customers. About 37 percent of its revenue is from installation work, compared to 33 percent maintenance, 20 percent irrigation, and 5 percent both pest control and trees and ornamental care.

EMPLOYEES: 50 year-round, 20 seasonal

EQUIPMENT: 15 riding mowers, 10 walk-behind mowers, 20 blowers, 20 trimmers, 15 edgers, 5 chain saws, 12 hedge trimmers, 3 spray vehicles, 50 maintenance vehicles

THE COMPANY

MISSION STATEMENT: To continuously strive to be recognized in the landscape industry as the best with a constant emphasis on exceptional customer service on the current clientele and an appreciation for our workforce. To maintain an awareness that growth of this company occurs first by customer and employee retention and secondly, by word of mouth from satisfied customers and satisfied employees. To constantly take care of our reputation in all areas of the business environment and recognize that our reputation is our most important asset.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Formalizing standard operating procedures so the company can to continue expanding its geographic market along with its customers and delivering them the level of service they expect from Raymow Enterprises.

THE OWNER

Ray Bradley, age 31

BACKGROUND: Started mowing lawns in 1980 at the age of 13. "Expanded" his market at age 15 when he bought his first riding mower and built a trailer to haul additional fuel and string trimmers.

At a
Glance

Ray Bradley
(right)
discusses the
installation at
one of Raymow
Enterprises'
signature new
community
accounts with
Erik Pearson.
Photo: Tom
Kaczmarek



Ray Bradley isn't interested in being the biggest contractor around, but he wants to be considered one of the best.

When
Reput
IVIA



Ray Bradley's introduction to the landscape industry emphasized the importance of scheduling jobs as close to the office as possible since he traveled to most of his early clients on his bike with a mower in tow. He spent so much time out mowing lawns that his childhood friends tagged him with the nickname "Raymow."

That was nearly 20 years ago, and now the neighborhood kid with the mower is president of Raymow Enterprises, a company with about 70 employees and goals for approximately \$4 million in annual revenue in 2001. Bradley has even traded in his bike in favor of more than 50 trucks. In addition, a clientele consisting primarily of some of the most successful community builders and developers in the Tampa Bay area has replaced all of those neighborhood customers.

The last three years have been particularly good for the company as it tripled its revenue in that time while essentially maintaining the same customer base because of a company-wide focus on real estate builders and developers as clients and a commitment to building long-term partnerships with them.

THE BUILDER/DEVELOPER NICHE. Like most landscape firms, Raymow Enterprises started out with a residential focus, but Bradley was interested in going about this work in a somewhat different fashion. He thought working with developers of residential communities could offer tremendous opportunity for growth while minimizing the need for new sales efforts if the work was done correctly.

After getting the opportunity to build and maintain a landscape for a developer's model home, Bradley learned a critical lesson he will never forget about a contractor's role in a developer's business. "We are a part of the builders' and developers' marketing efforts because they are selling people a complete property, not just a home," he pointed out. "The landscape is part of that sale."

Providing such a critical component to its customers' businesses helped Raymow foster the long-term partnerships and repeat business that so many contractors strive for. "Once we had success with the first builder, other builders started asking us to work for them as well," he recalled. "This was back when the building was slower than it is today, so we had a chance to get our arms around this kind of work. We do the irrigation, landscape and maintenance work for the property, and we'll succeed as long as they succeed."

Raymow began growing as the clients completed communities and started subsequent developments and hired Raymow to landscape them as well. "This lets us focus on our current clientele and spend money that would otherwise go to marketing on keeping our customers happy," Bradley explained, adding that these relationships are critical to Raymow's success now. "We'll even accept blame for something we know we didn't do because if we can spend a few dollars to get a problem fixed the relationship will be that much stronger and then we don't risk upsetting the client."

The company's clientele includes eight builders and four developers, and these 12 clients accounted for nearly 80 percent of the Raymow's total revenue in 2000. (The remainder of the company's work comes from property management contracts with completed communities that Raymow helped landscape.) Bradley is comfortable that none of these accounts represent so much of the company's business as to put the company in a risky situation if it

(continued on page 36)

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USE READER SERVICE #99

Cover Story

(continued from page 33)

lost one of the accounts, but he does acknowledge that there are key points to note when working with these clients.

"Builders are very number oriented," he observed. "However, we are very service oriented. We do what we say we're going to do. We show up when we say we're going to

show up, and we stand behind our work. As a result, we are not the cheapest company around. A lot of the supervisors and purchasing managers we work with compare us to the competition strictly by the numbers, so we have to show them that they get what they pay for."

GROWING UP. When a number of Raymow Enterprises' key customers started expanding into new geographic areas 50 miles away from the company's headquarters in 1996, Bradley was willing to allow other contractors to work on some of the more distant properties because he didn't want the hassles of servicing such a large area. At this point, however, one of these customers explained to Bradley why he needed to keep expanding his market along with his customers.

"This client asked me if I was ever on a high school sports team, and I told him that I was," Bradley recalled. "Then he asked me if that team played away games and, if so, did I participate in those away games. Of course, we played away games, and, of course, I participated."

"He went on to explain how my participation during those away games allowed me to stay on the team," Bradley continued, "and he related this experience to my business situation at the time. If I was going to stay on their team, then I needed to play away games as well as home games."

The ensuing expansion into the new area was a gradual process for the company. "In 1996 and 1997, I went over to the new area

"We are a **part** of the builders' and developers' **marketing efforts** because they are **selling people a complete property**, not just a home. The **landscape is part of that sale.**"

— **Ray Bradley**

every Tuesday to handle meetings, review the jobs and so on, and we would send a crew over every Thursday to work," Bradley commented. "As we grew the amount of work in the area, the crew went over every Thursday and Friday, then Wednesday through Friday, and so on until we had enough work over there to justify opening a new office and putting a manager there."

(continued on page 38)

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Cover Story

(continued from page 36)

Once he decided to open the new office, Bradley had to make some decisions. First among them was how to equip the crew that didn't have all of the resources afforded crews in the company's main location. "The first truck we bought for the branch was the most versatile truck we could find so we could

carry irrigation supplies or tow a trailer with landscape or maintenance equipment on it," he pointed out.

When Bradley needed to select a location for the branch he obtained an overhead map of the area and drew a circle around the area the company would be working in. From

there, he was able to find a warehouse location that offered an outdoor yard and offered easy access to the major east/west and north/south highways.

The branch's 2000 revenue were nearly \$1 million – double the 1999 revenue – but Bradley is honest about the challenges of managing a remote location. In particular, he learned about the importance of having consistent operations and policies between the branch and the main office.

"Today, our biggest challenge is conformity," he admitted. "When we opened our satellite branch, our primary focus was to get that branch up and running – acquiring the vehicles and equipment, hiring and training the staff, etc. – so that we wouldn't miss a beat with the customers we were expanding with. That branch has now been running smoothly and profitably for almost two years."

"However, after reviewing the operation more closely, we realize that we need to re-group and mimic that branch after our corporate office," Bradley continued. "We need to adopt the same policies and procedures we have at the corporate office at the satellite office. Doing this is just a matter of re-organization, but we are challenged with reversing some negative habits and attitudes."

Developing this consistency is particularly important to Bradley as he looks plans for the company to continue its geographic expansion. "I want to make sure that we're running all of our operations the right way as we grow," he emphasized. "This growth happens because of our name and our reputation, as opposed to a lot of marketing, so we have to protect that."

As a result, Bradley and his managers are developing a complete operations manual that spells out how to handle all facets of the business from what time all field personnel should begin work to when is the most efficient time to fuel up, how often to sharpen blades and proper lunch procedures.

GROWING UP. Like most entrepreneurs, Bradley's natural inclination is to focus on operations instead of management, but formalizing the company's operations showed him how dangerous that approach was.

"In the days when we had 25 employees and a handful of trucks, I ran the company on instinct and I just knew where we were mak-

(continued on page 127)

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USE READER SERVICE #59

by Nicole Wisniewski



Systematic SOLUTIONS

Three system-savvy landscape contractors explain why taking the time to efficiently organize operations means working smarter, not harder.

In 1997, Nick DiBenedetto realized that his snow division was the most hated area of his business – internally and externally.

Inspired by Michael Gerber's book *The E Myth*, which focuses on business success through system development, DiBenedetto decided he wouldn't settle for this negative perception and structured N.D. Landscaping's first official system.

"It took me 200 hours to write that system, which is about 10 pages long," said DiBenedetto, president of the Topsfield, Mass.-based company. "And since I wrote that system in November 1997, I haven't personally been in a snow truck to plow snow and we haven't lost one plowing account – not one. I spent two years managing the system and getting it in place, and now the system runs itself. My managers and employees don't need me around because they know how to do it the right way every day by following a system I put in place."

According to DiBenedetto, setting up systems within a company can make or break a business. "When you run a company, you have philosophies in your head on how you're going to do things," he said. "You put people in positions and then you get distracted doing other things. Suddenly, no one is happy. By setting up a system, we have a structure in place we can count on. We branded the N.D. Landscaping name on that system, and now no one is left disappointed with our service."

Although time is sparse in a business owner's day, taking time to formalize a system pays off. In DiBenedetto's case, it became addictive. To date, he has 13 systems in place.

SYSTEMS & FRENCH FRIES. In 1998, McDonald's spent \$1.5 million researching french fries, said DiBenedetto, who has studied the McDonald's business philosophy.

(continued on page 42)

A formal snowplowing system delivers details from where and when to plow to what to wear while doing it. Photo: Boss Snowplow

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Setting Up Systems

(continued from page 40)

"McDonald's owners use a potato supplier who grows potatoes to their starch content specifications," DiBenedetto explained. "And, today, 80 percent of McDonald's orders include french fries. That's how deep within an organization a system penetrates."

"A system isn't only about your little nucleus of an organization—it gets into your

suppliers too," DiBenedetto continued. "For instance, if I work with a brick supplier who helps me better organize my brick storage—maybe makes a different-sized brick for me—then I can purchase more bricks per square foot of storage space and more efficiently control that space. This could save my customers money, as well, if due to this new

supplier relationship, I can lay brick for half the cost of other local contractors. I'm selling my expertise and knowledge to that customer by internally setting up a simple system of organization."

But looking at every area of an unsystematic organization and transforming it into one with structure can prove daunting. Where does one start? According to Phillip Fox, estimator, Showplace Landscaping, Crittenden, Ky., focusing on original company goals or mission statements can be helpful.

"Before you succeed in business, you have to first define what your goal or destination is," Fox said. "A system is the highway you take to reach your destination. Of course, the reason we are in business is to make a profit. And having efficient systems in place is critical in the competitive landscaping market. There is simply no room for sloppiness—you have to constantly be on guard to turn a profit in this business."

Maria Threadgill has seen first-hand what a positive outcome implementing systems can have on a company. Threadgill, now the operations manager at James River Grounds Management, Glen Allen, Va., was originally hired for office administration. In this position, she realized how disorganized a business is without systems.

"From an accounting standpoint, there were massive amounts of unnecessary paperwork," she said. "Each invoice was a Word document that had to be manually reentered into the accounting system—it was truly a mess. From a human resources perspective, there were no defined job responsibilities. We had the people who did the work and the people in the office and that was all the clarification that was made. From a customer standpoint, the person who handled the account was the same one who answered the phone call; the same could be said for the office. Any task needing completion was taken care of by whoever found the problem. There was no organization."

"That was \$4 million and six years ago," Threadgill continued. "Our fast-paced growth has made it crucial that we take each one of these areas and implement systems for them."

When helping to implement James River Grounds Management's systems, Threadgill focused on forming checks and balances, eliminating waste and duplication and

(continued on page 44)

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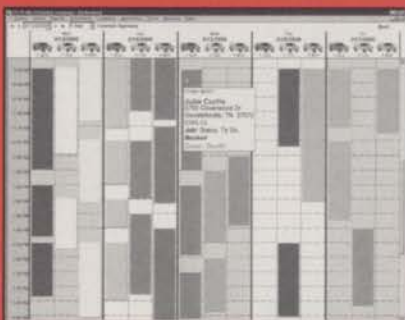
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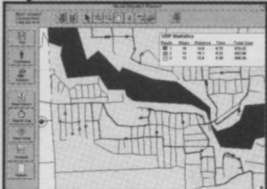
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Setting Up Systems

(continued from page 42)

strengthening the company's vision.

"Integrating an inexpensive database program into our existing accounting software eliminated excess paperwork for routing, job costing, inventory and sales," Threadgill said. "Writing well-thought-out job descriptions for each position eliminated the overlap of responsibilities. And the implementation of an account management system where each customer knows exactly who is taking care of them and who that person's back-up is helped us give customers one or two contacts to deal with for their sites instead of 10, so they weren't being transferred to different people every time there were different requests."

These simple systems achieved what Threadgill believes is the end result of a sound system: "A process that enables a task, or set of tasks, to be performed without the chance of something falling through the cracks and in the most simplistic way possible but still reaching optimum performance."

DON'T JUST SAY IT - WRITE IT.

Developing a system takes commitment, Fox pointed out. "In the early stages of implementing a new system, more time and effort is involved," he said. "And there will be temptation to revert back to the old way of doing things. Adjusting to the new system takes time for everyone involved."

The first step is writing out the necessary steps involved to keep the system running smoothly. But simply writing out the steps can prove discouraging, DiBenedetto admitted. "There isn't a book available on how to write a system," he said. "But if it's not written, it's not a system - it's just a habit and will vaporize over time."

DiBenedetto learned this lesson the hard way. He developed a system for his construction division, explaining to the production manager that he must arrive 15 minutes early every day before the crew and foremen to prepare for a morning meeting. As the foremen came in, the production manager was to discuss with them the day's jobs, available employees and equipment, help load trucks and send crews out.

But after a short while, the production manager started coming in later, claiming that the process worked better if the trucks were loaded nightly, DiBenedetto explained.

"The system wasn't written down so the production manager adapted the system to

Setting Up Systems

what he felt worked best," he said. "I had to explain to him that I felt the foremen weren't managing themselves in the morning. Therefore, I needed him to be there early to manage the foremen and prepare questions to get them thinking and talking. Then he needed to efficiently get the crews out the door on time. I told him, 'If your idea of a different system can do that - great, let's talk about it when we get a chance. But, right now, we have to do it this way because that's the current system we have in place.'

"I understand that systems need to be constantly reviewed and upgraded," DiBenedetto continued. "I'm willing to change my systems, but to do that we need to discuss system ideas, write them down and then implement them. And until we do that, we can't abandon the current system that is in place."

Few landscape contractors have the time to stop what they are doing to write out a new system, which is the main factor discouraging most of them from implementing systems. But this is a challenge worth facing, DiBenedetto said.

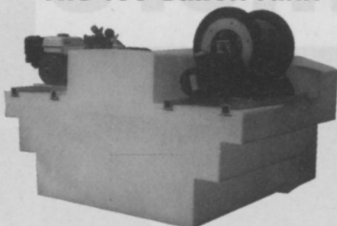
"Sure, there's no time while running a business to write a new system - that's the challenge," he said. "As a business owner there's always something to do other than develop a system. But you can't have someone else come in and develop a system for you; they don't know who you are, what your customers expect from you or how you want a job site to look when you leave."

While writing and implementing systems can be a challenge, contractors who set them up can eliminate time-consuming activities and recognize their employees' capabilities, Threadgill pointed out. "Systems are usually fairly easy to set up, but keeping them going is critical," she said, adding that her company's biggest mistake in the past was not having a specific person responsible for monitoring and enforcing specific systems. "By implementing systems, we learned that we spent a lot of time doing unnecessary tasks and no time doing really important ones. Also, we learned that a good system helps us capitalize on an employee's strengths." ■

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine. For more information on systems, visit this article with the January issue at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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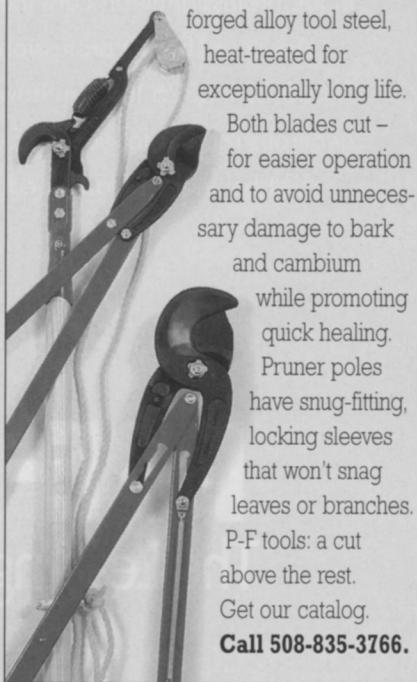
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USE READER SERVICE #73

Financing Growth

by Cynthia Greenleaf

Subsidizing
a smaller
landscape
company's
growth comes
down to a few
key factors.

Take it slow and watch the cash flow. That philosophy succinctly sums up the art of financing growth for a young landscape company, according to several seasoned contractors.

Audrie Seeley, president, Audrie Seeley & Co., Kansas City, Mo., learned this lesson by watching a few of her competitors dive headfirst into the industry, never to resurface. She recalled one young, overzealous company in her market that went out and "bought 15 brand new trucks, the best of everything and only lasted two years," she said. "They went in full speed and didn't take it slowly. That taught me a lesson.

"There's a misconception that money will get a good, strong business," Seeley added, pointing out that money alone isn't the answer to establishing a successful company – such success is a matter of using financial resources in an appropriate, disciplined manner.

SPEAKING FROM EXPERIENCE. For Seeley, who started her \$4-million company from the basement of her house, growing her operation was a matter of financial discipline: She didn't pay herself for two years and she reinvested everything she could back into the business. "Watch your numbers, such as payables, receivables and cash flow," she said of her guiding philosophy. "If you really want (to succeed) with a passion, you have to be ready to starve yourself for a while. You need to grow slowly, adding a few vehicles a year, for example. Start out with one and let that pay for itself."

John Luznicky, co-owner, Durham Hill Nursery, Muskego, Wisc., has taken a similar, cautious approach to expanding his business. "Part of financing is carefully charting out growth," he noted. "You really need to be sure you're forecasting and budgeting as best you can."

Durham Hill plans on adding a new crew in the spring, so Luznicky is forecasting accordingly, taking stock of factors such as what additional equipment will be needed and what can be shared with existing crews. When financing growth, estimating is critical, he said. "Compare what you said and what you did and know that the cash flow will support it. You need to know how much money you'll take in and spend and know the difference between that gap."

Along the same lines, Rood Landscape, Tequesta, Fla., bases its growth on predetermined financial goals, according to Bert Clattenburg, the company's president. "We get with the managers and ask 'How much can we afford to grow?' We set a goal of total sales and work backward from there."

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER. When financing a landscape company's growth, there are three primary points to consider.

Know the numbers. "Good accounting practices are critical," pointed out Jonathan Bartels, owner, Northwestern Landscape Company, Puyallup, Wash. "The most important thing is to watch cash flow. See if you're actually making a profit. If not, there's no way you'll have the cash flow. Make sure you focus on the bottom line."

(continued on page 50)

Figuring out

FINANCES

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Financing Growth

(continued from page 48)

Don't take on too much debt. Out-of-control debt can be a company's downfall. To avoid this death trap, contractors should determine how much debt they can handle and stick to that ratio, according to Bartels. Generally, a two-to-one debt to equity ratio is considered healthy, he advised. "If you're worth \$1 million, you should not have more than \$2 million in debt," he said. "You need to look at how much debt and profit you have and monitor that monthly. Don't put growth before profits. If you're making a good, strong healthy profit and not overextending yourself, you'll have the capital to grow."

Luznicky defines "reasonable debt" as a financial obligation that can still be met if a job falls through. This means a contractor can't be too conservative when making major financial choices, Luznicky noted. "You live and die by those decisions that you make," he warned.

(continued on page 52)

Savvy contractors must know their financial terms – the first step in understanding and fostering healthy growth. So whether you need to brush up or you're new to the game, here's a refresher course, according to John McCarty, senior vice president, KeyBank, Toledo, Ohio.

- **Cash flow** – cash available to make interest and principal payments to all lenders; defined as net income and depreciation
- **Leverage** – what a landscape company owes (total liability) compared to what it owns (net worth)
- **Profitability** – net income
- **Line of credit** – appropriate for covering seasonal fluctuations such as payroll; not recommended for equipment purchases; generally has a floating rate and annual renewal
- **Term loans** – suitable for equipment purchases, acquisitions or long term growth; typically has two to seven year maturity, fixed or floating rate and one time fee
- **Commercial real estate loans** – for financing a building; generally 10 to 20 year maturity with a fixed or floating rate and a one time fee

Business Banking 101

- **Short-term notes** – issued for 90 days to address temporary needs; generally not recommended for landscape contractors
- **Corporate credit cards** – good for business travel, entertainment and other small purchases.

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Financing Growth

(continued from page 50)

Clattenburg favors a common sense strategy to staying debt-free. "Try to pay down all your debt," he advised. "Pay with cash. There's nothing wrong with being 'cash and carry.' Keep it simple."

Build a good line of credit. Whether or not they need it, contractors should work on building a line of credit, Bartels suggested.

"It's good to establish that," he said. "If you don't have any history, start small and prove you're responsible. We started out at \$50,000, and now we can pretty much borrow anything we want."

A line of credit, however, should only be used to cover operational expenses and not for capital investments such as equipment,

Bartels warned. "That's when you get into trouble – when you take a line of credit and use it for capital purposes," he said. "If you start buying things (with the line of credit), you won't have the money coming in (for cash flow). A line of credit should only be used to help with cash flow."

BUILDING A BANK RELATIONSHIP.

Finding the right bank to do business with is critical for growing companies. With so many options available, contractors shouldn't settle for anything less than a bank that can meet their needs exactly. "Sometimes bankers have a hard time keeping up with the growth of a company," Bartels observed. "Sometimes banks aren't willing to take risks as you grow. If you're not satisfied and don't think they're meeting your needs, do some interviewing and find a bank that's willing to help you accomplish your goals and do whatever it takes to keep you happy."

When initially meeting with a bank, contractors should provide detailed financial information about their business. "The number one thing is having a financial statement," Bartels urged. "If you don't have one and can't show the banker exactly what's going on, you won't get the money."

John McCarty, senior vice president, KeyBank, Toledo, Ohio, recommended that contractors have three years of accountant-prepared financial statements, three years of tax returns, a personal financial statement, both conservative and optimistic projections and a cash flow budget. From his standpoint, the five most significant loan approval factors are a company's profitability, leverage, cash flow, collateral and personal guarantee, McCarty added.

Education also is an essential part of establishing a good banking relationship. Many financial institutions simply aren't familiar with the intricacies and quirks of a landscape business, Luznicki pointed out. "You can't treat a landscape company like a manufacturing plant that

(continued on page 54)



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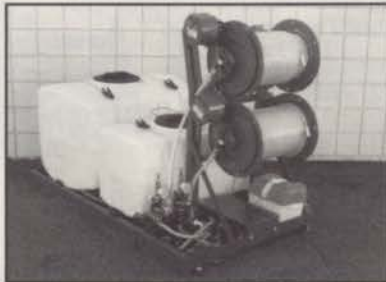
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Financing Growth

(continued from page 52)

makes 200 widgets every Thursday," he said. "We have to educate our banker. We gave him some green industry business management publications. It helped validate some of the stuff that falls outside of the realm of normal banking – the industry's highs and lows and ups and downs."

Another way to educate is to have bank-

ers visit contractors at their operations, said Rood's Vice President, Tom Whitesell. "Invite them out and show them your property and equipment, so they can see that you're not a fly-by-night outfit but a company they can count on," he suggested.

Contractors should make sure their bank feels comfortable with their accountant,

which can work in a company's favor, Luznicky added. "It's good if there's credibility coming from another source, other than you," he said, noting that many banks have a relationship with a local accounting firm and contractors should try to take advantage of this.

Choosing the right bank is obviously a very individual decision. Rood Landscape has found success working with local, community-oriented banks, according to Clattenburg. "You're just a number at larger banks," he said.

Whitesell added that working with their local farm bureau has been an effective strategy, since it understands the fluctuating, often unpredictable nature of the landscape industry, which parallels that of agriculture.

"Make sure you're working with a business bank that understands your situation," added Luznicky, who noted that his former bank resisted valuing his company beyond its tangible assets. "Every time we went to our previous bank, all they would say is 'What do you have for collateral?'"

OPEN TO ADVICE. When it comes to financial matters and company growth, smaller contractors should seek outside guidance as soon as possible. "It's never too early to bring in a consultant," Luznicky pointed out. "The earlier you do, the earlier you'll find out what you don't know."


Bartels agreed. "Make sure you surround yourself with capable, competent advisors," he said, pointing out that his two most important advisors are his attorney and accountant. "When somebody starts a business, they need to hire a professional accountant to make sure they're doing the books properly."

With an accountant in particular, establishing a long-term relationship can be invaluable. "Once you find a good accountant who understands your business, the longer you're with them, the more beneficial their advice is," Bartels observed. As an outsider, "they can see all the pros and cons" to the financial decisions you're making.


Always remember that a good accountant is one who's going to do more than just come up with the numbers, Luznicky pointed out. "It's somebody holding your feet to the fire a little more, holding you more accountable." ■

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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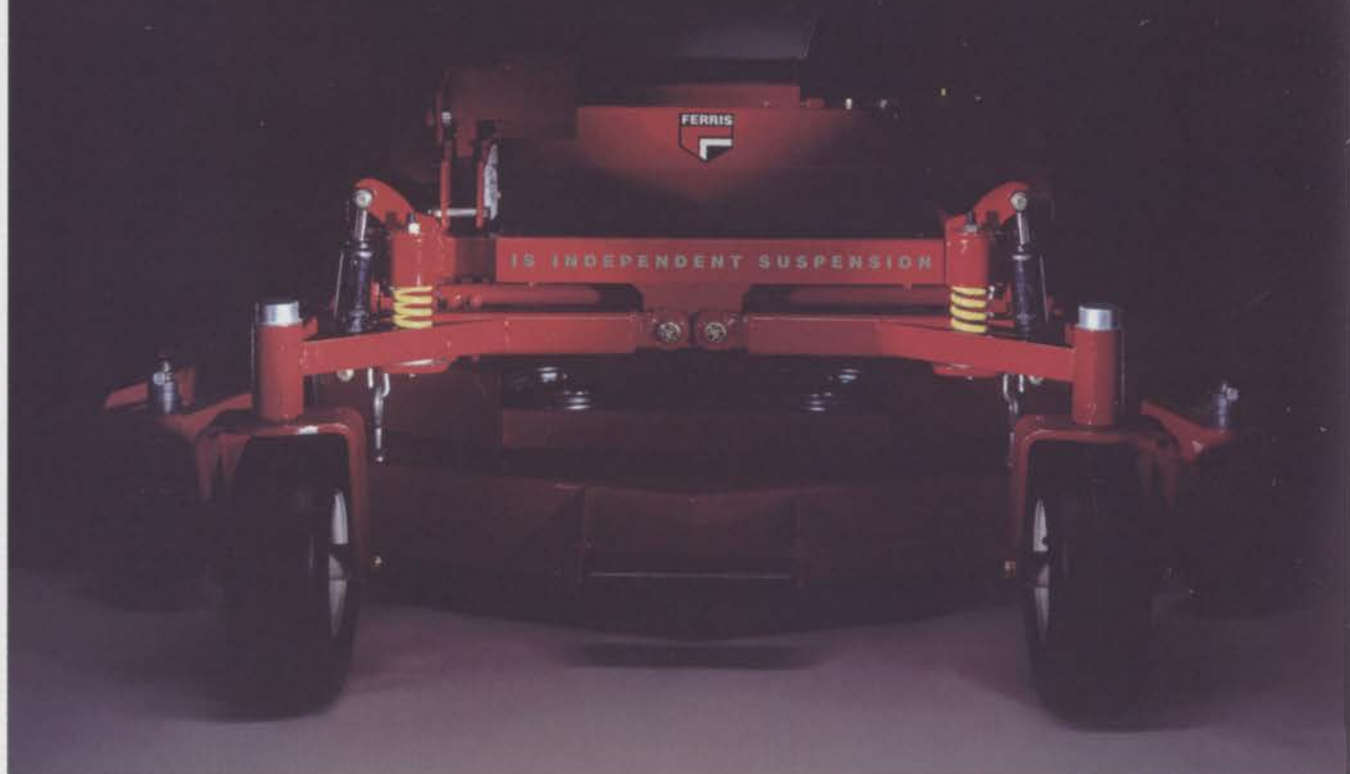
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In its third year, the Commercial Mower Buyers' Guide, the first of eight equipment buyers' guides from Lawn & Landscape in 2001, takes an in-depth look at mowers. This includes operating them safely, maneuvering them in tricky areas and a guide with product specifications. Photo: Hustler Turf Equipment

Cover photo courtesy of Exmark



FOCUS: Mowing Tricky Areas

by Kristen Hampshire

Master
mowing
challenges
without
cutting
profit and
productivity.

Some properties contain all the elements of a virtual mowing obstacle course loaded with sloping hillsides, wet grasses, risky ruts and overbearing berms. These hurdles and blocks — obstructions where mowers might roll over or tip — create demanding conditions for landscape contractors.

At the same time, what is a chore for some is a challenge for others, noted Brad Hjort, vice president, K & H Lawn Services, Fairfax, Va. Along with the satisfaction of completing a challenging mowing job, he wins customer praise, which often justifies the time and energy spent maneuvering mowers on tricky areas, he said.

"Some people like the challenge of a tricky mowing job, and others dread it," Hjort distinguished. "I used to enjoy doing tricky areas, and it always made me feel good when a customer would remark that their lawn looked great. I looked at these jobs as a challenge, and I would try to do them as efficiently as I could so they would look the best."

Call this perspective the "glass is half full" outlook. Hjort calls it a job prerequisite. Training, practice and the right equipment can ease challenges, but tuning up a technician's mental game to make sound judgments when assessing tricky spots will ensure efficient, effective service, Hjort stressed.

A CHALLENGE COURSE. "As far as tricky, we call them high-maintenance areas — anything that's not a straight run or requires special equipment outside of a walk-behind mower or tractor unit," described Lindsey Purcell, landscape maintenance manager, Becker Landscape Contractors, Indianapolis, Ind. "Anything greater than a 3 to 4 percent slope, anything that presents a hazard to our guys," he continued, trailing off with a list of popular "tricky spots," including berms, slopes, strange bed lines, sharp angles and pool sides.

The most common high-maintenance hazards Purcell confronts are berms and slopes, he noted, adding that most contractors or landscape architects who install or design these features consider them aesthetic additions, not maintenance obstacles.

"A lot of people don't design with maintenance in mind," he said. "They don't build berms with the



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FOCUS: Mowing Tricky Areas

idea that they're going to need mown. The slope angle is much too sharp or the top is not wide enough to support a mower, so when a mower goes over the area you end up scalping the turf."

Manuel DeSouza, owner, N.D. Landscaping, Topsfield, Mass., stressed the role customer communication plays in justifying the higher prices of tricky areas, adding that these discussions with customers can be opportunities to land additional sales. Most clients are unaware of landscape features that present challenges when they are choosing the design and uneducated about the extra time and effort these areas demand for proper maintenance.

"For the most part, only about 10 percent of customers will ask questions like, 'How would you mow that tricky area by the pool,' or, 'How would you mow around that waterfall?'" DeSouza said.

Purcell uses client communication as a key tool for selling work. When identifying mowing barriers on a property, he points them out to the customer and suggests solutions to permanently mend the problem — adding mulch to a bed to eliminate thin fingers of grass or leveling a steep grade, for example. He views challenging areas as an opportunity for an enhancement sale, and like Hjort, welcomes the challenge of redesigning or conquering tricky areas.

"I feel like it's my responsibility to point those areas out to the customer," he added, stressing that communication helps clients understand why their properties might be a costly mowing job. "You have to prove to your customer that it's not just a mow and blow — it will take some additional manpower and equipment to negotiate the tricky area."

This is why examining a property, locating potential problems and defining a solution to successfully master mowing obstacles are key points to review prior to accepting a job, Purcell added. "Tricky areas are only undesirable if you don't evaluate and price them accordingly."

For example, challenging properties might hike a price up 20 to 30 percent based on a system Purcell uses that prices properties for every thousand square feet of mowing. After evaluating the site as easy, medium or difficult, he determines how much more to add to the estimate. Mowing considerations carry over to the scheduling process, where extra time is allotted for complicated accounts, he said.

"The more difficult a property is, the less coverage you get per hour," Purcell explained. "With some properties you can mow upwards of 70,000 square feet per hour, but when you get to more

challenging areas, your productivity might run down to 12,000 square feet an hour, so that's why it influences your price structure."

CROSS TRAINING. If judgment drives whether or not tricky mowing areas are handled responsibly or with haphazard negligence, contractors are wise to invest time in training their employees to tune in to potentially dangerous situations, advised Rick Kier, president, Pro Scapes, Syracuse, N.Y.

He emphasized sound on-the-job decision-making after experiencing several cases where safe mower use was not practiced, he noted. "We've had employees tip over mowers and we had one case where an employee fractured an ankle — he should have

*"A LOT OF PEOPLE don't design
with maintenance in mind. They
don't build berms with the idea
that they're going to need mown."
— Lindsey Purcell*

used a walk-behind mower and instead he took a rider on the grassy berm," he described. "It was too steep of an incline and the center of gravity was not where it should have been, so the machine tipped."

These lessons motivated Kier to institute a safety training program, he added. A combination of videos and discussions that identify problem areas educates his employees.

"You can't be out there holding their hands and telling them how to use a mower in a particular spot," Kier pointed out. "You have to train them to have the knowledge to make their own decisions in the field."

Kier accented the importance of responsible choices with digital photos one of his former employees e-mailed him. In this picture, the damaging effects of tipping a mower are clearly depicted and serve as a warning to workers, he noted.

"On his own time, he tipped a mower and just about cut his hand off," Kier described. "He sent me some photographs that I'm using as training aids that illustrate the accident graphically. I think it hits home and my employees get the idea."

To sharpen these images, Kier implements additional safety training by discussing how technicians should mow potentially dangerous areas so they can identify these pitfalls while they are servicing an account and assess the safest, most efficient way to

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FOCUS: Mowing Tricky Areas

handle them. In addition, a work form specifies tricky areas so when crews are dispatched to a property they are aware of its challenges, he noted.

"We try to have the person who sold the job meet the crew there on the first mowing," Kier said. "The crew won't feel like they're up against an unknown and they will know what is expected of them."

After the estimator identifies difficult areas on a property and the customer agrees to the proposal, Hjort passes the responsibility of informing technicians of challenges to the supervisor, he said. "Nine times out of 10, when a supervisor is notified, he can go out on the job the first time with the technician and the problem is taken care of," he noted. "Problems occur when the area is not identified initially and a crew is sent out without a supervisor and might do it two to three times before the problem is identified."

This is why training is necessary, especially in a tight labor market with many employees new to the trade. Inexperience requires education, Hjort said.

"There is no substitute for teaching and training and getting the people doing the work to understand your philosophy and how you want the job done," Hjort explained. "Our philosophy is quality, so we need to train our laborers to get more information in their hands in all cases."

SPEEDY RECOVERY. Safety dictates sales for Kier, who has rejected jobs because the risk factor outweighed the value of retaining the account.

"We had a situation where the builder put in new condominium units and planted grass on a slope that was too steep and could not be mowed," he described. "We went to the builder and said it was too dangerous — build a retaining wall, terrace it, it's too difficult to mow."

Liability limits some jobs, but just as there are tricky areas, there are tricks technicians perform to manage these traps. Using the right mowing angles is one method of hurdling obstacles, suggested Purcell, who recalled an incident where a mower slid down a steep slope into a nearby pond. Running mowers on slopes presents an element of danger, he noted, and tipping or sliding can occur if grass is wet.

Belt-driven mowers might be more likely than gear-drive mowers to slip on steep grades, Hjort added, warning that these mowers can raise off of the ground, spin and cause turf to tear. "Eventually, you end up with ruts if you're mowing the property the same way every week," he described.

Hjort recommended contour mowing to avoid wear and tear from over-used patterns. Constantly changing the mowing pattern will allow for easier

Hovering Over OBSTACLES

Confined spaces, soggy turf, steep slopes — these landscape quirks often outwit the capabilities of a traditional lawn mower. Rolling equipment over damp grass can damage turf, and mowing on high grades presents safety hazards for operators. Contractors who deal with challenging mowing areas need extra tools to conquer these circumstances.

"Just as a landscaper uses a zero-turn radius mower, a string trimmer or blower to get the job done, a hover mower would be in a similar category," describes Nick Nikazmerad, president, Eastman Industries, Portland, Maine. His company produces a hover mower that moves on a pocket of air instead of wheels. A rotating impeller draws air from the top of the mower, compresses it against the bottom of the deck and rushes it against the ground to lift up the mower, he explained.

"It's like a hovercraft or those navy jets that you see taking off vertically from the deck of the carrier — it's the same concept," Nikazmerad compared. "The entire mower lifts up about 1/2 inch off the ground, so it follows the contour of the land as you push it on the grass."

While string trimmers might scalp grass on steep slopes, a hover mower skims over the surface, cutting the grass without damaging the turf with repetitive wheel motion, he noted. The light-weight mower is designed not as a replacement for a traditional mower, but instead as a supplement to a contractor's equipment fleet, he said.

Ideal applications for this type of mower maximize its free-moving qualities, Nikazmerad said. "Since there are no wheels, you can actually move the mower from side to side, so the mower is tremendously maneuverable," he added. "If you have very tight, confined areas, with a regular mower you can only go backward and forward and you have to keep rotating the mower to get access to the area that you want to mow."

Also, hover mowers handle tricky mowing areas bordering ponds and can glide over soggy areas without creating a rut, he said. "It's a specialty tool that can save contractors time, money and effort." — *Kristen Hampshire*

long-term mowing because the equipment won't fall into a pre-existing track, which can increase chances of slippage on slopes.

"I try to set up two patterns to start with and I never mow over the same line," Hjort explained. "I usually set up one at a slight angle or have the technicians off-set the tire tracks to avoid damage and keep the turf in good condition. The better the turf is in a situation like this, the easier it is to mow and the less long-term damage you get."

To maintain productivity when mowing challenging spots, Purcell assigns one man on each crew to a string trimmer and another to a 20-inch mower, so that each crew is prepared with equipment to manage obstacles efficiently. This way, the larger equipment can move freely on the property and finish large land tracts, he said.

Besides technique and equipment, Purcell insists there is "better living through chemicals." Growth regulators allow his company to mow on a bi-weekly or monthly basis, which provides a pricing economy, he added.

"We've used growth regulators for 15 years and they reduce the need for string trimmers," he said. "Twenty to 35 percent of your time is spent on string trimming or blowing, so when you can de-

crease that you decrease your time on the site."

This solution isn't always ideal for high-profile spaces, such as front entries, however, as plant growth regulators can result in yellowing turf that customers find unappealing in visible areas. But growth regulators can serve as an effective maintenance tool for around ditch lines or severe slopes near ponds — "the back 40, so to speak," Purcell described.

However, no matter which strategy a contractor implements to master mowing challenges, practice makes perfect. A combination of equipment, training and sound judgment form a winning combination to defeat tricky areas, Hjort stressed.

"If you have the proper machinery, there should be no damage or injury that occurs," he said. "Second is training or teaching your guys how to handle these situations when they are on site, whether it be something like a specific pattern — there's always going to be some sort of judgment there. Making sure the operators are trained and know what to do in all types of situations and have the right piece of equipment in their hands — that's really what it all boils down to." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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FOCUS: Mowing Safety

by Kristen Hampshire

SENSIBLE Safety

A contractor who doesn't practice precaution risks injuries that can puncture the company's revenue, reputation and reliability.

Just as cutting and clean-up comprise a landscape contractor's daily to-do list, considering potential equipment hazards is an obligation equipment operators can't afford to ignore. The stakes are high for those mindlessly operating commercial mowers — negligent equipment use can injure the technician as well as bystanders and their vehicles, homes and properties.

For safety's sake, conscientious landscape contractors should add responsible mower use to their job description. "Safety is not above and beyond, it is part of the job and part of why you are getting paid," stressed Lou Kobus, agronomist and CEO, Village Turf, Mt. Vernon, Va.

HIGH-RISK HAZARDS. Visibility, noise, thrown objects, speed, comfort—these concerns and others form a lengthy list of areas that demand attention to avoid dangerous outcomes.

"There is a relationship between sound for the operator's hearing and for his ability to be aware of what's going on around him," noted Gregg Breningmeyer, marketing manager, commercial mowing, John Deere Worldwide Commercial Consumer Equipment Division, Raleigh, N.C. "Operator comfort in an indirect way has a lot to do with safety, because as operators become fatigued, they are less aware and tend to be less careful."

Bill Shea, vice president of sales, Ferris Industries, Munnsville, N.Y., said operator fatigue is the most common cause of mower-related injuries as most technicians work long hours. "By the end of the day, employees might not be following the safety procedures that they are supposed to follow," he said. "As time goes

on, everyone gets a little sloppy, and technicians can walk a lot of miles during the day with walk-behinds."

Speed is also a safety and quality issue, Breningmeyer added, noting that mowers that exceed 10 to 12 miles per hour might not to process the volume of clippings through the deck, which decreases the quality of the cut. Also, mowers that move too quickly might fail braking tests.

Tip speed — or speed of the mower blade — also is a common inadequacy in



Sticking to a regular maintenance schedule is one way contractors can ensure mower safety.

Photo: Toro



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FOCUS: Mowing Safety

the industry, added Mike Mack, vice president for marketing and sales, John Deere. "A good deck design can control the tip speed with the discharge shoot," he explained.

Mowers that fail a ball-bearing test most likely exceed the ANSI standard of 19,000 revolutions per minute, create more noise, generate a detrimental velocity through the blade tip and increase the risk

of shattering a blade, Breningmeyer noted.

Beyond spinning blades, outside considerations — the neighbors, for example — also figure into the risk factor list, noted Mark Meagher, marketing manager, Dixie Chopper, Coatesville, Ind.

"You need to have your wits about you while you're mowing," he added. "Someone on a riding mower might think you can just go out and drive

RISK Reducers

"Insurance companies are becoming very selective about which risks they want to take on," noted Peter Ruvalcaba, loss control, CNA Commercial Insurance, Chicago, Ill. "This evidence is visible to your insurance company, your employees and their families, OSHA and your customers."

The following are signs that a landscape company is committed to a safety program and is in a favorable position for better insurance rates, Ruvalcaba listed.

- Written safety program
- Designated safety coordinator
- New employee orientation
- Weekly safety training
- Employee involvement in safety
- Supervisor accountability for safety
- Disciplinary policy
- Early return to work program
- Security controls for equipment and tools

around the yard, but there are other things you need to worry about — houses, trees, hillsides, your safety and that of others, as far as other people within an area of flying debris."

Peter Ruvalcaba, loss control, CNA Insurance, Chicago, Ill., reported that nearly 40 percent of "struck claims," claims due to an employee being struck by objects including the mower body, blade or something ejected from the discharge shoot, are caused by equipment contractors use, including mowers. These injuries are reduced when technicians mow during off-hours, when there are not as many bystanders present, and when operators position the discharge shoot toward the property and never toward the sidewalk, cars or people, he said.

"Bad things only happen when the engine is running," Meagher commented, which is why respecting a mower's safety devices and not overriding an automatic engine shut-off function is critical to minimizing on-the-job risks. Most commercial mowers are equipped with a function that allows the engine to continue running but stops blade rotation when an operator dismounts the machine or lets go of the controls on a walk-behind mower. Some offer a device that cuts the engine completely.

Roll-over protection systems (ROPS) are also available on some commercial mowers and can prevent serious injuries caused by mowers that tip over, Mack added.

However, operators must properly utilize safety

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features and respect shut-off functions in order for them to dependably reduce danger. Meagher categorized most mower accidents in two categories: Operator carelessness and safety device negligence. Ultimately, the technician is responsible for making sound judgment calls while operating equipment. "Safety is an attitude and it starts with you," he reminded. "You have to be in a safety state of mind."

SAFETY-MINDED SUGGESTIONS. Beyond mechanisms, safety is a matter of judgment and responsibility. However, Kobus pointed out that "common sense is not always common — you have to teach people what is good and what is bad, especially with problem mowing areas," he explained.

While Kobus admitted there are endless possible pitfalls that can put a damper on even a detailed safety program, the odds taper when contractors stress precautions. "A thousand things could go wrong, but the chances are diminished with a well-maintained machine and a good operator," he said.

Kobus assigns responsibility to his technicians — each employee maintains and operates a desig-

nated mower. He claimed that holding workers accountable for maintenance reduces accidents.

"Each technician is responsible for a machine," he explained. "In the morning, they check the oil, gas and go over the entire machine. At night, machines get cleaned, blades changed and the mower is topped off with fuel.

"When you run a maintenance check like that, your safety is a lot more assured," he stressed. "If they are conscientious enough to take care of their mower, then they'll take care of the truck, trailers and other equipment — it's infectious."

In order for Kobus' employees to assume responsibility for their mowers, novices must learn maintenance and operation methods, he said. Progressive training — advancing from edgers to blowers to riding mowers — provides employees detailed instructions.

By emphasizing the importance of mower safety, companies reduce the probability of work-related injuries no matter the size of the staff, said Andy Maushbaugh, loss control engineering manager,

FMI, Edwardsville, Ill. "The company safety program with tailgate safety meetings are a must — maybe 10 minutes at the start of the day to get operators ready," he said. "Give employees one topic to take out into the field to bring safety to the forefront."

VISIBILITY, noise, thrown objects, speed, comfort — these concerns and others form a list of areas that demand attention to avoid dangerous outcomes.

For some employees, hazards become more real when they see injuries caused by negligent mower use, Mack noted. One John Deere engineer kept a picture book of accident victims to show to employees. "We try to visualize safety on a personal level instead of a statistical level," he emphasized.

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FOCUS: Mowing Safety

Personal responsibility for safety includes not only training and maintenance, but also wearing protective equipment such as long-sleeved shirts, sturdy work boots with slip-resistant soles, safety glasses, hearing protection and leather gloves when working around cutting and puncture hazards, Ruvalcaba listed.

Finally, to avoid accidents that spring from haphazard mowing, contractors should press safety as a priority over time. In an industry where productivity means profit, technicians might speed through a job, leaving safety concerns at the curb, Breningmeyer noted.

"There are a number of small operators that knowingly take risks every day because of the pressure of productivity," he commented. "The way to compete in the marketplace in the minds of some of these folks is to do the job faster. When that happens you have a dangerous situation."

COMPENSATION FOR CARE. Since safety must be practiced full-time, many business owners offer incentives to encourage employees to practice

maintenance, protection and sound judgment and to remind staff that safety is a constant function of their job.

Ruvalcaba described a reward program at one company where employees who work without a lost time injury are rewarded with \$25 gift certificates. If no lost time injuries occur during the calendar year, five employees' names are drawn from a hat and awarded a \$1,000 prize, he explained.

"The prizes are awarded at the company Christmas party," he added. "What better time to celebrate — and celebrate safely — that no one was seriously injured that year."

Meagher stressed that safety goes beyond personal injury. "You think of a safe day as one without bodily injury, but a safe day might be a day where you don't hurt others or put a scratch on someone's vehicle with debris," he described.

Company compensation for implementing safety programs can payoff on the insurance end, as many insurance agencies offer credits for safety initiatives, Maushbaugh noted.

"One serious accident can drive a company's

experience modification into the debit area, and that will hang around for three years," Maushbaugh added. "Companies relive accidents as they pay for years, and injured employees will be reliving them for a lifetime."

The bottom line is, "safety pays," he stressed.

Since insurance pricing is based on the quality of the risk a company represents, a contractor who implements controls to prevent and reduce losses is in the position to receive a better insurance rate than a company that doesn't do so, Ruvalcaba added. (See *Risk Reducers sidebar on pg. M12*)

When management sets a safety example and establishes a program, the technician and company both will reap the rewards.

"Safety has to be prominent in our minds," Meagher emphasized. "Safety is as safety does. It truly is an attitude. You have to think as you're mowing and you have to be aware of other people's properties. You have to be safety conscious." **LL**

The author is the Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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Find the above features at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Introducing My Lawn & Landscape Online



Some people fear change, while others welcome it with open arms. Lawn & Landscape Online is confident that you will choose the latter path and welcome our brand new site design as a useful tool to help connect the fragmented green industry.

Our redesign, launched at 5 p.m., Dec. 19, 2000, is a bold and necessary change to the way users navigate Lawn & Landscape Online's wide array of resources. The site is categorized by subject title and is completely searchable to help you find the exact information you are looking for. It also features a personalized area, named "My Lawn & Landscape," that allows you customize the site to your preferences (see sidebar at left).

The site redesign and additions were made with you, our faithful users, in mind. We value your needs and opinions and request that you forward any comments, questions or criticisms to my attention so we can work to make this site as valuable a resource for you as possible.

Thank you for your continued interest in Lawn & Landscape Online and for being a vital part of the changing face of the green industry online.

Sincerely,

Scott Hunsberger

Internet Editor, Lawn & Landscape Online

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Please e-mail your comments to shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com. Lawn & Landscape Online is: Scott Hunsberger, Internet editor (shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com) and Sydney Work, web department manager (swork@gia.net). Enjoy your visit to Lawn & Landscape Online!

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- Reduced grip force and short grip travel distance
- Fully-floating Super Flow System deck
- 2-by-2-by-1/16-inch tubular steel carrier frame
- Blade tip speeds reach 18,000 feet per minute
- Available with 36-, 44- and 52-inch cutting decks

Circle 201 on reader service card

Kubota Front Mower

- Temporary "on-demand" four-wheel drive function
- Powered by an 18-hp diesel engine
- Three Vortex Combustion System
- Rubber engine mounts minimize vibration
- Cool air discharged to the rear
- Mowing blade features a multi-belt drive system

Circle 202 on reader service card

Encore Prowler Mid Cut

- Mid-mount commercial mower features front-cut style deck suspension
- Wheels allow deck to float
- Three-point pivot system creates articulating deck – each side moves independently with the front wheel on the corresponding side
- Front wheels maintain ground contact
- Features a dual-path hydrostatic drive, PTO shaft and 5 1/2-inch cutting deck
- Available in 52-, 61- and 72-inch cutting decks
- Powered by 22- to 31-hp gas or diesel engines
- Choose either single or dual tail wheels

Circle 203 on reader service card

Land Pride Flail Mowers

- Designed to manage a variety of tasks, from cutting to shredding
- Rotor works in opposite direction of travel
- A threaded rod offsets the hitch by 8 inches
- Cast iron gearbox incorporates an over-running clutch, enabling rotor to swing free to stop when tractor's PTO is turned off
- Rear gate can be closed for mulching
- Open gate to simplify discharge in heavy conditions

Circle 204 on reader service card

Great Dane Super Surfer

- The 36-inch commercial stand-on zero-turning radius mower features a fully floating 3-blade cutting deck
- Single lever adjustment for cutting height allows for simple height change
- Engine options include 15 hp twin and 17 hp twin Kawasaki

- Speed reaches 8.5 mph
- Enhanced operator visibility

Circle 205 on reader service card



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FOCUS: Mower PRODUCTS

Husqvarna Large Frame ZTH

- Reaches a ground speed of 10 mph and is powered by Kohler or Kawasaki engines ranging from 23 to 26.5 hp
- Cutting heights range from 1½ to 6 inches in ¼-inch increments
- Features heavy-duty Parker/Ross wheel motors with 1¼-inch diameter tapered output shaft
- Includes an automotive style "stacked" hydraulic oil cooler
- Dual 5.7-gallon tanks allow for a 11.4-gallon fuel capacity
- Deck lifting system requires little force to lift deck; optional foot assist deck lift available
- Non-greasable blade spindle design requires little maintenance

Circle 206 on reader service card

Ferris New Z's

- Mid-mount Z line includes the 1000 Z, IS 3000 Z and IS 4000 Z in cutting decks from 48 to 72 inches



- Offered with two- or four-wheel independent suspension options
- Movement is controlled by spring/shock combination
- Front suspension system combined with independent suspension on rear wheels eliminates shock to chassis and operator

- Single pin adjusts cutter deck in ¼-inch increments from 1½ to 4½ inches
- Anti-scalp rollers
- Available with a certified two-post roll-over protection system
- Engine options: 21-hp Kawasaki for 1000 Z, 23-hp Kawasaki or 25-hp Kohler for IS 3000 Z and 27-hp Kawasaki or 31-hp Daihatsu for IS 4000 Z

Circle 207 on reader service card

Grasshopper True ZT Mid-Mount Mower

- 300 Series Model 321D is powered by a 20.9-hp Kubota liquid-cooled diesel engine
- Mower reaches speeds up to 10 mph
- Optional Down Discharge™ mulching
- Large drive tires provide traction and create a smooth ride
- Removable rear panel allows accessibility to clutch and belts
- Rugged caster wheel design includes double-sealed, dust-proof, greasable wheel bearings and sealed fork shaft
- Cutting height ranges from 1 to 5 inches
- 10-gallon fuel capacity

Circle 208 on reader service card

Scag Turf Tiger

- Mower is powered by a 23- or 25-hp Kohler Command engine or a 22- or 27-hp liquid-cooled Kawasaki engine
- Available with cutting decks ranging from 52 to 72 inches
- Heavy-duty hydro-drive combination
- Split front deck roller design ensures free movement of anti-scalp rollers
- Includes a large-capacity 10-gallon fuel tank and 6-quart hydro fluid tank
- Cutter deck constructed with a 10-gauge steel top with 7-gauge support plate
- Cutter deck drive shaft system designed for

maintenance and serviceability

- Features a large-capacity radiator, new hydraulic pump design and larger clutch

Circle 209 on reader service card

Cub Cadet Commercial

- HF1748 Dual Hydro Wide-Area walk-behind mower powered by a 17-hp Kawasaki V-Twin



OHV engine

- Features a 48-inch Command Cut System deck
- Features steel construction, extra-deep deck design and marbane blades with a 1.7-inch overlap to offer a clean cut
- Rear roller design provides striping effect
- Features include a dual-lever hydrostatic controls, electric PTO, articulating front axle, Timken tapered roller-bearing spindles and an optional 2-wheel sully

Circle 210 on reader service card

Bunton BZT 2000 Series

- Zero-turn, ride-on rotary mower engine options include a 20-hp Yanmar diesel, 23-hp Kohler Aegis gas and a 25- or 26-hp Kohler Command Pro V-Twin gas engine
- 12-gallon capacity fuel tank
- 48-, 52.5-, 61- or 72-inch cutting decks
- Equipped with electronic deck lift
- Hydrostatic transmission with dual variable displacement pumps
- Hydro brakes and disc-type parking brake
- Lever steering controls
- Optional two-post ROPS, knobby-tread rear tires and Eco Plate mulch kit

Circle 211 on reader service card

Wright Stander

- Cutting decks from 36 to 61 inches
- Oversize discharge with bracketless flat-mounting for Grass Gobbler attachment
- Cutting height adjustable from 1¾ to 4½ inches in ¼-inch increments
- Operator presence switch on foot platform
- Two Hydrogear variable displacement pumps
- Zero-turning radius
- Ground speeds up to 8 mph on 61-inch model
- ¼-inch thick, high-lift wing blades

Circle 212 on reader service card

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As part of the third annual Commercial Mower Buyers'

Guide, *Lawn & Landscape*

is providing an

overview of the

products many

mower manufactur-

ers are currently

offering professional

contractors.

Included in this

guide is a listing of

companies that

participated, along

with each

organization's con-

tact information.

Also, following is a

compilation of each

manufacturer's

walk-behind and

riding mowers.

Commercial Mower BUYERS' GUIDE

FOCUS: Mower Buyers' Guide

DECK SIZE:	GAS OR DIESEL:	HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE:	MULCHING CAPABILITY:	LIQUID- OR AIR-COOLED ENGINE:	ZERO-TURN CAPABILITY:	OTHER KEY FEATURES:
WALK-BEHIND MODELS						
AMERICAN HONDA MOTOR CO.						
21 inches	Gas	Push mower	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	
21 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	
21 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	BBC
21 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	BBC
21 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	BBC
36, 48, 54 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	"No Tool" quick height adjustment, Hour meter
36 and 48 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	"No Tool" quick height adjustment, Hour meter
ARIENS COMPANY						
21 inches	Gas	N/A	Yes	B & S 6.5 hp Intek	N/A	Quick conversion from mulching to bagging to side discharge
21 inches	Gas	Infiniti-Speed Self Propelled	Yes	B & S 6.5	N/A	Quick conversion from mulching to bagging to side discharge
21 inches	Gas	Infiniti-Speed Self Propelled	Yes	Robin 6 hp	N/A	Quick conversion from mulching to bagging to side discharge
BLACK ROCK MANUFACTURING						
32 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	12.5-hp air-cooled	No	Kawasaki engine
36 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	12.5-hp air-cooled	No	Kawasaki engine
48 inches	Gas	Both	Yes	14-hp air-cooled	Yes	Kawasaki engine
52 inches	Gas	Both	Yes	17-hp air-cooled	Yes	Kawasaki engine
BOBCAT - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS						
32, 36, 48, 54 or 61 inches	Gas	Gear	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	4 engine options, side-discharge cutting decks
32, 36, 48, 54 or 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	4 engine options, side-discharge cutting decks, infinitely variable ground speed
21 inches	Gas	Push mower	N/A	Air-cooled	Yes	Accessories include a metal screen or polyester mesh grass catcher
BUNTON - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS						
21 inches	Gas	Push mower	N/A	N/A	No	Cutting height adjustments from .5 to 3.5 inches in .5-inch increments
36 or 48 inches	Gas	Gear	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	5 forward speeds, side-discharge decks
36, 48, 54 or 61 inches	Gas	Gear	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	3 engine options, stand-up sully attachment, side-discharge
36, 48, 54 or 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	Twin speed levers, 4 engine options, side discharge cutting decks
CUB CADET COMMERCIAL						
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Command Cut system
54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Command Cut system
21, 32, 36, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Command Cut system
EASTMAN INDUSTRIES HOVER MOWER						
16 inches	Gas	N/A	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Hover
19 inches	Gas	N/A	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Hover
ENCORE MANUFACTURING						
32 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Removable fuel tank, Dual V-Drive deck, reinforced deck, low-maintenance spindles
36 inches	Gas	Both	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Removable fuel tank, Dual V-Drive deck, reinforced deck, low-maintenance spindles
48 inches	Gas	Both	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Removable fuel tank, Dual V-Drive deck, reinforced deck, low-maintenance spindles
EXCEL INDUSTRIES						
37 and 48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	H-bar steering, 15 hp
48 and 54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	H-bar steering, 17 hp
EXMARK MANUFACTURING						
21 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Push and self-propelled or BBC
32 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Feather-Lite Grip Tension
36 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Feather-Lite Grip Tension
48 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Feather-Lite Grip Tension
36 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Quick-height-adjust; full floating deck
48 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Quick-height-adjust; full floating deck
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Insta-Track adjustment system
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Insta-Track adjustment system
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Exceptional cut, smaller footprint
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Electric/Air-cooled	Yes	Exceptional cut, smaller footprint
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Exceptional cut, smaller footprint
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Enhanced Control System
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Electric/Air-cooled	Yes	Enhanced Control System
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Enhanced Control System
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Electric/Air-cooled	Yes	Enhanced Control System
52 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Quick-height-adjust and Feather-Lite grip tension
FERRIS INDUSTRIES						
36, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes, on 36- and 48-inch models	Air-cooled	N/A	Simple drive wheel assembly with individually replaceable parts; operator-friendly electric clutch system

FOCUS: Mower Buyers' Guide

DECK SIZE:	GAS OR DIESEL:	HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE:	MULCHING CAPABILITY:	LIQUID- OR AIR-COOLED ENGINE:	ZERO-TURN CAPABILITY:	OTHER KEY FEATURES:
36 and 48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	Heavy-duty Eaton commercial specification transaxle; operator-friendly controls Self-contained Eaton transmissions; wide, low stance
48, 52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	No	Air-cooled	N/A	
GRAVELY - AN ARIENS COMPANY						
36 and 50 inches	Gas	Gear	N/A	Air-cooled	Zero-uncut turn	Zero-uncut turn
36, 40, 50 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	N/A	Air-cooled	True zero-turn	
30, 40 and 50 inches	Gas	All-gear planetary, 2-speed transaxle		N/A	Air-cooled	
GIANT-VAC MANUFACTURING						
32, 36, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Gear/Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	
GREAT DANE POWER EQUIPMENT						
32 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Single-lever control
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
HOWARD PRICE TURF EQUIPMENT						
36 to 48 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Floating deck
36 to 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Floating deck
HUSQVARNA						
36 and 48 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	14-hp engine
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	14-hp engine
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	17-hp engine
LESCO						
32, 36, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Belt and gear	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Parking brake
36, 48, 52 and 54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Parking brake
MTD PRODUCTS						
21, 32, 36, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
36, 48, 52, 54 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
RICH MFG.						
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Can ride
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Can ride
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Can ride
SCAG POWER EQUIPMENT						
36 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Advantage deck
48 and 52 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Advantage deck
36, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Ultimate floating deck
32 inches	Gas	Gear	No	Air-cooled	No	
36, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Advantage deck
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Advantage deck
72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
36 and 48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Ultimate floating deck
52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Ultimate floating deck
SNAPPER						
21 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes/Accessory	Air-cooled	No	2 engine options, 6 forward speeds, converts to zero-turn with swivel wheel kit accessory
36 and 48 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes/Accessory	Air-cooled	Yes	3 engine options, pistol grip or loop handle control, backside idlers standard
36, 48, 52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes/Accessory	Air-cooled	Yes	4 engine options, loop handle controls, electric clutch lode engagement
TORO LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR EQUIPMENT						
32, 36 and 48 inches	Gas	Gear	Recycler Mulching	Air-cooled	No	Fixed decks, 3-in-1 decks (side-discharge, bagging, recycler mulching)
32, 36, 37, 44 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Recycler Mulching	Air-cooled	Yes	Floating decks, 3-in-1 decks
32, 36, 37, 44 and 52 inches	Gas	Gear	Recycler Mulching	Air-cooled	No	Floating decks, 3-in-1 decks
21 inches	Gas	Push mower	Recycler Mulching	Air-cooled	No	
21 inches	Gas	Transmission	Recycler Mulching	Air-cooled	No	
21 inches	Gas	Push mower	Yes	Air-cooled	No	
TRAILMATE - KEE						
22 inches	Gas	Belt	Yes	Air-cooled	No	5-year warranty
24 inches	Gas	Belt	Yes	Air-cooled	No	5-year warranty
26 inches	Gas	Belt	Yes	Air-cooled	No	5-year warranty
TRU-CUT						
21 inches	Gas	N/A	Yes	Air-cooled		
YAZOO/KEES POWER EQUIPMENT						
32 and 36 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	12.5 hp
36 and 48 inches	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	14 hp
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	14 hp
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	17 hp

FOCUS: Mower Buyers' Guide

DECK SIZE:	GAS OR DIESEL:	HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE:	MULCHING CAPABILITY:	LIQUID- OR AIR-COOLED ENGINE:	ZERO-TURN CAPABILITY:	OTHER KEY FEATURES:
RIDING MODELS						
BLACK ROCK MANUFACTURING						
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
BOBCAT - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS						
42 and 48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	2 engine options, 42- or 48-inch side and rear discharge
48, 52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	2 engine options, side-discharge cutting decks
72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	N/A	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Height of cut adjusts from 1 to 5 inches with electric deck lift, productivity up to 5 acres per hour
BUHLER MANUFACTURING						
156, 192 and 228 inches	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Triplex finishing mower
BUNTON - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS						
42 and 48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	N/A	Air-cooled	Yes	3-2-1 warranty, side-discharge or collection decks
48, 52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air-cooled	Yes	3-2-1 warranty, 3 engine options, electric deck lift for curb climbing, side-discharge cutting decks
72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	N/A	Liquid-cooled	Yes	3-2-1 warranty, height of cut adjusts from 1 to 5 inches, side-discharge cutting decks
B & H MFG., INC.						
50 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	
60 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	
72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	
BUSH HOG MFG.						
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Front mount
54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Front mount/Mid-mount
60 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Front mount/Mid-mount
72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	No	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Front mount/Mid-mount
COUNTRY CLIPPER						
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	O/F Stand-up deck
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	O/F Stand-up deck
60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Mid-mount tilt-up deck
DIXIE CHOPPER						
42 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	20 hp or 19 hp
50 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
60 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	
72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	
DIXON INDUSTRIES						
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Front mount
60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Front mount
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Belly mount, 10 mph
60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Belly mount, 10 mph
60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	"Big Rig" seat suspension
72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	"Big Rig" seat suspension
60 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	"Big Rig" seat suspension
72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	"Big Rig" seat suspension
ENCORE MANUFACTURING						
52 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Low-maintenance spindle, articulating floating deck
61 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Low-maintenance spindle, articulating floating deck
72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Low-maintenance spindle, articulating floating deck
EXCEL INDUSTRIES						
40, 48, 54 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	H-bar steering
51 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Catchers
60 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Catchers
60 and 72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Catchers
60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	23 hp, mid-mount
EXMARK MANUFACTURING						
52 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	No	Electric start, deck lift and blade clutch
44, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Walk-behind maneuverability and riding comfort
52 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	High-speed productivity
60 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	UltraCut deck, EFI engine, comfort package
60 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Donaldson canister air filter, wavy radiator screen
60 and 72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Instant adjust system, fuel-efficient Daihatsu
60 and 72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	27-hp diesel or 31-hp gas engine; XP Series
FERRIS INDUSTRIES						
48 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	No	Air-cooled	Yes	Spacious operator compartment; adjustable steering control levers; foot-operated deck lift
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	No	Air-cooled	Yes	Rear IS independent suspension; dual-point pivoting front axle

FOCUS: Mower Buyers' Guide

DECK SIZE:	GAS OR DIESEL:	HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE:	MULCHING CAPABILITY:	LIQUID- OR AIR-COOLED ENGINE:	ZERO-TURN CAPABILITY:	OTHER KEY FEATURES:
61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	No	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Front and rear IS independent suspension; 27-hp LC Kawasaki or 31-hp LC Diahatsu
52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	No	Air-cooled	N/A	Drive system includes Industrial series Sundstrand pump and White 1 1/2-inch axle, 5-bolt wheel motors
61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	No	Air-cooled	N/A	Electric lift raises cutter deck
THE GRASSHOPPER CO.						
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	20 hp
52, 61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	25 hp
61 and 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	20.9 hp
61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	24.5 hp
44 and 48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	14 hp
44 and 48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	16 hp
44, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	18 hp
48, 52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	18 hp
48, 52, 61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	20 hp
48, 52, 61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	25 hp
48, 52, 61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	21 hp
48, 52, 61 and 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	20.9 hp
48, 52, 61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	24.5 hp
52, 61 and 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	28 hp
GRAVELY - AN ARIENS COMPANY						
40 inches	Gas	Hydro-Gear automatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	
48 inches	Gas	Hydro-Gear automatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	
42, 48 and 60 inches	Gas	Sundstrand automatic	Yes	Air-cooled	N/A	
50 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	True zero-turn	
50, 60 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	True zero-turn	
50 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
60 and 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	12-degree	
GREAT DANE POWER EQUIPMENT						
36 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Super Surfer stan-on rider
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Super Surfer stan-on rider
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Super Surfer stan-on rider
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Super Surfer stan-on rider
HECK						
36 inches	Gas	Gear/Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	
88 inches	Both	Gear/Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Flex Deck
55 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Flex Deck
72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Flex Deck
91 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Flex Deck
HOWARD PRICE TURF EQUIPMENT						
52 to 72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Off-set deck
60 to 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	
120 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	No	61-hp triple-charged engine
180 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	No	110 hp
HUSQVARNA						
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	23-hp engine
52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	25-hp engine
JOHN DEERE						
48, 54 or 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Air-cooled	Yes	Deck rotates for service 90-degrees
54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Air-cooled	Yes	Low center of gravity and wide stance for increased hillside stability
54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Air-cooled	Yes	True 9 mph mowing speed and 10-gallon fuel tanks increase productivity
60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Air-cooled	Yes	7-iron 7-gauge stamped steel mower deck
42-inch side deck, 62-inch center	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Almost 11 feet of mowing width
48 or 54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Differential lock increases traction
48, 54 or 60 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Tight-turning radius
60 and 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Rear-wheel power steering
60 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Standard cruise control
60 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Dual hydraulic lift cylinders
60 and 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	side or rear discharge
72-inch side discharge, 60-inch side discharge, 60-inch rear discharge	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Demand or full-time four-wheel drive
60 and 72 inches side discharge, 62 inches rear discharge	Gas	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Only leaves 28-inch uncut circle of grass
60 and 72 inches side discharge and 62 inches rear discharge	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Air intake system
60 and 72 inches side discharge, 62 inches rear discharge	Diesel	Hydrostatic	Optional	Liquid-cooled	No	Low center of gravity and wider tire tread
KUBOTA TRACTOR CORP.						
54 and 60 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	N/A	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Front wheel pivot
48, 54 and 60 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	N/A	Liquid-cooled	N/A	Direct chute
48 and 54 inches	Gas	Gear	Kit available	Liquid-cooled	N/A	
60 and 72 inches	Diesel	Hydrostatic	N/A	Liquid-cooled	N/A	2-wheel drive/4-wheel drive

FOCUS: Mower Buyers' Guide

DECK SIZE:	GAS OR DIESEL:	HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE:	MULCHING CAPABILITY:	LIQUID- OR AIR-COOLED ENGINE:	ZERO-TURN CAPABILITY:	OTHER KEY FEATURES:
LESCO						
48, 54 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Floating axle
MTD PRO						
60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Command Cut system
54 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Command Cut system
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Command Cut system
RICH MANUFACTURING						
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Can walk
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Can walk
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Can walk
SCAG POWER EQUIPMENT						
61 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	No	3-wheel
42, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Bagging Cougar
42, 48 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Utilitybed Cougar
40 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	No	Air-cooled	Yes	Compact Cub
48 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Compact Cub
52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Turf Tiger
72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	HD Turf Tiger
61 and 72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Sabre Tooth
SNAPPER						
52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes/Accessory	Air-cooled	Yes	Joystick control, 2 engine options, mid-mount decks
52, 61 and 73 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes/Accessory	Both	Yes	Joystick control, 3 engine options, out-front decks
STEINER TURF EQUIPMENT						
52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	
60 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	No	Front-mount; articulates
48, 60 and 72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	No	Flip-up deck
TORO LANDSCAPE CONTRACTOR EQUIPMENT						
44 and 52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Recycler Mulching Kits	Air-cooled	Yes	20- or 23-hp Kohler engines or 17- or 23-hp Kawasaki engines
52, 62 and 72 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Recycler Mulching Kits	Liquid-cooled/electronic fuel injection		23- or 25-hp air-cooled or 26-hp electronic fuel injection Kohler engines or 22- or 27-hp liquid-cooled Kawasaki engine
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Recycler Mulching Kits	Air-cooled	Yes	25-hp Kohler outfront ZRT bagger or recycler
WALKER MFG. CO.						
36 to 42 inches	Gas	Dual Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Built-in grass handling system
36 to 54 inches	Gas	Dual Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Built-in grass handling system
42 to 62 inches	Gas	Dual Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Built-in grass handling system
42 to 62 inches	Diesel	Dual Hydrostatic	Yes	Liquid-cooled	Yes	Built-in grass handling system
WOODS EQUIPMENT CO.						
50 and 60 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Mid-mount
48 to 72 inches	Both	Hydrostatic	Yes	Both	Yes	Front-mount
48 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Residential unit
WRIGHT MANUFACTURING						
36, 42, 48, 52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Stand-on
48, 52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	Flip-up seat, sitar stand, Rapid-Hite deck adjustment
YAZOO/KEES POWER						
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	22 hp
52 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	25 hp
61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	25 hp
52 and 61 inches	Gas	Hydrostatic	Yes	Air-cooled	Yes	23 hp

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Lawn & Landscape made several attempts to contact all manufacturers in this product category for this Buyers' Guide. The inclusion or omission of any companies should not be taken as an endorsement or criticism of its products.

Lawn & Landscape READER SERVICE CARD

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286	287	288	289	290	291	292	293	294	295	296	297	298	299	300

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1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

- I. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES
- ☐ 1. Landscape Contractor (maintenance & installation)
 - ☐ 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
 - ☐ 3. Lawn Maintenance Contractor
 - ☐ 4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service
 - ☐ 5. Irrigation Contractor
 - ☐ 6. Landscape Architect
 - ☐ 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

- ☐ 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- ☐ 9. Dealer
- ☐ 10. Distributor
- ☐ 11. Formulator
- ☐ 12. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

- ☐ 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
- ☐ 14. School, College, University
- ☐ 15. Trade Association, Library
- ☐ Others (please describe) _____

2. What best describes your title?

- ☐ Owner, Pres., Vice Pres., Corp. Officer
- ☐ Manager, Director, Supt., Foreman
- ☐ Agronomist, Horticulturist
- ☐ Entomologist, Plant Pathologist
- ☐ Serviceman, Technician, Crew member
- ☐ Scientist, Researcher
- ☐ Company, Library copy only
- ☐ Other (please specify) _____

3. What services does your business offer? (please check all that apply)

- ☐ 1. Landscape Installation
- ☐ 2. Landscape Maintenance
- ☐ 3. Landscape Renovation
- ☐ 4. Mowing and related maintenance
- ☐ 5. Irrigation Installation
- ☐ 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- ☐ 7. Turf pesticide application
- ☐ 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
- ☐ 9. Turf fertilization
- ☐ 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
- ☐ 11. Tree Pruning
- ☐ 12. Snow Removal
- ☐ 13. Interiorscape
- ☐ 14. Other _____

4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

5. What year was your business founded?

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2000?

- ☐ 1. Less than \$50,000
- ☐ 2. \$50,000 to \$99,999
- ☐ 3. \$100,000 to \$199,999
- ☐ 4. \$200,000 to \$299,999
- ☐ 5. \$300,000 to \$499,999
- ☐ 6. \$500,000 to \$699,999
- ☐ 7. \$700,000 to \$999,999
- ☐ 8. \$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999
- ☐ 9. \$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999
- ☐ 10. \$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999
- ☐ 11. \$7,000,000 or more

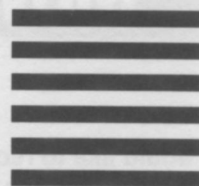
7. Please indicate your approximate business mix:

- 1. Residential _____ %
- 2. Commercial _____ %
- 3. Other _____ % Specify types _____

Total 100%

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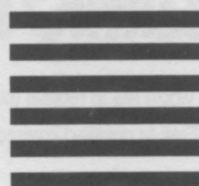
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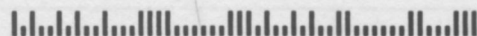
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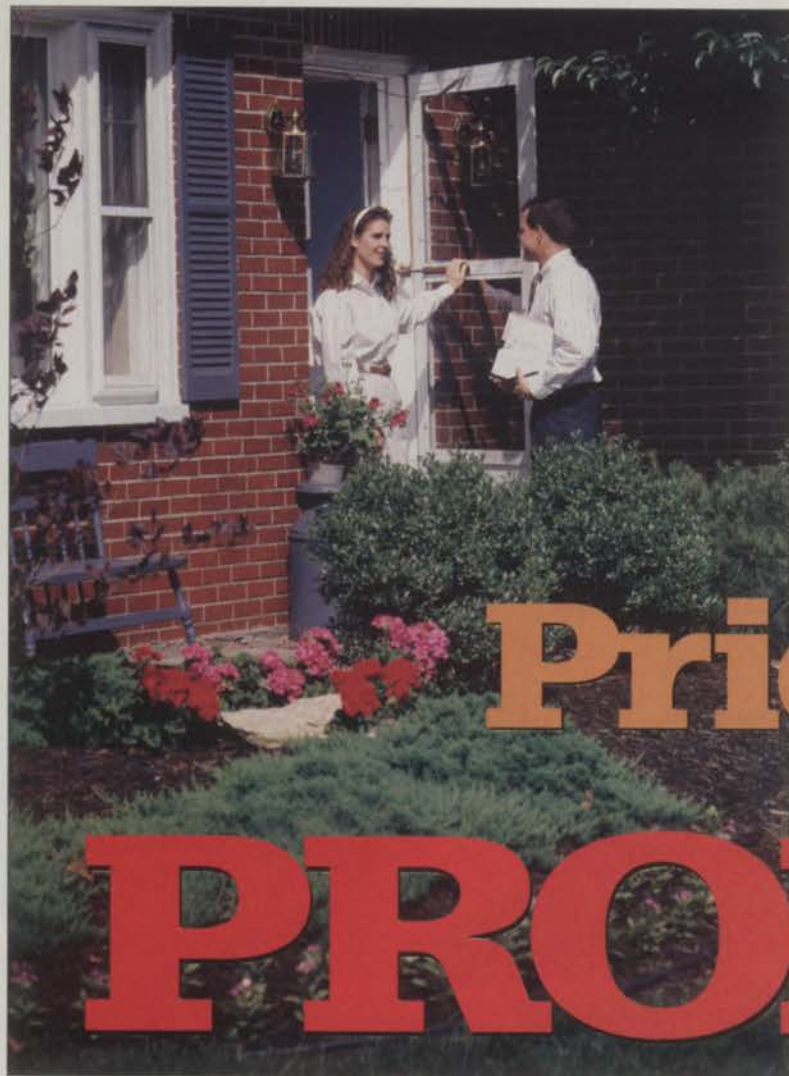
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Pricing Work

by Kristen Hampshire

Contractors who recover costs and produce profits don't play price guessing games.

Pricing for PROFIT

Contractors who explain the numbers to clients can avoid unrealistic invoice expectations.

Pricing work can parallel computing a complicated algebra equation. Contractors figure in constants, plug in variables and hope their Xs and Ys equal a profitable solution.

Covering overhead, deducting direct costs, estimating labor and predicting work hours – all this number jumble leaves little room for error, noted Frank Ross, president, Ross-Payne & Associates, Chicago, Ill.

"It seems like pricing ought to be an easy thing for us to do, and it really isn't that difficult," he reasoned. "But, honestly, there's a lot of subjectivity that's associated with pricing."

There isn't a magic number or secret code that deciphers pricing mysteries, and there isn't a cookie-cutter format to shape the perfect profit-earning pricing system. There certainly isn't a guarantee that one contractor's method will be another's recipe for success. Perhaps this is why so many contractors rely on blind guesstimates, Ross suggested.

Whether a company is a one-man operation or a multi-branch corporation, establishing a pricing system to recoup overhead costs will separate a business-minded company from one that relies on random estimates, stressed Tom Wood, president, Wood Landscaping Services, Hilliard, Ohio, adding that despite his company's growth through-

out the past 10 years, his pricing process shifted minimally.

"There are a lot of people out there losing money," he commented. "You need to know your costs and your overhead, and price accordingly to recover that."

PRICING PIECES. The reason low-bidders pitch rock-bottom prices is the same reason some novice contractors underestimate sales prices: lack of knowledge.

A firm understanding of a company's expenditures – equipment, materials, labor and hidden costs – is the first step to creating a successful pricing strategy, and contractors cannot be too informed, stressed Ron Tatton, owner, Erickson Landscaping, Salt Lake City, Utah.

"There are so many ideas about pricing that many don't realize that they aren't recovering their overhead," he pointed out. "They've heard of a magic multiplier, but they don't have a sound strategy. I can't say enough that the estimate is what drives the company – everything comes from that estimate."

However, reaching an estimate requires more than sketching a rough number. Contractors should follow a series of steps when pricing jobs, beginning with a detailed tally of necessary materials and labor hours. This figure

(continued on page 86)



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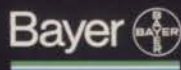
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Pricing Work

(continued from page 83)

then can be translated into the company's raw costs. For example, if a contractor pays an employee \$10 per hour, the raw cost for 100 hours on a job is \$1,000, Ross explained. Similarly, if a contractor purchased an oak tree from a nursery for \$210, the raw cost would be \$210.

Underestimating even a few jobs will af-

fect year-end finances, he stressed. Or, as Tatton said: "Costs are costs."

The actual pricing portion of the process takes place when contractors mark up their raw costs to recover overhead, Ross noted.

"Pricing is very independent depending on the contractor," he explained. "When you develop the strategy for pricing, you

have to determine your lifestyle and how you spend money so that every job that goes out the door has a share of that."

MULTIPLE METHODS. Expenses span a myriad of cost levels depending on the company. Some businesses are more financially experienced, some require more capital and some simply spend more.

With a system of measures, Jim Baxter, owner, Baxter Landscape Contracting, Exton, Pa., estimates prices by the acre, or square foot if the work is labor intensive. He aims for an 18 to 25 percent gross profit margin and knows which numbers will achieve this goal, he said.

"I've already done the math to arrive at my square foot prices," he noted. After rounding the digits, he recognizes that the \$45 hourly rate he tacks on for every acre on a mowing job or herbicide treatment will add a bonus to his bottom line.

Baxter charges extra for additional labor on certain challenging projects, he said. His fine-tuned system of measurement is a common industry method, so customers easily can compare contractors' estimates, he explained.

"I've been driven this way," he added. "People like to know that they can compare two estimates."

Comparison serves as a key motivation for landscape companies who shoot low estimates at customers to win accounts. While contractors must nail down a pricing structure to balance out budget deductions, they also fight those who cut prices and risk losses, Baxter noted.

"Earlier this year, someone said they could get a company to spread topsoil and cultivate their lawn for \$600," he remembered. "In my quote, there was \$600 worth of topsoil. They were not charging for labor or anything."

These low-ball quotes reflect inexperience, Baxter translated.

Ross identified three key trends influencing pricing. First, contractors are more knowledgeable and efficient in their work, and second, they are educating their consumers. Both of these factors are raising prices. On the down side, the industry is an "easy entry" for entrepreneurs with or without landscape experience to launch a business, he said, which pushes pricing down.

"Costs are going up, and prices are going down," Ross observed. "If you turn back the

(continued on page 88)



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USE READER SERVICE #116

Pricing Work

(continued from page 86)

clock 25 years, when contractors started selling work to consumers, competition was low and the perceived value was very high. There wasn't any downward pressure to put the price at the lowest possible rate. This has changed, and today, prices are lower than they were 25 years ago.

"In an economy that's strong, I'm seeing

guys bidding like we're in the hardest times ever," he added. As such, the skimpy 4 percent profit margin most contractors clear at the end of the day leaves little leeway for loss, Ross figured.

ALLOTING FOR LABOR. An efficient, profit-bearing pricing system for one busi-

ness might not suit another. Companies must pinpoint financial strains so their pricing system can be adjusted to recover these expenditures, Wood noted.

Of the various essentials necessary to complete a job, labor costs create tricky digits for contractors, Wood continued. Determining materials prices is simple, and "if you can't do a quantity take-off to find out what your materials cost, you ought not to be in the business," he added. "The equipment is a little more difficult, and the toughest is labor."

To fully recover labor expenses, Wood considers the cost from the time a worker clocks in and includes travel time to the job in his estimate. Wood adjusts fees based on the service the employee performs. "People don't want to pay \$35 an hour if you have someone pulling weeds," he asserted. "Correspondingly, if we have a highly-trained foreman doing technical work, we need to charge a higher labor rate."

Sam Creekmore, owner, Creekmore Landscape, Ltd., Albany, Miss., carefully estimates man-hours for each job to measure profits.

"We know our materials costs and we know what we want to make on materials — usually a 10 percent profit — and we can add other expenses into the hourly rate," he explained.

"There is no exact science and we're always changing and tweaking our system here and there," he added.

Details such as managing a job, acquiring materials on time and loading trucks before a crew arrives can pinch costs, he remarked.

Streamlining labor and increasing job efficiency saves money, noted Tatton, whose company reached the \$3-million revenue mark in a 10-year period.

"We do more with equipment and less with people, and have just become smarter on how we install landscapes," Tatton said.

Wood added that companies also must be smart with their finances. "If you're going to be a guesser in this game, you better be awfully, awfully lucky or you will price a job at a loss and not even know it." **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

For additional recommendations from Frank Ross, visit this article with the January issue at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

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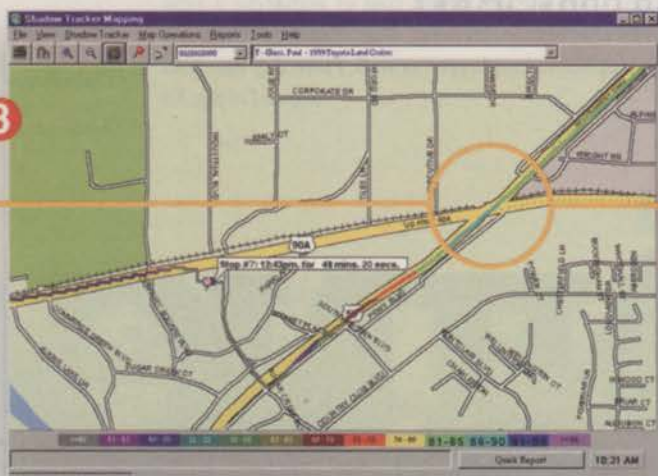
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11:19AM	11:22AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:22AM	11:27AM	00:05	L-Exxon Gas Station	0.00
11:28AM	11:31AM	00:03	In Transit	1.10
11:31AM	4:14PM	04:43	S-Your Company Office	0.00
4:14PM	4:17PM	00:03	In Transit	1.18
4:17PM	4:18PM	00:02	L-Grand & Hwy 90	0.00
4:19PM	4:36PM	00:17	In Transit	15.01
4:36PM	6:50PM	02:14	B-Home, Employee U.	0.00
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USE READER SERVICE #63

Training Programs

by Cynthia Greenleaf

Few factors are more critical to the success of a landscape company than an ongoing, consistent training program. For smaller contractors, in particular, a training program should be implemented as soon as possible, according to Mitch Rolsky, vice president of operations and business development, Stano Landscaping, Milwaukee, Wisc. Diligent employee education is an effective means of ensuring quality service and creating a benchmark for success, he pointed out.

Training is also the key to employee empowerment, which can be a small company's greatest advantage against its larger industry counterparts, Rolsky noted. "When you empower employees, you give them the ability to make decisions," he said. "That all comes back to training and education."

MAKING THE CASE. With contractors facing constant pressure to turn a quick profit, training frequently takes a backseat to more immediate workday

concerns. To ignore or delay training, however, is a colossal mistake that will come back to haunt those who neglect it, according to experienced contractors.

"Training doesn't have to happen every day, but it has to be consistent," Mike Angles, vice president, McFall & Berry Landscape Management, McLean, Va., observed. "It's not something you can put on the back burner. It's much easier to train the right way than to retrain."

Like any piece of equipment purchased, training is a necessary investment, added Vedere Dutes, support services manager and trainer, Stiles Landscape Company, Pompano Beach, Fla. "How can you *not* justify the time commitment?" he pointed out.

"You're talking about the future of your company. If you don't train, how will you keep employees? Training teaches those guys to become future foremen, supervisors and managers."

Training also lets employees know that they are valued. "We all talk about cost of acquiring a new client vs. trying to start over," Rolsky noted. "The same logic applies to employees as well. From day one, you

(continued on page 92)

Training saves money and effort in the long run, if contractors make an up-front commitment. Photo: California Landscape Contractors Association

Basic TRAINING

Here are some tips to keep in mind when implementing and improving a training program – a must for any successful contractor.



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Training Programs

(continued from page 90)

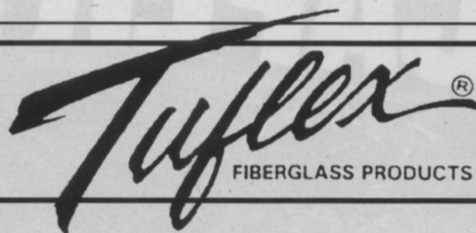
want to show employees that you care and want to invest in them and commit to their long-term future. Training does this."

Increased safety is also a critical argument for training, according to Carrie Andree, human resources and safety officer, All-Phase Landscape, Lakewood, Colo. Before All-Phase's training program was implemented

about three years ago, "there were a lot of employees who didn't have the slightest idea how to work safely," she recalled. When the company's program was put into place, however, the benefits were tremendous: fewer lost time claims and savings on workers' compensation and health insurance.

(continued on page 101)

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USE READER SERVICE #42

With so many training materials available at a minimal cost, contractors have no excuse not to have some form of training in place. Here are a few places to start:



- **Networking.** Talk to other contractors for training tips.
- **Internet resources.** "Use a search engine to find training and safety information," Mitch Rolsky, vice president of operations and business development, Stano Landscaping, Milwaukee, Wisc., suggested. For basic safety info, go to the National Safety Resource Center at www.nrsc.com or visit OSHA's site, www.osha.gov.
- **Consultants.** Bringing in a consultant to establish or improve a training program can have tremendous benefits, according to Rolsky. "Using an outside source to train forces structure," he noted. "You can't blow off training in favor of production."
- **Industry Associations.** "Take your people to industry functions," Rolsky urged. "It's a great way to get the benefits of speakers that you could otherwise not afford to bring in." The big three - ALCA, PLCAA and PGMS - all offer a range of training materials and information.
- **Insurance companies.** Most every insurance company offers free safety training, newsletters and will even send representatives to conduct on-site training, Mike Angles, vice president, McFall & Berry Landscape Management, McLean, Va., noted.
- **Equipment manufacturers and safety equipment suppliers.** Many of these companies offer free or reasonably-priced training for contractors, Vedere Dutes, support services manager and trainer, Stiles Landscape, Pompano Beach, Fla., pointed out.
- **Television and Movies.** There are plenty of good (and free!) examples of training issues in popular movies and TV shows, according to Rolsky, who frequently uses the movie "Hoosiers" during training and is currently trying to track down an especially educational episode of "The Drew Carey Show."

- Cynthia Greenleaf

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2001 SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE PROGRAM

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 10

9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m. Pre-Conference Workshop
Managing a Multi-Cultural Workforce
(Separate admission required)

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11

6:45 a.m. School of Management Golf Outing
Carmel Mountain Ranch Golf Club
(Bus leaves from lobby promptly at 6:45 a.m.; shotgun start at 8:00 a.m.)

10:00 – 6:30 p.m. Registration Desk
Attendee Networking Lounge
Grounds Tour – Catamaran Resort
Contractor Workshop
Determining The Value of Your Business
(Steve Gaines)

1:00 – 2:30 p.m. Keynote Address
Setting The Vision For Your Company
Featuring Joe Tye

2:30 – 4:00 p.m. Welcome Reception

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12

7:30 a.m. Registration Desk
7:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast

8:00 – 9:00 a.m. General Session
The Power of Networking (Jim Paluch)

9:20 – 10:40 a.m. General Session
Keys To Effective People Management
(Charles Vander Kooi)

10:40 – 11:00 a.m. Refreshment Break

11:00 – 12:30 p.m. Concurrent Educational Sessions
M1 E-Commerce: Is It For You? (Bill Cox)
M2 Hiring Tomorrow's Leaders Today (Bill Hoopes)
M3 Understanding Service Agreements (Tom Grandy)

12:30 – 1:30 p.m. Networking Lunch

1:45 – 3:00 p.m. Concurrent Educational Sessions
M4 Putting Bite In Your Marketing Strategies (Jim Campanella)
M5 Effective Crew Management Practices (Tim Lynott)
M6 A New Approach To Estimating and Bidding (Jim Huston)

3:00 – 3:30 p.m. Refreshment Break

3:30 – 5:00 p.m. Concurrent Educational Sessions
M7 Using Financial Statements For Effective Management
(Robert West, Sr.)
M8 Winning The Recruiting Game (Bill Arman)
M9 Charging What You're Worth: Tips For Effective Pricing
(Tom Grandy)

5:00 – 6:30 p.m. Networking Cocktail Reception

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 13

7:30 a.m. Registration Desk
7:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast

8:00 – 9:30 a.m. General Session
How To Get Them To Buy From You (Fred Berns)

9:30 – 9:50 a.m. Refreshment Break

9:50 – 11:30 a.m. Concurrent Educational Sessions
T1 Cutting The Waste Out of Operations (Tim Lynott)
T2 Winning The Recruiting Game
(Repeat Session) (Bill Arman)
T3 Taking Advantage of Tax Planning Opportunities
(Robert West, Sr.)

11:30 – 12:30 p.m. Networking Lunch

12:45 – 2:15 p.m. Concurrent Educational Sessions
T4 Putting Bite In Your Marketing Strategies
(Repeat Session) (Jim Campanella)
T5 Customer Service Solutions (Bobby Jenkins)

2:15 – 2:30 PM Refreshment Break

2:30 – 4:00 PM General Session
The Power of Networking (Jim Paluch)

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 10

9:00 – 3:00 p.m.
Pre-Conference Workshop

MANAGING A MULTI-CULTURAL WORKFORCE

The topic of how to effectively manage a multi-cultural workforce is one that grows in importance and in difficulty with each passing day. Green industry professionals are expending considerable time and resources to identify solutions to make managing a multi-cultural workforce easier and more effective. The educational program at the Managing A Multi-Cultural Workforce Seminar will include such important topics as employee screening and hiring practices, the H2B program, cultural assimilation, employee motivation, compensation and career path issues, and the legal ramifications of managing a multi-cultural workforce.

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(Separate admission fee required; see page 7 to register)

What They Say About School of Management

"We had a great time at School of Management and made some excellent contacts. Thanks for doing a great job on the conference."

Scott Fay
Treasure Coast Irrigation
Hobe Sound, Fla.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11

2:30 – 4:00 PM
Contractor Workshop

DETERMINING THE VALUE OF YOUR BUSINESS

If you are preparing to expand your company's business operations through acquisition, thinking about selling your company or just want to better identify your company's actual value, then this session is for you. In this informative session you'll review the many steps that go into determining the value of a business. From identifying your company's financial strengths and weaknesses and developing accurate financial reports to understanding how others value your business, this session will give you the tools to obtain the information that you need.

Speaker: **Steve Gaines**, KPMG,
Baltimore, MD

5:00 – 6:30 PM
Opening Keynote Session

SETTING THE VISION FOR YOUR COMPANY

Joe Tye
Paradox 21



In this dynamic general session listen as noted author and teacher Joe Tye explains how you can set a vision of success for yourself and for your company. Learn how to take your aspirations for success and turn them into reality. Packed with practical action steps for helping entrepreneurs set and achieve a vision for their company, this session will help you create positive attitudes about change and uncertainty, and cultivate customer service and team leadership within your company. After this session you'll be ready to set the vision that will help your company prosper.

Sponsored by  **Husqvarna**

6:30 – 8:00 PM
Welcome Reception

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 12

7:30 – 8:00 AM
Continental Breakfast
Sponsored by



8:00 – 9:00 AM
General Session

THE POWER OF NETWORKING

Jim Paluch
JP Horizons



Harness the power of networking and get the most out of the 2001 School of Management! In this interactive, high-energy session you'll play an active role and experience how a team approach to learning can benefit your business. This special session will help you set your learning game plan for the remainder of the conference and will steer you towards valuable industry contacts that you'll use during and after the conference. Arrive ready to learn and ready for some surprises.

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9:20 – 10:40 AM
General Session

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

Charles Vander Kooi
Vander Kooi & Associates



One of the most used phrases in business speak today is "people management skills." What are people management skills, and how do they impact your business? Find out the answer to this question by attending this informative session lead by noted management expert Charles Vander Kooi. In this session, you'll learn the fundamental qualities of effective people management. Learn how to identify different types of workers and different types of work styles and how they mesh with your management style.

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10:40 – 11:00 a.m. Refreshment Break

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11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

M1 E-COMMERCE: IS IT FOR YOU?

E-commerce and the potential for driving revenue and expanding customer databases are setting the business world on its ear. Is your business prepared to enter into the e-commerce world? Find out the necessary steps you'll need to take if you are to successfully design and market a web site that will steer customers and revenue to your company. This session is designed for those contractors who want to make the web and e-commerce work for their company.

Speaker: Bill Cox, Cox Consulting, Cleveland, OH

M2 HIRING TOMORROW'S LEADERS TODAY

You've identified the candidate for the opening you've had for the last six months and you are bringing him or her in for an interview. Do you know exactly what you want from the position or what you are looking for in the candidate? You may have a list of required skills, but skills alone never determine overall job performance. Learn more about discovering the important intangibles – those often overlooked qualities that can make or break a candidate.

Speaker: Bill Hoopes, Scotts Lawn Service, Marysville, OH

M3 UNDERSTANDING SERVICE AGREEMENTS

Because they build vital relationships between contractors and customers, service agreements are the basic building blocks for profitable growth in the 21st century. In this session, Tom Grandy walks contractors through designing, pricing, and marketing – the essential steps to creating an effective service agreement.

Speaker: Tom Grandy, Grandy & Associates, Owensboro, KY

12:30 – 1:30 p.m.
Networking Lunch

1:45 – 3:00 p.m.
Concurrent Sessions

M4 PUTTING BITE IN YOUR MARKETING STRATEGIES

Are you ready to grow your current business operations? Whether you're expanding the services you currently offer or looking to grow established market segments, telemarketing can be a most effective growth tool for your company. Join us for this enlightening "nuts and bolts" session from one of the industry's up and coming entrepreneurs, and learn how you can put bite into your marketing efforts and increase your market share.

Speaker: Jim Campanella, The Lawn Dawg, Nashua, NH

M5 EFFECTIVE CREW MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

Leading an effective lawn or landscape crew is no easy task. Personnel are the all important link in your company's service delivery chain, and you need them to perform consistently and at peak efficiency. This session will discuss a variety of practical, field-tested strategies and systems you can implement with your service crews to improve their overall performance and your company's bottom line.

Speaker: Tim Lynott, Lynott Landscape Consulting Services, Eldersburg, MD

M6 A NEW APPROACH TO ESTIMATING AND BIDDING

Who says you can't teach an old dog a new trick? In the area of estimating and bidding contractors are always searching for new methods of improving the accuracy and competitiveness of their bids. In this session hear from consultant Jim Huston as he walks you through a different approach to bidding and estimating that will help you write bids that make better economic sense for your company and your customers.

Speaker: Jim Huston, Smith Huston, Inc., Englewood, CO

3:00 – 3:30
Refreshment Break
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3:30 – 5:00 PM
Concurrent Sessions

M7 USING FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

Your balance sheet and your income statement can tell you a great deal about how efficiently your business is operating. This session will help you understand how you can use these basic financial statements to better manage your business. You will learn the significance of your accounts receivable turnover, debt-to-equity ratio, gross profit margin and other key financial statistics that will tell you more about your operation.

Speaker: Robert West, Sr., West & Co., Cleveland, OH

M8 WINNING THE RECRUITING GAME

In a marketplace with record low unemployment, one of the greatest keys to successful recruitment is identifying and attracting what talent exists. In this upbeat session, learn how to prevail in today's war for talent by creating and implementing a plan that focuses on "fit" rather than on availability. Don't miss this fantastic opportunity to learn the winning ways of recruiting!

Speaker: Bill Arman, Environmental Industries, Calabasas, CA

M9 CHARGING WHAT YOU'RE WORTH:
TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE PRICING

The phrase "Sales up, profits down," sounds all too familiar to many contractors today. This session deals with the most basic of issues – how much do we have to charge to cover our costs of doing business while still generating a profit? Determine what the *real* cost of doing business is and how to maximize and ensure profitability.

Speaker: Tom Grandy, Grandy & Associates, Owensboro, KY

5:00 – 6:30 PM
Networking Cocktail Reception

Did You Hear About School of Management?

Here is what attendees of the 2000 School of Management in Dallas had to say about their experience at the conference.

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8:00 – 9:30 a.m.

General Session

HOW TO GET THEM TO BUY FROM YOU**Fred Berns***Power Promotion*

How to use personal promotion to dramatically increase your sales and profits is the theme of this powerful presentation. The program focuses on how to communicate with confidence, differentiate yourself from competitors and make a maximum impact for a minimal investment of time and money. Included are "how to" steps and insights on polishing your sales presentations, turning contacts into contracts, overcoming procrastination and price objections, closing sales, upselling, and more.

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9:30 – 9:50 a.m.

Refreshment Break

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9:50 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Concurrent Sessions

T1**CUTTING THE WASTE OUT OF OPERATIONS**

From route scheduling and sales follow-up to equipment and product inventory, keeping tabs on the vital elements of your company's day-to-day operations is essential to building a well-run and profitable organization. Learn how to properly analyze your company's operational structure and spot areas where waste and inefficiency commonly occur.

Speaker: Tim Lynott, Lynott Landscape Consulting Services, Eldersburg, MD

T2**WINNING THE RECRUITING GAME (RS)**

For session description see Session M8.

T3**TAKING ADVANTAGE OF TAX PLANNING OPPORTUNITIES**

The opportunity to take advantage of tax savings starts with planning and selecting the best form of organization for your business and, deciding how to withdraw your company's earnings. This session will explain in simple terms how you might reduce payroll and income taxes with timely and continual planning, and potentially save thousands of dollars in payroll tax expenses.

11:30 – 12:30 p.m.

Networking Lunch

Sponsored by



12:45 – 2:15 p.m.

Concurrent Sessions

T4**PUTTING BITE IN YOUR MARKETING STRATEGIES (RS)**

For session description see Session M4.

T5**CUSTOMER SERVICE SOLUTIONS**

In this session hear from a veteran of the service industry who has turned his company into a perennial customer service champion who will share his company's recipe for making customer service number one with your employees.

Speaker: Bobby Jenkins, ABC Pest & Lawn Care, Austin, TX

2:15 – 2:30

Refreshment Break

2:30 – 4:00 PM

Closing General Session

THE POWER OF NETWORKING

Jim Paluch, JP Horizons

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2001 SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT REGISTRATION AND TRAVEL INFORMATION

Lawn & Landscape Tournament of Champions Golf Outing

A Fundraiser for the Evergreen Foundation

Carmel Mountain Ranch Golf Club

Sunday, February 11

6:45 a.m.

Spend a morning testing your golf skills at the 3rd Annual Lawn & Landscape Tournament of Champions Golf Outing. Cost for the outing is \$100 and includes greens fees, cart rental, practice balls, lunch, prizes and transportation to and from the course. A portion of the registration fee will be donated to the Evergreen Foundation, a green industry non-profit organization devoted to promoting the development of public green space. **Advance registration and payment is required.** Registration deadline is **February 3, 2001.**

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CONFERENCE REGISTRATION

Contractor Registration	\$245 per person
(Includes all educational sessions, conference materials, receptions, lunches, breakfasts, refreshment breaks)	
Contractor Group Registration	\$195 per person
(Three or more from the same company)	
Contractor One Day Registration	\$125 per person
Pre-Conference Multi-Cultural Workshop	\$95 per person
(Saturday, February 10, 2001)	
Supplier Non-Sponsor Registration	\$495

Special Events

Tournament of Champions Golf Outing	\$100 per person
Fundraiser for the Evergreen Foundation	
Sunday, February 11 (Includes greens fees, cart, lunch, prizes and transportation)	

CANCELLATION/SUBSTITUTION/REFUND POLICY

All cancellations must be made in writing. A full refund will be accepted if received before **February 2, 2001.** No refunds will be issued after February 2, 2001. Advancement payment is **required** for the golf tournament and no cancellations after February 7, 2001. *No on-site refunds.* Attendees can notify *Lawn & Landscape* at any time that another individual will attend the conference or social events in their place.

CONFIRMATIONS

All registrations postmarked by February 2, 2001 will be acknowledged by mail. Registrations received after that date should be picked up at the School of Management Registration Desk at the Catamaran Resort starting Sunday, February 11, 2001 at 10:00 a.m.

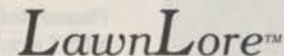
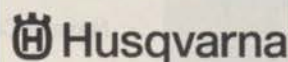
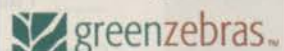
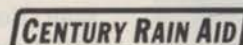
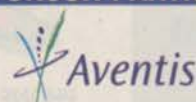
HOTEL INFORMATION

A block of rooms has been reserved for School of Management attendees at the Catamaran Resort. Located on scenic Mission Bay, the Catamaran Resort is the ideal location for your trip to sunny Southern California. Attendees should make their reservations directly with the hotel on or before **January 17, 2001** to receive the special conference room rate of **\$120 per night** (single/double). Please ask for the School of Management Conference rate. For reservations call the Catamaran Resort at **800/422-8386** or **858/488-1081.**

DISCOUNT TRAVEL INFORMATION

School of Management has arranged for special discount fares to San Diego for the School of Management. To take advantage of the discount rates, please contact AAA Business Travel at **800/999-0038** between the hours of 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM Eastern.

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Registration Form



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PHONE: Call 800/456-0707 and ask to register for the School of Management (weekdays 9 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. EST)

MAIL: Conference Registration, School of Management, 4012 Bridge Ave., Cleveland, OH 44113

FAX: Complete form and fax, with credit card information, to 216/961-0364 (24 hours)

ON THE WEB: Register on-line at www.lawnandlandscapeconferences.com

(Please print or type. Form may be photocopied for additional registrants; one form per person)

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REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Conference Registration

	Number	Total
Contractor Registration	\$245	=

Contractor Group Registration (3 or more same company)	\$195	=
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Contractor One-Day Registration (Monday or Tuesday only)	\$125	=
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Pre-Conference Workshop: Managing A Multi-Cultural Workforce (Sat. February 10, 2001)	\$95	=
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Supplier Non-Sponsor Registration	\$495	=
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Special Events

Golf Outing	\$100	=
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Fundraiser for the Evergreen Foundation		=
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TOTAL		=
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(There is no advance registration for individual educational sessions.
Seating for all sessions is on a first come basis. Lawn & Landscape
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SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT REGISTRATION CHECK LIST

- Completed Registration Form
- Included Method of Payment
- Made Hotel Reservation at the Catamaran Resort
- Called for Discount Travel Information
- Told a Friend To Register For School of Management

(continued from page 92)

TRAINING TIPS. To stay committed to a successful employee training program, here are nine points to ponder.

1. Make a commitment to training part of the company's mission. A dedication to training should be part of a company's core values, according to Rolsky. "Good mission statements makes this point and make (the importance of training) part of the employees' mindset," he said. For smaller companies in particular, the trickle-down theory holds true: the president or CEO must constantly "champion" the training cause, Rolsky advised.

GreenDrop Lawns, Calgary, Alberta, conveys its corporate commitment to training through its SECRET program, which constantly reminds its employees to "Satisfy Every Customer Respectfully Every Time."

"We use it both internally and externally in every decision that we make," said Brian Gibson, the company's vice president.

2. Pay for training and provide incentives. To let employees know they should take it seriously, training should always be paid, according to Andree. "Even if they haven't been out in the field, they have been working," she said. "They should be compensated - that's their incentive."

Incentives don't always have to be monetary. Both Stiles and All-Phase have recognition program in place, which give out annual safety awards, recognizing such accomplishments as injury-free crews.

Angles warns against putting too much stock in incentive programs, however. "When you have 225 employees and only 10 people reach their incentives," it can be bad for morale, he pointed out. After all, "it's everyone's job to work safely."

3. Have a dedicated trainer. Having one point person, ideally not working in the field, to track training efforts is a valuable investment, according to Angles. "When you have employees who are in the heat of the battle, you need someone on the outside to make sure the wheels keep turning," he advised.

Andree pointed out that a company with more than two crews should have a dedicated trainer, "because that's two different supervisors sending out two different messages. You need to have someone spearheading that information."

4. Use a variety of trainers, if possible. "The best tool for learning is being put into

the position of having to teach someone else," Rolsky noted. "Teaching others forces you to anticipate the questions and gain command of the information."

For this reason, "You want as many people involved in training as possible," he said.

Trainers teaching a topic outside of their

area of expertise will polish their skills and look at things from a fresh perspective. "They're given the ability to judge the process and see things others wouldn't," Rolsky said.

As Dutes observed, training can have a positive, chain reaction effect within an or-

(continued on page 128)

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by Cynthia Greenleaf

Five successful contractors share their insights and experiences on growing a business and getting ahead in the green industry.

Been THERE, Done THAT

What does it take to make it beyond the small business boundary? Here, five established landscape contractors from across the country sound off on what every young company needs to know to grow.



**BILL CANON, OWNER AND PRESIDENT
CANON RUSSEAU LANDSCAPE, CARLETON, MICH.**

The smartest strategy smaller contractors can use to position themselves for growth is to get solid systems in place and stick to them, according to Canon. From a mission statement to a business plan to a customer service strategy, establishing systems will set the stage for success. "Even if you're the only person in the business, you need to have systems," Canon pointed out. "Without this structure, you won't grow."

Canon recalled the days of doing business without one particular system, a clearly defined customer service procedure. "When I started my first company doing residential design/build, I would get paid but I didn't have good follow up," he remembered, adding that warranty concerns and complaints from customers soon overwhelmed the company. "As we kept growing and growing, the calls became greater and greater. It got to a point where we could hardly function, dealing with past clients. The problems were killing us."

Canon finally sat down with his staff and came up with a form letter to give to clients immediately after a job's completion, clearly explaining what they should expect in terms of service, warranty and so on. After the system – the letter – was put into place, "the calls just disappeared and customers were happier," Canon related, adding that with smaller companies in particular, these kinds of issues are all over, just begging to be addressed. "There is room for systems everywhere."

In addition, a system such as a mission statement provides a focus, which is invaluable to growing companies, Canon advised. "What is the company there for? What is it trying to sell? Who is it selling to and why?" he said, offering up some of the questions smaller contractors need to consider.

(continued on page 104)



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102	Shrub	Baldy, Red	3	ea	35.00	
103	Flower	Bougainvillea	1	ea	45.00	
104	Evergreen	Arizona, Coral Bell	3	ea	15.00	
105	Evergreen	Arbutus, Tachy Globe	4	ea	10.00	
106	Flower	Aspid, Bronze Flowering	1	ea	35.00	
107	Shrub	Baldy, Red	1	ea	45.00	
108	Evergreen	Arbutus, American	3	ea	110.00	
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USE READER SERVICE #137

Success Tips

(continued from page 102)

Canon warned of the danger of getting too sidetracked from a mission statement. "It's easy to go off on some tangent when you're smaller, to be drawn away from your focus by interferences," he said, noting that at one point, he got sidetracked into a garden center venture, which slowed down his company's growth for a brief time. However tempting a new business opportunity might be, straying from a mission statement "eats up your money and your thinking time," Canon warned. "Keep it simple and stay focused on what you do well. Be disciplined. Otherwise you'll get clobbered."

One more bit of advice: When it comes to drawing up a business plan – another critical system to have in place – Canon suggested that contractors scrutinize all growth and revenue projections. “Critique what you’re assuming. If you assume you can do \$1 million in sales, back it up,” Canon urged. “Once you start putting all the numbers down,

(continued on page 106)

One of the biggest questions related to growing a landscape company is when to move beyond the comfort zone. Although many find this point at the \$1 million in revenue mark, this zone varies for individual contractors and is a place they shouldn't linger in too long, according to Bill Canon, owner and president, Canon Rousseau Landscape, Carleton, Mich.

Canon's company reached its comfort stage at \$5 million in annual revenue, which eventually caused him to wonder, "Do I want the company to get bigger? Does it provide opportunity?" he recalled. For Canon, the answer came down to his staff - one reason to grow is to retain and challenge employees.

"Without growth you stagnate," he argued. "And there is no place for key employees to go. People want to advance. If your company isn't growing, you're

going to lose those key employees."

Stop or Go?

Perry Bratt, president, Bratt Inc., Pleasant Grove, Utah, agreed with the necessity of keeping employees challenged. Bratt's company reached the \$1 million mark 15 years ago and stayed there for six years, mostly due to a poor economy and a lack of construction work, he recalled. But the motivation to reward and challenge loyal employees through expansion was there. "The main reason we left that comfort zone was because we realized that we had some great individuals and we could not increase their wages without increasing our volume," he said.

"An upside of growth is to be able to show employees that they have a career path," added Bill Cox, president, Lawn Management Co., Houston, Texas. "To me, that's the most important thing."

Cox offers a caveat, however: the danger of growing too fast. There's no point in expanding if quality labor isn't available, he warned. "With labor so tight, it's hard to find good people." — **Cynthia Greenleaf**

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Success Tips

(continued from page 104)

back them up. You really need to go through and do the 'what ifs.' What if your assumptions change? Be as conservative as possible and don't create too rosy a picture."

PERRY BRATT, PRESIDENT BRATT INC., PLEASANT GROVE, UTAH.

Establishing a professional image should be a top priority for smaller contractors looking to make a long-term name for themselves in the industry, according to Bratt, whose family-owned company currently brings in about \$8 million in annual revenue. "Image is extremely important," he said. "Start cultivating a professional image as soon as you can afford to."

Bratt's company has differentiated itself from the competition with its unmistakable trucks and uniforms, all done in the company's signature color: bright yellow. From customer recognition and increased community awareness to improved employee morale and retention, there are countless benefits to this standardization, Bratt pointed out. "Our employees like that they work for the sharpest looking company around."

While this sounds cliché, all contractors should know that their employees are their most valuable asset and act accordingly, Bratt urged. "Nothing has helped us more than realizing this."

One way of letting employees know they factor into the success or failure of a business is through open book management—an approach Bratt firmly believes in for any size company. On a quarterly basis, Bratt reviews his company's financial information (all numbers except wages and salaries with all employees. Open book management motivates employees to view the company as "their own little business," Bratt said. He has found that illustrating how production is tied to employee bonuses is a tremendous motivator and clearly demonstrates how employee actions affect the company's bottom line.

"If we can eliminate five minutes of wasted time per hour per employee, the net profit increase would be \$126,720," Bratt said, describing an example he recently gave to his employees. "That's 80 employees x 8 hours per day x 5 minutes per hour x 198 working days (22 working days per month x 9 months) equals 10,560 wasted hours x \$12 per hour (average pay) equals \$126,720 additional net profit or \$25,344 additional bonus money."

To get ahead, Bratt also advises networking within the industry as much as possible. "Nothing is more important than to visit with other contractors," he said, adding that whenever he travels outside of his market, he meets with area companies to gain a sense of how they do business. Of the contractors he's visited with, in just about every case, "they're more than willing to share their expertise, successes and horror stories," Bratt said.



DUANE DENISON, EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT, DENISON LANDSCAPING, FORT WASHINGTON, MD.

Knowing their niche is essential for smaller contractors, Denison advised. His \$12-million company has found success concentrating on what it does best—installation work. "We've paid attention to our core customers," Denison said. "From the very beginning, we realized that this was important. We're not a maintenance contractor."

(continued on page 108)



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USE READER SERVICE #25

Success Tips

(continued from page 106)

Denison also noted that good credit can be a small business's most important asset in the growth stage. "Without good credit, you're up against a wall," he said. Simple things, such as paying bills on time, can work wonders for a contractor who's just starting out, helping to establish solid relationships with banks and suppliers, Denison described. "You may get products at a lesser price or get better terms."

From employees and customers to vendors and consultants, effective communication and people skills are also essential for growing a business, Denison observed. "If you can't communicate, you're going to have some problems. Pay attention to the people that you're working for and work with you."



**BILL COX, PRESIDENT
LAWN MANAGEMENT
COMPANY,
HOUSTON, TEXAS**

Cox, who runs a \$3.2 million commercial maintenance

landscape company in Texas, warned smaller contractors against putting too much emphasis on making it to the \$1 million mark – a traditional benchmark for success. "It's a common mistake," Cox related. "You can focus so much on that goal that you lose sight of what your business is about – satisfying clients. Focus on customer service rather than just growth."

Cox recalled a time when he lost his focus. In the late 1980s, when the economy took a downturn, he had hired a salesman to bring in new business. The salesman ended up bringing in too much business, and maintaining quality became a concern, Cox described. To get back on track, he ended up getting rid of about \$250,000 in business, to return to a more customer-oriented focus. Going through that "turned me around from being so sales oriented," Cox said.

"It was a major mistake and it hurt us – we lost a lot of money. Today, the company has no sales staff and I control the growth of the

company. We're not going to take on more than we can handle."

Cox also suggested that contractors surround themselves with those they can learn from. "You need the ability to bring in the right people," he said. "Surround yourself with quality."

"An ongoing challenge is finding the right people to bring in as you grow," he pointed out. "Finding those who want to share your vision. In 20 years, slowly but surely, if you hire people who buy into your vision, you end up with the best people. It's not by accident."

One of the keys to growth is employee empowerment, Cox added. "As an owner, you've got to be able to trust others to do their jobs," he said. "After you get more than one or two crews, you can't do all the supervision. You have to find which area you're most efficient in and do that. Delegate responsibility and focus on your strengths."

(continued on page 110)



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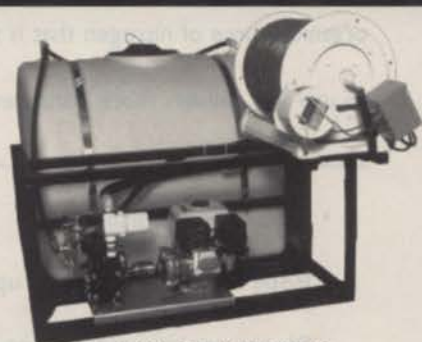
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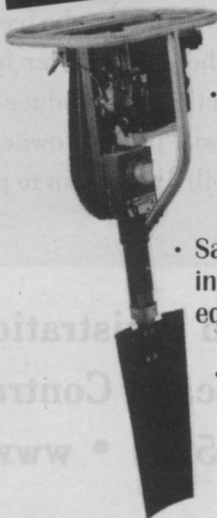
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Success Tips

(continued from page 108)

KERRY ROTOLO, OWNER JACK'S NURSERY, SLIDELL, LA.

According to Rotolo, leader of a \$9-million Louisiana landscape company, one of the keys to a smaller company's growth is the ability to delegate and maintain a long-term perspective. "A business manager must facilitate an atmosphere where clients and employees both want the business to succeed because of past performance and in anticipation of a future ability to 'make it happen' on the job site," Rotolo advised, adding that this will help with employee retention.

Another way to keep good workers is to welcome their feedback. Owners must establish a means to include key managers in their company's decision-making process, Rotolo urged. "Eventually, managers feel as though they can be compensated elsewhere for the same work and effort," he observed. "By generating loyalty and common causes, a business can continue to grow."

Judging from his several decades of industry experience, Rotolo thinks growth gets easier as a company gets larger. Life often becomes more complicated for the owner, however. "Eventually, management realizes that getting additional business is easier due to a growing list of satisfied clients, and relationships are formed that lead to repeat business and more negotiated work," he remarked.

"However, at some point the realization hits that you are not strictly an entrepreneur, but you must also be an administrator, cheerleader, provider of last resort for employees, organizer, accountant, banker, lawyer, insurance man and forger of the initial infrastructure to carry the company forward.

"It is at this point that many small businesses stagnate or fail as the owner-operator fails, chooses not to, or is incapable of making the transition to owner."

To the benefit of smaller landscape contractors, growing a business isn't as isolated an endeavor as it used to be. "There's a lot more knowledge available now," Rotolo said. "It is easier to grow a business today because there are so many examples of past successes that have been documented, that an enterprising owner can pattern his company after one that closely fits his situation."

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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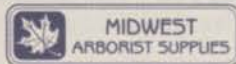


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Daily Features

L&L Online will bring you daily features Monday through Friday on a variety of topics. Our current schedule is as follows:

Mon. - Contractor Talk: Profiles of industry professionals and common practices.

Tues. - Irrigation Issues: An update on new products and issues of importance to irrigation contractors.

Wed. - Lawn Care Roundup: A look at problems and solutions for the lawn care world.

Thurs. - Legislative Issues: The information you need for all matters of landscape design, installation and maintenance.

Fri. - Business Management: Industry consultants and management firms offer advice on running a business.

First Sat. of each month - Plant Of The Month: In January, author Barbara Ellis will cover nigellas, commonly known as love-in-a-mist.

Find the above features at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Introducing My Lawn & Landscape Online



Some people fear change, while others welcome it with open arms. Lawn & Landscape Online is confident that you will choose the latter path and welcome our brand new site design as a useful tool to help connect the fragmented green industry.

Our redesign, launched at 5 p.m., Dec. 19, 2000, is a bold and necessary change to the way users navigate Lawn & Landscape Online's wide array of resources. The site is categorized by subject title and is completely searchable to help you find the exact information you are looking for. It also features a personalized area, named "My Lawn & Landscape," that allows you to customize the site to your preferences (see sidebar at left).

The site redesign and additions were made with you, our faithful users, in mind. We value your needs and opinions and request that you forward any comments, questions or criticisms to my attention so we can work to make this site as valuable a resource for you as possible.

Thank you for your continued interest in Lawn & Landscape Online and for being a vital part of the changing face of the green industry online.

Sincerely,

Scott Hunsberger

Internet Editor, Lawn & Landscape Online

shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com

ONLINE Contents

Check out these links to discover the tools available on Lawn & Landscape Online to help you stay on top of the latest industry news and grow your business:

Daily News and Features - Catch breaking industry news and daily features.
www.lawnandlandscape.com

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Events Calendar - Locate industry events across the country.
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Please e-mail your comments to shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com. Lawn & Landscape Online is: Scott Hunsberger, Internet editor (shunsberger@lawnandlandscape.com) and Sydney Work, web department manager (swork@gie.net). Enjoy your visit to Lawn & Landscape Online!

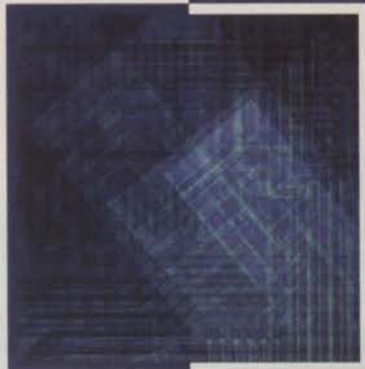
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- Optional rechargeable gel battery

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- Model 633 Chain Saw is powered by a two-cycle, 2.2-cubic-inch displacement engine
- Incorporates SOLO anti-vibration system and Primer system for easy starting
- Weighs less than 8 pounds
- Features a 12-inch guide bar and delivers 2 hp
- Equipped with a safety chain brake that automatically stops chain in case of kickback
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- A NIKASIL coated cylinder, half-throttle automatic and $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch Micro-Lite chain pitch facilitate the starting process

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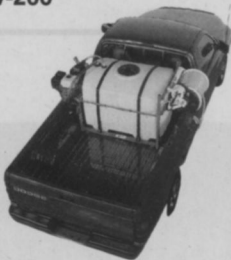
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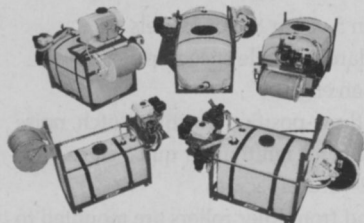
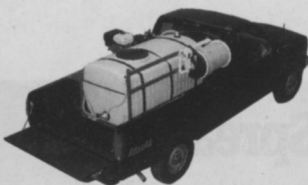
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- Circle 215 on reader service card**

Sno-Way Spreadator

- Constructed of 12-gauge mild steel or 304 stainless steel
 - One piece sides and sills minimize rust
 - Includes full support bracing
 - Available in 25- to 27-inch heights in 5-, 6- or 8-foot models
 - Electronic controls offer burst-standard-variable speed options
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 - Spreader comes in ½-, ¾-, 1.4- and 2-yard capacities
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- Guide titled "Don't Become a U.S. Department of Labor Target: Practical Compliance for the Ag/ Hort Employer," addresses potential violations
 - 12-page guide comes in a three-ring binder and is written in simple language
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- ables the oscillating front three-point arms to prevent scalping
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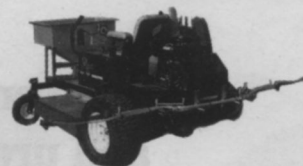
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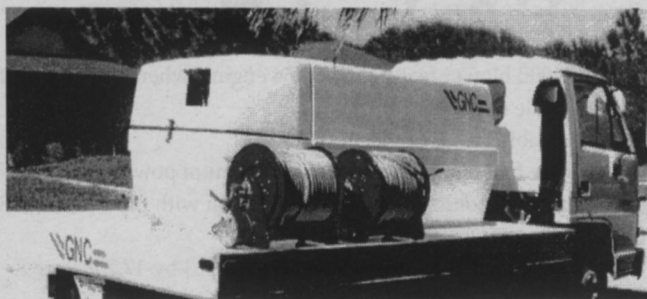
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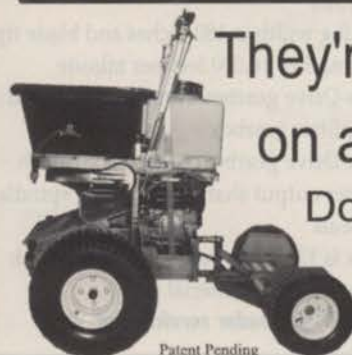
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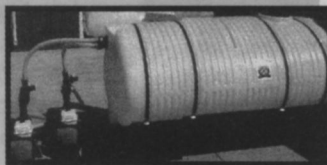
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Circle 226 on reader service card



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Circle 227 on reader service card

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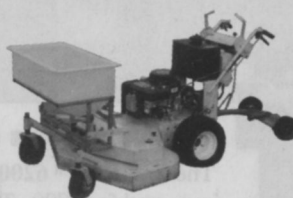
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1. What is your primary business at this location? (choose only one)

I. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES

- ☐ 1. Landscape Contractor (maintenance & installation)
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- ☐ 5. Irrigation Contractor
- ☐ 6. Landscape Architect
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- ☐ 2. Landscape Maintenance
- ☐ 3. Landscape Renovation
- ☐ 4. Mowing and related maintenance
- ☐ 5. Irrigation Installation
- ☐ 6. Irrigation Maintenance
- ☐ 7. Turf pesticide application
- ☐ 8. Ornamental/tree pesticide application
- ☐ 9. Turf fertilization
- ☐ 10. Ornamental/tree fertilization
- ☐ 11. Tree Pruning
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5. What year was your business founded?

6. What were your company's gross revenues for 2000?

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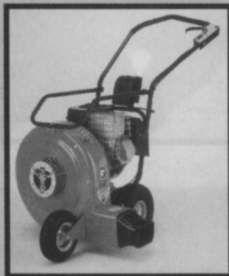
- Reel mower system is designed for large, commercial areas, including parks, schools and golf courses
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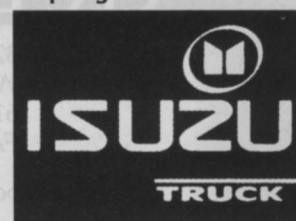
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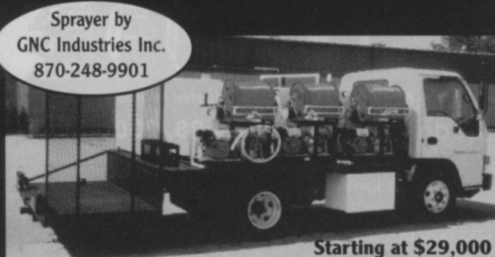
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USE READER SERVICE #82

USE READER SERVICE #83

(continued from page 38)

ing money and where we were losing it," he explained. "As we grew, we had to implement accounting systems so I could actually see where we were making and losing money, and I found out that some of my instincts had been wrong. I had even let some profitable accounts go because I thought we were losing money on them."

Bradley noted, however, that this more formalized system challenged some of his employees. "Our field staff actually threatened a boycott and refused to do the necessary paperwork, but this was a short-lived protest that was more talk than anything," he recalled. "But we had to teach a lot of old dogs new tricks, and some people didn't survive that change."

"Now, however, I can read the company like a book and I can see what projects and what divisions are profitable or losing money, and I can funnel my energies accordingly," he continued.

This more formalized structure has also

helped Bradley as a manager. "I subscribe to the management by wandering around philosophy, and I'm a relationship person," he said. "I would much rather be mingling with my people and my customers in the field, not necessarily talking strictly business, but strengthening my relationships with them through conversation. I've learned that casual conversations go a long way toward cementing relationships, and I've structured the company so I have the time and ability to do just that."

In addition, Bradley recognizes the need to formalize certain parts of a business, such as personnel issues, and he has learned how doing this can help him as well. "You have to have guidelines, procedures and policies for when instances get personal in nature," he related. "Now, I can blame the corporation as the bad guy when I have to do something that someone won't like."

Developing such formalized policies and procedures remains an on-going task, accord-

ing to Bradley, since the company continues to identify areas the manual needs to address. Getting started, however, was relatively simple. "We had been doing a lot of this work as we went along," he pointed out. "Every month or so we would send out a memo announcing a new policy as a result of something that happened that we didn't want to have happen again. Putting together the manual meant putting all of these memos together."

Bradley is confident the company is well positioned for continued growth, especially in light of the relationships it has built with key customers. "We have such strong relationships with our customers that a few of them have even included us in their growth plans, not just as a line item landscape budget/plan, but Raymow is actually in print in their marketing plans," he emphasized. "Our reputation is our foundation."

The author is Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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Training Programs

(continued from page 92)

ganization. "Teach one person to teach others," he urged.

5. Be hands-on. Hands-on training that actually shows how to do something is often the most effective kind. "You can't just sit there and show pictures," Andree said. "We can hand out earplugs, for example, but if they don't know how to put them in, they're not worth much."

As part of his approach to training, Rolsky will make an example of an incident, such as a lost gas cap off of a blower. "I'll say 'Guess how much this costs to replace?' And whoever gets it right, gets an envelope with some money or gift certificate in it," Rolsky related. Doing this makes a memorable point and lets employees know how their actions affect the company's bottom line, he said.

6. Keep training relevant. A common mistake is not making training relevant to what workers are actually doing, Andree pointed out. In her program, she is careful to keep training topics season- and task-specific, so workers can immediately relate their training to the actual job responsibility. "If I'm

seeing several strained back injuries, I might do a session on proper lifting techniques," she described. "If we're doing a job with more trenching than we're used to, I might do a session on trencher safety."

7. Be bilingual. With a predominantly Hispanic workforce, contending with a language barrier can be a contractor's most significant training challenge. This issue is one that contractors must overcome, according to Rolsky. "If you are not figuring out a way to deal with this issue, you're going to be left behind," he warned.

To effectively communicate, contractors should use bilingual employees for key positions such as human resources manager and translate as many training materials as they can, Rolsky urged. "If you want to make sure someone understands something, it needs to be in their language," he said. "If you don't have something in their language, it says, 'I don't care about you.'"

8. Follow up and hold everybody accountable for training. To make sure their efforts aren't futile, contractors need to have

a tool to evaluate training. Dutes likes to observe employees out on a job to make sure their training has transferred through to their work habits, he said, adding that he takes detailed notes that serve as a record and a way to address any problems that crop up.

In addition to employees, trainers should also be actively held accountable for training. Andree does this by checking periodically to make sure her field supervisors are holding their mandatory training sessions.

9. Don't overwhelm. A common training mistake is providing too much information, too quickly, according to Gibson. "After you go through, it's important to have some time to let everything sink in."

Dutes follows a similar approach and tries to keep his employees actively engaged. "Always be very brief with training," he suggested. "If you do any talking, keep it to 10 or 15 minutes and have the guys communicate with you."

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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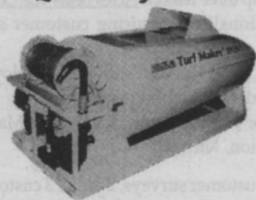
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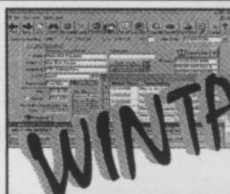
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How We Do It

Creative Training at Signature Landscape

Turning a training program into a road trip where employees from one organization can learn from employees at another company proved beneficial for Signature Landscape.

Photo: Signature Landscape



Signature Landscape, Olathe, Kan., is a \$4.4-million business that employs 95 people during peak season. Training those people can be a tough job, but I came up with

a creative method to effectively train my employees.

I sent my employees for a week of training at Post Landscape in Atlanta, Ga. I developed a friendship with Jim McCutcheon, Post's director of operations, and I thought we could learn a lot by going to Atlanta and training with some of Post's employees. Post could use our employees for free, and our employees could learn some hand pruning techniques and refine other skills.

Jim and I finalized our plans for the week-long trip. I selected a crew of six employees who drove 14 hours to Atlanta. My employees stayed in some of Post's corporate rental apartments. Signature and Post split the rent, and I gave each employee \$125 for the week's worth of food.

I held two pretrip meetings for the crew members scheduled to go on the trip and this gave them a chance to ask questions. We talked about what we wanted to get out of the project, what our visions were and what to expect.

The anticipation was great among my key foremen, who often don't attend the larger conventions. We sent journals with them so they could record their thoughts, and

I wrote personalized notes in each journal, noting each employee's great accomplishments.

During this training trip, our main goals were to have fun and to learn.

In particular, we wanted to improve our hand pruning skills. Post employees do a lot of shrub pruning work, and I wanted my Signature Landscape employees to learn this. We also looked at Post's use of seasonal color, saw some exciting new varieties and observed differences in our design techniques. In fact, one of our employees was truly impressed by the scope of a residential project that required 12 trucks, 25,000 bulbs and a 15- to 20-person crew.

On our trip, positive learning experiences were plentiful. In addition, everyone at Post was extremely cordial and took the time to show us around the city and their properties.

Still, we did experience some difficulties. The journey to and from Atlanta was long, and some employees said that one or two days should have been shaved from the length of our stay. Leaving their families behind for a week was tough, though we did give each employee a phone card to call home.

Also, while the trip – budgeted at \$5,000 – was expensive, the investment was worthwhile. Although only six of us went on this trip, the whole company benefited from it.

In the future, I would like to do this type of training on a smaller scale for our irrigation service technicians or perhaps send some of our designers and planting teams to work with a design/build company.

Through this experience we learned that the best way to train employees is to have them observe how other landscape companies work. – Bill Gordon

The author is president of Signature Landscape, Olathe, Kan.

FIVE *Keys to a Successful Road Trip*

1. Plan every detail of the trip as far in advance as possible.
2. Try to split costs between both companies.
3. Provide journals for employees to record their thoughts and ideas during the trip.
4. Hold several pretrip meetings to voice goals and expectations and to allow employees the opportunity to ask questions.
5. Hold several meetings following the trip to share new ideas and skills with all employees in the company.



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Not Just Another Spray Head

Introducing the Hunter Pro-Spray



Sure, the new Pro-Spray may look familiar – until you do a little product comparison. The Pro-Spray has a tough new ribbed body and cap that make it easier to grip and install. And a new pull-up ring so you can “nozzle up” in less time. A new directional flush plug facilitates clearing the lines, and a new multi-

function wiper seal ensures reliable performance under a wide range of pressures. The Pro-Spray also works with all standard adjustable, fixed or specialty nozzles on your truck. With this line-up of features, you’ll agree the Pro-Spray is not just another spray head!

Hunter®
The Irrigation Innovators

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USE READER SERVICE #70

**New
Pro-Spray**
Now Available
4", 6" and
12" Pop-up

