

Lawn & Landscape

**THE SMALL
BUSINESS ISSUE**

**Marketing
Strategies:
Think Big**

**Sit In On
Our Small
Business
Roundtable**

**Our Annual
Commercial
Mower Buyers'
Guide**

**Mike Schmitt,
Shamrock
Irrigation &
Landscape**

**Getting
his
WINGS**

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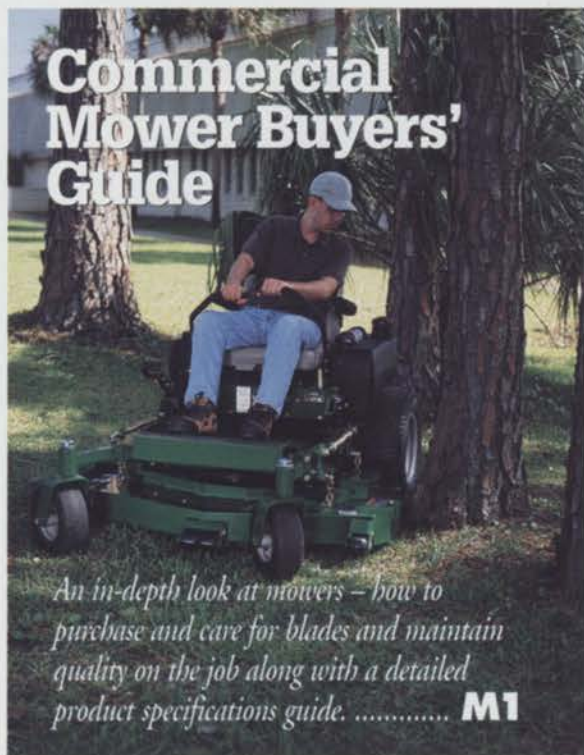
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Calendar OF EVENTS

Don't just sit around this winter! Get out and network with other industry leaders at the many events going on around the country and in your area. Let the extensive calendar listing available on Lawn & Landscape Online keep you in touch with peers and in the loop on major industry events.



Daily Features

Lawn & Landscape Online offers daily features on a variety of topics. Our current schedule is as follows:

- Mon.** – *Contractor Talk*: Industry professionals discuss common practices.
- Tues.** – *Irrigation Issues*: Keeps visitors up-to-date on breaking irrigation news and product updates.
- Wed.** – *Lawn Care Roundup*: Lawn care operators and researchers share industry problems and solutions.
- Thurs.** – *Landscape Issues*: Contractors reveal information to bolster design, installation and maintenance skills.
- Fri.** – *Business Management*: Industry consultants and management firms offer business advice.

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"When we learn to give thanks, we are learning to concentrate not on the bad things, but on the good things in our lives."

— Amy Vanderbilt

A New Take on New Year's

I'm not even going to bother asking you if you've made your New Year's resolutions yet. Instead, let's talk about what really matters – have you broken those promises to yourself already?

All of the good, holiday food is gone, so the leftovers probably aren't appetizing enough to threaten that annual weight-loss commitment already. And the lack of snow this winter has certainly made it easy for those of you determined to work less in the new year to spend more time at home. How about those of you planning on getting in shape in 2002? Have you already decided that working out involves too much work?

Personally, I'm tired of breaking these resolutions each year, so I'm taking a new approach – I'm resolving to NOT do certain things. The more I think about this the more I think there's true wisdom in this approach because we all know that not doing something is generally much easier than actually doing it. In that theme, here are some suggested resolution alternatives for contractors to avoid in 2002:

- Don't provide a price to every potential customer who calls your office. Just because someone is a potential customer, they aren't necessarily a potentially good

customer. Your office personnel need to be able to screen potential customers over the phone and separate the good from the bad.

- Don't hire a job applicant just because they apply for the vacancy. Yes, there are immediate pressures to fill openings, but hiring the wrong person creates more problems than not having anyone. Take the extra time and identify the person who is a long-term solution.

- Don't neglect phone calls from customers or potential customers. I'm amazed by the number of homeowners I talk to who tell me that they had to call three landscape contractors before they received a return call.

- Don't beat up your local dealer to get the very best price possible unless you don't have any problem with customers who price shop various contractors as well. Dealers deserve to make money in their businesses just as you do, and if you treat them as partners who are invaluable to your work then they just might view you the same way.

- Don't let complaints from current customers go unanswered for more than 24 hours. This is obviously a service industry so, above all else, your clients expect you to be customer focused and fix problems as soon as possible.

- Don't let spring arrive without trying out at least one new product that offers technology your company isn't currently using. This could be anything from considering buying your first hydrostatic mower to automating your operations with new software. Businesses that grow bigger and stronger do so because they invest in new technology that makes them more productive and efficient.

- Don't let your employees think you don't appreciate them. Your company only exists because of the people you employ and the work they do for you. Landscape work can be very rewarding, but it also presents a host of challenges based on the nature of the work and being outside all summer long. A simple thank you goes a long way.

- And, of course, given everything that happened last year, don't forget to see the bright side of things. Hopefully we'll never have to endure another year like 2001, but we should still never let the problems in life block our view of all of those things worth celebrating. Happy New Year.

■



Bob West

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For some reason I can't convince my employees to be responsive to our customers, at least to my level of expectation. Do you have any ideas that might help?

Your scenario is very common. Many of us who have been owners or senior managers don't understand why our associates won't or can't deliver the type of customer service we would. It is good that you have recognized this problem – now you have to find out where the “root” of the problem is and take steps to correct it.

Start with analyzing the tone you have set as a leader. You must be committed to providing excellent customer service and this commitment must be communicated regularly to your staff. However, giving lip service to the topic is not enough. You cannot just mandate that all associates provide excellent service for their customers and assume it will happen. You need to be the role model and motivator of your team. Having a passion for delivering exceptional customer service is a must and you need to “live” that passion each day. Start by incorporating this philosophy into your company mission statement or values statement. If you do not have either, this is a great reason to develop one or both of them.

“Talking it up” regularly is important, but those words won't matter if you do not give associates the training necessary to live your service passion. I suggest that at the very least you create various scenarios that happen regularly in your business and give your associates the information needed to handle any situation. Role-playing various scenarios is very helpful, and this can be a group learning opportunity. Do not assume that your staff can properly deal with all possible scenarios.

This just won't happen. What you may think is a common sense solution to a basic problem could be handled incorrectly by someone on your team. Use role-playing as an opportunity to show your associates how you want them to handle situations they'll likely encounter.

Lastly, I think it may be appropriate to evaluate how your associates are being rewarded. Often, providing excellent customer service gets lost in the equation. It is common to give incentives based on profits,

Having a **passion** for delivering
exceptional customer service is a
must and you need to “**live**” that
passion each day. Start by
incorporating this philosophy into your
company **mission statement** or
values statement.

but if you don't incorporate customer service into the equation, then you may not get the behavior you want or, if you do, it will be by accident.

There is an old saying: “What gets rewarded, gets done.” If exceptional customer service is important to you, reward associates for providing it. This could include both financial and non-financial rewards. Try recognizing your people publicly in company meetings or having an area in the office to post complimentary letters from customers. Next, take this recognition to the next level and incorporate it as a component of a team or individual bonus plan. Consider using customer retention as part of your grading plan or, if your customers are “one-time” projects, consider a post-job survey in which you visit with the customer and ask detailed questions about their experience.

The bottom line is you must communicate your expectations, live them everyday and reward your staff for delivering excellent customer service. If you do those things, you'll see a significant change in your associates' attitudes and the end result will be happy customers. **LL**

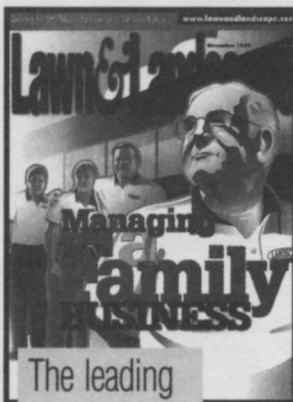


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500 award-winning company he founded in 1978 and sold to TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1998. Readers with questions for Minor can fax them to Lawn & Landscape at 216/961-0364 or e-mail them to bwest@lawnandlandscape.com.

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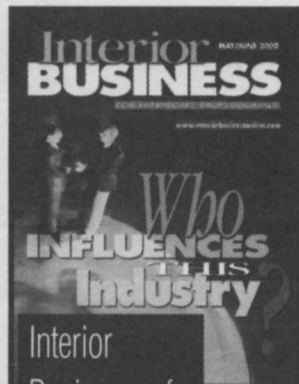
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The author is president of Seawright & Associates, Inc., a consulting firm located in Winter Park, Fla. She can be reached via e-mail at jpilleggi@seawright.com or at 407/645-2433.



Today, talented candidates have higher expectations that you must be willing to meet. Noncompetitive wages, inflexible work environments and poor management are just a few of the catalysts to turnover. Before investing in competitive recruiting methods, take an honest look at your business and be sure you are doing everything possible to maintain an environment where people want to work.

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(continued on page 18)

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A person stands in a field, their body partially obscured by a large, white, hand-painted 'X' on the ground. The scene is bathed in a deep red light, creating a somber and intense atmosphere. The person's face is in shadow, and their hands are positioned near the center of the 'X'. The background shows faint silhouettes of trees and a distant structure.

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FIRST TO START. LAST TO QUIT.

In The Office

(continued from page 15)

for difficult-to-fill positions. Hiring bonuses in the \$250 to \$1,000 range aren't uncommon.

- Providing a compensation incentive for newly hired employees such as an accelerated performance review after six months, with potential for an increase.

- Participation in a drive-through job fair. Your company's recruiting brochure, application or other information goes into a bag with other companies' documents. Candidates drive through a line and grab a bag of documents. They contact you if they are interested in applying.

- Staying in touch with former (productive) employees (called "boomerangs") who have resigned with proper notice. Invite them back whenever possible.

- Creating a resume bank and referring to it when there is a vacancy. Contact qualified candidates who may be working now.

- Advertising via newspaper, Internet, radio, your Web page, community papers, church bulletins and other sources. Ensure all ads are well written and attractive. De-

velop a recruiting brochure or flyer.

- Hiring interns or student workers. Remember, part-time work does not necessarily equate to part-time effort. A student worker can be converted into a full-time, trained employee eventually.

- Attending job fairs.

- Contacting school or military out-placement firms.

- Watching the newspaper for companies experiencing a layoff or merger. Contact their HR departments to find out how to get in touch with displaced employees.

- Networking within the community.

- Offering an open house. Advertise the event and serve beverages and food. Invite families and candidates. Some are even hosting "Pink Slip Parties" where those out of work can mix with company officials.

- Contacting trade and professional industry associations for referrals.

- Setting up booths at community events.

- Asking for referrals. It's never too early to ask for referrals. Ask new hires for

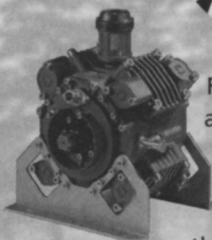
names while information about former colleagues is fresh in their minds.

Classified advertising still remains a viable source for talent. However, the ad must be attractive and interesting.

If recruiting is marketing in today's market, then retaining employees is akin to reselling a customer. How do you keep your customers? Determine and meet their needs. Offer new services at a fair price. Treat them with respect. Customers and employees want to be associated with businesses that are forward-thinking and that listen to them. Put as much effort into finding and keeping employees as you do finding and keeping customers – it will pay off. **LL**

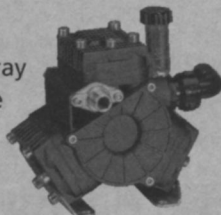
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Check online for Jean Seawright's tips on limiting liability when hiring new employees.



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- Speedometer to track ground speed
- Rhino Lining coat on frame and casters

The Original



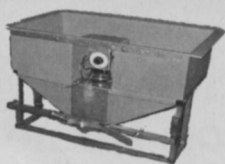
- Fits through a 42 inch gate
- 180 lb hopper throws 4ft to 25ft wide
- 30 gallon tank sprays 60k sqft
- Sprays 4ft, 8ft, 12ft passes
- Speedometer to track ground speed
- Rhino Lining coat on frame and casters

The Stand-up



- Fits through a 36 inch gate
- 180 lb hopper throws 4ft to 25ft wide
- 18 gallon tank
- Sprays up to 8ft passes
- Excellent on hills
- Great for residential and commercial use

The Spreader



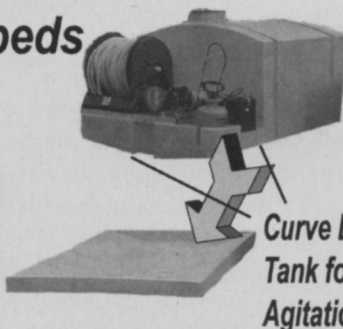
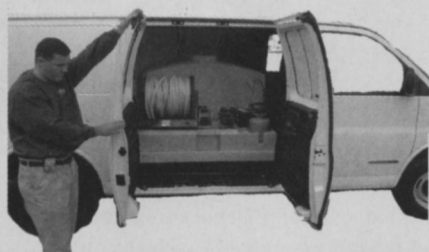
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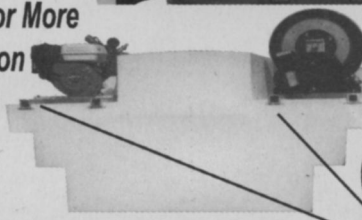
Low profile tank allows more
visibility to the rear



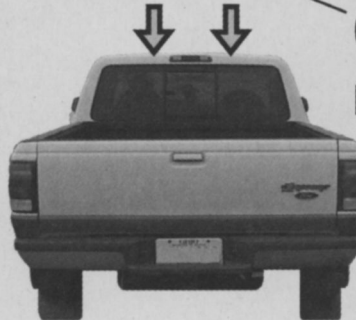
400 Gallon Pick-up Tank



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Optional pump &
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Market Trends

SAVE YOUR PENNIES

Insurance Costs Expected to Rise

The Sept. 11 terrorist attacks and a soft stock market have triggered steep increases in insurance prices across the nation, raising costs for small businesses as well as large corporations.

"Experts are calling the World Trade Center disaster the most significant event in the history of the insurance industry," said Michael Weisburger, president, B. & D.A. Weisburger Insurance, White Plains, N.Y. "Until now, Hurricane Andrew in 1992 was the most expensive U.S. insurance event at \$16 billion. But estimates of World Trade Center losses have ranged from early forecasts of \$10 billion to more recent predictions of \$72 billion."

And, it's not over yet. According to an article in the *New York Times*, higher insurance prices are taking effect immediately for many commercial customers as clients renew services for 2002. Increases, far from uniform, are extreme in many cases. Customers who are most likely to file claims – based more on their records and their perceived riskiness than on the terrorism threat – face the highest increases.

(continued on page 35)



OPEI Predicts SHORT RECESSION

	2001 UNITS SHIPPED	EXPECTED 2002 UNITS	EXPECTED 2003 UNITS
Commercial Inter- mediate Walk-behinds	48,088	47,677	48,780
Commercial Riding Mowers	114,884	112,508	116,475

Source: Outdoor Power Equipment Institute

ALEXANDRIA, Va. - Shipments of 2001 model year power equipment are declining as a result of the current economic recession, but relief could come early next year according to The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI). OPEI's economic forecast for commercial turf products shows that commercial intermediate walk-behind shipments dropped .1 percent and commercial riding mower shipments increased 5 percent, considerably less than the 24-percent increase in 2000 and the 35-percent increase in 1999.

However, the organization predicts that this recession will be short, with national recovery beginning early this year and the industry seeing signs of improvement by fall.

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Contractors Have a New Competitor: Home Depot

ATLANTA - ServiceMaster President and CEO Jonathan Ward announced that the parent company of lawn care giant TruGreen-ChemLawn brought in a new marketing team that was determined to find new ways to bring in customers.

"Their initial perspective is that we've been buying nontargeted and nonqualified lists regardless of phone numbers and zip codes," he acknowledged. "Essentially we've been buying every phone number and dialing for dollars."

Ward also said the company was exploring retail distribution opportunities, which resulted in a significant announcement - consumers now will be able to purchase TruGreen-ChemLawn services from Home Depot.

The two companies plan to "test a range of residential maintenance and repair services such as landscaping," according to a Home Depot announcement. The services will be co-branded and offered through 30 Home Depot stores located in Sacramento, Calif., Memphis, Tenn., and Orlando, Fla. These markets were chosen due to their geographic diversity and the presence of TruGreen-ChemLawn lawn care and residential mowing services there.

The program will launch Feb. 15 and be promoted through kiosks, signage, promotional activities and direct marketing to Home Depot customers. "We were looking for a number of years for new way to go to market," noted Don Karnes, president, TruGreen Group. "If you look at telemarketing and brochures, you have to ask yourself how else can we get to these customers and where else do they meet? You won't find my places where more customers meet than a Home Depot. The number of potential customers who go through there is just unbelievable."

(continued on page 22)



Pad

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Market Trends

(continued from page 20)

For the first nine months of 2001, the combination of TruGreen-ChemLawn and TruGreen LandCare landscape maintenance work grew about 1 percent to \$1.1 billion with an operating income of \$126 million – 14 percent off last year's mark.

Now the company will focus on "growing margins in the maintenance business through the implementation of plant and material purchasing programs, improved labor productivity and more effective leveraging of overheads," according to a release.

ON THE LAWNFRONT

Taking the 'P' Out of NPK

ST. PAUL, Minn. – Plans are underway for the city council to vote on an ordinance banning the use of phosphorus in lawn fertilizer. The ordinance, already passed in September 2001 by the Minneapolis city council, identifies phosphorus as a leading cause of water

(continued on page 24)

Association NEWS

The **Metro Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association** named its executive board of directors. They are Scott Chatham, president; Kevin Caldwell, vice president; Matt Hoydar, treasurer; Ray Wiedman, secretary; and Becki McMinn, past president.

The **Associated Landscape Contractors of America** now offers "Straight Talk on Careers in the Landscape Industry," a career brochure that offers insights into the types of professional careers available in the industry, the advantages of college training for a career in the industry and information on internships and scholarships. To order copies, call 800/395-2522.

The **Southern Nurserymen's Association** elected its new officers. They are Frank Collier, president; James Guy, vice president; Wayne Sawyer, director chapter 1; Daniel Baston, director chapter 4; William Boyd, director chapter 3; and Wilfred Robbins, immediate past president.

The **Interior Industry Growth Initiative** Oversight Committee announced three distinguished media spokespersons for the Plants at Work campaign. The Initiative Oversight Committee named Barbara Helfman, David Liu and Gary Mangum as the spokesperson team.

The **New York State Turfgrass Association** contributed \$2,000 in support of reference materials for students of Delhi College's golf, turf management and landscape programs.

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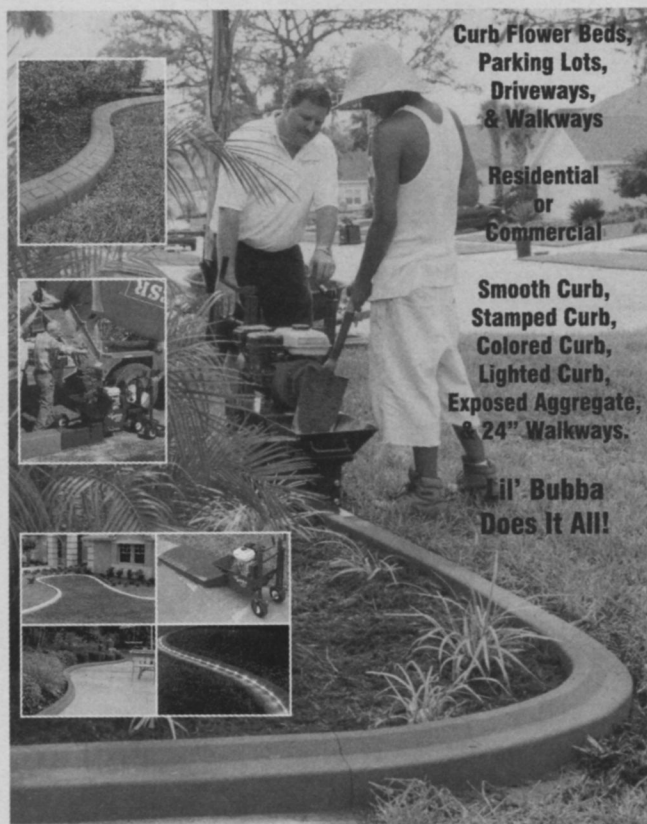
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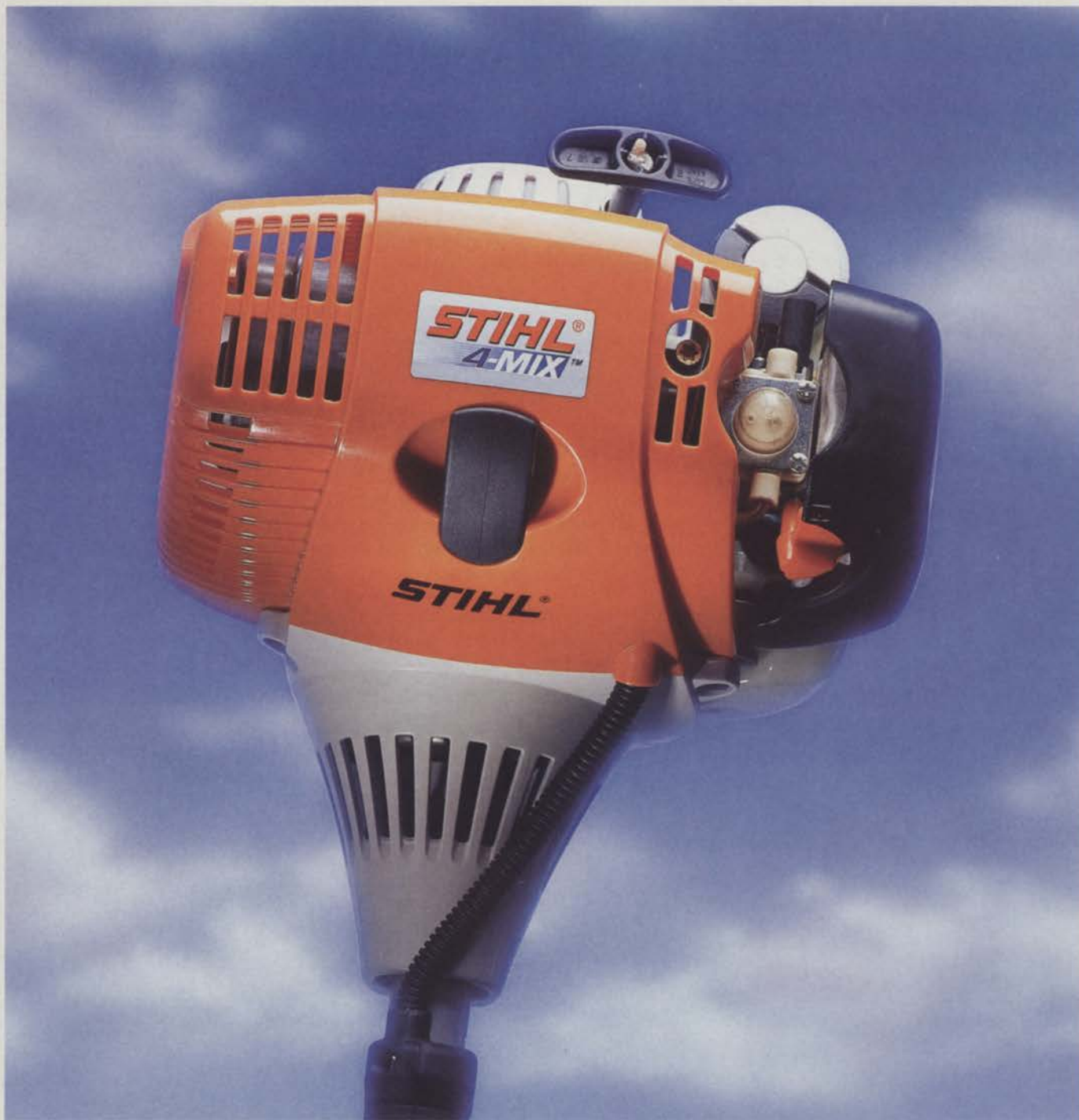
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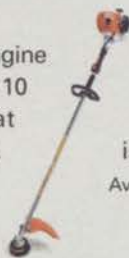
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Market Trends

(continued from page 22)

pollution in the Twin City metro area because the ingredient causes algae growth. Thus far, this regulation has faced both support and opposition throughout the region and the industry.

Alison Fong, environmental inspector for the city of Minneapolis, explained that the regulation initially came about in an attempt to be proactive and stress industry-wide education. "Water quality is a very important issue here in the city, and the future is in the chain of lakes," she said. "They are directly affected by what happens in the land around them and, in many lakes, phosphorus is the limiting nutrient. It's certainly easier to prevent the problem than react to it."

However, while phosphorus does exacerbate water pollution, fertilizer application may not be solely responsible for the phosphorus runoff, said Bob Fitch, executive director of the Minnesota Nursery & Landscape Association in St. Paul. "We have con-

(continued on page 27)

People

Mike Ponder returned to Roberts Supply as a sales representative for north and central Georgia.

Environmental Industries named **Andrew Mandell** senior vice president and chief financial officer.

Greg Freyermuth will serve as Turf-Seed's new southeast southeast sales representative.

Contra Costa Landscaping, a subsidiary of the RBI Companies, appointed **Bill Horn** to area manager of its northern California operations.

RedMax promoted **David Vick** to general manager, sales and marketing, and **Diana Matos** to marketing manager.

The J.R. Simplot Co.'s Turf & Horticulture group named **Steve Franzen** western region director of sales for their fertilizer division.

John Mowder, president, Dixon Industries, was elected chairman of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute. In addition, **William**

Docherty was elected vice-chairman and **L.E. Schultz** was elected secretary/treasurer. **Michael Ariens, Stephen Bly, John Jenkins, James Martinco,**

Kendrick Melrose, Fred Whyte, James Wier and **David Zerfoss** will also serve on the board of directors.

The Irvine/Lake Forest location of Miramar Wholesale Nurseries appointed **Mitch Farr** as the new commercial landscape center manager. Former manager **Sam Banuelos** is now outside salesman for Riverside and San Bernardino counties.



Mandell (top),
Farr (bottom)

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- 4 LM Mapping™ links with Microsoft© MapPoint™ to automatically sort route lists to minimize driving distance/cost. LM Mapping™ also provides detailed maps and written driving directions to each job site.

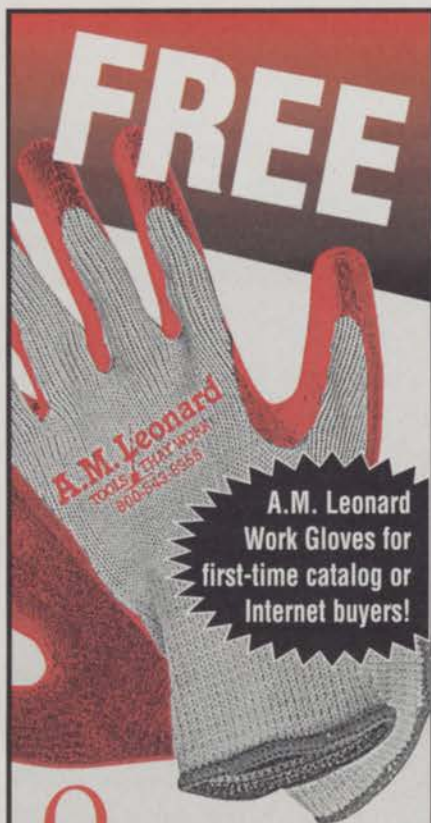
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Market Trends

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- JAN. 18** Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Certified Landscape Technician Training and Testing in Plant Sensitivity, Chicago, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.
- JAN. 18-19** Plant Biology Workshop 2002, Frogmore, S.C. Contact: 888/290-2640.
- JAN. 19-21** Tennessee Nursery & Landscape Association 25th annual convention and trade show, Chattanooga, Tenn. Contact: 931/473-3951.
- JAN. 21-24** 72nd Annual Michigan Turfgrass Conference, Lansing, Mich. Contact: 517/321-1660.
- JAN. 22-23** Missouri Landscape and Nursery Association Nuts and Bolts Employee Short Course, St. Louis and Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/233-1481.
- JAN. 22-23, 29-30** Cornell Organic Turfgrass Management Short Course, Long Island, N.Y. Contact: 607/255-1792.
- JAN. 22-24** MAGIC 2002 – The Convention, Kansas City, Mo. Contact: 816/561-5323.
- JAN. 23-25** PLCAA & NPMA Conference, Atlantic City, N.J. Contact: 800/458-3466.
- JAN. 24** Northeastern PA Turf School & Trade Show, Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Contact: 814/863-1368.
- JAN. 24-26** The Gulf States Horticultural Expo, Mobile, Ala. Contact: 334/502-7777.
- JAN. 27-29** Nebraska Nursery & Landscape Association Winter Conference & Trade Show, Omaha, Neb. Contact: 816/233-1481.
- JAN. 28-30** Iowa Turfgrass Conference & Trade Show, Des Moines, Iowa. Contact: 515/232-8222.
- JAN. 29** 12th Annual Reno Nevada Landscape Association Trade Show & Conference, Reno, Nev. Contact: 775/673-0404.
- JAN. 29-30** Maryland Turfgrass 2002 Conference and Trade Show, Baltimore, Md. Contact: 301/345-4199.
- JAN. 29-FEB. 1** Turfgrass Producers International Orlando Midwinter Conference, Orlando, Fla. Contact: 800/405-8873.
- JAN. 30-31** New Jersey Nursery & Landscape Association 2002 Trade Show, Somerset, N.J. Contact: 800/314-4836.
- JAN. 30-FEB. 1** Iowa Nursery & Landscape Association Annual Convention & Trade Show, Des Moines, Iowa. Contact: 816/233-1481.
- JAN. 30-FEB. 1** ProGreen Expo, Denver, Colo. Contact: 303/756-1079.
- JAN. 31-FEB. 3** 2002 American Nursery & Landscape Association Management Clinic, Louisville, Ky. Contact: 202/789-2900.
- FEB. 3-10** Golf Course Superintendent's Association of America annual conference and show, Orlando, Fla. Contact: 800/472-7878.
- FEB. 7-9** New England Grows, Boston, Mass. Contact: 508/653-3009.
- FEB. 7-10** Associated Landscape Contractors of America Executive Forum, Cancun, Mexico. Contact: 800/396-ALCA.
- FEB. 11-12** Illinois Landscape Contractors Association Winter Seminar, Hoffman Estates, Ill. Contact: 630/472-2851.
- FEB. 15-16** Jacksonville Horticultural Trade Show, Jacksonville, Fla. Contact: 904/292-1117.
- FEB. 15-16** PLCAA Management Forum, Charlotte, N.C. Contact: 800/458-3466.
- FEB. 17-19** 2002 Lawn & Landscape School of Management, Charlotte, N.C. Contact: 800/456-0707.

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Market Trends

Mattingly's MESSAGE

EDITOR'S NOTE: Every month, industry consultant Jack Mattingly will offer suggestions on key tasks for contractors to focus on. Here are his January thoughts.

We're off to another successful year. Here are a few to-dos to focus on and accomplish in early 2002:

- Budget the total man-hours of each maintenance account, per function, per month. You now have the basis to track and monitor the hours for each project, each month.
- Review your financials and, particularly, your chart of accounts. Your accounting system should represent the method you use to estimate your costs, such as income, direct costs, indirect costs, equipment and vehicle expenses, administrative overhead and profit. Make the adjustments now in your software program.
- Become proficient in the software you are using. The computer can provide an abundance of information needed to manage operations. Become well trained.
- Eliminate the valueless. Now is the time to cut the paperwork that never leads to action. Eliminate anything wasteful. This includes trimming people whose

skills or interests will not add value to your company's future. Re-engineer your systems so that the field operations have the necessary man-hours and material information provided to them on a frequent basis – preferably weekly – to manage the labor.

- Training and Education. Take advantage of any and all seminars, teachers, programs, and send your people. It will be the best investment you make this winter.

Involve your people in considering the above and develop a written game plan for accomplishment, including dates for completion. You will now be on your way to reaching your new profit goal.

Jack Mattingly is a green industry consultant with Mattingly Consulting. He can be reached at 770/517-9476 or online at www.mattinglyconsulting.com

(continued from page 24)

sistently been vocal in stating the fact that we don't believe that phosphorus fertilizer, properly applied, is contributing significantly to the greening of the lakes in the area," he said. "What's interesting is our lawn care applicators in the Twin Cites are already, almost without exception, at 0 percent phosphorus."

The Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), Washington, D.C., also opposes the restriction on the grounds that phosphorus contamination stems from a variety of sources other than fertilizer con-

tent. Jim Skillen, manager of formulator issues for RISE, identified alternate sources for phosphorus runoff, including the leaching of organic phosphorus from dead vegetation during the winter and the phosphorus content in goose excrement.

Skillen stressed that additional research would reveal that phosphorus has less of an environmental impact than previously thought – and that a strict ban may be too hasty of a decision due to the lack of sound science.

(continued on page 30)

On the WEB

Sound Landscape Services – www.soundlandscapeservices.com

Earth-a-peel Industries – www.earthapeel.com

Universal Lighting Technologies – www.universalballast.com

ADM Property Services – www.admservices.com

Michigan State University

Department of Plant Pathology – www.plantpathology.msu.edu/index.htm

U.S. Small Business Administration – www.sba.gov

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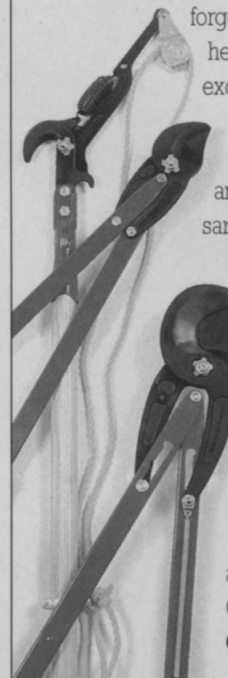
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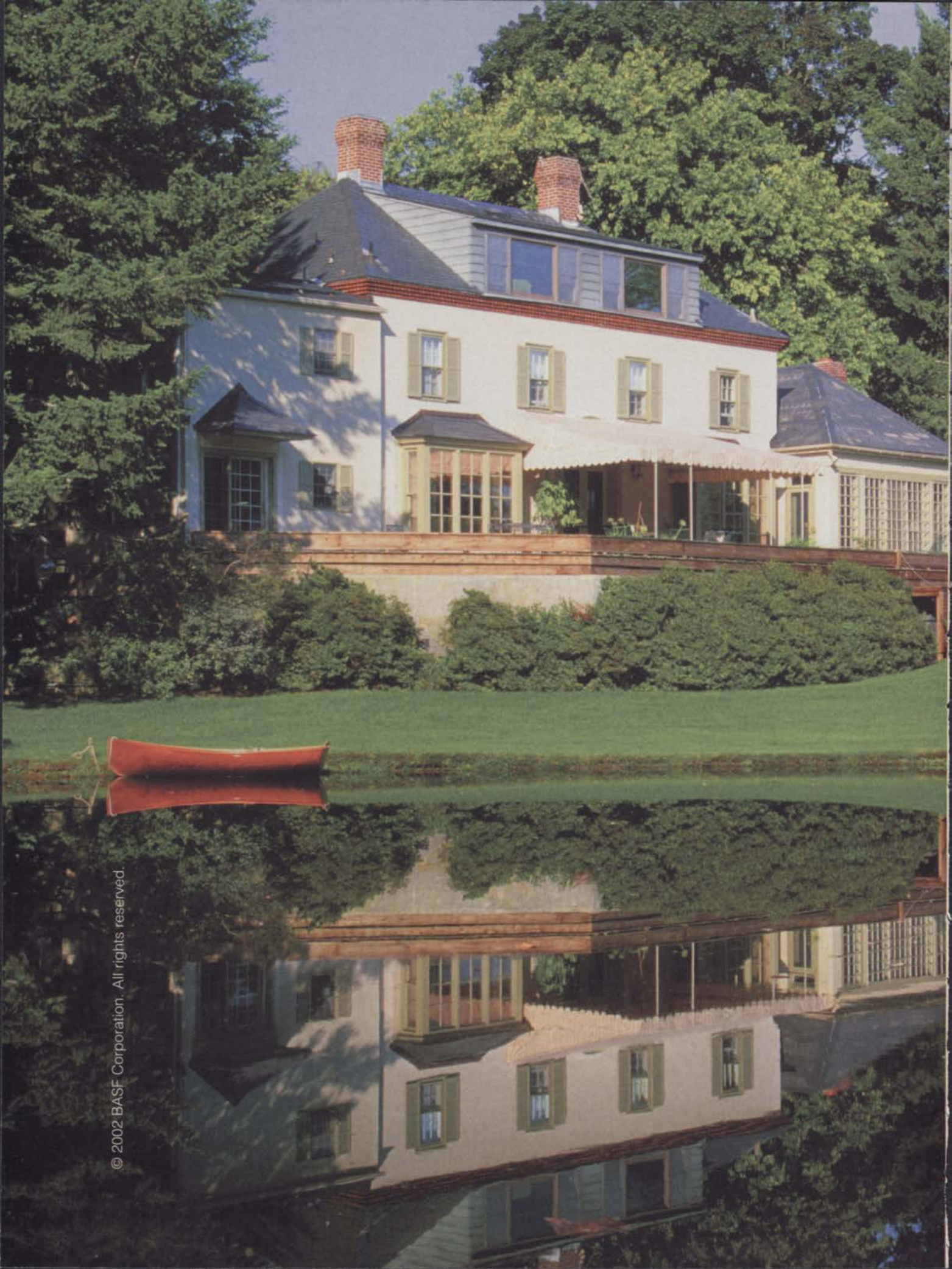
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BASF

Market Trends

(continued from page 27)

Nevertheless, Fong admitted that many lawn care operators have viewed the regulation as a step toward consistency, especially since many have already limited the use of phosphorus in fertilizers due to the content in the soil. Opinions remain mixed, but Fong cautioned against interpreting the ordinance strictly in either direction. "It doesn't solve the entire problem, but it is a step in the right direction," she remarked.

IN THE NEWS

Toro Finishes 2001 Strong

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Despite the economical and social challenges the 2001 season presented green industry manufacturers, Toro Chairman and CEO Ken Melrose told analysts that the company is pleased with its 2001 performance and cautiously looks forward to a stronger 2002.

"We're pleased with the record perfor-

(continued on page 35)



Book Report

DEVELOPING THE LEADER WITHIN YOU

by Dr. John C. Maxwell

Everything rises and falls on leadership.

The key to success in any endeavor is the ability to lead others successfully. No one knows that better than Dr. John Maxwell, America's authority on leadership. *Developing the Leader Within You* is a foundational must read for anyone in a leadership position. Maxwell writes, "The effectiveness of your work will never rise above your ability to lead others." Plainly, your level of success depends on your leadership skills.

Maxwell mentions a quote from the President of Hyatt Hotels: "Ninety-nine percent of all employees want to do a

good job. How they perform is simply a reflection of the one for whom they work." For those who feel they need help in this area, there is hope.

By reading this book, you will learn how to develop yourself into an effective leader. There are very few books that deal with leadership wholly. *Developing the Leader Within You* is not a lesson in management, but rather a guide to help you acquire influence. Effective leadership motivates people to carry out the vision you cast. Ultimately, you will learn that people do not want to be managed, they want to be led. Ask yourself, would you follow your own leadership or would you jump ship? – Derek Blumberg

Blumberg is president of Quality Seasons in Savage, Minn. To order Maxwell's book, log on to www.injoy.com.

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Monsanto scientists used scanning-electron microscopy to photograph the effects of weeds sprayed with Roundup PRO and an imitator. Taken just one hour after application, these images clearly show more formulation in the leaf sprayed with Roundup PRO.



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In the first two hours, it delivers three times more power to the roots than Syngenta's latest imitator product.

The proof is in the roots.²

Scientists also used autoradiography to photograph and measure the amount of herbicide in the roots two hours after application. Time after time, at least three times more herbicide showed up in the weeds sprayed with Roundup PRO. With the imitator, barely any herbicide has moved to the roots.





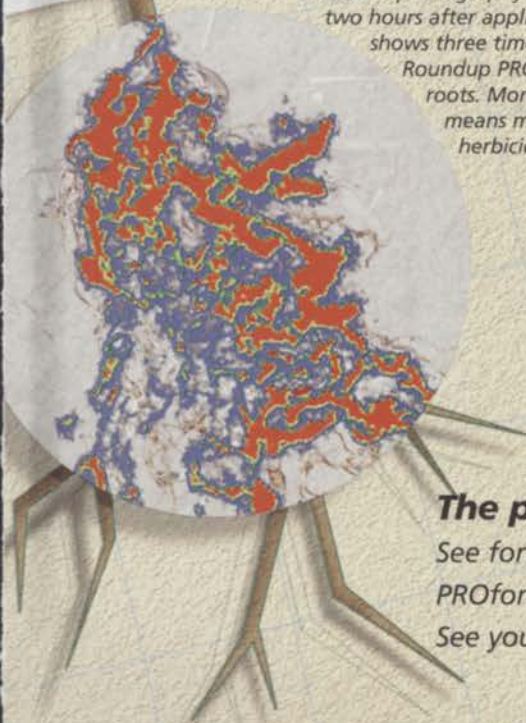
This is a cross-section of a weed leaf magnified 1000x. The yellow droplets mean Roundup PRO is already at work inside.



This weed, sprayed with the imitator, has almost no droplets in the leaf.

Syngenta's latest imitator product

In the first two hours, almost no imitator herbicide has moved to the roots.



Scientific photography taken two hours after application shows three times more Roundup PRO in the roots. More color means more herbicide.



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Always read and follow label directions. Test conducted with MON 77360, EPA Reg #524-475 with comparison to Syngenta product carrying EPA Reg. #10182-449. 1. Test methodology: In scanning-electron microscopy, Monsanto scientists identified penetrated formulations of both Roundup PRO and Touchdown Pro in the mesophyll cell layer. These micrographs support the evidence that formulations containing Monsanto's patented PROformance technology rapidly penetrate the leaf surface. 2. Test methodology: Radiolabeled formulations were applied at equal acid-equivalent rates. Radioactivity was visualized by autoradiography following a simulated rain event two hours after application. Monsanto laboratory tests, 2001. Roundup®, Roundup PRO® and PROformance™ are trademarks of Monsanto Technology LLC. [12748 jct 10/01 J. ©2001 Monsanto Company RUPRO-12748

(continued from page 30)

mance in fiscal 2001, particularly in light of the challenging economic conditions worldwide," Melrose said, referring to the company's record sales and profits. Toro's sales for its fiscal year totaled \$1.353 billion, which represented 1.1 percent growth over 2000. In addition, earnings jumped 11.4 percent to \$50.4 million in 2001.

The landscape contracting industry continues to be a key driver of the company's profitability, particularly through its leading Toro and Exmark brands. The late, cold spring and resulting economic slowdown kept professional sales essentially flat this year at nearly \$859 million, however, while Toro's earnings from these sales climbed 7.2 percent. For 2001, the golf and irrigation markets presented the biggest challenges selling to the professional audience.

"The irrigation industry was down considerably this year," remarked Melrose. "We were down, but everyone else was as well in terms of our major competitors going through some contraction. That was

Insurance Costs (continued from page 20)

In the landscape industry, health and liability insurance is expected to increase another 15 to 20 percent, remarked Richard Lehr, general counsel for the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, Atlanta. "Typically the past increases have been more in health areas, but this year all insurance lines will be affected," Lehr explained. "Even if a company has had zero claims over the past year, it should be prepared for increases."

To prepare themselves, contractors should budget for insurance premium increases now, Weisburger advised, and the first step is insurance company research. "I think you'd be hard pressed to find an insurance company that isn't affected—some might well

go out of business," he said. "You should check the A.M. Best rating of your insurance company, [which reports on the financial condition of insurance companies.] If it has an 'A' or lower rating, consider changing to a company that is financially more sound."

Lehr also suggested that contractors contact their insurance providers and discuss how rates will change this year and what they can do. "Since the deductible a company has is the primary factor that affects insurance costs, it might be financially prudent to change the deductible or some of your coverages to make insurance more affordable," he said. "Contractors shouldn't be afraid to take competitive bids at this time either."

due more to weather patterns, cold, late springs, and a very hot, dry summer that created watering bans. The economy also played a part, but the lion's share was due to weather."

Melrose expects Toro's irrigation division to post stronger performance in 2002 driven by improved products. "Next year, we're looking at somewhat of a rebound," he shared.



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Nursery Market Report

NEW SHRUBS

Spring Forward

Snow may be falling and cold winds blowing, but spring has already sprung for some plant breeders. One breeder, Monrovia, Asuza, Calif., launched an exclusive line of shrubs and vines for 2002.

Here's the latest on Monrovia's six innovative new shrubs.

SHRUBS. Nuccio's Bella Rosa Japanese Camellia is an evergreen that produces 4-inch, fire-engine red flowers. Each bloom has petals that are symmetrically arranged in layers, creating a formal look. The Bella Rosa is shade tolerant and

grows well in containers, reaching 6 to 8 feet tall and wide. It likes full shade to morning sun and well-drained, acidic soil. This shrub prefers U.S. Department of Agriculture Zones 8 to 10.

El Dorado California Lilac features glossy, lime-yellow, variegated foliage that offers a striking contrast against the blue cylindrical flowers. This hardy shrub is heat tolerant and drought resistant. A slow grower, it reaches 6 to 10 feet tall and 8 to 10 feet wide. It is suitable for U.S. Department of Agriculture Cold Zones 7 to 11.

lawnandlandscape.com

CHECK OUT this article online for more information on new vines for the landscape.



Strawberry Lemonade Butterfly Bush (left) features fragrant, conical flowers that attract butterflies. Bella Rosa Japanese Camellia (below) produces 4-inch, bright red flowers and grows 6 to 8 feet high and wide. Photos: Monrovia

Banana Split Variegated Soft Leaf Yucca is ideal as a bold accent planting or container plant. Its variegated, strap-like leaves with yellow centers bend backward, giving the plant a rosette shape. Trunk-like stems grow 4 to 6 feet tall, and throughout the summer, spikes of white blooms stand 2 to 4 feet high. This drought-tolerant yucca prefers full sun to part shade and well-drained soil. It is suited for cold zones 7 to 9.

Strawberry Lemonade Butterfly Bush features pink, conical clusters of fragrant flowers backed by variegated leaves. The 5- to 10-inch-long flowers attract butterflies, and the bush reaches 6 to 8 feet tall and 4 to 6 feet wide, making an effective background, accent or specimen in a butterfly or fragrance garden. It does best in full sun with average watering and is suited for cold zones 5 to 9.

Variegated New Zealand Christmas Tree is an evergreen with crimson stamens and golden tips. This slow grower reaches 5 to 6 feet tall and wide. The shrub prefers well-drained neutral to acidic soil, attracts birds to its blooms in summer and develops an attractive bark as it ages. It can be grown in cold zones 9 to 11.

Coral Flower Carpet Groundcover Rose has 2-inch, pink-coral flowers and dark green foliage. This hardy groundcover does well in mass plantings, borders, containers and hanging baskets. It tolerates a wide range of soils in full sun to part shade and is disease resistant. The shrub prefers cold zones 5 to 11. — Ali Cybulski

The author is Contributing Editor to Lawn & Landscape magazine, and she can be reached at acybulski@gie.net.





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USE READER SERVICE #92

On

Paper

Focus on Customers

The Job Checklist was started because The Pattie Group, Chagrin Falls, Ohio, strives to put clients' needs first.

"This form was developed about a year ago because we wanted to be sure that all the small details are taken care of when a job is complete," explained Bill Fehrenbach, the company's president, adding that the company also created similar forms to address irrigation and lighting issues. "All of the things on the checklist are costly to go back to fix but are ridiculously cheap to take care of while we're there."

These forms also serve to strengthen the relationship between the company and its primarily high-end residential customers. "The foreman gets together with the client and goes over the job checklist with him or her," Fehrenbach related. "That face time is used to reinforce the relationship we've built with the customer. That last interaction provides closure."

Included with the job checklist form is a special homeowner's guide the foreman gives the client during their last meeting.

"What we do costs significantly more than a vehicle, an appliance or a television set, and all of those things come with an operator's manual," Fehrenbach acknowledged. "We wanted to give them something to explain how they can take care of their investment."

Once foremen have met with their clients for the final time, a copy of the paperwork is kept on file at the office in the job folder. Management will review the job folder, making sure all paperwork was completed, and especially that the foreman met with the client for the final time to go over the job checklist.

"The paperwork is evidence that the client has been given everything." — Cheryl Green

The Author is the Internet Editor for Lawn & Landscape Online, and she can be reached at cgreen@gie.net.

Job Checklist

Client Name:
Job Number:
Job Completion Date:



- ☐ 1. All tags are removed from plant materials.
- ☐ 2. Check for broken branches, hand prune problem areas.
- ☐ 3. Mulch has been properly installed: for example, not covering trunks of trees or plant materials
- ☐ 4. Homeowner's Manual must be given to client, hand deliver, if client is not home, drop off and make a follow up phone call to go over proper watering and care. Make sure that all the client's questions and concerns are covered.
- ☐ 5. If irrigation has been installed complete irrigation checklist.
- ☐ 6. If electrical has been installed complete electrical checklist.
- ☐ 7. Site has been checked for all misc. tools and equipment.
- ☐ 8. Walks and drives are properly cleaned.
- ☐ 9. Ask client for permission to display Pattie Group sign.

Project Manager

Date

Lawn & Landscape introduces On Paper, a new department highlighting contractors' business forms. To view additional documents contractors use, visit the Business Tools section at www.lawnandlandscape.com. If you have a form you think contractors would benefit from, contact Cheryl Green at cgreen@gie.net or 800/456-0707.



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USE READER SERVICE #18

Minding Your

Business



Surf's Up

You only get one chance to make a first impression, and that encounter might not last longer than 15 seconds if it is on a Web site. "People that surf the web want something that downloads fast – something that is easy to navigate," said Bill Jones, president, Terra Systems, Charlotte, N.C. So, companies that launch Web pages don't have long to keep clients from clicking off the site.

Service offerings, project pictures and company histories fill some businesses' sites, along with basics such as contact information and references, or extras like seasonal tips. Jones says the more information, the better. "People go to Web sites if they are chock full of information," he pointed out.

Jones hired a professional to make sure www.terrasyslawns.com runs smoothly, and he invested \$5,000 in the initial Web site launch. Each month, he provides the fresh content and the computer company handles "behind the screens" technicalities. "I would have been neglecting my business if I spent the time needed to launch a Web site," Jones admitted.

But the cost is worth it, he said. "[The site] substan-

tiates what you do," he noted. "It shows that we're past the point where we are jumping on the bandwagon."

Jones' site sells itself. During peak season the two-year-old site attracts up to two dozen requests for the company's e-mail newsletter, and each quarter it generates thousands of hits, he said. Education keeps viewers coming back, with planting, watering and seasonal tips posted regularly. Then, Jones nurtures the online relationship by sending out quarterly newsletters.


A function that allows site visitors to e-mail the company enhances the site's customer service value, Jones added. Terra Systems fol-

lows up by scheduling these appointments. "One of the things we want to do is build relationships," he said. "It's important that your clients feel like they know you."


And, as clients demand more convenience in the future, interactive sites might climb in popularity, suggested Joe Palko, vice president of sales and marketing, Alocet, Toronto, Ontario. "Paying bills online – that might become a trend," he predicted. "Also, interactive services, where people can go online and change their schedule date of the job or request quotes online, [might become more popular]."

On the other hand, Joe Loyet, president, Loyet Landscape Maintenance, St. Louis, Mo., is planning a more simple Web strategy. He plans to display photographs of six "anchor" properties that people recognize and list their services, history and contact information.

"You almost have to have a full-time person updating the Web site every week," he noticed. "I'd rather use that person to market out on the streets."

Simple or sophisticated, even basic Web presence will enhance the company image and also turn on potential customers, Jones stressed. "Information is key on the web. Information for free." – **Kristen Hampshire** 

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

lawnandlandscape.com 

Check online for articles on "To Web or Not To Web" and some basics to include on your site.

ON THE WEB

Web-Building Basics

Joe Palko, vice president of sales and marketing, Alocet, Toronto, Ontario, suggested some basics for contractors creating company Web sites:

- Keep the site simple. "A focused message is always better," Palko said. "People get annoyed by too many things moving when they are trying to read – it makes them want to leave the page."
- Develop a strategy or mission for the site. "Do you want it to upsell your existing clients? Do you want it to explain or provide information? Do you want it to attract new clients? Keep a goal in mind with every page that you put up," he suggested.
- Keep the site updated. "People use the Internet quite a bit now, and if they find out that you have October's promotions still running in December, they can't rely on the site." – **Kristen Hampshire**

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Advanced Software For The Business Side

USE READER SERVICE #19

CLIP

by Kristen Hampshire

SHAMROCK IRRIGATION & LANDSCAPE

HEADQUARTERS: Simi Valley,
Calif.

FOUNDED: October 2000

2001 REVENUE: \$620,000

2002 PROJECTED GROWTH:

\$1.2 million

SERVICE MIX: 78 percent installa-
tion, 8 percent irrigation, 11 percent
maintenance, 3 percent miscella-
neous

EMPLOYEES: 11 year-round, 4
seasonal

EQUIPMENT: 3 trimmers, 2
blowers, 13 pruners, 2 chain saws,
2 hedge trimmers, 3 maintenance
vehicles and 3 installation vehicles

THE COMPANY

CHALLENGES: Managing cash
flow, refining systems and develop-
ing people.

PRESIDENT: Mike Schmitt
graduated from California Polytech-
nic University San Luis Obispo with
a degree in horticulture. He worked
for Environmental Industries for six
years and served as its chief
technical. He started Shamrock
Irrigation & Landscape in October
2000 and boasts extensive
irrigation knowledge.

VICE PRESIDENT: With 25 years
of experience in the field, Hal Ward
left Environmental Industries, where
he was managing commercial
maintenance for Santa Barbara and
Ventura counties. He and Schmitt
are partners in the business.

INSTALLATION

SUPERINTENDENT: Jorge Utrera
worked his way up from laborer
through field experience, he also left
Environmental Industries to join
Shamrock in 2000.

Mike Schmitt was more than ready for takeoff when his flight departed the Atlanta Hartsfield International Airport last September. He called home around 10 p.m. – a habit after spending 16 nights that month in stagnant hotel rooms.

"I had just gotten off of the phone saying good night to my wife and daughter, and I said, 'You know what? I'm done. It's time to go,'" he recalled, a hint of laughter revealing disbelief in just how quickly he changed his destination.

He didn't expect to reroute his career during the five-hour flight back to California, and he didn't expect to hatch plans for a million-dollar fledgling operation before landing. He didn't expect the bedtime phone call before his departure to bump his aspirations to a different level – one that melded his personal and professional lives.

"I had 85,000 frequent flier miles that year," said Schmitt, who was Environmental Industry's (EII) chief technical officer at the time. "I was spending more time on the road and I had a two-year-old at home. It's hard to build a family if you're telling your kid good night from whatever airport you're in that night. If you're going to be Dad, you have to be around."

Needless to say, he didn't expect that within one month he would steer his own company in Simi Valley, Calif. – Shamrock Irrigation & Landscape: an air-born operation headed for high altitudes.

A GRAND SCHEME. Schmitt doesn't always make decisions on the fly. He's well-grounded, really, and a careful plan and the right people preceded the company's October incorporation date.

"I've been a guy that always had a business plan in hand," he explained. "There was always something I was kicking around or working on, and when I was in college I figured at some point I would go into business. It just happened a little earlier than I expected."

Schmitt's archive of grand plans includes a draft of how to run and acquire a beer distributorship – the research he acquired while working

(continued on page 46)



At a
Glance

EARN HIS VW



Shamrock Irrigation & Landscape

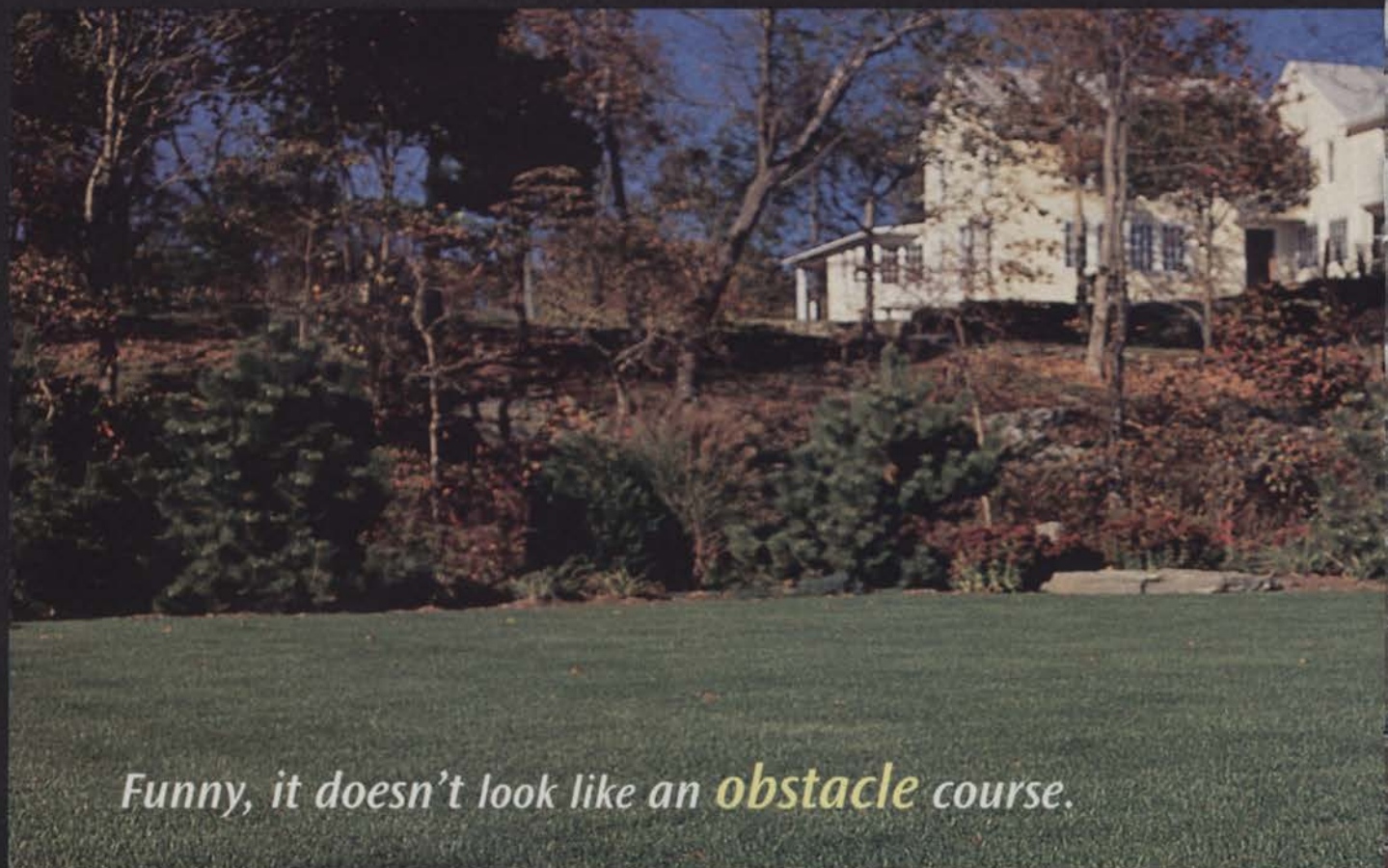
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Simi Valley, Calif. 91360
PH: 818/519-5700
FX: 805/581-2990
schmittmj@earthlink.net

From EII to independent, Mike Schmitt and the Shamrock team realize the sky is the limit and the goals they set their first year are just a few of the destinations on their journey.

Owners Mike Schmitt (right) and Hal Ward (left) say the secret to successful business is the people who share their vision – the people on “team Shamrock.”

Photo: Tory Avram

ING ings



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USE READER SERVICE #20

Cover Story

(continued from page 43)

in operations at beer distributorships during college. While studying horticulture at California Polytechnic State University, he considered the nursery side of the green industry and sketched out management structures. Besides some budgeting input at EII, he had not devised landscape plans like he did for other businesses before starting Shamrock.

But EII's work culture served as a business boot camp for Schmitt. He considers his time there thorough training for building his own effective operation, which pulled in \$620,000 in revenue its first year.

"My business plan is detailed for 36 months and it goes out for years four through 10," Schmitt said, adding that the plan in-

cludes monthly sales breakouts detailing dollars in maintenance and installation, the costs associated with those sales and overhead costs. "One of the key things I learned while working at EII was how to go through a project and develop not only the pie in the sky, but realistic numbers and systems."

Keep in mind, the size of Schmitt's 11-man operation pales in comparison to his former employer, which could afford to assign a 25-man crew to a single project. Schmitt realizes his big-company ideas are both a blessing and a curse.

"We have a large mentality," he noted. "We have a mentality that we can do just about anything – that we set big trees, we work on big pipes and we work on things that the average competition hasn't done."

"This is also somewhat of a hindrance," he countered. "To get started, we were going for clients whose expectations weren't quite as high as what we were used to all the time. We still need to not get too locked in – we need to deliver what the customer is asking for, not what we think the customer needs. If we can raise their expectations and get them to ask for some additions, then great."

Valuable employees drive the business and help it reach clients, all of them new business. Ask any of the staff the key to its success and they'll say each other. The people are its lifeblood. "We have different backgrounds, which makes a really great team," said Hal Ward, the company's vice president.

Meet team Shamrock: Schmitt handles the numbers – the business brain who synthesizes systems. He'll admit that he's a "hard driver," and his partner, Ward, said "Schmitt is more the visionary of the two of us, and he comes up with all of these wonderful ideas."

Ward has a sharp eye for detail and a disposition for customer service. He headed up EII's high-end residential department and is Shamrock's key maintenance man. "We could probably grow faster if I spent more of my time selling, but everything is reputation, which is how a lot of the neat things happened for Shamrock," Ward pointed out.

Jorge Utrera, Shamrock's installation manager, was looking for an adventure. "There was a little bit of uncertainty when I joined the company, but that all went away in the first couple of days," he remembered. "I realized there was potential for more growth

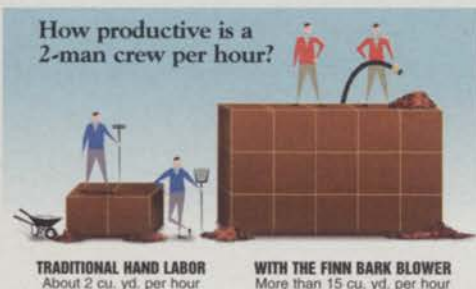
(continued on page 48)



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Cover Story

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and that there was a potential for a future." Together, they form a close-knit clan. They are a congruent blend of skills, and they treat Shamrock like their prodigal child. They set high expectations for its success.

PIE IN THE SKY. Schmitt knew his goals for Shamrock were hefty ones – "challenges"

might better describe the marks he hoped to hit after his first year.

"One of the things in goal setting is you can't be afraid to really set high goals," Schmitt stressed. "Part of goal setting is you need to go back and adjust them for your reality," he added.

Schmitt did just that. With plans to hit

\$1.5 million the first year, the team adjusted this figure to \$1 million when they realized their manpower and newborn systems would limit growth. Instead, the company earned more than \$600,000 in revenue its first year – an aggressive start for a new business. Next year, Schmitt aims to double this figure. "It doesn't feel like we've maxxed ourselves out," he said. "We had a little bit of an attitude when we came in, and we've been humbled. We came from the big leagues and now we're starting an organization, and though we were not involved directly in running the big show, we knew we could do this."

Now, Shamrock's motto is "scrappy." "Scrappy is a dog who just doesn't really give up, who doesn't really get a real meal, but when something appears, he makes the most of it," Schmitt defined. This describes how Shamrock rustled up its first clients, starting with a joint venture in a Christmas lighting company and a few landscape jobs, and ending up with \$300,000 in work six months later. Schmitt's "scrap" was piling up.

All the while, the young company learned to balance its time and organize its schedule. "January was a little light because we didn't sell enough," Schmitt said, setting sales as a key concentration for the company next year. February's rain provided drainage work and spring unfolded a full installation schedule. "Now, we're building our maintenance and we have a full route at this point."

Ward oversees this portion of the business, serving as an on-site quality checkpoint. After all, quality will drive the maintenance division's growth, he pointed out.

Meanwhile, Schmitt will continue to focus on sales development. "I would like everyone on our team to be looking for opportunity and feel that they have the authority to go through and help the client out with their needs – writing proposals, getting a signature or collecting a check – so that we are a sales-based organization," he said, noting that this structure grows from the culture.

Schmitt fuels this sales initiative with simple tools like invoice books that technicians carry to accounts so they can easily identify "extras" for clients. Supervisors hold unit pricing sheets to help them estimate costs on the job. "Give them the tools so that when they see the opportunity, they know how to price it and they have the confidence that they won't be

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USE READER SERVICE #10

Cover Story

(continued from page 48)

under- or overpricing it," Schmitt stressed.

Furthermore, communication seals sales deals, and Schmitt urges the staff to talk to their clients, whether the conversation is over the phone or in person. Contacts are recorded in phone logs so employees can summarize their discussions and note problems, actions and ideas. This routine will also build sales confidence, he pointed out.

Again, people will steer the company to success. Team Shamrock will continue to pick its players carefully and train them thoroughly.

"I've built some training methods and tools – sheets that summarize job descriptions and progression in the company," Schmitt added.

But Schmitt wants more than basic outlines—he wants to refine human resources with an employee manual that spells out worker responsibilities and illustrates their potential for growth within the organization.

Utrera sees opportunities already. "Standing still is not an option," he said simply.

SHAPING UP SCRAPPY. Schmitt knows the difference between sharp and shoddy – between a company that runs like a well-oiled machine and one that grinds, scrapes and eventually halts.

"Sharp companies seem to have a couple things in common," he noticed while visiting and interviewing dozens of contractors for an operations study he conducted at EII.

"They have low debt," he listed. "They like operating in a controlled environment, so they are into controlled growth and paying for things as they go, like the property where they operate their businesses, most of their fleet – all of it is paid for.

"They stay close to their communities," he continued. "They are well known in their communities, which helps them to bring in business, and they are shrewd." Schmitt not only identifies these qualities in other companies, he realizes the importance of implementing them in his own.

Watching his cash flow, which was a

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Check online for Schmitt's tips on how to finish off your first year with success.

challenge for him this year, will allow him to reduce debt. "It's an important function of you running the business and not letting the business run you," he remarked. This is why he breaks up jobs into five to 15 critical elements – from materials deliveries to plant installations – collecting payment after each one. This high-maintenance billing method is a bit timely, but it brings in dollars, he said.

Maintaining compact service routes will keep his trucks close to the office and close to the customers. And, finally, sticking to the well-founded business plan will supply Sham-

(continued on page 130)

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USE READER SERVICE #23

by Nicole Wisniewski

*Similar to the hurricane
that inspired its start,
Cotleur & Hearing Landscape
Co. stirs up a whirlwind
of success in South Florida.*



The Cotleur & Hearing Landscape Co. team, including Design Sales Manager Tony Grimaldi (front left) and Managing Partner Tim Osborne (front right).

RIDER on the Storm

Rob Cotleur and Don Hearing favored business with more of the design and less of the build.

But in August 1992, Hurricane Andrew hit their small town of Jupiter, Fla., and, within a few days, caused an estimated \$25 billion in damage.

Many Florida houses, apartment buildings and office parks suffered considerable destruction, and the rebuilding process started immediately. Cotleur and Hearing became involved when a condominium client of theirs in Key Biscayne asked them to complete its landscape cleanup and renovation. From that job, Cotleur & Hearing Landscape Co. was born as a separate entity from Cotleur & Hearing Landscape Architecture.

Today, with a new manager in place to direct and grow the business, Cotleur & Hearing Landscape Co. is stirring up its own South Florida whirlwinds.

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Cotleur & Hearing Landscape Co. started in a similar leisurely fashion. High-end land-

scape construction, although profitable, was a difficult market to penetrate.

Though the company sustained \$750,000 in average annual revenue between 1996 and 1999, its focus was unclear. It took on a variety of work – from commercial to high-end residential – but lacked specialization.

The company also experienced some managerial turnover until 1999, when Cotleur and Hearing hired Tim Osborne, a University of Florida graduate who had a background in mechanical engineering before he discovered the landscape industry.

STORM ADVISORY. A hurricane builds strength from other storms in the area that feed it. In business, client referrals similarly enhance a company and make it stronger.

Cotleur & Hearing Landscape Co. does little marketing – referrals breed additional business along with leads from its design counterpart. Since the company is located in a small town where the median annual income is \$1 to \$2 million, and Palm Beach is only 20 minutes south, high-end residential clients in golf and yacht communities make up the bulk of the work.

(continued on page 85)

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FOCUS: Mower Blades

by Kristin Mohn



THE Cutting EDGE

The mower alone cannot create a flawless lawn.

Contractors can ensure top-notch lawn maintenance with the proper selection and care of mower blades.

Gear-drive, hydrostatic, zero-turn, stand-on, riding, walk-behind – contractors' choices when purchasing lawn mowers have never before been so varied. Whether you're looking for high speed, comfort or compact size, mower styles offer something for everyone.

Ultimately, these options are merely fancy packaging for what is truly important: the components that will get the job done. Underneath it all, mower blades determine whether a machine will be a dream or a dud when cutting the grass. Choosing the appropriate blade for the application, inspecting the blades for wear and tear, and following safety precautions ensure a quality cut. In addition, familiarity with mower blade types and uses allows contractors to avoid frequent blade replacement – and thus cut down costs. "The blade is what the lawn mower is all about," said Paul Jurgens, director of

customer service, Exmark, Beatrice, Neb. "Consider the blade a necessary evil to generate revenue with the unit."

SHOPPING AROUND. Of course, mower type cannot be ignored when selecting the correct mower blade, suggested John Kuhn, senior engineer, commercial mower development, John Deere, Horicon, Wis. "Buy blades that have been designed to perform for the specific mower in question," Kuhn said. "A mower blade design that works well on one mower will not necessarily be optimal for another mower."

Blades are tested for specific applications, so using them for alternate uses or equipment other than those suggested may actually weaken the effectiveness of the blade, Kuhn continued. Ken Day, president, Frederick Manufacturing, Kansas City, Mo., also warned against choosing generic blades. "Universal blades are compromises that a professional should not choose if specific fit blades are available."

Next, contractors must decide between the two main categories of mower blades: side- or rear-discharging and mulching. Discharge blades offer notches in the air foil that help chop grass and leaves into small pieces, Jurgens offered. "The high-lift blade provides for the most efficient means of discharging grass from the deck," he said. These features also help with bagging applications, Kuhn noted. "Typically a higher airlift will create more airflow for better dispersion or bagging," he said.



Above: A new, sharpened blade is compared with a used, inefficient blade. Photo: Excel

Left: Mulching blade design helps direct mowed material back into the ground. Photo: Snapper

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FOCUS: Mower Blades

"It is sometimes, but not always, the case that higher airlift improves cut quality."

Mulching blades, on the other hand, offer features that direct the mowed material back into the grass. "Mulching blades typically have a downdraft feature inboard from the airlift that directs cut material back into the turf," Kuhn said. Another type of mulching blade features projections or

vanes above the cutting edge, Day noted. "After the grass is cut it flows over the top of the blade and impacts the vanes," he described. "This tends to pulverize the clippings. The vanes are formed so they direct this same blade of grass toward the center of the blade where it falls through and is cut and pulverized again. The blade results in a reduction of clipping volume by 30 to 50 percent."

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SHARPEN YOUR Skills

John Kuhn, senior engineer, commercial mower development, John Deere, Horicon, Wis., offered the following mower blade care tips:

- Use gloves when handling blades.
- Replace blades when they are bent, if the blade thickness has been sand-blasted to half its original thickness, or if sharpening and/or wear have reduced the width to more than $\frac{3}{8}$ of an inch.
- Remember that mower blade replacement depends on regional conditions and can be determined only by regular inspection.
- Avoid mowing areas with hidden obstacles, which can potentially damage the blades.
- Keep the factory-installed chute guards intact and in the proper position.
- When sharpening, remove as little material as possible.
- In dry, sandy conditions, use a low-lift blade that minimizes sand pick-up and wear, but still performs.

— Kristin Mohn



*The first photo depicts a blade that needs sharpening, while the second photo illustrates the correct thickness and sharpness of an efficient mower blade.
Photo: Frederick Manufacturing*



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FOCUS: Mower Blades

However, when cut quality is the main issue, high-lift blades offer better results, said Jaret Bishop, president, Custom Lawn Care & Landscaping, Washington Court House, Ohio. "High-lift blades offer better quality, where I haven't had as good results with the mulching blades." Day continued that the success of mulching blades depends on grass conditions like moisture or height.

Other mower blade considerations include the length of the sharpened edge and blade thickness. Jurgens related that the norm has generally been to sharpen only the outer 4- or 5-inch portion of the blade, but fully-sharpened blades may improve cut quality. In terms of thickness, commercial blades should be at least 1/4-inch thick, suggested Bill Wright, president, Wright Manufacturing,

Frederick, Md. "All else being equal, a thicker blade will usually last longer and be less prone to bending," Kuhn related.

Mower blades generally can be bought in retail stores for approximately \$9 to \$20 a piece, depending on type and manufacturer. Mulching blades tend to cost more because they require more attention and take longer to manufacture, offered Mike Seaford, product development manager, Stens, Brillion, Wis. Although purchasing mower blades one by one requires a relatively low investment, it may be more economical to purchase them in bulk, Bishop said. This reduces overhead and allows contractors to always have blades on hand should one break or bend.

Choosing the correct mower blade also requires regional knowledge of soil conditions and grass types. "A solid air foil blade may work better in the wide blade fescue, bahia and St. Augustine-type grasses where a notched air foil blade seems to perform better in fine blade fescues and bluegrass lawns," Jurgens said. Jurgens warned that lower-lift blades create less turbulence under the deck, which may reduce blowout in dry areas with little grass. However, "low-lift blades also tend to pick up less sand in sandy areas, which can reduce the sand-blasting effect that can be detrimental to deck and blade life," he added.

Kuhn also identified region as a factor in blade replacement. "In northern parts of the country where the soils are more of a clay, you are not picking up as much soil and the blade might last for the better part of a season," he said. On the other hand, in southern regions such as Florida, which feature sandy conditions and sparse grass, a blade may need to be replaced after only 30 to 50 hours of mowing. Yet, Kuhn warned against regional generalizations, as grass type and condition can vary from property to property.

BLADE TLC. After finding a mower blade that fits the application and mower type, contractors can extend blade life with proper care and safety. Kuhn identified blade sharpness and damage inspection as the two main components of blade care. "Sharp blades require less power, give a cleaner cut and do not fray the end of the grass blade, which results in grass tips browning," he said.

Since honed blades cut grass more cleanly and efficiently than dull blades, Jurgens suggested sharpening mower blades frequently. "In many cases it would be ideal to start each day with a freshly sharpened set of blades; it makes it easier and quicker to sharpen the blades that were removed if they are not run until they are extremely dull," he

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USE READER SERVICE #172

FOCUS: Mower Blades

said. "The load on the engine, the belts and the bearings in the cutting housings is significantly reduced when the blades are sharp vs. dull." Day added that frequently sharpening blades actually removes less material over time, thus allowing more efficient mower operation and a better cut.

When sharpening blades, contractors can expect the best results from a blade grinder, Day continued. "[Grinders] will pay back quickly in longer blade life, improved lawn cut, and extended engine and mower deck life," he said. For increased blade life, remove nicks that lead to cracking and balance the blade when finished sharpening, Day said. "Inexpensive balance testers are available from most dealers," he stated. "An out-of-balance blade will result in premature wear of the mower deck."

Continuously inspecting mowers and blades for damage also ensures maximum efficiency. At his company, Bishop insists that a mechanic examine all mowers at the end of the day and change out blades as needed. For damage control, he advises contractors to do a "trash run" on properties before starting the mowers. Removing rocks and debris from the lawn lessens the chance of mower blade damage — and damage to the operator.

When mowers do hit hidden objects, Kuhn suggested examining the mower immediately for bent blades and other damage. "A quick method for checking to see if the blade is bent is to check all combinations of tip alignment," he said. "The tips should align within 1/8 inch. If a blade is bent, it should not be straightened, it should be replaced."

On the other hand, Jurgens maintained blades must be checked and changed daily. In dry conditions this frequency may increase to more than once a day, he added. "Dust, dirt and sand are more easily drawn into the cutting chamber in dry conditions, thus causing increased wear to the blades and underside of the deck," he said.

Ultimately, a mower blade can only be maintained for so long before wearing out its welcome, Jurgens said. "It should be considered as a normal wear part that will need to be replaced on an as-needed basis," he commented. **LL**

The author is Assistant Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

lawnandlandscape.com

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online for additional
mower blade handling
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TOUGH. AFFORDABLE.

FOCUS: Quality Control

by Cheryl Green

While no landscape contractor can promise perfect work, striving to provide quality will improve service.

First impressions are priceless. The way an organization is perceived can very well make or break a client's interest in its services. This is why companies invest money in trucks, uniforms and equipment – these things help convey a professional image to prospective customers. But, after reeling in the client with an image of quality, the challenge to delivering services commensurate with the client's expectations. Of course, not all companies do this the same way, but there are a few common practices that any company can adopt to improve the quality of its services.

SETTING STANDARDS. Because quality is such a subjective term, employees must know and understand the company's definition of quality. They must be trained on the proper techniques to use to perform efficiently at a level that is acceptable to both the owner and the clients.

"When it comes to quality, you can't just watch a video to learn how to do something," asserted Joe Goetz, president, Goetz Landscape & Irrigation, Centerville, Minn. "You have to be out there doing hands-on work. After you show the crew how to do something, you let them try it and then you give them feedback on their performance."

Because Goetz realizes that not every employee hired will have all the knowledge necessary to work on large accounts, he is starting a new program this spring where each new employee will work with a training manager.

"This will be more of a one-on-one or one-on-two approach so that the training will be more individualized," Goetz explained. "When they've passed the checklist of things that we'll require them to know, they will be able to go out with the crews. We believe that will help quality and efficiency."

Until the new employees pass that list, they will be assigned to smaller jobs, such as planting trees, installing rocks and edging. "The emphasis here is more on quality, not on time," Goetz acknowledged. "As they get trained, time becomes more important. We're taking this approach to emphasize the culture of the company and to explain to them what quality means and what it looks like."

At New Garden Landscape Management Co., Greensboro, N.C., foremen stress horticultural excellence and expect that from each employee. "Everyone does landscaping differently, but potential employees need to want to do it our way," declared Jon Essick, operations manager. Essick explained



Proper equipment training ensures a high level of productivity, efficiency and quality on the job. Photo: Exmark

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FOCUS: Quality Control

that a lot of emphasis is put on selective pruning at New Garden because managers want employees to understand the plants and how they grow. Formal pruning seminars are held in the spring, but supplemental training continues year-round on the job to be sure that each plant is being pruned correctly.

At R.A.R. Landscaping Co. in Baltimore, Md., employees attend a field-training day before beginning work. "Field training is held prior to the grass cutting season," related Allan Davis, vice president. "We give the employees all the safety equipment they'll need and set up stations where they can learn to use all the different types of equipment they'll be using. That seems to be the most effective jump start for us."

Davis explained that most of his employees are obtained through the H2B visa program and that although these employees don't have to pass any tests during the field-training day, foremen work with them until they feel comfortable using the equipment and will continue to work with them on the job until they are proficient.

Davis maintained that it is this training, along with the ongoing training in the field, that will

prevent quality from suffering when foremen push the crews for productivity.

"And if we get a compliment or we see a crew doing a good job, we celebrate that," he emphasized.

Once employees understand a company's qual-

"WHEN IT COMES to quality, you can't just watch a video to learn how to do something. You have to be out there doing hands-on work." - Joe Goetz

ity standards, the next step is choosing clients who share them as well. "Before going into any contract, whether it's maintenance or design/build, we complete a needs-determination process," explained Ed Reier, vice president of operations, Tecza Environmental Group, Elgin, Ill. "Not only does that help

make clear what the customer is looking for, it also determines in both of our minds if we should work together. Because we're a quality-conscious company, if we come across a prospective customer who isn't attuned to quality, I'm up front with them and we won't even enter into an agreement with them."

The needs-determination process consists of a detailed list of questions for the potential client that each sales person tailors for his clients. The questions are meant to help both the client and the sales person establish the scope of the work to be performed.

"If the expectation is 'mow and go,' that's not typically our customer," Reier declared. "Sometimes a client doesn't know what his expectations are and this process helps to determine that."

Essick agreed that customers with high expectations are preferable because the company's name and reputation are at stake. "About 90 percent of our potential clients trust us because we're the experts," he

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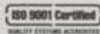
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diesel engines, with Bob-Cat's 7-gauge steel, fully floating, suspended ContourCut™ decks ranging from 48" to 72" wide. In addition, we've added features to improve operator comfort, like a redesigned footplate, so you can stretch out your legs, while our comprehensive 3-2-1 warranty gives you all the support you need. For a dealer near you, call 1-888-922-TURF or visit textronturf.com.



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FOCUS: Quality Control

emphasized. "If I can't educate the other 10 percent about the benefits of hand pruning and turn them around, they'll need to find someone else."

PROVIDING MOTIVATION. Once employees know what's expected of them and have the training to meet expectations, motivating them to perform is the next key to achieving quality. Many companies have found that offering performance-based incentives works well to motivate employees.

At New Garden, an extensive evaluation process ensures that one-third of each foreman's jobs are assessed for quality and efficiency each quarter by six other employees. The 10-point evaluation covers weed control, pruning, overall plant health, the irrigation system, cleanliness of hard surfaces, trash removal and mowing, among other things. The six employees assessing the property give each area a score of one to 10. The average of this score accounts for 70 percent of the \$300 incentive the foremen can receive each quarter. Other factors that affect the bonus amount are random truck checks and sharing safety information with the crew.

"The guys really bought into this, and what makes it work is that at the end of each quarter we post the scores," Essick explained. "The guys really try to beat the other guy. It's a friendly match, but peer pressure is pushing the quality and efficiency."

Although the incentive only applies to foremen, Essick believes the crews are motivated by the training program offered so they can one day become foremen. "I have a lot of Hispanic employees and sometimes they think moving up is related to how hard you work instead of what you know how to do," he maintained. "The whole idea is to teach them skills they'll need as a foreman. They can move through it at their own pace."

Just as the 10-point evaluation scores are posted for everyone to see, Essick also posts each employee's skill level. He believes that this motivates employees to produce quality work and learn enough to move up in their skill level.

Until lower-level employees move up to the foreman level, they are eligible to receive a \$50 bonus each quarter through the company's Gold Card Program. When an employee goes above and

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Visit our Business Tools section online for customer surveys that can help your company measure quality.

beyond his expected performance, his foreman will write up a gold card and post it on the bulletin board for everyone to see. One employee is then drawn at random each month to win the money.

Peer pressure works as a motivator for Mark Stupcenski, director of operations, Russo Lawn & Landscape, Windsor Locks, Conn. Next year, the company will visit each property twice a month and score it, Stupcenski related. "I want to put something down on paper that will be visible to everyone to create some competition."

Russo Lawn & Landscape also gives out annual bonuses, but Stupcenski doesn't think this program motivates lower-skilled workers because they typically think in the short term. To motivate these

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FOCUS: Quality Control

employees, Stupcenski said his company is going to institute an employee-of-the-month program and tie that into a weekly or monthly bonus.

"If you're the guy with the weed eater, you look toward the end of the week, not the end of the year," he related.

BE YOUR OWN COMPETITION. When employees and management are at the top of their game and work together, quality is inevitable. However, Goetz warned that when assessing his company's ability to provide quality services, he tries not to get caught up in what his competition is doing, and advised other contractors to do the same. Each company is unique, so the focus should remain on developing training programs and communication standards that best fit each organization, he said.

"We just try to do the best that we can do," Goetz concluded. We know that we can make or break our own company,"

The author is Internet Editor for Lawn & Landscape Online.



Have a **FIELD DAY**

Using the H2B visa program has its advantages, but one disadvantage is that the employees might not be familiar with common landscaping equipment. This unfamiliarity can cause productivity problems and can adversely affect quality.

To combat this problem, Allan Davis, vice president, R.A.R. Landscaping Co., Baltimore, Md., explained that the company holds a one-day training event, which they call "field training day." About 60 employees, primarily Mexican, are brought together prior to the grass-cutting season and are introduced to each other and walked through the orientation process, which includes filling out paperwork and watching training videos in Spanish and English. The employees are then given all the safety equipment they will need over the course of the season, such as goggles, gloves, ear protection, etc. and are then taken around to stations manned by foremen, who are all bilingual, where they can learn how to operate different pieces of equipment.

"The field training is for our mowing maintenance crews so they learn how to use walk-behind and riding tractors, line trimmers, stick edgers and blowers," Davis explained.

At the end of the day, which usually lasts about 10 hours, all the employees are expected to be familiar with their co-workers and the operation of all of the equipment. Even returning employees participate in this training as a refresher or to help newer employees learn the equipment.

"This is a way for them to get fired up about the upcoming season," Davis enthused.
— Cheryl Green

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Mower ATTACHMENTS

As part of the third annual Commercial Mower Buyers' Guide, *Lawn & Landscape* provides an overview of the products many mower manufacturers offer contractors. Included in this guide is a listing of companies that participated, along with their contact information. Also included is a compilation of each manufacturer's attachments and walk-behind and riding mowers.

ALAMO INDUSTRIAL
800/882-5762
Rotary, hydraulic and mechanical flails, boom mower, shredder, tree and brush cutters

AMERICAN HONDA MOTOR CORP.
800/426-7701
Electronic ignition, mulch kit

COUNTRY CLIPPER
800/344-8237
Grass catcher, vacuum wand, dump box, debris blower, ROPS, snow blower, snow blade, mulch kit

DIXIE CHOPPER
800/233-7596
Snowplow, snow blower, mulching and vacuum attachment

DIXON INDUSTRIES
800/264-6075
Grass catcher, snow blower/blade, broom

EASTMAN INDUSTRIES
800/760-1680
Lift kit

ENCORE MFG.
800/267-4255
Mulcher, grass catcher

EXCEL INDUSTRIES
800/395-4757
Uppercut deck, catcher, rangewings, stump cutter, snowplow

EXMARK MFG.
402/223-6300
UltraVac Commercial Collection System, MicroMulch mulching accessory

FREDERICK MFG.
816/231-5007
Air filter, bearings and bushings, belts, blade adapter, universal replacement blades, OEM exact replacement blades, Gator Mulcher blade, Gator Mulcher HI-LIFT blade, Gator Mulcher Magnum blade, Gator Mulcher blade, commercial and drive parts, Gator spark plugs, electrical replacement parts, fuel line, fuel accessories, gaskets and seals, grass bags

GIANT-VAC
860/423-7741
Sulky

THE GRASSHOPPER CO.
316/345-8621
Bed Shaper, blower, coreless aerator, dethatcher, dozer blades, rotary broom, snow thrower, sprayer, V-snowplow, PowerVac collection system, remote vac, ROPS, sunshade canopy, winter enclosure

GRAVELY - AN ARIENS CO.
812/481-5508
Hourmeter kit, Bahia/Tall grass baffle kit, striping kit, double blade maximum productivity kit, grass catcher, leaf collector, tire chaints, headlight kit, front weight kit, mulching kit, rear weights and bracket, two-bucket bagger, collection system, front blade, 40-inch Sno Head, ROPS, height of cut index kit

GRAZER
920/582-5000
Snow blower, vac system, ROPS

HECKENDORN EQUIPMENT
800/835-7805
Snow blades, cabs

JOHN DEERE WORLDWIDE COMMERCIAL & CONSUMER EQUIPMENT DIVISION
800/537-8233
Material collection system, snow blower, mulching attachment, front blade, rotary broom, lights, weather enclosure and cab

JRCO
800/966-8442
Dethatcher, leaf plow, electric broadcast spreader, transporter, blower carrier, push sweeper, aerator, sprayer

JUNGLE JIM'S ACCESSORY PRODUCTS
888/844-5467
Jungle wheels

KUBOTA TRACTOR
888/458-2682
Snow blower, blade, thatcher, tire chains, weights

LANDSCAPERS SUPPLY
800/895-4589
Metal and plastic grass catchers, leaf plow, dethatching rake

LESCO
800/321-5325
Stand-up sulky, cloth and steel collection systems

MIGHTY MOWERS
502/964-0804
Sulkies, grass catchers

NATIONAL MOWERS
888/907-3463
Verti-cut unit

RICH MFG.
765/436-2744
Snow blade, spreader, sprayer, Convert-A-Barrow, dethatcher, aerator, vacuum, grass catcher, light kit

SCAG POWER EQUIPMENT
920/387-0100
Grass catcher, ROPS, sulky

SNAPPER
800/935-2967
ROPS, grass catcher, broom, dozer blade, Dual Fork ZF tail wheel option, Wide Stance ZF tail wheel option, Ninja mulching system, two-stage snow thrower, debris blower

SUTECH INDUSTRIES
888/536-8368
Grass catcher

THE TORO CO.
800/348-2424
Toro TRU TRAK sulky, Z-stand lift, recycler mulching kit, atomic mulching blades, soft and hard baggers

TRU-CUT
323/258-4135
Steel catcher, mulching plate, side discharge and bag

VENTURE PRODUCTS
866/836-8722
Blower, snow thrower, tiller, trencher, loader, stump grinder, power rake, generator blade, ToughCut mower, broom, terra rug

WALKER MFG. CO.
970/221-5614
Snow blower, rotary broom, dozer blade, dethatcher, debris blower, edger, boom sprayer

WOODS EQUIPMENT
815/732-2141
Grass collection system, snow blade, snow blower, broom, ROPS

WRIGHT MFG.
301/360-9810
Grass Gobbler grass catcher, mulching plate

YAZOO/KEES POWER EQUIPMENT
402/223-2391
Deluxe seat kit, ROPS

Commercial Mower BUYERS' GUIDE

A man with a beard and a baseball cap is shown from the chest up, looking down at a walk-behind mower. He is holding the ECS (Enhanced Control System) handle, which is a black lever with a trigger. The mower is red and black, with the 'exmark' logo on the side. The background is a dramatic, cloudy sky.

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DECK SIZE:	GAS OR DIESEL:	HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE:	MULCHING CAPABILITIES:	LIQUID- OR AIR- COOLED ENGINE:	ZERO-TURN CAPABILITIES:	PHONE NUMBER FOR MORE INFORMATION:
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WALK-BEHIND MODELS

AMERICAN HONDA MOTOR CO.

21	Gas	N/A	Optional	Air	No	800/426-7701
21	Gas	Gear	Optional	Air	No	

BOB-CAT - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS

32,36,48,54,61	Gas	Gear	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air	Yes	888/922-TURF
32,36,48,54,61	Gas	Hydro	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air	Yes	
21	Gas	Push	N/A	Air	Yes	

BUNTON - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS

21	Gas	Push	N/A	N/A	No	888/922-TURF
36,48	Gas	Gear	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air	Yes	
36,48,54,61	Gas	Gear	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air	Yes	

COUNTRY CLIPPER

36,48	Gas	Hydro	No	Air	Yes	800/344-8237
36,48	Gas	Gear	No	Air	Yes	
36,48,54,61	Gas	Hydro	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air	Yes	

CUB CADET COMMERCIAL

36,48,54	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	877/835-7841
21,32,36,48,52	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	Yes	

EASTMAN INDUSTRIES HOVER MOWER

16,19	Gas	N/A	Yes	Air	Yes	800/760-1680
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ENCORE MGF. CO.

26,32,36,48	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	No	800/267-4255
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EXCEL INDUSTRIES

37,48,54	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	800/395-4757
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EXMARK MFG. CO.

21,32,36,48	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	No	402/223-6300
32,36,48,	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	
52,60						

FERRIS INDUSTRIES

36,48,52	Gas	Gear	No	Air	N/A	800/933-6175
36,48	Gas	Hydro	No	Air	N/A	
48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	No	Air	Yes	

GRAVELY - AN ARIENS CO.

21	Gas	Gear/self-propelled	Yes	Air	No	800/678-5443
32,36,48	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	N/A	
36,48	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	N/A	

GIANT-VAC MANUFACTURING

21	Gas	Push mower	Yes	Air	N/A	860/423-7741
32,36,48	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	N/A	
25,48	Gas	Hydro	N/A	Air		

GREAT DANE POWER EQUIPMENT

36, 48, 52, 61	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	877/246-8770
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HOWARD PRICE TURF EQUIPMENT

36,48,52	Gas	Gear/Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	314/532-7000
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HUSQVARNA

32,36	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	Yes	704/597-5000
42,52	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	
48	Gas	Both	Yes	Air	Yes	

JOHN DEERE

36,48,54	Gas	Hydro	Optional	N/A	Yes	800/537-8233
36,48,54	Gas	Hydro	Optional	N/A	Yes	
36,48	Gas	Gear	Optional	N/A	Yes	
36,48,54	Gas	Gear	Optional	N/A	Yes	
48,54	Gas	Gear	Optional	N/A	Yes	

KEE BY TRAILMATE

22,24,26	Gas	Belt	Yes	Air	Yes	800/777-1034
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LANDSCAPERS SUPPLY

36,48,52	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	No	800/895-4589
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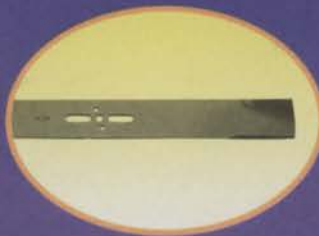
FOCUS: Mowing Buyers' Guide

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LESCO						
32	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	Yes	800/321-5325
36, 48, 52	Gas	Both	Yes	Air	Yes	
MIGHTY MOWERS						
36	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	No	502/964-0804
48, 52	Gas	Both	Yes	Air	No	
NATIONAL MOWERS						
25	Gas	Gear	N/A	Air	No	888/907-3463
RICH MFG.						
48, 52, 61	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	765/436-2744
SCAG POWER EQUIPMENT						
32,36,48,52	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	No	920/387-0100
36,48,52,61,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	
36,48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	No	Air	Yes	
SNAPPER						
2, 36, 48	Gas	Gear	Yes/Accessory	Air	No	800/935-2967
SUTECH INDUSTRIES						
33	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	Yes	888/536-8368
THE TORO CO.						
21,32,36, 44,48,52	Gas	Gear	Recycler	Air	No	800/348-2424
36,44,52	Gas	Hydro	Recycler	Air	Yes	
TRU-CUT						
20,21,25,27	Gas	N/A	N/A	Air	No	323/258-4135
YAZOO/KEES POWER EQUIPMENT						
32,36,48	Gas	Gear	Yes	Air	Yes	402/223-2391
36,48	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	
RIDING MODELS						
BAD BOY						
60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes	866/622-3269
BOB-CAT - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS						
42,48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air	Yes	888/922-TURF
72	Gas	Hydro	N/A	Liquid	Yes	
BUNTON - TEXTRON TURFCARE AND SPECIALTY PRODUCTS						
42,48	Gas	Hydro	N/A	Air	Yes	888/922-TURF
48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	Eco Plate Mulch Kit	Air		
72	Gas	Hydro	N/A	Liquid		
B & H MFG.						
50,60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	507/847-2802
BUSH HOG MFG.						
54,60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	334/874-2700
48,54,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes	
48,54,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	
COUNTRY CLIPPER						
42,48,52,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	800/344-8237
DIXIE CHOPPER						
42,50	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	800/233-7596
60	Both	Hydro	Yes	Both	Yes	
60,72	Both	Hydro	Yes	Both	Yes	
DIXON INDUSTRIES						
60,72	Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes	800/264-6075
60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes	
52,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	

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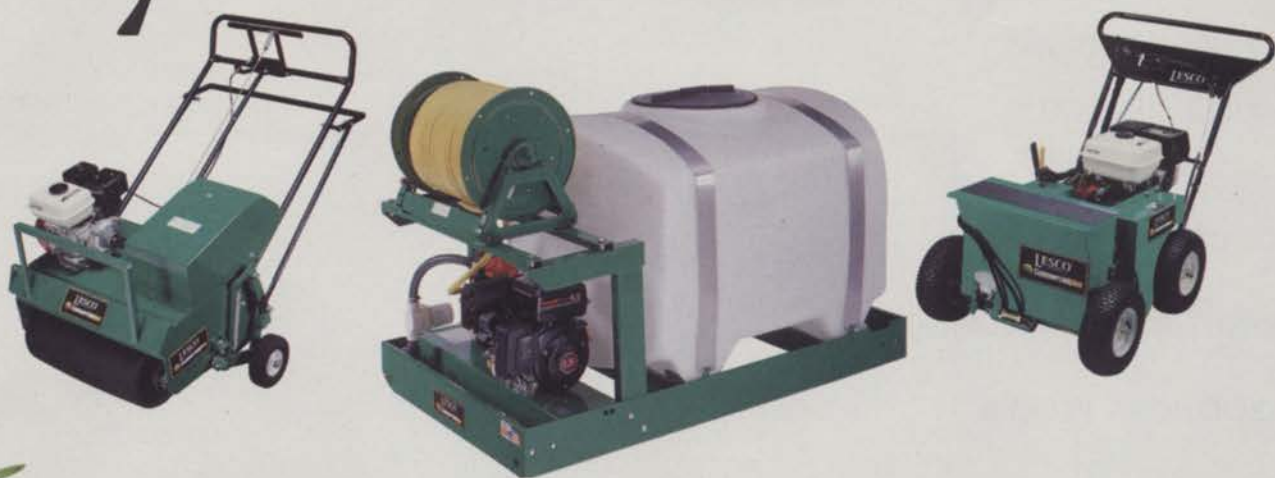
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FOCUS: Mowing Buyers' Guide

DECK SIZE:	GAS OR DIESEL:	HYDROSTATIC OR GEAR DRIVE:	MULCHING CAPABILITIES:	LIQUID- OR AIR- COOLED ENGINE:	ZERO-TURN CAPABILITIES:	PHONE NUMBER FOR MORE INFORMATION:	
ENCORE MFG. CO.							
34	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	800/267-4255	
42,48,52	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	No		
61,72	Both	Hydro	Yes	Both	Yes		
EXCEL INDUSTRIES							
48,54,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	800/395-4757	
48	Gas	Hydro	No	Air	Yes		
51,52,60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes		
60,72	Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
60,72	Both	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
72,146	Both	Hydro	No	Liquid	Yes		
EXMARK MFG. CO.							
52,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	No	402/223-6300	
44,48,52, 60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes		
60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
60,72	Both	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
FERRIS INDUSTRIES							
52,61,72	Gas	Hydro	No	Air	6-inch turning		800/933-6175
48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	No	Air	Yes		
61	Gas	Hydro	No	Liquid	Yes		
THE GRASSHOPPER CO.							
52,61,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	316/245-8621	
52,61,72	Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
44,48	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes		
44,48,52, 61,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes		
48,52,61,72	Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
GRAVELY - AN ARIENS CO.							
40,42,48, 50,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes		800/678-5443
60,72	Both	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
72	Gas or Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
50,60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes		
60,72	Diesel	Drive shaft	Yes	Liquid	Yes		
GRAZER							
52,62,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	920/582-5000	
GREAT DANE POWER EQUIPMENT							
36,48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	877/246-8770	
HARPER INDUSTRIES							
70,72	Gas	Hydro	N/A	Air	N/A	800/835-1042	
HECKENDORN EQUIPMENT							
36	Gas	Both	Yes	Air	yes	800/835-7805	
48	Both	Both	Yes	Both	Yes		
62	Both	Hydro	Yes	Both	Yes		
72,91	Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Both	Yes		
HOWARD PRICE TURF EQUIPMENT							
52,60,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	314/532-7000	
60,72	Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	No		
120,180	Diesel	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	No		
HUSQVARNA							
42,48,52, 61,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	704/597-5000	
JOHN DEERE							
48,54,60	Gas	Hydro	Optional	Air	Yes	800/537-8233	
2,42-inch sides; 62 for center deck	Diesel	Hydro	N/A	Liquid	No		
60,72	Gas	Hydro	Optional	Liquid	No		
60,70,72	Diesel	Hydro	Optional	Liquid	No		
KUBOTA TRACTOR CORP.							
60,72	Diesel	Hydro	N/A	Liquid	Yes		888/458-2682
LANDSCAPERS SUPPLY							
52,61	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	800/895-4589	



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LESCO 48,54,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	800/321-5325
MIGHTY MOWERS 48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	502/964-0804
CUB CADET COMMERCIAL 48,54,60	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	877/835-7841
RICH MANUFACTURING 48,52,61	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	765/436-2744
SAYLOR INDUSTRIES 48,60,72	Gas	Both	Yes		Yes	814/288-5969
SCAG POWER EQUIPMENT 61,72 42,48,52, 61,72 61,72 61,72	Gas Gas Gas Diesel	Hydro Hydro Hydro Hydro	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Air Air Liquid Air	No Yes Yes Yes	920/387-0100
SNAPPER 52,61 52,61,73	Gas Both	Hydro Hydro	Yes/Accessory Yes/Accessory	Air Both	Yes Yes	800/935-2967
STEINER TURF EQUIPMENT 52,61 48,60,72	Gas Both	Hydro Hydro	Yes Yes	Both Both	Yes No	330/828-0200
THE TORO CO. 44,48,52, 62,72	Gas	ZRT Hydro	Recycler	Air	Yes	800/348-2424
NATIONAL MOWERS 68,84 70,84	Gas Gas	Gear Hydro	N/A N/A	Air Air	No No	888/907-3463
VENTURE PRODUCTS 60,72	Both	Hydro	Yes	Liquid	No	866/836-8722
WALKER MFG. CO. 36 to 74 42 to 74 42 to 74 42 to 74	Gas Diesel Gas Gas	Dual Hydro Dual Hydro Dual Hydro Dual Hydro	Yes Yes Yes Yes	Air Liquid Air Liquid	Yes Yes Yes Yes	970/221-5614
WOODS EQUIPMENT CO. 50,60 52,61,72	Gas Both	Hydro Hydro	Yes Yes	Air Both	Yes Yes	815/732-2141
WRIGHT MANUFACTURING 36,42,48,52,61 48,52,61	Gas Gas	Hydro Hydro	Yes Yes	Air Air	Yes Yes	301/360-9810
YAZOO/KEES POWER 48,52,61,72	Gas	Hydro	Yes	Air	Yes	402/223-2391

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 - ☐ 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

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- ☐ 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 _____ %
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USE READER SERVICE #167

(continued from page 54)

But Cotleur & Hearing isn't the only company to take advantage of the available business – competition is fierce.

In dealing with this, the first trick is to make sure job quality is second to none, Osborne said. Also, open communication lines, as well as finding time to spend with customers to explain projects, answer questions and make them feel confident about their investments, build strong client bonds, he explained.

In addition, small tokens of business appreciation can be favorable client pleasers. "We'll stop by unexpectedly or send them gifts to let them know we're thinking about them," Osborne said. However, the company is working on establishing a more consistent program. "We used to send thank-you cards and orchids, but we have let this become a random practice. We need to look into doing something on a more regular basis."

UNDER COVER. A safe feeling results when people find adequate cover from harsh storms. Similarly, workers who are fairly compensated and appreciated maintain a sense of security and can be easily retained.

Cotleur & Hearing's major strength is its employees, Osborne said. The company employs 12 full-time workers, a part-time billing clerk and two managers – one for design and sales and one for maintenance.

The organization currently uses overtime as a retention tool since many area companies have 40-hour-workweek limits. "I've actually picked up good employees because I pay overtime," Osborne remarked, adding that the company pays overhead costs that are slightly below the industry average of 19 to 20 percent of revenue. "I find that in the long-run, if I really consider this when pricing jobs, it's better than adding a man on and taking on the additional overhead. If the employees work 45 to 47 hours per week on average during the year, I think it's more cost effective than adding two more guys and going down to a 40-hour workweek."

To ensure productivity doesn't slack due to overtime appeal, Osborne will stop offering it for a few weeks to rejuvenate employees who may have subconsciously paced themselves to complete work in six rather than five days.

Cotleur & Hearing also offers quarterly cash bonuses that are rewarded on company performance as a means of retention. Employees with more responsibility, such as

foremen, will get larger, yet comparable, bonuses, and employees with less responsibility, such as crewmembers, receive smaller bonuses than foremen. Since the company is small, Osborne said he can monitor each employee's performance throughout the year pretty easily.

Osborne said he likes to maintain a goal of 10 percent net profit. The percentage the company grows above that – maybe 2 to 3 percent – usually provides the pool from which quarterly bonuses are drawn. For the first three quarters, some money is put aside so that the end-of-the-year bonus is roughly double the amount of the previous bonuses.

Additional retention tools include higher-than-average compensation, health benefits

"It's my job and the sales manager's job to get the top-end work so we can pay our people well." – Tim Osborne

where the company pays half of employee costs, and an IRA plan where the company matches 2 percent of employees' salaries. "So it's my job and the sales manager's job to get the top-end work so we can pay our people well," Osborne said, adding that his payroll is 30 percent of total revenue.

The busy season in south Florida is Nov. 1 through April 30. Cotleur & Hearing uses Hispanic labor from temporary agencies to supplement its full-time, mostly Haitian work crews. Since the business is year-round, Osborne said utilizing these services makes more sense than using the government's H2B program, where Hispanic employees stay for only eight or nine months of the year. "We pay them an hourly rate and they receive this daily," he explained. "When we use the agency, we also experience zero overhead since we don't have to pay health insurance."

In the area, there are temporary employment agencies that are used consistently by landscape businesses, so the workers are already industry-trained, Osborne said. But since a majority of this supplemental labor lacks communication skills, supervision is necessary. "The good thing is that many times you have the same guys coming back so they figure out how you work," he added.


BEST TRACK. Many tropical storms have erratic paths, but some actually travel on a smooth course. Where maintenance services are concerned, Cotleur & Hearing started on a rocky path, but currently is leveling out the rough spots.

The company's service mix is 80 percent design/build, 10 percent maintenance and 10 percent environmental services, such as coastal tree pruning and wetland mitigation work. When Osborne started three years ago, the business serviced 75 percent residential and 25 percent commercial clients. That balance has shifted to 90 percent residential and 10 percent commercial clients.

The majority of the commercial work came from bidding maintenance jobs, an unsuccessful company venture. "We would do the installation and the client would love us, but then doing high-quality maintenance at a competitive bid price became challenging," Osborne said. "We just couldn't do quality work and make money at the same time."

So the company shifted its focus away from bid work, but still has its eyes on maintenance expansion. Growth has been fairly steady for Cotleur & Hearing, with a 25 percent average over the past three years, resulting in \$1.3 million in 2001 revenue.

To expand maintenance, Osborne recently hired a manager for that department and plans on selling additional work and crosstraining current employees prior to building dedicated maintenance crews. "Having the accounts first will also justify the additional equipment purchases we'll have to make," he pointed out.

With this strategy, Osborne said he'd like the company to reach the \$2-million mark in a year and a half. And, as far as future goals are concerned, he said he doesn't want Cotleur & Hearing to grow beyond \$3 million. "I like being small," Osborne said, pointing out small company benefits, such as maintaining low overhead, having time to get to know employees and giving them responsibility so they feel like they are making a difference. "Sometimes in larger companies, employees get lost in the mix. Here, what I do and what each person does every day really matters." 

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

by Bob West

One of the largest segments of the landscape industry is those companies generating less than \$1 million in annual sales. In fact, *Lawn & Landscape* research shows that about 80 percent of the firms in this industry fall into that group. And, for whatever reason, that \$1 million mark represents a key target that many smaller companies aspire to reach. In order to learn more about the challenges facing these companies and the keys to reaching that mark, *Lawn & Landscape* sat down with four companies whose annual sales range from \$500,000 to \$1.5 million to learn from their experiences. Here is a portion of that conversation, the rest of which is available online at www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Lawn & Landscape: What have been the keys to your companies' growth?

Joe Goetz: We were fortunate because we are in a very nice area and we just marketed the homes that are of extremely high value. I remember one of our first customers was a good friend of mine. She told me, 'You'll never grow poor by catering to the rich,' and she was right. So, we really hit those communities and built up around \$500,000 in annual sales.

Brent Flory: We are in a small market an hour north of Indianapolis and an hour and a half south of Chicago. We are far enough out into the cornfields that we don't have the great opportunities that you would have in a large city.

We are 90 percent commercial. We do not have many high-end properties. I want the
(continued on page 88)

SMALL Business CHALLENGES

Lawn & Landscape sat down with four growing firms to learn the keys to success for smaller landscape companies.



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USE READER SERVICE #51

Roundtable

(continued from page 86)

condominiums, I want the commercial, industrial sites. I don't want to mess with the residential. I'd rather go after the big property and know that I won't lose it the next day. I'd rather sell more man hours at a lower rate than I would spend time messing around with residential.

Now, we do have a new job this year that is an hour and 10 minutes away, and we are going to drive down there for it. It is a homeowner association, I'm hoping if we can get some quotes down there that I can set up a little satellite office of some kind. Structurally, I have too much to learn so I am not going to do that yet. But I see that as my only real way to achieve the growth I really want because there is a limit to how big I can get in the area I am in right now.

We were doing about \$850,000. We were geared up for more structure. I just brought on a full-time salesman, and I was geared up to bump up to \$1 million. It's not that \$1 million is a big number, but I already figured that I needed to get up there so I'd have the administrative budget to put a few more people in place, but then I had to step down and retool because I had the overhead for \$1 million. But this year we went back about \$150,000 when we lost a series of six commercial properties because a new property manager came in who went with a national company.

JG: Do you guys plow snow?

BF: We have 12 trucks that we plow with.

JG: All yours?

BF: I've got two subcontractors that plow for
(continued on page 90)

Lawn & Landscape invited four contractors to sit down with the staff at the 2001 GIE Show and talk about the biggest challenges they faced in 2001 and their concerns in 2002. Here are the companies who participated.

Maurice Dowell DowCo St. Louis, Mo.	Joe Goetz Goetz Irrigation Minneapolis, Minn.
--	--

Jeff Bowen Images of Green Stuart, Fla.	Brent Flory Freedom Lawns New Delphi, Ind.
--	---

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10120	Shrub	Barberry, Red	1				25.00	
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Roundtable

(continued from page 88)

me. In fact, if I could find 12 subcontractors, I'd hire 12 subs. I would rather pay them \$45 or \$50 per hour and charge \$80.

Maurice Dowell: Try concrete contractors. We have a concrete factory right next door to us. They all have a commercial driver's license. They drive for a living and they are not pouring concrete when it is snowing.

BF: One of them is a concrete guy, that's a good idea. Good idea. So snow removal is good money for us. And we like to do it. It's like milking cows – you can't get away from it and you have to have somebody around. With a small company, it is not easy for me to just leave and let other people take care of it.

MD: Milking cows?

BF: You got to be there twice a day to take care of them. It's not easy to leave and just to have somebody who can walk in the parlor and stand there and watch the milk go into the jugs. That's kind of how I feel about snow removal. You don't know really what is going to happen unless you have structure set so that you have someone who can really handle it.

Jeff Bowen: How do you budget for snow?

BF: I don't know how. You're better off to budget about 25 percent of what you would expect and hope to make it with that because I have 60 tons of salt sitting behind the barn.

JG: We have that, too.

L&L: You guys have each talked about being full service. How important is that for smaller landscape companies?

JB: Our customers are primarily very high-end residential, so our motto has been we will do whatever it takes to take care of you.

JG: One of our biggest challenges is finding good crew members or lead people so we are thinking the best way to do that is to train them. We think we can do a good job of this, but we need more work. So we got into the snow business, which dovetails into lawn care because a lot of the places just don't want you to do the snow – they want you to care for the entire property. So that it all kind of mixes together where irrigation does this service as well. If we wouldn't have done that, I don't think we would have progressed as much.

BF: We do irrigation installation, we do landscaping, we do hardscaping – we try to do everything that we can to be full service. We feel like that is necessary even though we are small to get these properties.

I think it's kind of like job security. When we get a big job, my intention is if the customer has any need, I want to be the first person he thinks of. If he has an irrigation problem and I can't offer that service, he is going to call in my competition. Everybody else who has irrigation may provide other maintenance services, so I see providing full service as a means to keep my competition from being on my clients' properties.

MD: My company takes care of my home. I love the fact that whatever the problem is, we can take care of it. You can always get a lower bid. But if you want a company that can coordinate the mowing with the fertilizing, we're the answer. How many times have you fertil-

(continued on page 92)

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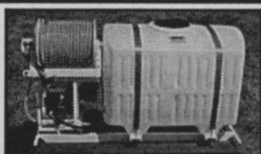


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Roundtable

(continued from page 90)

ized just to have someone else come in behind you and mow the grass? It doesn't happen with us because we carefully monitor those types of things. Those are the type of things that as a full-service organization, we can control better.

And we don't want other people on our accounts. It really gives us another route [to grow], too, because there aren't a lot of companies in Chesterfield, Mo., that can provide that full service, have irrigation divisions and fertilization technicians. We'd like to have a design/hort person back on staff, and when you can bring that all together, you have a powerful vehicle for generating critical mass.

L&L: So, it is strategic in terms of keeping the clients off as well as marketing. You know you want to be able to sell that.

MD: Exactly.

L&L: How big of a challenge is the labor issue, and how do you deal with it?

JB: The least challenging for me, I think it was not an issue in 2001.

MD: We have 31 employees. Twenty-one of them are Hispanic, Mexican, so it was lower on my list of problems than ever.

JG: I would say it was less of an issue in 2001 than it was in 2000.

BF: Labor was very tough for us in 2000. We went through a lot of growth and couldn't find people. That was the single most stressful thing last year. It went from the single most stressful issue to the close to the bottom of the list [in 2001]. It is amazing what 2 or 3 percent more unemployment will do. That is what I attribute it to.

JB: We have profit sharing that we created last year and everybody is just jumping for joy when they see the check in January after the end of the year, which is different from me and my wife who is also half owner of this business. It took me five years to talk her into sharing.

But the most stressful issue for me is insurance. Everything this year is insurance related. There were no predictions for a 67.4 percent increase in health, life and dental.

L&L: Who do you insure?

JB: We insure all of our supervisory staff, which is five people, plus my wife and myself, which is seven total. And all the way down to the bottom, they can get insurance at 50 percent. Half of our laborers pick that up. So, quite

(continued on page 94)

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USE READER SERVICE #26

Roundtable

(continued from page 92)

a few people get our insurance, but not over 20, which I'm told I need to get to.

So rather than go to the employers and say, 'It's time for you to start contributing because the company pays 100 percent,' we bit the bullet for this year at least. Who knows about 2002? And then, general liability goes up, vehicle goes up, workers' comp goes up.

L&L: The insurance industry has obviously been devastated since Sept. 11, and one insurance company told me it expects the good companies to see upwards of 20 to 25 percent increases again this year for premiums and bad companies, the phrase they used is, 'The sky is the limit.'

JG: We've done a couple of things because we had the same problem. We really want to develop a good company, and offering insurance is one way of showing that there is added value. And you hate to have to go back on that. I thought about it as added value, but it was taking such a chunk out that we decided to go to 50 percent. Everybody understood. We made them part of that meeting and kind of

built up to that decision. Then we told them, 'We want to do the best we can but we need your help with this.' They understood.

JB: We went to our group and put it on the table and said, 'Hey, what do you want to do?' Because we have profit sharing, they kind of all said they wouldn't mind seeing it fall to the bottom line. They helped make the decision that we all eat it, basically. But, we shall see. For me, it's stressful, and I just can't understand it easily because we are a company that has no health insurance plan, no auto claims, no accidents, we haven't run into anybody's house or anything like that.

JG: It's stressful.

L&L: How about you, Maurice, what were the big challenges for DowCo this year?

MD: Actually, [2001 was] really good. We've had growth issues and problems bringing in quality management people and that design/build person, but that's more of a recruitment issue. I can only imagine where sales could be if we were taking on that kind of work. Since we've had three designers over the last 10

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Check this article online for a complete transcript of this conversation and more of the group's ideas.

years, we're taking our time because we want the perfect fit. I want the person who's going to be there for a long time. We haven't rushed into anything.

JB: I think a challenge for us going to the next level is middle management and dealing with our own culture, too. It's not labor.

You know, I would have to tell you after this year I wonder if I can hire the right people. I have a great core group. But this year I have already gone through two white shirts - \$35,000 up, full company benefits - that I no longer have. They didn't make it 90 days. So I just wonder how good I'm doing hiring. But I just try to find the best people, then train them. Put something back into them, because if you don't then you'll never win. **LL**

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USE READER SERVICE #28

by Kristin Mohn

Making a STATEMENT

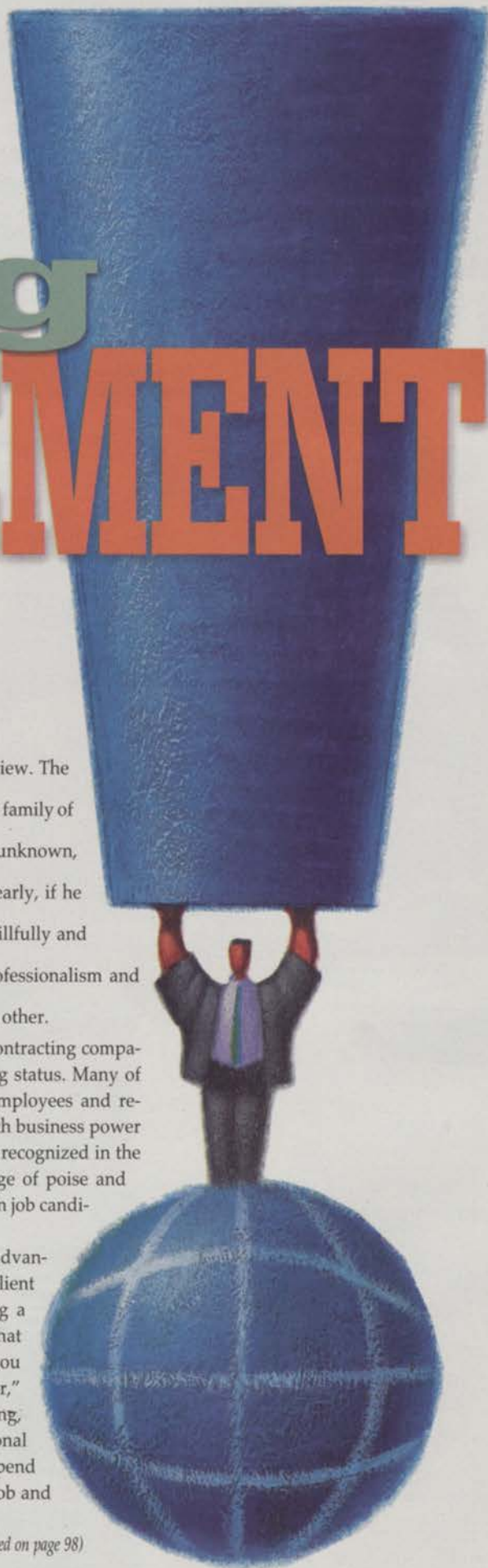
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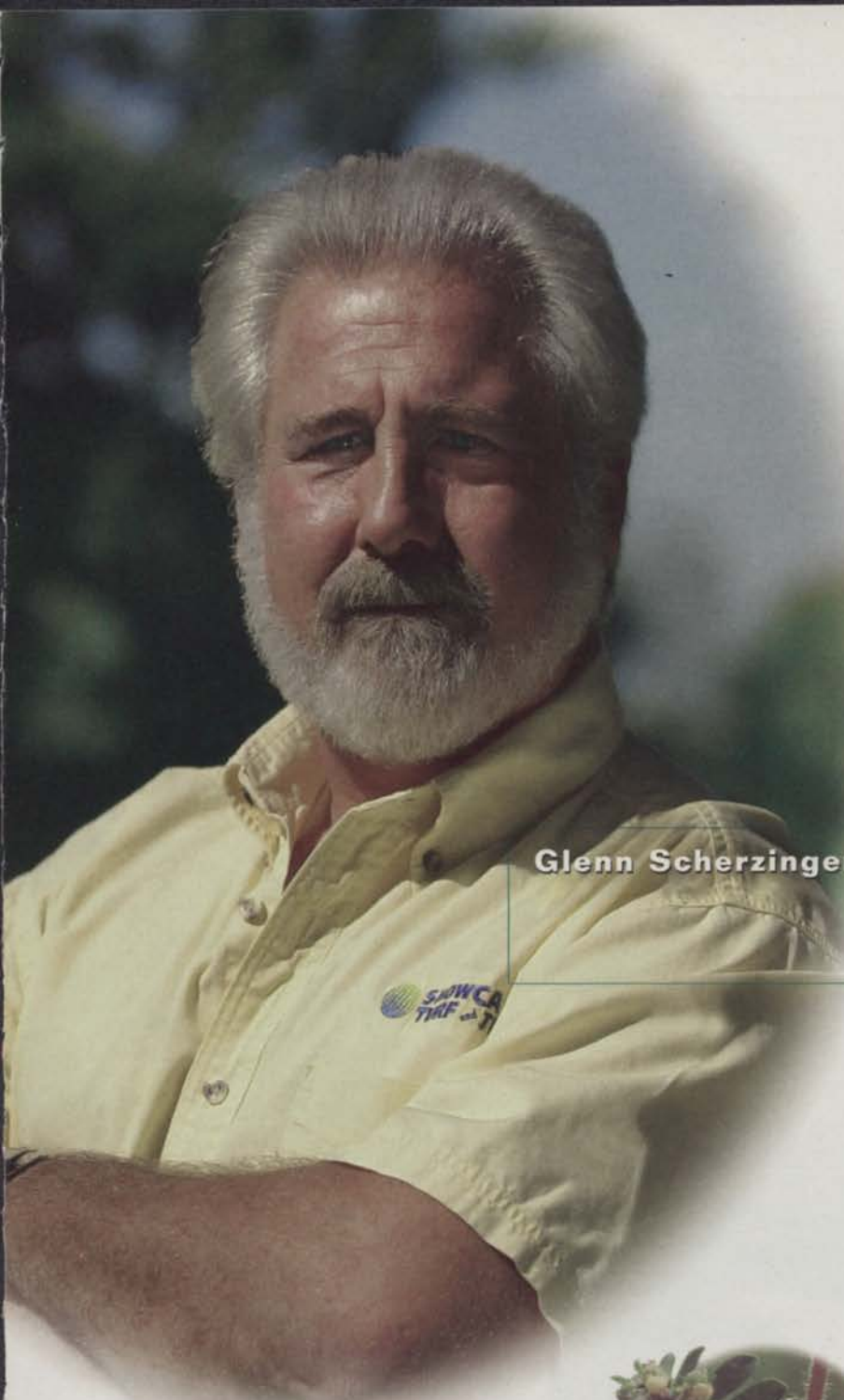
Two men walk into an office for a job interview. The first has a mile-long resume and comes from a family of successful professionals. The second, a mere unknown, offers only a couple years of experience. Clearly, if he wants the job, the second candidate must skillfully and confidently project an image of success, professionalism and knowledge that trumps the reputation of the other.

In the same manner, smaller landscape contracting companies sometimes struggle with their underdog status. Many of these businesses are young, with limited employees and resources to cover the bases. They compete with business power players – the household names immediately recognized in the industry. Consequently, projecting an image of poise and reliability bodes well for both the little-known job candidate and the small company.

Realizing that smaller entities have their advantages – quality, consistency and personal client relationships – is necessary when projecting a competitive image. “A lot of people think that because you don’t have the big display ad, you can’t produce the product they’re looking for,” said Dan Steff, owner, NorthCoast Landscaping, Erie, Pa. “But we’re able to provide more personal care for our customers and we’re able to spend more time with our customers, both on the job and when we’re complete.”

(continued on page 98)





Glenn Scherzinger

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USE READER SERVICE #93

Developing an Image

(continued from page 96)

IN THE BEGINNING. The most volatile time period for a business is its first few years – particularly for a small company trying to make a name for itself in the midst of established corporations. John Chiarella, Jr., president, Ultimate Services Lawn Care, Wolcott, Conn., proved persistence was the only sure-fire way to win those initial clients.

"During the first three years, I sat in my room and called every lawyer, doctor and real estate person in the phone book," he admitted. "I tried to look neat on the job, tried to be pleasant with the customer and kept that philosophy from the



Ultimate Services Lawn Care utilizes a brochure to eclipse its small-company status. Photos of past properties show off the company's range of abilities to prospective clients. Photo: John Chiarella, Jr.

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very beginning." These tactics helped earn Chiarella clients, but he had to be patient – he didn't see the company advance until five years later. And even after 20 years in business, Chiarella still keeps up with the phone calls. "I still do a lot of the sales and marketing myself," he said.

Similarly, Leroy Heppner, president, Nature's Way & Landscaping, Portland, Ore., understands that maintaining an image is most difficult from the outset. "Being a brand-new business, your biggest obstacle is you have no history – no unhappy clients, no happy clients and no references," he noted.

Consequently, Wayne Talley, president, The Lawn Ranger, Mechanicsville, Va., initially established his qualifications by securing prominent groups of buildings. Potential customers familiar with the area would then see The Lawn Ranger on the property. "If you have a chain of places or group of places owned by a certain company with a good image, and then people see your trucks on that property, then you are on the same level as the company," he justified.

Diving in headfirst to a new business means bringing along a few life-saving devices. Heppner created photo portfolios from the beginning, taking several pictures of completed jobs and sharing them with potential clients. Ten years later, he continues this on a larger scale as the company grows. "We've now created several brochures and postcards for phases of landscaping that we do," he explained. In addition, the company utilizes local events such as home and garden shows. "[Those events] set us up as one of the bigger landscape companies in town, even though we're not. People have the vision that we're much larger than we are."

(continued on page 102)

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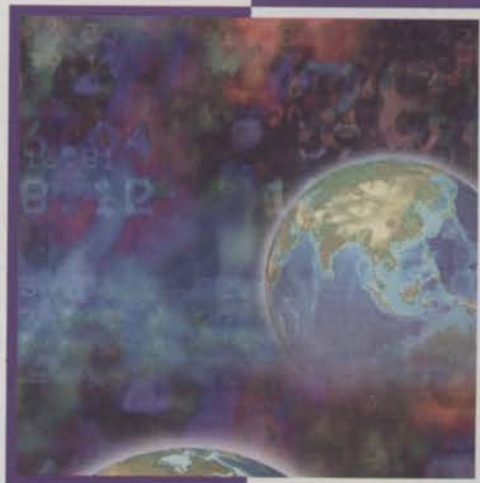
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PERSONALIZATION

Developing an Image

(continued from page 98)

Steff related that a strong advertising slogan helped him win clients during his business years. "We had to have some sort of image that we thought was important," he said. "Image wasn't everything about our company but image would portray what our philosophy was in lawn and landscaping." After Steff and his associates decided on "grass with



Nature's Way Landscaping initially used the lefthand logo, but Leroy Heppner, president, said the bright colors distracted clients. Instead, the new righthand logo emphasizes professionalism and elegance. Photo: Leroy Heppner

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class" as a catchy ad campaign, the company increased its client base substantially. "We did very well from the beginning with our marketing analysis," he offered. "People just looked in the phone book and liked our ad."

Nevertheless, small companies can't expect to become household names even after those first few years of business, related Kurt Bienmueller, co-owner, Foursquare Landscape Management, Dallas, Texas. As a solution, he tries to position his services in neighborhoods where the larger companies already have a presence. Over time, referrals will drive business, he said. "My personal opinion is that everyone can mow and blow, but our service is attention to detail and not having a lot of layers – they deal with me or my partner and we can give information to them in pretty good order," he stated.

DOES SIZE MATTER? A key ingredient to a successful small company image is differentiation, Heppner highlighted. Six years into the business, Heppner's company logo had not made the impact he hoped it would. He suddenly realized it resembled the brand of other successful landscape companies. "I sat down looking at other companies' logos, and then looked at ours to see what we were missing," he said. "We ended up redesigning our logo to be more elegant and created a whole new image. The logo and image change was a real benefit because the new logo stood out."

A small company's charm can lie in noticing the little things, as well as catering to the customers' detailed needs, suggested Chiarella. Having a smaller network of employees – less red tape – also ensures people can be out on a property in a timely manner. "We can sneak in between the cracks and go in where the big guy can't," he said. "We have quick turnaround. Our customers say, 'I knew if I got into a bind I could call you and you would take care of it.'"

This has led Ultimate Services Lawn Care to some pretty unique jobs over the years: shooing a bee from a client's sun porch, re-

moving a wild animal from the yard and, in one case, driving several hours to Nantucket, Mass., to take care of a request. As a result, Chiarella has plenty of examples to back up his motto and company image. "Our focus, or mission, if you will, is, 'We service the customer, period,'" he said. "Nothing is too big or too small."

Limited size can also prove advantageous when managing costs and operations, Bienmueller identified. "We can maintain costs because we have a handle on it, while things can get lost in other companies," he illustrated. "Each person signs out his or her own equipment and has the responsibility for it." In turn, that responsibility is expected of each foreman because even though the managers constantly have their ears to the ground, they can't be in all places at all times. "Other companies may not give foremen all the responsibility, but foremen need to know what is expected, have responsibility for the equipment, etc."

An image of professionalism speaks volumes, regardless of size. Steff has taken this into account in terms of pricing, which means that while his prices may not be the lowest, his service is on the top of the list. "We wanted to maintain a particular standard for everything we did," he related. "We weren't going to low-ball or undercut as far as the price. We had a minimum price when we started and we weren't going to go below that. That showed customers we were very confident in our service and we'd provide quality and professional service."

In return, Steff emphasizes education so he doesn't have to worry about projecting false confidence. As a smaller company with fewer employees, he feels more prepared to offer training sessions and safety seminars, join industry associations and advertise as a fully-insured company. "It's a little bit easier to get a smaller group together for training sessions and have them over to our home for training, rather than do it in our building setting where it's not as comfortable," he explained. "We have also found that in a personal setting vs. a business setting, people feel less threatened, are more open and are more inclined to get involved."

So, small has its advantages, Steff said, as long an image can be substantiated. "It is easy to market yourself through words, but we do it through actions," he remarked.

DOS AND DON'TS. Smaller may not necessarily be better or worse, but it can allow companies to build specific niches for their business, Chiarella identified. "We've developed a niche for customers who want a person with an eye to detail," he said. "As far as the competition, they can't micromanage like we can."

To heighten this image, Chiarella gives potential clients reference lists of past customers. Since the lists are based on what clients desire for their properties, he tries to match new clients with past customers who had similar goals and priorities. Even though Chiarella's prices often are the highest among

(continued on page 107)



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Check online for additional tips and tricks for building a reputable and reliable company image.

the bidders, he feels confident that quality justifies a premium price. "We are the best in what we do and we do it quickly," he said.

Yet, Heppner cautioned against becoming over-confident, and said knowing one's limits builds company strength instead of wasting it. For example, Heppner avoids smaller projects where the company is simply in and out. Instead, the company prefers jobs involving large, visible landscapes, which create more powerful referrals. "We want to project a larger company, high-end image," he said. The company can then add larger projects to its resume and increase accountability among customers. "It goes back to building customer reference – you want a broad base with the projects you do."

Of course, those who boast skills they do not possess will be stuck when it comes time to prove them, said Steff. "You just have to avoid misrepresentation of your company," he said. "It takes many years to build a company, but only minutes to destroy it."

Bienmueller agreed, emphasizing honesty and fairness as the best policies. "I don't ever downplay anyone, I don't know what the other contractors are doing," he said. "We don't do it if we can't perform it and thus we've been able to maintain clients and not lose work because we've gotten too big."

Further, smaller companies must avoid overextending their costs, Talley said. "We can't buy the products or the volume that some of these larger companies can," he said. "Also, when recruiting, some larger maintenance companies can offer better benefits." In these cases, continuing to emphasize company culture and focus on quality acts as a saving grace from financial limitations.

It can take time to gain the customer's respect, Steff added. For example, his company recently lost a condominium complex job to a larger company that had offered a lower price. However, the president of the complex called back later in the season and admitted his mistake. "They had gone with the bigger company at a lower price, but they didn't get the personal service that we were

able to give them," Steff illustrated. "It doesn't matter what size you are, you need confidence in yourself, and with confidence comes price." In other words, higher prices can be defended if they reflect quality service.

Capitalizing on small company quirks and the detailed services a smaller staff can ensure thus translates to confidence – an

Developing an Image

attractive feature whether hiring a new employee or a landscape contractor. Reflecting on how differences improve the company, rather than burden it, is the key to success, Steff noted. "The only disadvantage is the disadvantage you make it," he said. **LL**

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



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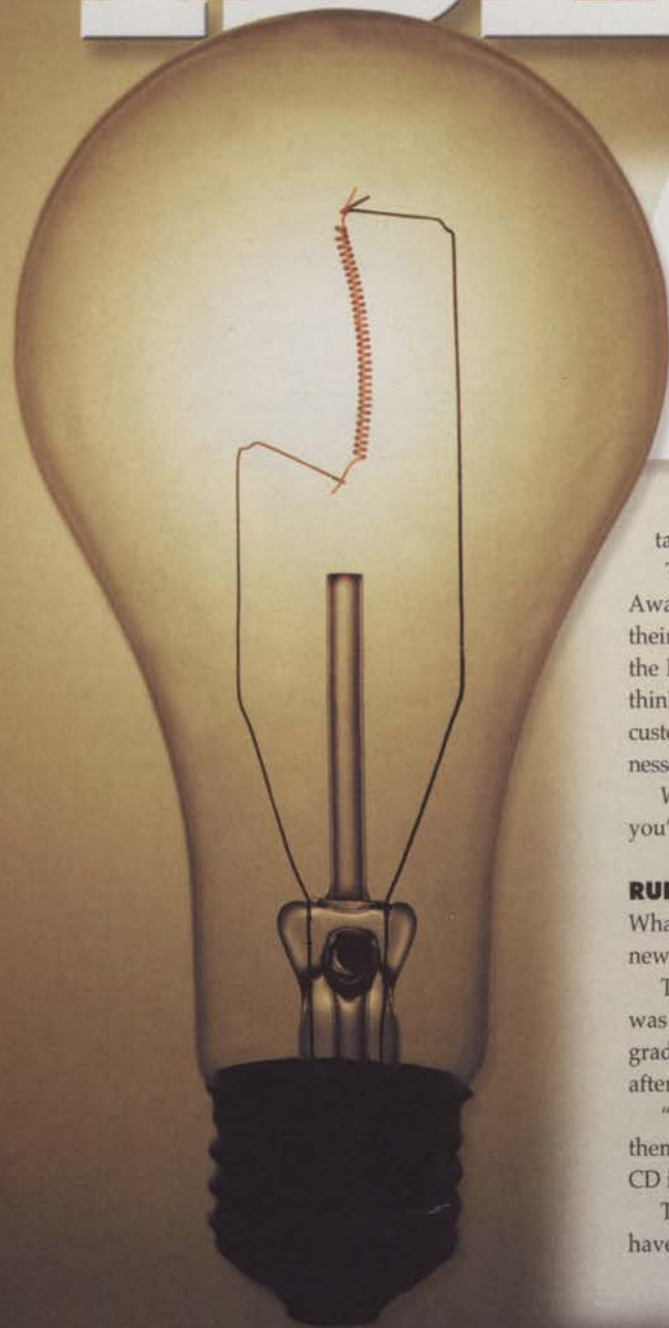
USE READER SERVICE #62

Award Winners

by Nicole Wisniewski

The first place Pendulum Award winners share their business building concepts.

Bright IDEAS



As gadgets go, the pendulum clock may seem rather boring. But one look at the inner workings of the grandfather version shows how complicated and accurate these machines actually are.

In fact, legend has it that the inventor of the pendulum also invented the wheel, which moves worldwide business growth. Practically speaking, while the pendulum's uses are limited, it still has the monumental task of gauging the time by which people calculate their lives.

The power to move like a pendulum inspired the nine 2001 Pendulum Award winners to craft simple ideas that transformed different areas of their businesses. The awards, sponsored by *Lawn & Landscape*, BASF and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, recognize innovative thinkers in the following categories: employee retention and recruitment, customer relations and marketing. These winners sustain not only their businesses, but also increase industry professionalism.

Without further ado, swing to and fro through this story and maybe you'll catch an idea or two from the first place Pendulum Award winners.

RULING RECRUITMENT & RETENTION. *First Place: College Spirit.* What do college kids like more than pizza and beer? Music. And with the new trend in CD burners, blank CDs are always a student attraction.

These were the thoughts going through Tom Tolkacz's head when he was looking for a way to bring more college student interns and college graduates to Swingle Tree and Landscape Care, Denver, Colo. Blank CDs, after all, cost only pennies a piece.

"We recorded a 30-second company commercial on the disks and gave them away at local college job fairs," Tolkacz said. "The remainder of the CD is blank so students can copy their music to it."

The CD label has the Swingle Tree name and Web address so students have a way to contact the company for career and internship opportunities.

(continued on page 110)

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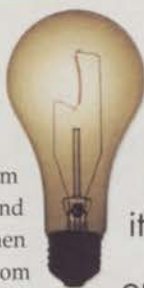
(continued from page 108)

And providing this information in the form of a CD means students won't lose it as easily as a business card.

Swingle Tree purchased the CDs from a company that records the video and audio information on the disks and then labels them. Cost per disk can range from \$1 to \$4 depending on whether or not development of content is required. Duplication disks are closer to \$1.50 each, Tolkacz said, adding that this year the company purchased 500 CDs and gave 300 of them away.

"It's something students find useful to their college lifestyle – they think it's unique and different," Tolkacz enthused. "Several contacts for seasonal work and internships were made because students were using the CDs. It has proven to be our most effective and popular recruitment giveaway to date."

However, Tolkacz can't track how many contacts he's made specifically through the CD. "We have a multifaceted advertising



"[Our **CD giveaway program**] is something students find *useful* to their college lifestyle – they think it's **unique** and **different**. It has proven to be our **most effective** and popular **recruitment** giveaway to date." – **Tom Tolkacz**

campaign," he said. "The positive thing is that we're getting our name out there in different ways."

CRAFTY CLIENT RELATIONS. *First Place: Blade Runner.* Since Prairie State Landscaping only handles the fertilization, weed and insect control, seeding and overseeding on its clients' properties, it has no control over how clients maintain their landscapes in other ways, mainly mowing, explained Ted Diener, president of the Hazel Crest, Ill.-based company.

Clients would call claiming they had an insect or disease problem when, in fact, the shredded grass tips were a result of dull mower blades, Diener pointed out. "Mowing with dull blades makes the tips brown, especially in the summer when the turf is under stress," he said.

Five years ago, Diener started offering to sharpen clients' mower blades for them to alleviate this problem. "When we're on site we ask them if they can take the blade off and

(continued on page 112)

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Award Winners

(continued from page 110)

we'll take it back to our office, sharpen it and return it the next day," he said, adding that the cost of the program is only the time it takes for his lawn technicians to visit with clients and sharpen the blades. "We'll also tell them if they have blades that need replacing."

After starting the free service, Diener realized that clients appreciated that the additional interruption was unrelated to add-on sales. "They expect us to try and sell them something, but instead we're doing something for free," he said.

Sharpening clients' blades a couple times throughout the year not only aids clients' lawn maintenance, it also gives Prairie State an edge, Diener said. "You can't be in a rush – you have to have time to offer your customers something extra," he explained. "When you do that, there's a better chance they'll come back to you again next year."

MARKETING MASTERS. First Place: *The Great Pumpkin.* Two weeks before Oct. 31, a

similar thought crosses many people's minds: "I have to buy my Halloween pumpkin." While some take the time to carve intricate, spooky designs into their burnt orange gourds, others just set them out in holiday spirit.

About this same time every year, the



"You *can't* be in a rush – you have to have time to offer your customers something extra. When you do that, there's a *better chance* they'll come back to you again next year." – Ted Diener

season shifts for Derek Blumberg. The short break between fall cleanup and winter snowplowing allows the president of Quality Seasons in Savage, Minn., to take a minute to think about his clients. "I wanted to find a way to thank my clients that was cheap, festive and fun," he said.

The pumpkin idea actually originated from Blumberg's wife in 1995. "We con-

tacted a local grower to find out the cost of various sizes of pumpkins," he said, adding that a basketball-sized pumpkin carries a price tag of only 50 to 75 cents each.

That year, Blumberg and his wife delivered 100 pumpkins with "Fall Greetings" notes at-

tached by ribbon to the stems. The response was overwhelming. "Our clients really appreciated the fact that we did something they didn't expect," Blumberg explained.

By the third pumpkin-delivery year, Blumberg had a realization. "I thought, 'I'm already there – why don't I just distribute pumpkins to the entire neighborhood block?'" he said. He targeted high-end areas and on

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Those interested in entering the contest can e-mail or phone *Lawn & Landscape's* Nicole Wisniewski at nwisniewski@gie.net or 800/456-0707. Please include your name and contact information, so an entry can be sent to you when the 2002 contest rules are finalized.

Ideas Wanted

the note encouraged pumpkin-receivers to thank their neighbors.

The 1,000 pumpkins Quality Seasons delivered not only generated new business, but also strengthened current client relationships.

But delivering 1,000 pumpkins was becoming a challenge because employees were getting paid overtime to do this. So, in 1999, Quality Seasons gave a \$1,000 contribution and free t-shirts to a local youth group in exchange for their help in passing out 1,500

pumpkins. Employees who volunteered to drive the children from neighborhood to neighborhood received a free lunch at a local rib hotspot. By 2001, the company had drafted separate promotional notes for clients and their neighbors and increased the number of pumpkins to 2,000. Since the youth group couldn't be held accountable for delivering the right pumpkin notes to the right clients, Blumberg used a two-man crew during a slow week to do the job.

This October, Blumberg hopes to get the youth group involved again. He's also planning to promote the sale of fall displays, which will include two bales of hay, a scarecrow, pumpkins, gourds and corn stocks for \$125 each.

"It's a creative and inexpensive way to get my name out in front of potential clients," Blumberg said. "We're thankful that it works so well."

The author is Managing Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine. Turn to How We Do It on page 132 for a Pendulum Award-winning employee retention program from Tropics North.

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Check out this story online for details on the second and third place Pendulum Award winners' programs.

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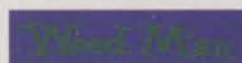
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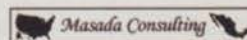
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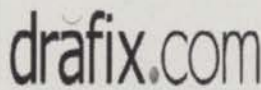
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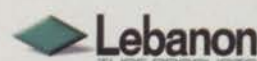
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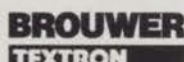
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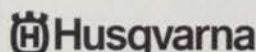
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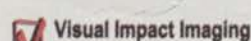
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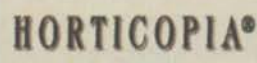
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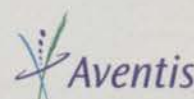
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Products

John Deere 667 Quik-Trak



- Operator stands on platform, which is supported with suspension springs to absorb shock and provides a smooth, comfortable ride
- Compact size re-

quires less trailer space and improves maneuverability and trimming ability

- Powered by air-cooled, vertical, 23-hp Kawasaki engine
- Controlled by dual-loop levers that function as a zero-turn-radius lever system
- Equipped with a 60-inch deck
- Cutting height of Quik-Trak can be adjusted from 1½-inch to 5-inch in ½-inch increments without tools

Circle 200 on reader service card

Toro Groundsmaster 228-D

- Choose from five full-floatation cutting units: the 52-inch rear discharge, the 52-, 62- and 72-inch side discharge units and the Guardian 62-inch Recycler
- Powered by a Kubota 28-hp diesel engine
- Tighter turning is achieved with steering brakes and four-lever steering linkage
- Year-round performer with optional attachments: rotary broom; snowthrower; 15-cubic-foot, hi-lift collection system; debris blower; v-plow; and cab with ROPS

Circle 201 on reader service card



Ditch Witch H514

- New sealed Eaton motor and new bearings and headshaft eliminate the need to pre-load bearings
- Larger lifting cylinder offers 45 percent more lifting capacity over



the model H412 digging attachment

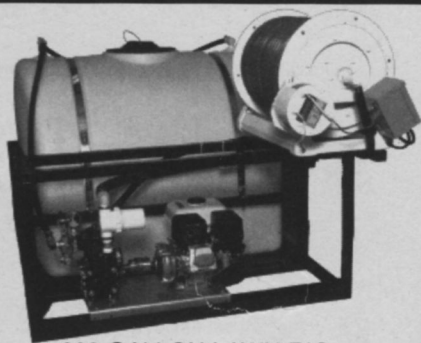
- Attachment works well in most soil conditions
- Unit able to reach a trench depth of up to 62 inches
- Improves reliability

Circle 202 on reader service card



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Products

Textron Bunton Midsize Series

- Features 36-, 48-, 54- and 61-inch decks
- Gear-drive models available with 15- or 17-hp, air-cooled Kawasaki V-twin gasoline engines
- Hydrostatic models available with 15-, 17-, or 21-hp air-cooled Kawasaki V-twin gasoline engines
- Equipped with smooth-operating electric clutch for easy blade control
- New top-mounted cutter spindle for improved impact resistance
- Spindle warranty covers both parts and



labor and includes pulleys
• Re-engineered for toughness and versatility
Circle 203
on reader service card

Pequea Machine Model C-2500 Dump Trailer

- Hauls, dumps and spreads the load
- Features 12-foot bed with 6-foot 6-inch inside width
- Combination doors split to open wide or swing out from the bottom for spreading
- Scissor lift has 5-inch main cylinder for ease in dumping entire load
- Safety prop allows operator to lock the bed in the "up" position



Circle 204 on reader service card

Thomas Equipment LTD T25 S Mini Excavator

- Machine powered by 26-hp, liquid-cooled diesel engine
- Features variable flow piston pump drive system and two-speed travel
- Boasts a full 5,545 pounds of breakout force and a deep, 9 feet 6.2 inches of digging depth
- Standard equipment includes rubber tracks, lights, hydraulic pilot-operated joysticks with armrests, auxiliary hydraulics with boom arm breaking piping, and 18-inch toothed bucket



Circle 205 on reader service card

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Patent Pending

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~ Tom Jessen

Perma-Green Supreme President and 27-year lawn care owner, 20-year sprayer manufacturer, owner of 3 patents, and fellow dreamer

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USE READER SERVICE #70

Products

Elite Trenchers and Concrete Saws



- Can be used for sprinkler systems, root pruning, telephone cable, drainage, landscape edging, satellite drops, laying conduit for electric lines and other applications

ing, satellite drops, laying conduit for electric lines and other applications

- Ability to dig 20 to 30 feet per minute
- New 900-pound winch design and roller wheel body allows the machine to roll up and down easier and faster
- Depth gauge tells operator how deep the machine is digging
- No aggravating clutch or expensive clutch parts to replace

Circle 206 on reader service card

Chipco Acclaim Extra Herbicide

- Helps stop growth of susceptible grassy weeds
- Active ingredient is fenoxaprop
- Tankmixing Acclaim Extra with other herbicides reduces the likelihood of resistance while providing better weed control
- Herbicide works in diverse turf management programs
- Can be applied as a broadcast spray directly over trees, shrubs and herbaceous and flowering plants
- Takes only 3.5 ounces per acre to control crabgrass

Circle 207 on reader service card

TrynEx International Pivot-Pro 1075 Tailgate Spreader

- Designed for both large and small snow and ice control contractors
- Offers a pivot mount, maximum torque transmission and spreader control system
- Mount requires no drill holes in the truck bed and allows spreader to swing away
- Unit comes standard with 2-inch receiver hitch mount



- Downtime minimized because there are no belts, pulleys or chains

Circle 208 on reader service card



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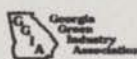
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Products

Ingersoll 7020LBH Loader/Backhoe

- Compact, 4-wheel-drive is designed and built from the ground up as a loader/backhoe
- Features heavy-duty lift arms with reinforced bucket for maximum strength



- Includes single-lever control operation
- Lift capacity is 750 pounds at full height
- Backhoe is coupled to the tractor via mounting arms
- Offers 92-inch digging depth with joystick controls and a selection of buckets from 8 to 24 inches
- Powered by 20-hp Kohler engine

Circle 209 on reader service card

FMC SmartBiz Software

- Allows contractors to manage all areas of the business with one program
- Advanced routing and scheduling provide the ability to preset and organize customer appointments, maximizing productivity and reducing technician travel time

- Maintains existing and prospective customer information, assisting in cross-selling of new services
- Tracks complete site history of all activities performed and materials used
- Full invoicing and accounts receivable capabilities of the software include interface to the general ledger
- Tracks material usage and routine vehicle and equipment maintenance

- Ability to custom-tailor software helps meet changing business needs
- New features include interoffice messaging, on-demand scheduling, seasonal scheduling, spray notification tables and electronic exporting of N.Y. state chemical usage report
- New hand-held field manager technology to be available soon

Circle 210 on reader service card

Z-Spray Zero Turn Spray System New 36" Wide Unit



COMPACT DESIGN

- Digital speedometer for calibration
- 15 Gallon capacity. 5 gpm pump
- 3 section/3 valve boom with AI tips
- 200 Fertilizer capacity
- 15 HP Kawasaki electric start
- All hydraulic pump/wheel motor trans.
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USE READER SERVICE #74



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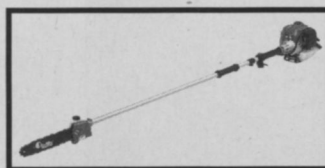
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USE READER SERVICE #73

Products

Red Max PSZ25005 Power Pole Saw

- Power pole saw powered by a 25.4-cc Strato-Charged, two-cycle engine
- Engine meets CARB II and EPA clean-air standards by introducing fresh air into the



engine between the exhaust gases and the fresh charge of air/fuel mix

- Pole saw reaches 8 feet
- Offers 74 percent fewer emissions and is 34 percent more fuel efficient

Circle 211 on reader service card

PBI Gordon Corp. Power Zone Herbicide

- Excellent postemergent activity with proven performance for broad-leaf weed control in turfgrass
- The herbicide's fast-acting, cool-weather response exhibits evidence of injury within hours
- Serves as an alternative formulation where 2,4-D is not an option



- Herbicide is rain-fast in as little as three hours
- Able to reseed in as little as two weeks
- Offers extended season for applications – apply earlier in the spring and later in the fall

Circle 212 on reader service

Banko Manufacturing Spray Products

- Two spray products to choose from include a 200-gallon space saver sprayer and a spot sprayer

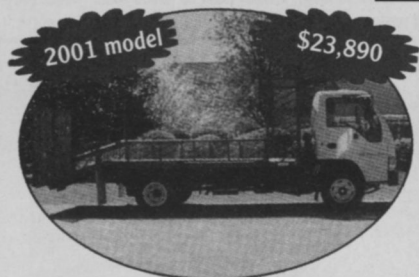


- The 200-gallon sprayer comes on aluminum frame and is equipped with Honda engine and Maruyama piston pump
- Spot sprayer available in 25-, 30- and 50-gallon sizes and equipped with a Honda 4-cycle engine and Maruyama piston pump
- Engine pump on spot sprayer capable of delivering up to 1.8 gpm at up to 360 psi

Circle 213 on reader service card



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2001 model

\$23,890

2001 ISUZU NPR: gas, 16' landscape body, auto., ac, am/fm, weedeater racks, water cooler rack, shovel rack, curbside gate folds down

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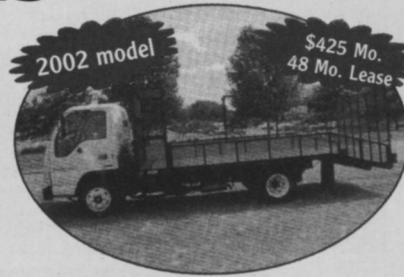
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2002 model

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48 Mo. Lease

2002 ISUZU NPR: diesel, auto., ac, am/fm, 16' LANDSCAPE BODY, Weed Eater Racks, Water Cooler Rack, Shovel Rack, Curbside, Gate Fold Down

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48 Mo. Lease



2002 ISUZU Crewcab, 14' dump body, 48" tool box, hitch, tarp, auto., ac, am/fm cass.

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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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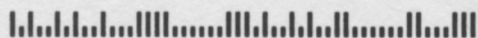
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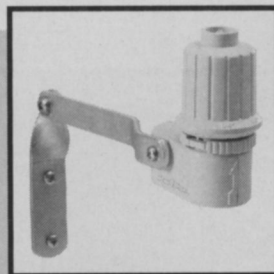
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Products

Rain Bird RSD Rain Sensor

- Easy to install and durable
- Saves water and extends irrigation system life by automatically measuring precipitation and keeping irrigation systems from watering in rainy conditions



- Suitable for 24VAC residential/commercial applications
- Multiple rainfall settings from 1/8-inch to 3/4-inch are quick and easy by twisting a dial
- Adjustable vent ring helps control drying time
- The sensor's high-grade, UV-resistant polymer body resists the elements
- 25 feet of UV resistant extension wire offers easy connection to irrigation controllers

Circle 214 on reader service card

Vermeer Manufacturing BC1000XL Brush Chipper

- Enlarged feed opening
- Equipped with standard 85-hp Cummins diesel engine

- Split fiberglass engine hood provides easy access to engine components
- Equipped with 66-inch feed table to put more distance between the operator and the roller system
- Features noise-reducing design and optional sound abatement package
- Cutter drum provides cutting inertia to handle wood up to 12 inches in diameter

Circle 215 on reader service card



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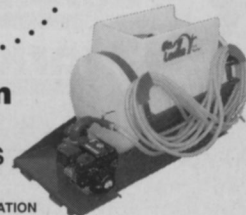
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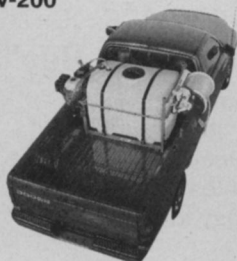
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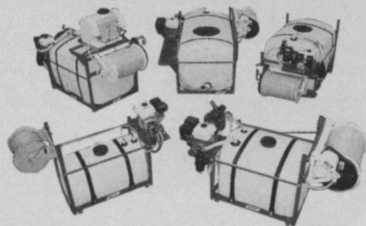
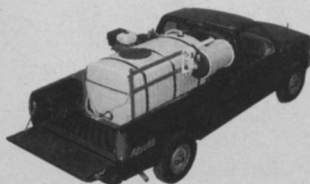
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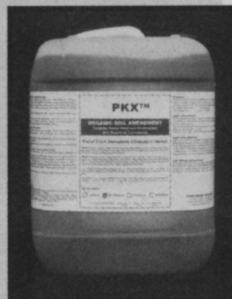


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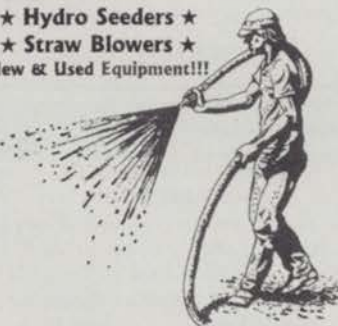
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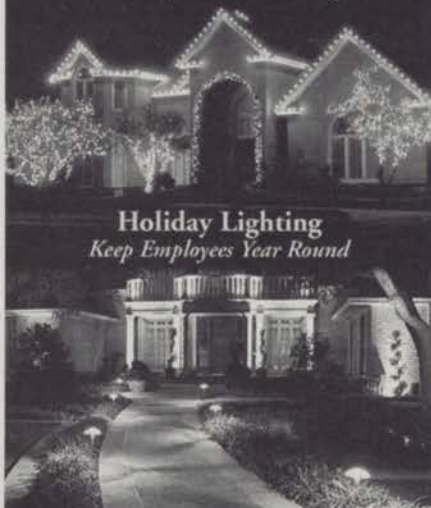
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Cover Story

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rock with checks and balances as it grows.

"It takes time to go through and build the systems and procedures that are going to be necessary," Schmitt realized. "I want to build a capable company. I want the systems and procedures to grow and maybe even duplicate themselves."

Laying solid groundwork means polishing the nitty-gritty numbers – like accounting systems. "I'm still fussing with it," Schmitt admitted, adding that he underestimated the value of a large company's accounting entourage. Shamrock's department consists of Schmitt and a bookkeeper who comes in two days a week.

And to make sure the business continues to do more than break even, maintaining low debt is imperative, he added. So is low overhead, which is why he will decrease his 19-percent cost to 15 percent this year. Schmitt is weary to accept credit lines, and he is skeptical of loans that hand over ownership of the company. "As a small start-up, you need to gut it out, and we're gutting it out."

At the same time, the company fosters community partnership through the rotary club, chamber of commerce and involvement in the Boy Scouts. "I think it's too easy to look at your business as something aside or apart from where you live," he pointed out. "If you can mold the two together..."

He considers this possibility and returns to the reason he founded Shamrock: for family, community and a sense of independence. For his two daughters and wife, for a chance to work for a lifestyle and not a paycheck, and for the ability to share these goals with like-minded achievers.

The company might be "scrappy" for a bit longer, but "word of mouth is starting to kick in," he noticed. Schmitt struggles with invoices and billing, but still, Shamrock is feasting on the area's opportunities, handling the turbulence of its first year quite well.

"We are building an organization that is good at finding the low-hanging fruit and plucking it, so we will be an efficient business with low overhead and low debt ratio," Schmitt insisted. "We are following through with our employees, so they will be well taken care of and happy in the long term." **LL**

The author is Associate Editor of Lawn & Landscape magazine.

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How We Do It

Positioning People at Tropics North

Human behavior, an excellent predictor of how one will perform a task, is difficult to define, measure or match to a job. Before you make well-informed decisions about people, you must know what you want and what they want. Unfortunately, we used to spend little time determining what is necessary to do a given job, relying primarily on education, job experience and personal projection in our hiring practices. This means we frequently took expensive risks when filling positions.

We didn't want to take those risks any longer. We wanted to improve our hiring practices and retention level. In 1996, we started utilizing the Cleaver System, which uses an integrated four-factor model to provide instrumentation for measuring human behavior.

Recognizing that every job and every individual displays four behavioral traits (drive, influence, steadiness and compliance) in different combinations and to different degrees, the Cleaver System teaches an employer to better understand those four traits and how they interact with and influence each other by measuring a person's behavior, internal motivation and motivating values.

Then the system encourages employers to set job standards in their hiring practices so that a potential candidate's test score tells the employer whether or not that person fits into the company culture and position. At Tropics North, we won't hire someone who doesn't score above a 75 percent match to our criteria.

All potential new hires are evaluated and measured against 13 success indicators, which are education, work experience, mental agility, character, financial wisdom, behavior, internal motivation, values, outside influences,

maturity, contacts, energy and personal projection. Rarely is any candidate a perfect match, but the Cleaver System teaches us how to create personal development plans for employees to reach and exceed job expectations and enhance personal growth.

For instance, Manuel Leyjas had been a loyal, long-term employee with Tropics North. Unfortunately, Leyjas was stuck in a role as a grower for several years and became frustrated with his inability to progress. As a result, his performance fell below expectations. Both the company and Leyjas were limited in their ability to help him progress and contribute in a more significant way.

Leyjas went through the preliminary Cleaver evaluation process, which is a three-page, multiple-choice and question-and-answer profile that asks people to rate different values and define their characteristics. The test results reported that Leyjas was best suited for a sales role and not a grower role, so we put him in charge of sales for our tree farm division. Without any formal sales training, Leyjas increased sales by 30 percent in his first year and almost doubled his income. His self esteem and job satisfaction went through the roof.

When we found out what motivated Leyjas and put him in the right job, great things happened. Once we determine what motivates individuals, we unlock their potential.

After an employee completes the basic profile, an evaluation date is set, which is when we go over his or her results.

Through this program, Tropics North had the choice of paying \$400 per individual to have an evaluation done or to train someone in the company to conduct these evaluations. I went through the basic and advanced training courses, which cost less than \$15,000. Then we evaluated all middle and senior managers, and now we evaluate every potential job candidate before he or she is hired. The system helps us make better hiring decisions, ensuring the applicant is qualified to meet our company's objectives.

By implementing this system, we learned that understanding the impact of people's values (the personal desires and priorities that most influence and direct motivation and behavior) in the workplace can mean the difference between success and failure. **■**

The author is chief executive officer at Tropics North, Princeton, Fla. To learn more about how the Cleaver System helped Tropics North, call Greg Proch at 305/258-8011 or gregp@tropicsnorth.net. Or contact the Cleaver Co. directly at 508/620-0553 or www.cleavercompany.com.

FIVE KEYS TO *Positioning People*

1. Create a common management language.
2. Determine what is necessary to do a given job.
3. Measure each candidate against the standard.
4. Identify key motivating employee values.
5. Develop programs for continuous employee improvement.

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A WEEK later you're strapped into the "fighting chair" on the back of a boat just about 25 miles off the coast when the line

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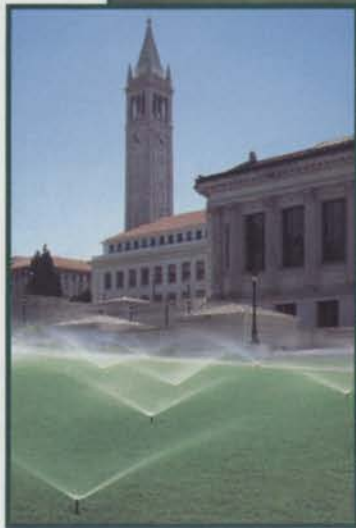
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