

Turfgrass Introduced to Russia

ANDREW GAYDON, VANDEN BUSSCHE IRRIGATION AND EQUIPMENT, REPORTS ON HIS RECENT VISIT

It is sometimes not easy to appreciate what we have here in Canada until one goes to other corners of the world to see how others live.

I have traveled to various interesting places in the world to experience horticulture and agriculture, but none have intrigued me as much as my trip to Russia last September. I was given outstanding VIP treatment by the warm and generous people who were associated with a company based in Moscow called Russki Gazzoni.

Following the fall of Communism, many entrepreneurs came out of the woodwork to do their bit for Mother Russia as well as gain profit for themselves. This type of redevelopment and direction in society takes time and now after 10-12 years, changes are fast, furious and dramatic.

One area of change and improving opportunities is a landscape company called Russki Gazzoni who have developed from their small beginnings as a garden maintenance company into a large landscape company with 800 acres of sod production and tree nurseries.

The driving force in this company is Roman Zhardanovsky, who has many connections with Ontario, including initially, some very sound advice from Gerry Brouwer, the "king" of the sod growing and harvesting industry. Brouwer's knowledge of all aspects of sod production and his reputation for creative solutions to any challenge related to sod production has made him internationally sought after.

Before Russki Gazzoni, sod has never been seen in Russia. With the many newly "wealthy" building beautiful houses in the country subdivisions, sod is becoming a very popular need for their gardens.

The large sod growing acreage meant irrigation was essential and Vanden Bussche Irrigation was asked to advise on the irrigation for the sod production, as the existing irrigation equipment from the old regime was in total disrepair.

With all this good advice from Ontario, which has very similar weather throughout the seasons as Moscow, many acres



Marc Vanden Bussche speaks to Russian sod farm managers through an interpreter.

of Kentucky bluegrass/fescue ryegrass blends grew well and was an encouraging sign that the company was on the right course.

With good advertising and connections in government (an essential ingredient in modern Russian business), Russki Gazzoni started to receive inquiries for the sodding of government projects. Especially parks – which are high profile areas in Moscow – gardens, sports fields, roadside embankments, and one golf course. It was noticeable in Moscow and the outside city areas that most gardens are very poorly maintained, other than those in rich residential properties. We never saw a mowed lawn. In fact, in all the time that we were in Russia, we never saw a lawnmower, of any size or type. In general, homes have no lawns or landscaping. Front and rear yards are rough, ungraded, full of weeds, with native grasses and trees.

Russki Gazzoni has found it necessary to buy all their machinery and equipment from Canada, including large volume topsoil screeners, tree spades, diggers, backhoes, tractors and all irrigation equipment including drip irrigation for their shade trees that are in storage ready for landscaping.

To organize and perform a simple job in Moscow, is usually a full day's opera-

tion. The traffic around Moscow has to be experienced to be believed – many roads have enormous potholes and everybody drives as fast as their vehicle can possibly go. There are many new luxury cars, Mercedes Benz, Audi, BMW, Jeeps, etc., and many rusting Eastern Bloc vehicles from the "old era" but very little in-between. For transportation, many ordinary folk rely on old smoky buses, which are constantly breaking down, but most walk and walk and walk. It was very noticeable, especially in the city, that people are thin (because of their exercise and hard work) and obviously have some self pride as most men and women were dressed in clean fashionable clothes.

Everywhere one looks there are signs of change – new methods and equipment have entered the country. Many large warehouse-type buildings are under construction, ready to house the new era. Most of this new development is centred in or around Moscow and therefore has become a magnet for the very poor and unemployed people from rural country areas. For this reason, Moscow has 17 million people and is growing very fast.

An associate company of Russki Gazzoni has 100 acres under glass equipped with modern irrigation and automated fertilizing feed systems. In these greenhouses, they grow the vegetables for

Macdonald's in Russia. We learned that an ordinary hardworking man or woman may save for a month to take their family out for a very special meal at Macdonald's!

When we had the good fortune to visit the countryside many hours drive outside of Moscow, we were amazed at the vastness of the area which was all weeds. A federation owns all the farm land in Russia. Russians own shares in the land. The land cannot be purchased, it can only be leased. Farms of 6,000 to 10,000 acres are common. Most have nothing – no equipment, no seed, no money and no skills, therefore no development. A good knowledge of farming practices seems to be lacking. They continue to do things the old way and are reluctant to change. If the Eastern Bloc ever started farming like western farmers, they could out produce European farms and dominate the market by sheer acreage alone.

In the city centres of Moscow and St. Petersburg, the two main cities in western Russia, it is a very different world. The architecture and historical buildings, statues and artwork are absolutely spectacular.



Ruski Gazzoni's nursery operation – features all Canadian design and equipment.

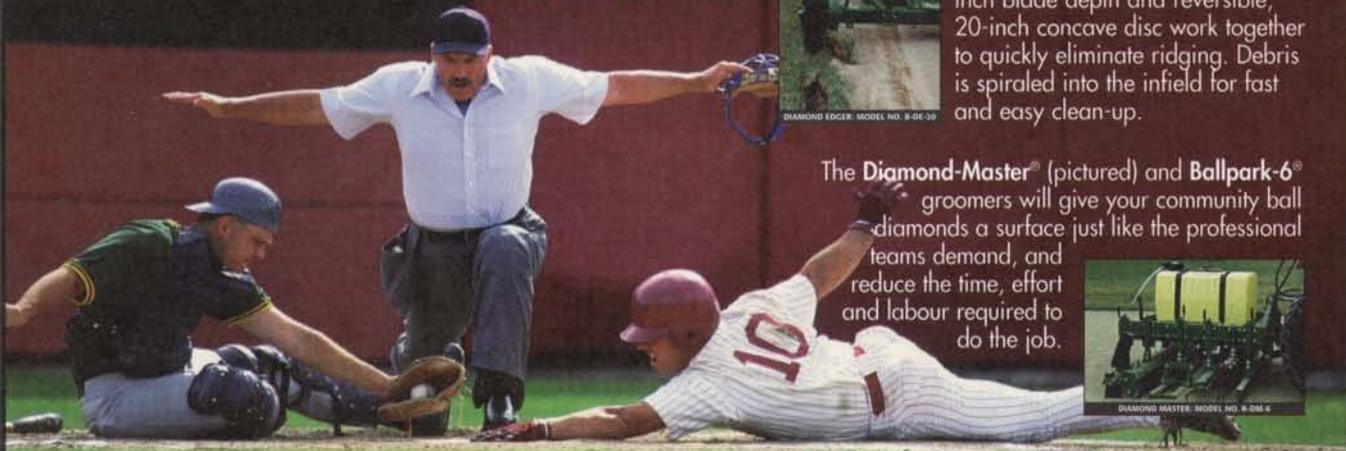
The historical artifacts are rapidly being restored everywhere with all kinds of different donated monies coming from the East and West. The whole world appreciates Russia's history both before and after the 1917 revolution.

With all this western influence and publicity dominating Russian society, people

are learning and changing the way they live. Every week, new improvements are brought in and being implemented. Hardworking, forward thinking and hungry for success, companies like Ruski Gazzoni are the driving force in Russia today and the capitalist economies of the world are all eager to help that progress. ♦

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