



Mechanize and beat the labor problems which beset many tree care companies today. This is the advice of Ted Smith who finds this 5-ton Alenco crane an indispensable piece of equipment.

WELCOME to Smith Tree & Landscape Service, Inc. So states the opening line of the company's employe manual. It probably should be on their front door, too, since the Smiths are specialists both in their business

Automated business office operation has become key to business management for the Smiths. Handling Burroughs sensomatic machine is Mrs. Ardith Donner.



Management session at breakfast bar is almost daily occurrence for Smith Tree and Landscape Service, Inc. Key members of management are, left to right: Edwin E. (Ted) Smith, president and general manager; Mrs. (Jane) Smith, secretary-treasurer and landscape architect; Thomas D. Smith, head of spray department and diagnosis; and Henry J. LaBrosse, vice-president and manager of landscape planting and construction.

Business Acumen and Specialized Training

*provide formula for success
for*

*Smith Tree & Landscape Service, Inc.
Lansing, Michigan*

and in making clients and visitors feel at home.

Their business, which during the peak season carries 40 employes, is operated from their home. Management sessions are held at the breakfast bar and a fully automated business is carried on in the ground level basement. It's a totally different and expanded company than the Smith Tree Service which originated in 1945 and operated with the dining room and kitchen of their old home as headquarters.

Today, the company consists of 7 divisions, each operated by a specialist in the field. Edwin E. Smith, known coast to coast only as Ted, is president, general manager, and supervisor of the Tree Department. Ted points out that

this department of the business consists of a complete tree service including bracing, cabling, diagnosis, insect control, feeding, etc. Tree moving and planting is a phase of the landscape operation in their organizational structure. He also reports that tree removal is big business now and limited only by available manpower. Dutch elm disease is taking a great toll of the big trees in Michigan as is true in many other areas. The Smiths do a great deal of spraying along with taking out dead trees.

Early in his career, Ted served as a foreman for the city of Lansing and earlier as superintendent of grounds at Willow Run. During his tenure with the city of Lansing, he also did private

spraying on the side, finally deciding along with his wife, Jane, to go into business for themselves. Mr. Smith handled the tree care work plus spraying and Mrs. Smith the telephone, book-keeping, and office work for the new company, with, as she says, only a typewriter and no adding machine.

Today they operate out of a new and modern home, designed specifically for both home and business. It overlooks a spring-fed lake and their nursery. The company's 7 divisions are equipped with the most up-to-the-minute equipment available and manned with longtime, experienced employees. Six key members of the company have college degrees in their specific specialty.

Broad Range Of Service Equipment

Equipment considered as a necessity for the company includes a Burroughs office machine for cost accounting, a 5-ton Alenco crane, radio equipment which includes 5 mobile units plus the base station, and the usual trucks, chipper, stone picker, sprayers, and power equipment necessary for vegetation control, tree care, and landscape work.

Success and growth of this company can largely be attributed to two key factors. These are business acumen and specialized training of staff. As to which has been most important, the Smiths do not offer an opinion. Visiting with them brings out the fact that they believe each complements the other and that success might not be possible without both.

Profitable operation demands astute business practice. Yet quality of service and technical knowledge of the specific jobs handled are mandatory if a community is to support the business. The Smiths feel that learning to operate a business has been the factor responsible for permitting them to take advantage of their knowledge and experience in the tree and landscape field.

Ted graduated in 1940 at Mich-

New and modern dwelling is designed specifically for both home and business. Entire ground floor is used as office headquarters for the 7 divisions of the company.



Roger Myers, left, and Mrs. Smith discuss details of landscape plan which will later be fulfilled by appropriate divisions of the company.



Tom Smith who handles spray department and diagnostic work handles radio while working up office report and laying out schedule for coming day.



Student employee, Dave Muma, fills tank of chipper at Smith's new service center. Company operates 14 trucks, 4 tractors, 2 cars, and airplane.



igan State University with a degree in forestry. After several years in the business and after the children were born, and growing, Mrs. Smith, or Jane, returned to college full-time and picked up a degree, in 1956, in landscape architecture. Thomas D. Smith, the eldest son, following the lead of his parents and being interested in the business, attended the University of Massachusetts at Amherst for his degree, granted in 1965 in arboriculture. He is in charge of the company spray department and handles all diagnosis work. Jane, besides serving as secretary-treasurer of the organization and office manager, heads a professional landscape design service, a separate division of the company which is operated as Jane Smith & Associates. This professional office engages the services of the tree care, landscape, and nursery divisions as needed. In this way, actually two companies operate from the same business office.

Henry J. LaBrosse, a vice-president, is manager of landscape planting and construction. He, too, has a degree in forestry, and has been with the company since 1951. Harold Mitchell, another vice-president, is manager of tree operations and a company stal-

wart since its inception in 1945. Merrill Wilson, foreman of utility line clearance, joined the company in 1947. Larry Tooker, foreman of the nursery, has been with the company only two years, but has a master's degree in horticulture and is helping expand this end of the business. Roger Myers, another recent employe, is a graduate landscape architect.

Management Team Members Each Have Specialty

Each member, including the Smith management team, has made his own place in the company, based on his specialty and ability to develop it into a component part of the overall business. Being able to activate and utilize this talent in a team operation points up the ability of the senior Smiths as personnel managers.

Equally important with staff development has been the Smiths own development through the years as business specialists. They have been able to apply the business principles necessary to successfully manage a growing company. It's at this point that the Smiths give liberal credit to their association friends and groups. They mention specifically the National Arborists, the International Shade Tree

Conference, and a Michigan group known as the Little Six. Jane says they have had help when needed. She and Ted feel that the monies they pay for association memberships and the time and effort expended in working with these groups is the best investment they have made through the years. Businesswise, they believe it a must for a company such as theirs. But beyond the business aspects is the association with others in the same type business on a basis which develops into lifetime friendships.

The Little Six, an association to which the Smiths attribute much of their business training, is an organization of 6 tree and landscape nurserymen groups, headquartered in various sections of the state. Founded in 1942, membership through the years has been maintained at 6. Generally, the groups do not compete for business, and very little of their trade territories overlap.

Little Six members meet 4 times yearly for 2-day sessions on their businesses. Each member lays out his company books and answers all questions regarding same. They discuss individual and mutual problems, along with business principles.

Bonsai trees are grown in small nursery greenhouse as sideline to business by Larry Tooker, foreman of nursery. Tooker began seeking out and developing specimens and now has small, but impressive collection.



Office assistants who are learning office management phases of business are Mrs. Gerald (Lois) Gable, daughter of the Smiths, left, and Mrs. Thomas (Brenda) Smith, wife of Tom.



They help one another by spotting weaknesses, discussing costs and prices, equipment, and any other factor affecting business. Once a year they meet socially, recently celebrating their 25th anniversary. Besides the meetings of top management, key employees of each are sent to a training meeting once yearly. To date, these employe meetings have been primarily spent on an introduction to management.

In analyzing their own business, the Smiths found that coffee breaks were costing them approximately \$75 daily. A session with the employes led to development of a policy that employes bring their own coffee with them to the job, do not use company vehicles for the purpose, and rigidly maintain 10-minute breaks. Another source of lost time proved to be the so-called "ulcer" hour or starting time each day. Working with foremen, the Smiths were able to organize their way around most of the obstacles here. In both cases, they found employes understanding and helpful.

Business Office Is Fully Automated

Automating the business office grew out of various association training programs and as a natural result of growth. The current Burroughs Sensamatic machine will do cost accounting, maintain a running breakout of down or nonproductive hours, and help calculate the various payroll and tax needs. Mrs. Smith feels that this equipment has helped as much as any other single factor in maintaining the growing company on a business basis.

Clients apparently appreciate the businesslike approach to the work which they hire done. The Smiths use a standard form for tree work. This locates trees in relation to the residence and records size and number. Besides his regular job order, each employe also is provided with an additional work authorization in cases when additional work is



Stone picker is another important piece of equipment in the Smith mechanized operation. On large school landscaping job, cost of manual labor saved on this single job paid a big portion of first year's depreciation on the machine.

Jack Parkhurst, assistant manager of landscape planting and construction, unloads rocks from school landscaping project.



called for. Employes do not do additional work without this form and until it is signed by the customer. This authorization tends to eliminate problems in billing and with foremen or employes involved in the work. Each, along with the company, has a clear understanding of procedure.

Employes respect and appreciate the frank manual of policy which each receives on joining the company. This applies both to the 28 key employes and the part-time help, the latter being made up largely of Michigan State University students who are majoring in the field.

The policy manual gives a brief history of the company, lists the officers and foremen along with their positions and provides general policy statements relating to conduct and use of equipment. For example, the manual states that personnel

are expected to maintain personal behavior and appearance which are a credit to the organization.

They are asked to be clean shaven, as neatly attired as the job will permit, and to refrain from liquor or profanity on the job. Common courtesy is to be shown customers and other employes. Key employes of the company participate in a company retirement program which is with Mutual Benefit of Connecticut.

By keeping customers alerted with a double postcard type direct mail piece, offering a 100% guarantee for both labor and material, and maintaining a business approach in dealing with both employe and customers, the Smiths have made theirs an enviable record. Their current monthly volume today often exceeds the yearly gross of five years earlier.