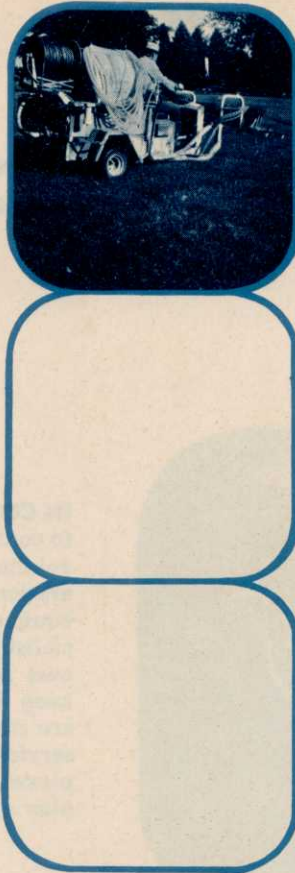


IN COMMERICAL TURF

RIPPER: "Men stay busy on one project or another, all year; that way I can keep experienced men."



CARL RIPPER owns Resthaven Cemetery at Des Moines, Ia. A short time back he saw little chance for expansion beyond the 56 acres he had set aside for Resthaven. He needed other outlets to utilize his own and his employees' experience in commercial turfgrass management.

For years, visitors to the cemetery, and even neighbors in the vicinity, had queried Ripper as to how he kept the grounds so beautiful. Why didn't he have the same problems they did with dandelions, crab grass, and the myriad weeds and fungus diseases which plague lawns.

He concluded that there would be money in doing it for them on a contract basis. He started small, but with the operation growing faster than the dandelions and other weeds he controls, in 1971 Ripper served 4,500 customers. These include private lawns, apartment grounds, factory lawns, hospital grounds, and motel areas. He even maintained the plots for a mobile home park.

Ripper has developed a streamlined operation which gives prompt professional service at reasonable prices. He has seven 2-man crews. All employees are state-licensed custom applicators. Their rigs are self-sustaining. Each carries tanks, pumps and extension hoses so that

truck travel across turf is at a minimum.

"The operators are on commission," says Ripper. "When they go out on assignment, it pays to pick up all the extra business they can." With their experience and equipment, they can do an average lawn — front and back — in about 15 minutes.

All rigs are in two-way radio contact with the office. Marian Boxwell — Miss Turfer — handles all calls from customers, and keeps in constant radio contact with the men on the rigs. If an order comes in from a neighborhood where a crew is working, she radios them and the job is handled immediately. "In the spring and fall, I get as many as 75 calls a day," she says.

In the beginning, the business grew by word of mouth, but now Ripper promotes it with direct mail. Ahead of the spring and fall spraying seasons, he sends out 6000 postcards to old customers and prospective new ones. Each is hand-addressed.

Dandelions, broadleaf weeds and crab grass are the biggest motivators for business. Ripper also offers a fertilization program. "Recently, we have been getting more and more calls about sod worm," he says. "It seems to be invading the midwest."

Ripper gives much credit for his results in the cemetery, and with

his new customers, to Dacthal W-75, a wettable powder herbicide produced by Diamond Shamrock Chemical Company. He counts on it to control most annual grasses and certain broadleaf weeds.

His lawn applications are carefully calibrated. He applies Dacthal W-75 at a rate of 16 pounds per acre, mixed in 60 to 70 gallons of water. He also uses Diamond Shamrock's dacamine, a water-emulsifiable and oil-soluble 2,4-D formulation.

Much of Ripper's present spraying is done in the spring. "People are lawn-conscious then," he says. But he is getting more and more fall orders. "I think fall spraying does a better job on dandelions and other broadleaf weeds," he points out. "You have a longer spraying season, up to 10 weeks. There is less wind in the fall, too. And I think the turf is less tender than in the spring. The perennial and biennial weeds are more susceptible. If there is moisture in the ground, or if you get one good rain, you are in business."

Ripper's diversification philosophy extends into still other fields. On the acres set aside for the cemetery but still unused, he has a thriving Christmas tree farm. He is also part-owner of a large tract in Des Moines which is gradually being developed as an industrial park.

Meanwhile, Ripper runs the land as a sod farm. He uses it in the cemetery, supplies it to his lawn customers, and sells it commercially.

He sees an extra benefit in his variety of projects. "I have gone a long way toward solving my labor problem," he points out. "There are no unreliable part-time people around here. My men can stay busy, on one project or another, all year. That way, I can keep experienced men on my permanent payroll. They don't care whether they are working on lawns, the cemetery, the Christmas trees, or the sod farm. They like the work, and they know what they are doing."

Resthaven Cemetery, where his business started, is one of the most beautiful in the Midwest. There are no tombstones at grave sites. Each is marked by a bronze plaque, imbedded at ground level. Ripper has two reasons for using plaques—one esthetic, the other practical. He feels that the absence of tombstones makes it possible to landscape for greater beauty.

On the practical side, the plaques make maintenance easier, require less labor. However, they create an-

(Continued on page 34)



Lewis Dinsmore looks over tree plantings he has made at Northwest Shopping Center, St. Louis.

TREE CARE (from page 14)

hard core of his business. These men are hired on a full-time basis and guaranteed year-round labor. Part-time help is hired for seasonal work.

Probably more important than the productive hours saved by Dinsmore's management practices is business acumen. An auditor furnishes him a monthly report. This report, drawn by the auditor from bookkeeping entries supplied by Dinsmore's long-time secretary and receptionist, Charlotte Watson, gives costs of sales, a statement of condition of the business, and a profit-and loss statement. He uses this monthly information on which to base his prices. Dinsmore operates on the theory that you can't wait the better part of a season to learn whether the small percentage increase being paid for materials is affecting the profit structure. He doesn't believe price is the key factor in gaining and holding customers. Most of the private customers who make up 80% of his business, and the remaining 20% who are commercial accounts, are more interested in service and reliability than in a few dollars less on the cost of a job.

Equipment used is pretty much standard in the industry. For his spraying business, he uses jeeps with 60-gallon John Bean tanks and pumps. Vehicles are equipped with special dual tires so in many cases, especially larger jobs, they may drive over turfgrass during treatment. Hoses are used to reach areas where hand spraying is necessary. During the busy season, six qualified crews are on the job.

For the future, Dinsmore predicts an acceleration in business for the industry. More people with greater appreciation for tree beauty will

continue to increase the demand. Dinsmore points to the growth of garden clubs, the moving of businesses from railroad sidings to highways where they are developed into

COMMERCIAL TURF (from page 12)

other kind of a problem. As summer progresses, and the ground dries, crab grass spreads over the markers and through the dormant blue grass. It takes extra mowing and even hand-trimming to control it. That's why he went searching for a herbicide that would get the crab grass but would not corrode the markers. Dacthal W-75, which he found being used on the athletic fields at Iowa State University, proved to be the answer to both problems.

"Some folks may think it is unusual for a cemetery owner to be mixed up in so many other activities," says Ripper. "But you can't go on for ever making your cemetery bigger. Eventually you run out of land. You either start over in a

showplaces, and general strength of the economy. These factors, he believes, are keys.

Dinsmore Shop Time Savers

1. Zoning the area served to save backtracking by crews.
2. Annual service contracts for advance scheduling.
3. Direct mail to regular clients as reminders for coming seasonal work and to help increase advance scheduling.
4. General tree work handled during slow periods.
5. Company coffee to eliminate enroute coffee stops.
6. Housing located at nursery site.
7. Maintaining hard core of year-round experienced men and supplementing with part-time labor.

new place, or be satisfied with what you have."

To Ripper, diversification proved to be the answer. He believes that lawn maintenance will continue to grow as a market. "I'm amazed at how much people will spend to have a good-looking lawn, and how little they know about what it takes to do it."

With labor difficult to get, he also likes the idea of having a permanent, experienced crew with him year in and year out.

Once the cemetery uses up the land he now has in Christmas trees, and, when the industrial park covers his sod farm, Ripper will probably have both operations going at another location.

Ripper uses seven 2-man crews such as this to serve 4500 customers including private lawns, apartment grounds, factory lawns, hospital grounds, and motel areas.

