

IN TREE CARE

DINSMORE: "We plan our tree work around spraying, and keep our experienced men employed."

MOST TREE CARE COMPANIES today depend on their contract application service to keep business on the upswing. Dinsmore Tree Service Company, St. Louis, Mo., offers a good example.

As company president, F. Lewis Dinsmore, states, "Profits in the business today depend on spraying and tree moving. This makes for careful scheduling and timely service."

"We try and plan our general tree work around the more profitable phase of the business, which for us is spraying, and keep our experienced men employed."

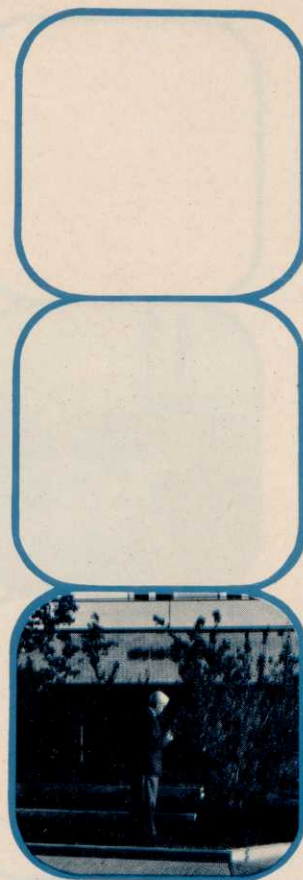
"When conditions are unfit for spraying — such as mildly windy days, men can be used to pick up waiting tree work."

Dinsmore has spent 40 years in the business, first as an employee, then a self-employed lone operator, and for the past 35 years as manager and owner of a going concern. With him in business today are his brother, W. T. (Red), and his son, Lew. Normally, they carry about 20 employees.

Management in this firm almost might be called a formula for operation. Regular rules are in effect for keeping down shop time hours. They have come as a result of experience and service to long-time customers. Rule No. 1 consists of zoning the St.

Louis area. In short, Dinsmore has laid out his own system of zoning to fit the areas he serves. He covers the greater metropolitan St. Louis area but still finds his business concentrated more in some areas than in others. In determining size and scope of zones, the number of customers and the type of business is taken into consideration. Each foreman is assigned a zone for which he becomes responsible. This works especially well for the usual types of spraying, but tree work is also handled in this manner. By having a zone to work, foremen save travel and route time by careful scheduling. They do very little backtracking. "Jobs are not handled as they come in but by where they are located, that is," Dinsmore says, "if people will stand for it." Spray work, for example, is scheduled in advance to take advantage of the zone system. Customers are assured that their work will be done "at the proper time."

Annual service contracts are perhaps as important as any one factor in reducing unproductive hours. These, coupled with new jobs permit foremen more leeway in scheduling. Summer spraying and dormant oil spraying during late winter or early spring can be scheduled well in advance and an efficient route scheduled.



Many longtime customers are not on annual service contracts but expect Dinsmore Tree Service to provide them regular service. Dinsmore reaches these people, and others as well, by mail. He uses direct mail service to about 3000 selected customers each month. These mail pieces are reminders to call in for service, aimed at keeping last minute scheduling to a minimum. Just because Dinsmore provides a service to a customer in his prime target area does not qualify that customer for direct mail service. This service is limited to longtime private and commercial customers rather than to the customers who only use a professional arborist for emergency and special jobs. Copy in the direct mail piece usually concerns spraying, tree moving, and general tree care. He also reminds customers that trees are available.

Direct mail is the only type of advertising which Dinsmore uses on a regular basis. Like other businessmen he supports community ventures such as school yearbooks and the like. But general advertising as such has never been a practice of the company. He has found that regular customers and referrals have combined to keep his crews busy through the years. Much of this must be attributed to providing good service at a fair price.

Free coffee also cuts unproductive hours. Dinsmore keeps a big coffee urn full of fresh brew for his crews; has it ready along with donuts or cookies a half hour before they leave on jobs. This, he says, eliminates the lost time crews use by stopping for coffee enroute to the job. Further, it boosts employee morale and saves the worker spending out-of-pocket change on the job. The employee thinks the free coffee and donuts are a good deal, and a favor from the company. Dinsmore believes this practice does more than save time. Along with the banter, normal in a coffee session, he finds that the men exchange job experience and gain from the morning sessions.

Another shop time saver is housing one foreman in a home at the nursery. The foreman does the tree digging with power equipment and is always on hand to help the driver load a tree. This saves sending an extra man along to pick up the tree. Also, if the wind is too high for spraying, the foreman stays on the job at the nursery. Both he and his brother maintain tree nurseries.

Dinsmore follows the practice of keeping well-trained men as the

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

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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

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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.

