

## VIEWPOINT

Bruce Shank, Editor

A recent editorial on landscape industry trade journals by Morton Herrman, president of the California Landscape and Irrigation Council, in its publication the Professional Landscape Contractor brought up a number of controversial points.

As editor of a landscape industry trade journal, I'd like to answer some of Herrman's charges. First, you can read what he had to say, and then I'll tell you what I think.

**Industry neglected**

"I feel that our segment of the industry has been sadly neglected by the California-based trade publications. For one reason or another their editorial staffs seem chain-bound to their desks, and are reluctant to pick up their telephones or leave their offices to find out what's happening in the industry. They seem more dedicated to soliciting advertising than in serving the needs of their readers in the landscape design and contracting professions. When was the last time you saw a story about an imaginative landscape construction project, or any kind of relevant, in-depth story on a landscape contractor or architect in one of our commercial trade publications?" *Herrman.*

**Mr. Herrman's remarks** should not be limited to California-based publications. He is right, to a great extent we are chained to our desks by the size of the task on hand and the staff available to do it. Trade magazines in the Green Industry rarely have more than two full-time editors. But, there is no excuse for not using the phone. We estimate that road time costs \$750 per week, a significant sum for any organization. We have to use it where it makes the most impact, such as for major trade shows. In 1979, however, we plan to attend more regional shows to improve our ties with regional interests.

Trade magazines can very easily forget the reader and become solely a tool for advertisers. This is why a trade magazine should have completely separate sales and editorial departments. The editor must defend his professional goal to serve his readers at all times. But, you should remember that without advertisers there are no trade magazines. Subscriptions, although very important for magazine stability, usually represent less than ten percent of gross revenue. You can't disregard 90 percent of your business, can you?

I agree that the landscape contractor has not received worthy coverage at times in the past few years. We have made a concerted effort to cover problems affecting landscaping contracting this past year and profiled at least four firms. Please read the articles on the landscape contractor/architect/nurseryman relationship in 1978. The architect has a fine publication through the American Society of Landscape Architects. The Associated Landscape Contractors of America has made great strides in serving the specialized needs of contractors through new affiliation with state and regional associations. Perhaps California

should strengthen its ties with the national groups and stop depending on state publications and groups entirely.

**Culture not our concern**

"I get so bored with the endless parade of tedious articles on turfgrass culture and rare ornamental diseases. How much more can you say about a blade of grass that hasn't been said before? We let the growers worry about plant culture and all those dreaded, little-known diseases. If a problem shows up on one of our landscape jobs, we call the grower who sold us the stuff, or some other professional who is far more qualified to diagnose and solve the problem than we are." *Herrman.*

**A contractor** who installs only and leaves the problem solving to someone else is making a terrible personal and professional mistake. Asking for help when needed is one thing, but leaving all "culture" to others goes against the principle that a person should strive to know all there is to know about his field. You are not a plumber or electrician who can install and forget. You are dealing with living organisms which are complex and susceptible to disease and insect attack, not inert wires and pipe.

Many people feel offended by seemingly over sophisticated articles written by our major extension agronomists and arborists. For this reason we try to rephrase such research in staff written material. Researchers are learning to write more on an understandable level, but they can't change overnight. They want to help and get their findings to as many readers as possible. However, it would be wrong to restrict this material to research journals only. Many readers need it.

You may pass the buck to the grower, but the general contractor is looking to you for answers. You must at least be able to make a general diagnosis to know which expert to call.

I greatly disapprove of layering knowledge in landscape contracting or any turf and tree field. There is a great deal to know about a blade of grass, especially when improved turfgrass varieties are considered. The contractor has to ask the grower for improved turfgrass in sod, not the other way around. When a certain tree species fails to survive in your area more than 20 percent of the time, you are the one to alert the growers and to signal a need for research on the problem.

The future of landscape contracting is in broadening knowledge, not dividing it. The design/build firm, the nurseryman contractor, and the arborist contractor are doing well today because they offer the most from a single source for customers. To grow in this way requires a vast amount and breadth of information. This information is what we, as trade editors, are trying to provide. Reject it if you like. But many readers want it, need it, and ask for more. **WTT**