

LETTERS

Parks face political problems

I wish to comment on the article in January's publication of "Park Maintenance Begins With Design."

"YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR"

is an old saying that I feel needs to be added to Professor Haskell's article in January's WEEDS, TREES & TURF.

During a portion of my professional career, while employed by consulting firms and self-employed, I have worked for and consulted with public agencies. Some agencies I dealt with employed under-qualified and unknowledgeable personnel who were responsible for giving important design criteria information to consultants. The agencies probably saved money in salaries, but ended up with a poorly designed project which was considerably over budget.

It seems some agencies hired consultants for political reasons, or hired consultants who would do the work for the least amount of compensation; again, this would promote poor design.

If public agencies are sincere about their project being competently designed, as Professor Haskell points out in his article, the agencies might start by hiring qualified personnel who in turn know good design from poor design, who are not placed in the position of retaining consultants for political reasons, and who have the background of experience to insure that the consultants do what is best for the agency — not what is best for the consultant.

"YOU PAY FOR WHAT YOU GET" both in professional "In-House" employees and consultants. You pay one way or the other.

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Message to landscapers

At best, a landscaper is a farmer at heart, working with soil and nature, toiling nine or ten months of the year, working some twelve to fifteen hours a day, using much the same equipment. The main exception is that the landscaper has many more unknown factors to consider. Plant material availability is becoming a serious problem and, after locating and planting same, is subjected to damage by all extreme elements of the weather. One exception to the farmer is that much of the work has to be performed by hand using shovels and small hand tools. The landscaper has to have an intricate knowledge of plants, growing habits, soil conditions, diseases, and plant growing requirements. Quality of plant material varies and vigilant expertise has to be practiced at all times.

The landscaper assumes a great responsibility when he estimates a landscape project. In most instances he calculates that "normal" or "average" weather conditions will prevail during the growing period for the plants. This fallacy has cost much money in plant replacement.

In many respects a landscaper is much like a doctor . . . A doctor works on human birth, growth, illness and injury, and the degeneration of the body which is comparable to the nurseryman or landscaper who works with live plants. Plant propagation, early growth and care, plus threats from weather conditions, diseases, injury, insect devastation, ground composition, location, and changing conditions as to shade and water levels, constitute a formidable problem and challenge for the estimator. The landscaper takes on a tremendous responsibility in making his designs and plantings and, in most cases, assumes and hopes that everything will be favorable for his plant material to survive and properly grow according to the landscape plan. Unexpected weather conditions quickly change this possibility.

For the responsibility entailed in the foregoing paragraphs, it seems idiotic for a landscaper to charge or estimate low rates just for the sake of getting the job. Forgetting to include an adequate amount to compensate sufficiently for the expertise is non-professional. Not considering all expenses and costs and working for a wage much below a "sanitary engineer" or sweeper in a factory, with no vacations, medical benefits, or certainty of work, is also non-professional.

If we consider ourselves to be professionals and want to up-grade our industry, then let us start by doing professional work, start paying adequate wages commensurate with associated industry, and start charging realistic rates to compensate us properly for our knowledge, expertise, and endeavors.

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