

## Time to Specialize

Government agencies reap new benefits from computers and specialized landscape managers.

by Bruce F. Shank, executive editor, and Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

Government landscape managers range from volunteers to school superintendents, from janitors to generals, and from football coaches to engineers.

Despite the inconsistency, all landscape managers seem to be facing the same challenges; intensive use of baseball and soccer fields, the increasing need to justify expenditures, and dealing with the boss, the taxpayer.

We polled a variety of government landscape managers to get a feel for their problems and their solutions. This is more a slice-of-life report than a numerical listing of purchases or acreage.

### Computer use up

We discovered the computer is rapidly gaining acceptance with government landscape managers. They are using computers to keep track of trees, equipment repair parts, scheduling, and to keep taxpayers posted on department activities.

Community size doesn't seem to matter. Eric Anspaugh, superintendent of Kettering, OH, parks, and George Eib, superintendent of forestry and landscaping for Kansas City, MO, both use computers.

Landscape managers may have to share computer time with the street

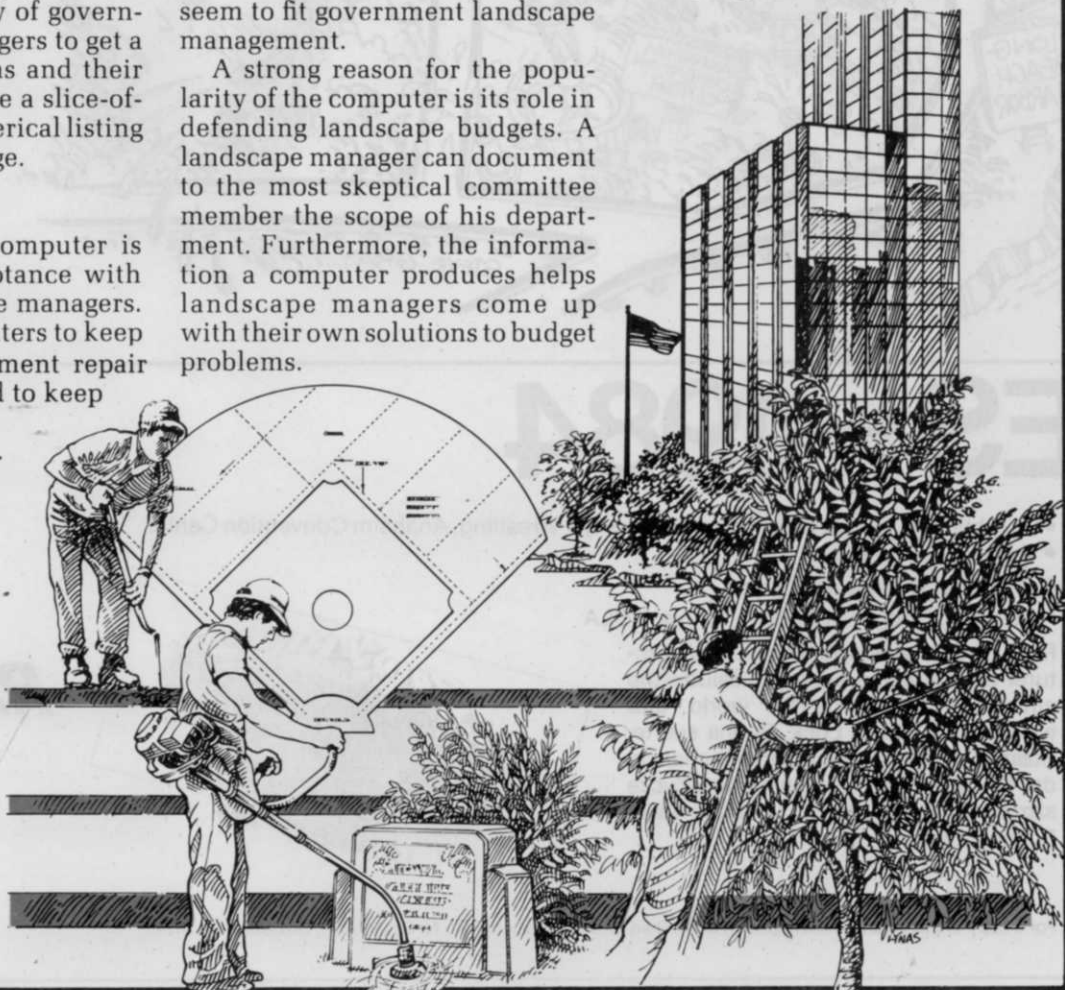
recreation departments, but they have access to a tool that helps them control labor, communicate with taxpayers, and justify needs.

Access to a computer does not seem to be a problem. Every person we talked to indicated their agency was willing and even anxious to help them. Setting up programs and record keeping systems are cited as early hurdles, but once these are cleared, computers seem to fit government landscape management.

A strong reason for the popularity of the computer is its role in defending landscape budgets. A landscape manager can document to the most skeptical committee member the scope of his department. Furthermore, the information a computer produces helps landscape managers come up with their own solutions to budget problems.

Kansas City is an example of creative computer use. Faced with smaller and smaller increases in his budget, George Eib realized he had to find a method to guarantee his department would have money to replace important equipment as it aged.

With the help of a computer, he devised an equipment amortization program. The replacement



value of key equipment (trucks, cars, mowers, etc.) is divided by its useful life. This amount is built into his budget each year and placed into an equipment replacement account. Eib does not have to make a capital expenditure request each time a piece of equipment needs to be replaced. It paid off this year when Kansas City froze Eib's budget.

Kettering's Anspaugh is lucky to have funds from a recent income tax increase in this city south of Dayton. Nevertheless, with the help of a computer he has documented the cost of maintaining each of 33 baseball fields under his care. Armed with this information, it's easier to win financial support from leagues using the fields. During summer

leagues his crew has to drag and reline nearly 30 fields each day. When leagues ask for fancier dugouts or bullpens, he has the data to negotiate.

### Specialization

Many of the battles with boards can be eliminated when public agencies recognize the special knowledge and needs of landscape managers and provide them with a more direct link to decision makers.

Lenoir, NC, has specialized all city landscape needs into a single department whose manager reports directly to the city manager.

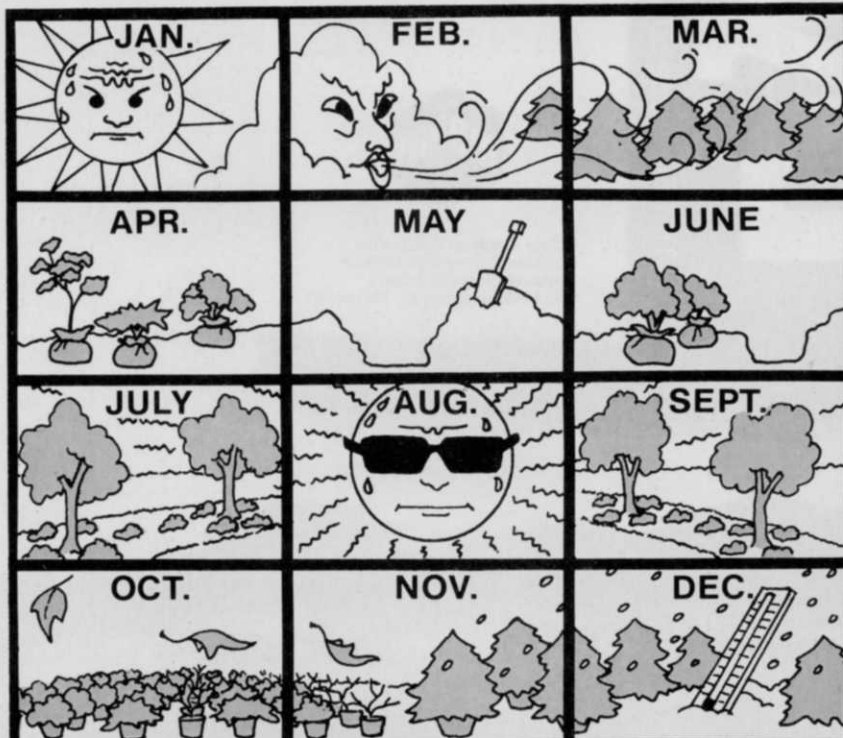
John Abernethy, the first person to be certified by the Professional Grounds Management Society in 1981, is the landscape superintendent in Lenoir, an important furniture manufacturing center. "My department does many of the things public works and recreational departments normally do," he explains. "We take care of street trees, cemeteries, athletic fields, and parks, and plant 4,000 tulips and 6,000 annuals each year around the city. The advantage is I go directly to the city manager when I need something, not a citizen committee."

"Recreation and public works departments simply don't understand what's needed to properly care for public landscapes. They tend to look at landscape maintenance as an area to cut when budgets get tight. It's much easier to explain the biological needs of plants to one person than a group," Abernethy stated.

Specialization plays an important role at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, NY. All pest control, from mice to weeds, is the responsibility of Theodore Copertino. His crew of seven controls weeds, diseases, structural pests, and outdoor pests from nematodes to gypsy moth.

This specialization gives John Nosick, head of maintenance, time to focus on facility maintenance.

*continued on page 88*



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nance, including mowing, roads, buildings, a golf course, and the West Point stadium. When you have 16,000 acres to take care of, 1,500 of this high maintenance, you simply don't have time to give plants the special attention they need.

In past surveys, we have found autonomous park districts receive stronger support for the horticultural and agronomic needs of landscapes. Joel Carter, chairman of the Ornamental Horticulture Department, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, suggests the best park administrators are those who appreciate horticulture and park management. "Lean too much in either direction (horticulture or park administration) and your ability to make decisions is limited," Carter said.

### Public schools

If managers of park landscapes have to constantly sell their programs just to meet basic needs, imagine what managers of public school landscapes have to face. At least in a park the purpose is recreation in a natural, outdoor setting. At schools, the purpose is education, and everything else is secondary.

For this report we interviewed maintenance managers and school superintendents. Clarence Lee, maintenance manager of Valley View Schools, Romeoville, IL, is responsible for 350 acres, 16 schools and a \$750,000 budget. His staff of five does it all, often transporting equipment from one school to another.

"My biggest job is keeping kids off the grass while we are trying to make repairs," Lee said. "In the summer I use CETA workers to help us catch up. During the growing season, we spend nearly all our time mowing. It takes us a week to do all the schools and then we start over again. The three high school football fields receive special attention, including aerification, extra fertilization and weed control. Our budget to do all this has grown about five percent per year."

The budget is slim and needs



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are basic for Ervin Himmerich, maintenance manager of New Richland School District, MN. He has to focus on priorities, such as changing the track to metric and the football field. However, he does apply postemergence herbicides in the spring and fertilizes athletic fields.

Edward Schultz is landscape manager for two school districts in Iowa, Elkhorn and Kimballton. He reports to two school boards and has a combined budget of \$85,000.

Schultz relies on Iowa State University agronomists for big problems, yet he leaves most chemical decisions to his staff of four. The two systems put the emphasis on their football and baseball fields, out of a total of 17 acres of turf. He makes certain herbicides and fertilizers are applied each year. His equipment includes one garden tractor, a gang mower, and a custom-built sprayer.

Richard Stegman is director of buildings and grounds for Goodland Unified School District, Goodland, KS. The district has 14 buildings and 40 acres. Again, summer CETA workers help Stegman out.

Stegman's main concerns are energy costs and the physical structure of the school system, such as plumbing, painting, and electrical.

For the landscape, he depends greatly on his extension agent and his equipment dealer. He uses one John Deere and one Ford farm tractor, two Ford riding mowers, a 72-inch Excel Hustler mower, and a 110-gallon boom sprayer. He uses liquid fertilizers and herbicides.

William Armstrong is superintendent of schools, Bellvue, KY, a city of 8,000. His mind is occupied mainly with the education and welfare of 1,100 students. For the fields, which he "is attempting to keep grass on", he relies on extension for expertise. There is no one person specifically in charge of grounds, nor is there a budget for grounds. But, he believes roughly \$500 to \$1,000 is spent each year for seeding, fertilizing and renovating. The district uses a commercial service for fertilization and weed control when needed.

## Public relations

As the computer is included more in the management of public landscapes, the doors also open for better communication with taxpayers. Since many public agencies share computers, they have the ability to share data. If the school district or parks department has a mailing list, landscape managers may be able to share this list to present their case to the public.

Perhaps the separate landscape department in Lenoir, NC, is an exception. But, it may also represent a trend. Schools and recreation are often given separate status, why not landscape management?

The way to achieve this beneficial status is through public relations, educating the public to the importance and special needs of plants as opposed to buildings, roads and sewage systems. The computer gives landscape managers the chance to state their case directly to the taxpayer, with accurate data.

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