

Courting Success

"Growing people," a commitment to quality and delivering what the client wants are specialties of the Brickman group -- one of the largest design/build, maintenance companies in the nation.

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

Dick Brickman makes success seem so easy.

Like an athlete in training, his companies, Brickman Industries and the Theodore Brickman Co., continually reach for the best -- in recruiting, training, management and motivation of their people and excellence in all phases of their work.

"Some teams play offense, some defense. We do both," says Brickman, 52, president and chief executive officer of the Brickman group.

Simply, Brickman's statement sums up the corporate philosophy of one of the major success stories in the design/build, maintenance

business. Brickman Industries, the maintenance portion of the business, and the Theodore Brickman Co., the design/build portion, forming the Brickman group, is the largest company of its kind in the country.

Dollar volume for 1983 is expected to be around \$14 million. Next year, the company hopes to do \$16 million. Brickman also owns the 40-acre Maple Leaf Nursery in Long Grove, IL. It supplies to Brickman jobs only. The Brickman corporate client list includes AT&T, Allied Corporation, Arco Chemicals, Bell Labs, Exxon, McDonalds Corp. and Rust-oleum. Condominium and apart-



John Mickle, left, marketing and sales manager for the East territory, Don Synnestvedt, operations manager of Brickman Industries, and Dick Brickman, president and chief executive officer of the Brickman group.

ment projects, shopping centers, banks, insurance companies, industrial parks, universities, recreation centers, office buildings, private businesses and residences have all been a part of the company's extensive job list.

Brickman does no advertising. It's finished projects are its greatest public relations tool.

And while Dick Brickman is proud of the projects his company has worked on, it is in the company's people where the greatest investment has been made.

"We can only grow as quickly as we can grow people," says Brickman, sitting in his newest branch office in Langhorne, PA, right outside of Philadelphia.

"We look to long-term tenure of our employees and because of this we have very low turnover. We want to grow for financial reasons,



A condominium development in Lancaster, PA, before and after the Brickman group designed and executed the landscaping.

but equally important to us is growing to satisfy the creative needs of our employees."

Teamwork

Intensive training programs, continuing education on the enrichment and graduate levels, and regular discussion sessions with employees and supervisors are some of Brickman's ways of investing in his people.

"As chief executive officer, it's my job to be the main company cheerleader and set the motivational tone. Everyone has his own style. I'm not a speech-giver. I believe in more personal contact. I have a dedicated, sincere interest

in our people."

The corporate structure of the company is streamline. Dick Brickman, as president, oversees the entire company and is responsible for planning, major clients and policy-making. His brother, Bob, in Long Grove, is executive vice president. Don Synnestvedt, in Langhorne, is operations manager of Brickman Industries and oversees all four of the company's maintenance divisions. Bruce Hunt in Illinois is operations manager of design/build with a Langhorne and Long Grove division employing 20 landscape architects. On the same level is a finance head and marketing sales

manager, each with an east and west division. Depending on the season, Brickman employs between 200 and 500 people. Each Brickman office, in Long Grove, Langhorne, Morristown, NJ and Laurel, MD, has developed its own, specific training program.

In the maintenance division, employees are given a 28-component test, ranging from job planning to employee relations representing 400 hours of training. The division also has a 40-hour winter program.

Behavioral analysis tests are given before promotions and everyone is evaluated semi-annually.



A sculpturing of the landscape, a Brickman group philosophy, is evident at the Oakbrook Club, a multi-residential development in Oak Brook, IL.

"While there is no pass/fail, this type of test gives phenomenal insight into a person," explained Brickman. "Sometimes we've seen the results years later."

For the most part, the company has formulated its own training programs, but has also adapted from corporate training programs such as Perron-Ambrose and Kraft.

Everything from MBA degrees to personal enrichment courses are encouraged -- and financed -- by Brickman after an employee has been with the company a year.

"We've never declined a request from an employee for any kind of course," said Brickman.

When hiring, the Brickman group is looking more and more

toward trained managers, people from graduate and specialty schools and strong on the business side.

"Traditionally, the type of person attracted to this field are those who like to make things look healthy and who are more 'artsy.' There aren't too many with a business background."

Brickman said 80 percent of the company's recruiting is done through schools.

The company also plans to formally start "quality circle" groups. In these sessions a trained leader or superintendent meets with employees once a week to hash out company issues as they apply to customers.

"This really gives us a chance

to get our field people involved in the decision-making process," explained Brickman.

At a more basic level, Brickman believes in cross-training his employees to provide the type of service clients need. The designers are taught what goes into maintaining a project and the maintenance group is taught to understand the intent of the design.

Back door

"Our designers are in the field," he says. "In the client's mind we provide a total service, that's why we cross train."

Brickman said design/build used to be considered unprofessional. Now, it is the fastest grow-

ing segment of the industry. Profit in this area is no longer a dirty word.

"With many firms today, design/build is looked upon as a fad," said Brickman. "Some contractors have looked to it to avoid the bidding process." At Brickman, design/build is hardly a fad.

"We look on design/build as a sculpturing process," said Brickman. "The execution is as much a design project as it is at the conceptual stage. We want to control a project until it looks right."

The design philosophy at Brickman keeps in mind the costs of construction and maintenance. The way a design is put together effects the maintenance.

Brickman got into the maintenance end of the business through the proverbial back door.

It was while the company was working on the McDonald's hamburger corporate headquarters in Oakbrook, IL, that the question of maintenance surfaced.

"I remember Fred Turner (of McDonald's) asking me once we completed our work, who was going to take care of it," recalled Brickman. "You can guess what our answer was. That's when we really got started in the maintenance business."

So, in 1977, the company turned its attention to aggressively pursuing just maintenance contracts.

Maintenance, now the foundation of the company's revenues, accounts for 60 percent of business (around \$8 or \$9 million) and Brickman would like to see it become 2/3 of the company's business in the future.

Don Synnestvedt, maintenance operations manager, oversees all four of the company's maintenance operations. Synnestvedt's background has been in the landscaping and nursery business, working with his uncle, Ralph, at Synnestvedt Nurseries in the Chicago area. He has been with Brickman 13 years and is now based in Langhorne, where, with his other duties, is temporarily in charge of the maintenance division there.

Besides the obvious financial

benefits of the division, Brickman says one of the most important things about maintenance is it serves as the "security blanket" for the company's design/build division.

"Because we maintain a project, we can preserve the design integrity our architects have built into each site.

"Our getting into maintenance was a stroke of genius," Brickman continued, "because it provides

Brickman believes in cross-training his employees to provide the type of service clients' expect.

us with an insurance for a project. If properly designed and maintained, a project can be an asset that really grows."

Because of the quality of its work, the company has won many awards, and, according to Brickman, these are the company's best calling cards.

"The area we've really been deficient in is marketing and strategic planning," Brickman said in the Chicago area especially, there are a number of firms copying their work - and cutting prices to do it.

"We've been a little too complacent (in the marketing area)," he said.

That lack of strategic planning, though, hasn't seemed to hobble the company's growth.

In the beginning

Theodore W. Brickman, Dick's father, is the founder of the Brickman group. At 77, he is chairman of the board and still keeps abreast of the company's business. It is Dick, though, who runs the day-to-day affairs. Brickman Sr. was drawn into the horticultural business in Texas. Later he was in charge of the gardens at the Century of Progress International

Exposition in Chicago in the 30s.

In 1939, after working with the Chicago Park System as a horticulturist, he started his own landscape business in Glenview, IL. His business was interrupted in 1941 with the start of World War II and gas rationing. In 1945, Brickman reopened his business. It wasn't until 1957 that Dick Brickman, after getting his degree in landscape architecture from the University of Illinois, joined his father. In 1959, Theodore Brickman Co. was incorporated and moved to Long Grove. Bob Brickman became active in the firm in 1961. With Dick's arrival and that of Bruce Hunt in 1961 (Hunt is currently operations manager of design/build), the company started to evolve away from its "grass cutting" image and into landscaping. "When we first started out in the business, we were mainly in residential," recalls Brickman. "I got sick of dealing with housewives. We went through a transitional period where we didn't do any residential work."

A project for Standard Oil was their first major design/build job.

"We got the contract for landscaping all the Oasis gas stops along the Illinois Toll Road," recalled Brickman. "That one job was worth more than we made all year. It scared the hell out of Dad. As it turned out, we did the project, but on a smaller scale."

Now, most of the company's contracts are in the commercial and institutional areas, although if a major client needs something residential done, Brickman will usually do it.

"We've had some very successful residential projects," he said.

With the company's continued growth, branch offices continue to be a necessity; operations in Langhorne were set up in 1977, in the Washington area in 1980.

"We create branches where it's necessary within the limits of our resources - mainly people resources," said Brickman.

Brickman says he has no plans
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