

Condominium and apartment maintenance managers have found the key to a successful working relationship is as old as the hills—keep the lines of communication open. In the rapidly growing condominium field, it is an integral ingredient.

A Simple Formula

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

There are no secret formulas for facility managers for having a good professional working relationship with condominium association boards. The formula is simple—communicate with each other.

That's the feeling of most of the respondents in an informal WEEDS TREES & TURF market survey among condo, apartment, and resort maintenance and management personnel. Most respondents were employed by condo associations and care for, on the average, 132.6 units.

"It's important to identify the key players (on a board) early in negotiations," explains one manager. "Some members are vocal, but may have little direct relation to decision-making."

Another suggested that a detailed

explanation of the work to be performed be given in advance of the maintenance agreement.

One manager took that one step further—have a written, specific contract and have all board members sent a copy of the contract, and where possible, a copy to every unit owner. They, in turn, should give a monthly written evaluation of the work being done.

Of those surveyed, three-quarters felt communication was their greatest ally.

Major complaints among respondents include finding qualified help, and on the other side of the coin, working for owners and boards who have no concept of landscaping and what it takes to keep the grounds the way they'd like them.

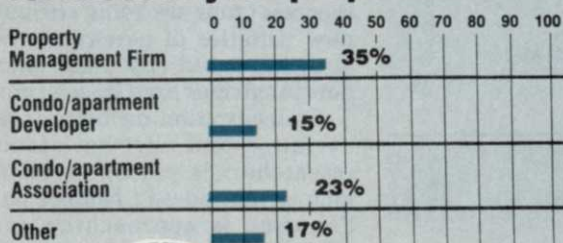
The quality of today's labor force, inexperienced staffers not paying attention to detail, and constant turnover of labor were all cited as trouble spots.

Another sore spot is integrity.

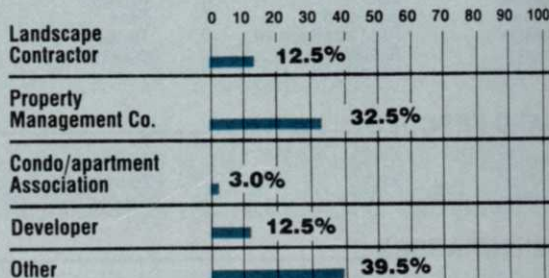
Says one manager, "Our largest problem is loosing large contracts to other contractors who we know are performing inferior work and not following specifications. Often cheaper chemicals or less quantity are used which may make a substantial difference in price. We hesitate to call this to the attention of the client though, since it would appear like sour grapes, and certainly unprofessional. We frequently find that purchasing agents or condo associations are not qualified technically to recognize the difference."

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Who hires the landscaping crew or contractor for most of your properties?



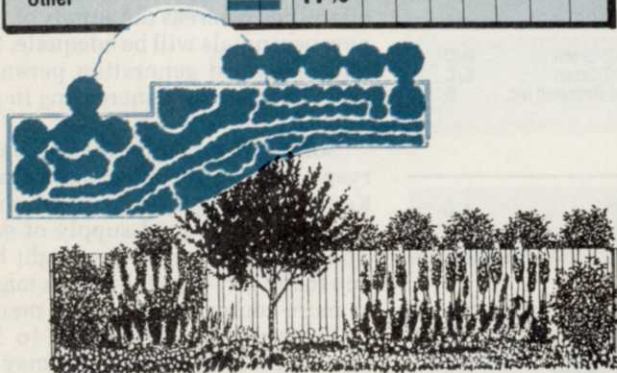
Who specifies the landscape program?



Do you plan and purchase chemicals?



*Those surveyed were responsible for an average of 132.6 condominium and/or apartment landscapes.



Making Heads Turn

Steve Bizon is an aggressive 28-year-old who knows it takes innovation, commitment and new ideas to make a fledgling maintenance company a winner.

The condos at Charbonneau are a testament to the kind of service Bizon delivers.

by Ron Hall, assistant editor



Aerial view of Charbonneau condominium complex in Oregon. Photos by Larry Kassell.



Steve Bizon behind the Toro tee mower he modified to a walk-behind.

When complaints start zinging around the room during a meeting of a condominium board they can often pierce the hide of even the toughest maintenance contractor.

Steve Bizon, the 28-year-old owner of Bizon Maintenance Company near Portland, OR, tries to blunt the barbs with a simple formula; and although his ideas have yet to stand the test of time (he's been in business just five years), he's off to an encouraging start.

"Some of the other maintenance companies are already starting to copy some of the things we do," Bizon claims.

Young and aggressive, he attacks potential problems before they get to the gripe stage, then he makes sure word gets back to where it counts—to the condominium board, a philosophy that has worked beautifully in the 1½ years his company has held the maintenance contract for one section of the classy Charbonneau condominium complex on the banks of the Willamette.

Charbonneau, just outside of Portland, is practically a community unto itself, a 600 acre, 764-unit complex with an 18-hole golf course, tennis courts, swimming pools, and shopping center.

Bizon holds the maintenance contract for the Charbonneau Greens Town Home section of Charbonneau, with 49 units, the smallest of the the three associations.

As small as it is, it's not without a bite.

It gave the previous maintenance contractor the heave ho.

Bizon is determined not to let that happen to him.

All important image

Charbonneau, even though condominiums make up just 20 percent of his business (the remaining 80 percent is strictly commercial), is a showy advertisement for his services, Bizon feels.

Also, he makes no secret he's eyeing the contracts from the other associations at Charbonneau, quite a plum considering the size and the variety of maintenance tasks in this community which was begun in the early 1960s.

"When we take a job we agree to provide all the maintenance from the front door to the property line. That includes the parking lot, the sidewalks, just about everything," Bizon says.

Charbonneau is his type of account. It has class, just the image he

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Shown above, the Hitchin' Post condominiums, North Chelmsford, MA. At left, Joe Dallorso favors petunias for their hardiness and vivid color.

One Man Show

Organization is Joe Dallorso's best friend to help him manage the grounds and buildings at the Hitchin' Post, a condo development in a rapidly growing condo area on the outskirts of Boston.

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

Being a one-man maintenance crew can have its advantages and disadvantages.

For Joe Dallorso, maintenance manager at the Hitchin' Post condos in North Chelmsford, MA, his Lone Ranger status lets one of his strongest attributes shine through—organization.

Dallorso's small but neat office on the grounds of the 77-unit complex hints at his business style—books organized by height on shelves; screws, nuts and bolts in neat organizers, log books kept with a month to month, week to week schedule of fertilizing.

"Being a one person staff I have to be organized," explains Dallorso. "I also have to know what I can get away with not doing because there are only

so many hours in a day."

Besides the grounds, Dallorso also does building repair and maintenance which takes up about 20 percent of his time, takes care of a swimming pool and a tennis court.

Condo hotseat

In his area of New England, Dallorso is in the hotseat of condominium development. In his area about an hour north of Boston, condominium developments are springing up everywhere.

Many high tech companies are locating there, such as Wang, bringing with them single professionals and newly-married couples ready to invest in a home. Condominiums, for a variety of reasons, are the obvious choice.

"Our Route 128 here is to North Chelmsford what the Silicon Valley is to California," says the 29-year-old.

Dallorso estimates that there are over a dozen condo developments in a five mile radius to the Hitchin' Post.

"Condominiums are the overall trend in New England," Dallorso says. "And sales of these condos ultimately comes down to how the property is maintained. It adds tremendously to resale value which potential consumers are concerned with."

Since he has been at the development for the past three years, Dallorso's plan of attack has been a slow, systematic upgrading of the facility and is in keeping with his philosophy of wanting not only to maintain, but improve the grounds.

"My major battle was and still is sparse grass," he admits. Dallorso inherited Kentucky 31 Tall Fescue that was custom blended by the builder. He has since overseeded that with perennial rye and Kentucky bluegrass.

Waiting on a new sprinkler system that was installed in August had Dallorso at an impasse. He has 250,000 square feet of turf to keep lush and green. With the area's sandy soil and

poor drainage, that was rather hard to do.

"I had reached a point where there really wasn't anything I could do without a new system."

And before getting that, he had to convince the three trustees of the condominium board that assessing each unit owner \$400 was in the best future interest of their property. When put to a vote, the measure passed with an 85 percent majority and only minimal grumbling.

He says he has no real problems with his \$60,000 a year maintenance budget and that within reason, all his requests are usually granted.

Time for growth

With the new sprinkling system, he can now progress to a new level of maintenance; adding more flowers and making other site improvements. Along split rail fences, he has added roses and other flowering plants. Along the fronts of the condominium's he has planted various colors of petunias because of their hardiness.

One of his first orders of business

was getting the turf away from underneath shrubs and mulching around them instead. He planted about 1800 annuals around the buildings and 1200 tulips and daffodils to add color. Each resident was assessed \$12 and couldn't have been happier with the results.

Right now, Dallorso gets by with one 18 hp Mitsubishi Beaver III tractor. For it he has a rear-mounted, PTO-driven Woods RM48. The front end loader is a Johnson's Black Hawk No. 25. His Vandermolen fertilizer spreader doubles as a sand spreader in the winter.

He hopes with the increased level of maintenance, he can round out his machinery to give him varying and more precise cutting options.

In August, Dallorso was battling Japanese beetles with Sevin. He also has an ongoing battle with grubs (which he treats with Diazinon) and treats chinch bugs with Dursban. He uses Scotts ProTurf fertilizer. Roundup is used extensively for weed control and Surflan for pre-emergent control.

Dallorso feels he is lucky because he

has such a good working relationship with the trustees he reports to.

"Personality-wise we're very much the same," he says, "and that's important. We have no adversarial relationship."

To keep them abreast of Dallorso's activities, he gives them a weekly written progress report.

Things are looking so good that Dallorso is eyeing his own maintenance company and hopes to keep the Hitchin' Post as a client.

Professionalism is very important to Dallorso and he has strong feelings about it.

"It seems as though most people don't respect as a professional, someone who uses their hands in their jobs," he explained. "Just because I do manual labor doesn't mean I'm not a professional."

Dallorso had been studying pre-law until he started "to go insane under neon lights." He had always liked gardening and let his interests steer him in that direction. He became an apprentice laborer and learned about landscaping. He has been in the business ever since. **WT&T**

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Condos in Sunriver: Oregon's Recreational Mecca Braces for Major Growth

Nestled in the shadow of the Three Sisters mountain range and the inviting ski slopes of Mt. Bachelor, are Quelah and Alberello. The two posh condominium complexes in the Sunriver resort area are harbingers of only the beginning of a boom in growth for this central Oregon area.

by Maureen Hrehocik, managing editor

Oregon is quickly changing from a lumber capitol to a recreation mecca. More and more condos will be built to accommodate the increasing influx of tourists.

Marvin Mix, in charge of landscape maintenance at Quelah, and Mike Dawkins, his counterpart at Alberello, both predict that the Sunriver area will explode in growth within the next few years.

"It's really the only growth going on in Central Oregon," says Mix.

A road has been completed from Sunriver that cuts about 45 minutes traveling time off getting to Mt. Bachelor, one of the premiere skiing mountains in the Northwest. It has opened the floodgates for skiers. The entire Sunriver area boasts about any sport you could be interested in—golf, tennis, rafting, canoeing, horseback riding and hiking.

Both Mix and Dawkins share some of the same landscape concerns. Both Quelah and Alberello are relatively new developments (especially Alberello).

They both have growing pains. Couple that with the extreme weather fluctuations of Central Oregon and you have one of the more challenging landscape situations in the country.

Quelah

Marvin Mix got the maintenance contract to the 15-acre Quelah complex only a year ago.

He inherited a headache.

Mix is the owner of Marvin's Gardens, a private firm specializing in large, commercial landscaping projects. He also has a retail garden center and landscape architects and construction crews available to clients

who would like them. Marvin Gardens has also branched out into interiorscaping.

Landscaping, maintenance and the nursery each make up about 1/3 of his business. Mix also has the maintenance contract to Tennis Village, another Sunriver complex.

Quelah is a six-year-old, 92-unit complex. The last phase was completed a year-and-a-half ago, with an additional two phases planned.

Mix's biggest initial challenge at Quelah was the irrigation system. It was badly maintained with most of the lines lying bare on top of the dirt. The systems in all four phases were different.

"We redid the whole system," says Mix. "We had one good system out of those four."

Mix's next order of business was to plant \$10,000 worth of shrubs once the irrigation work was done.

Tricky weather

The weather provides a real challenge

Mike Dawkins, landscape manager at Alberello, is a strong proponent of native plants and drip irrigation for his complex.



for landscapers in Central Oregon. Thirty-one degree nights in August are nothing out of the ordinary.

More often than not, we have a freeze every month of the year," explains Mix. "September is the first freeze and by November we have snow."

The snow can last until April. Ice damage on turf can be high. Mix's growing season is from April to October.

Quelah's lawns are fertilized four times a year. The soil is a sandy pumice that leaches nutrients readily. Mix uses a 12-12-12 fertilizing mixture.

"If I need a quick green-up I add ammonium nitrate."

Mowing on the combination bluegrass perennial rye lawns is done every week with Toro and Honda mowers.

Two of Mix's 40 employees put in about 10-12 hours a week maintaining Quelah.

Most of the units are rentals. The development only has four permanent residents. Because of the high number of transient residents, Mix says vandalism is high.

"People come in and fool with the controls on the sprinkler systems and try to reset them. With the turnover in guests, this happens often."

Mix is a great believer in the color flowers can provide. Among the native kinnikinnick groundcover, he uses perennials and wildflowers.

"I like staying with natural, indigenous plants," reports Mix. He has more perennials included in his 1985 landscaping plan.

"This year I'm just trying to get everything greened-up and up to a respectable level. Next year, we'll



Residents of Quelah get a spectacular view of Mt. Bachelor and the surrounding Sunriver resort area.



Native **poppies** provide color in Marvin Mix's landscape plan for Quelah.

start refining things."

Alberello

Don't mention the word "bark" to Mike Dawkins.

The landscape maintenance manager at the brand new Alberello condos will grimace.

"You mention low maintenance and native landscaping and most contractors (around here) think of junipers and bark."

Not Mike Dawkins.

He is a firm believer that native doesn't have to be synonymous with stark. Native flowers and shrubs are an integral part of his landscape designs. Using drip irrigation is also high on the list of priorities.

Dawkins, 38, is one of three partners in Cascade Garden Center. The company has 30 clients, mainly residential. Most are landscape design cli-

ents, not maintenance. In fact, the barely year-old Alberello is his only townhouse/condo maintenance contract. Only 10 of its 26 units are completed. The rest are currently being built. Alberello has two permanent residents. Most units are vacation homes; the others vacation rentals. Units start at \$145,000.

Each unit has its own courtyard which is completely irrigated.

Dawkins can't say enough about drip irrigation. He uses Microjets which are most widely used in citrus grove irrigation.

"The way the water is put out, it's just like a slow, soaking rain," explains Dawkins, "and it usually costs about 1/4 of what traditional systems cost to run. That leaves me more money for plants."

Dawkins also likes the ease of installing drip systems.

"I think cost and ignorance are the main reasons why more people don't use it (drip)."

Dawkins used Fortress fine fescue in the area between the residences and the golf course onto which Alberello abutts.

"It's a low maintenance grass that blends well into the rough of the golf course," he says.

Chipmunks are a major problem at Alberello and Quelah. Situated in the Deschutes National Forest, the area is full of them. They find Dawkins' succulent plants a particular treat.

"They're a real problem and we have to design what we plant around the critters."

Like Mix, lack of a growing season is also a problem for Dawkins.

He uses a lot of native kinnikinnick

groundcover to "cement" the earth. Potentilla, another native flowering deciduous shrub, is used extensively. Beds of daffodils and rambling roses are also used for color.

An alpine garden is in the works for a slope on one side of the tennis courts. Three hundred plants from as far away as South Africa, Asia and the Himalayas, will provide a stunning focal point on the slope facing the entrance to the complex.

"The different types of plants will provide different color breaks and will extend the blooming season. The alpine plants will also keep with the natural setting of the woods and rocks."

Penstemmons, saponaria, phlox, campanula, sedum and saxifraga will be part of the garden.

Dawkins, a bird lover, said he plants a lot of berry-bearing bushes such as choke cherries, beech plum, viburnum and manzanita.

Dawkins has been a full-time landscaper since age 17. He grew up on a golf course surrounded by a housing development his father owned. He did the landscaping there and his career as a professional landscaper was launched.

He majored in biology with an emphasis in botany at Southern Oregon State. He's lived in the Sunriver area seven years.

He did the landscaping there and his career as a professional landscaper was launched.

Dawkins and his partners are optimistic about the area's growth. Business has been so good, Cascade Gardens usually will not maintain a development it didn't design. **WT&T**

wants Bizon Maintenance to project.

His employees (there are 10 in addition to younger brother Phillip and himself) are fully uniformed with green pants and brown shirts, his company trucks are gloss white Chevy pickups with matching trailers, and his mowing equipment gets a thorough washing at the end of each work day.



Charbonneau Greens Town Homes association chairman Robert Martin, Phil Bizon and Steve Bizon.

Even his literature gets that extra touch because when he submits a bid he wants the first impression to count. The bid cover is glossy and displays his company logo in three colors.

"When we do something, we want to do it first class," Bizon stresses. "I don't mind spending an extra dollar, because sometimes it can make something look a thousand times better. That's the way we want to look and the way we operate."

So far the Charbonneau Greens Town Homes association, through its chairman Robert Martin, is responsive to Bizon's suggestions without dealing him *carte blanche*.

"Steve is doing a marvelous job," Martin says, "otherwise we'd be having a lot of meetings. We seldom have a board meeting now."

But, when it comes to approving all of Bizon's projects...?

"He tries to get a little bit extra all the time, but we're a small association and we can't always give him what he wants," Martin adds.

Even so, the condo board (pleased because it doesn't have all those stuffy meetings) and Bizon interact amicably.

Strictly business

Bizon feels the main reason is that he treats condominium maintenance much like he treats his commercial accounts.

"We insist we deal strictly with one person and not with an entire board. In the past a lot of people didn't like dealing with condominiums because there are so many different personalities to deal with. If we have to listen to everybody pretty soon our workers are listening to complaints rather than getting their work done. It's always better to have one person to deal with and that way that person can speak for the whole group."

Bizon realizes he has to bend a little, too, when dealing with a condominium board and he does by providing a written monthly report to Martin who then can make copies for board members. Bizon also makes himself available for meetings with the board.

But, it's been his company's aggressiveness in jazzing up the condo grounds that got the relationship off to a good start.

Shortly after earning the contract, Bizon initiated improvements to the lawn irrigation system. Water from the Willamette River is used in keeping lawns lush and green, but in the summer the water often carries debris

**"I felt no job
could pay me what
I was worth."**

—Steve Bizon

which clogs lines and sprinkler heads. Bizon Maintenance installed filters in both the in-coming mains then put in 1,000 new Toro 570 pop-up sprinkler heads with built in filters.

Bizon also decided to use only reel mowers on the Charbonneau property, Toro Triplex mowers which he ingeniously converted from riding to walk behinds for more maneuverability. He made the conversion by removing the mower seats and installing handlebars. Bizon says reel mowers give the grounds a neater look and also help reduce thatch build up.

With more reliable irrigation and mowing schedules the Charbonneau grounds quickly showed improvement.

The agreement between the board and Bizon stipulates the grounds are to be mowed 38 times, fertilized six times, and sprayed for broadleaf weed

control two times annually.

Self-starter

Bizon launched other projects to make noticeable improvements and earn valuable points with the board.

He started an extensive pruning project, then attacked the two traffic islands that had been allowed to grow shabby, tearing out much of the old planting and replacing it with pink and red geraniums, white azaleas, and red rhododendrons.

The colorful flower beds are a calling card for Bizon who goes into almost every job with the idea of doing something special and doing it quickly. Soon after landing the maintenance contract for O'Mark Industries in Portland, Bizon's company planted 3,000 bulbs which, when they flowered the following spring, made a sparkling display.

Bizon isn't afraid to begin tasks that may not show results for several months or even a year because he insists on a two-year contract from all his accounts.

"I'll do more for my customer this year knowing that I'll have that same customer again next year," he says. To provide his company with a winter cash flow and also as a convenience to his customers, billing is divided into 24 equal payments.

After only five years in business it's perhaps a bit early to be burdening Bizon Maintenance with the stamp of "success," but the company is visible and aggressive. And it is growing.

This is due in large part to the moxie of its owner who quit a job building components for nuclear plants to start his own business.

Bashfulness isn't one of his vices. "I felt no job could pay me what I was worth," he says candidly.

With an initial investment of \$5,000 he bought a Chevy pickup, three push mowers (two Snappers and one Tru-Cut reel mower), an edger, and a backpack blower.

He was in business.

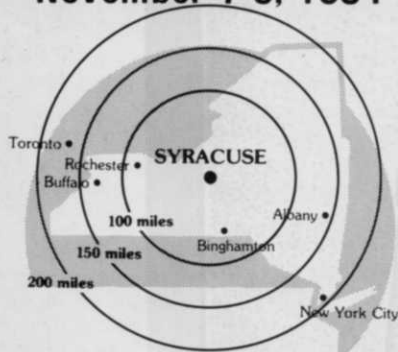
His first accounts were residential, but it didn't take Bizon long to start pushing for the commercial accounts and the pieces started falling into place. He left the residential market altogether and now brother Phillip, 24, helps share the business load.

"People didn't take good maintenance seriously a few years ago. They thought landscape first and maintenance second. Maybe it's because nobody ever showed them what good service is," Bizon says.

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SURVEY from page 22

Balancing the scales

Services such as mowing, trimming, fertilizer application, tree trimming spraying, seeding, were evenly divided between in-house crew and sub-contractors. The largest variances were in groundcover, flower care, turf seeding and herbicide application; all being done in-house in a majority of the cases.

Equipment ownership was divided fairly evenly between in-house crews and contractors. The most-frequently owned item by the facility was string line trimmers, followed by large riding mowers. The most widely owned piece of equipment by landscape contractors were small push mowers, followed by string line trimmers. On the average, they owned two large riding mowers and 4.4 small push mowers.

Of the answering respondents, an average of \$18,695 will be spent on new equipment in 1985 (a range of from \$0 to \$50,000 budgeted). An average of approximately \$5,000 is spent on chemicals per year (from \$500 to \$12,000 reported as budgeted.)

Good signs

One interesting finding of the survey is that most respondents found condo

owner associations do appreciate the difference between professional quality maintenance and less professional, seasonal bidders. There is also little decrease in interest and budget by owners after the units are sold.

These answers all bode well for the future of the industry which most described as excellent.

One manager from Orlando said, "With the tremendous growth in Orlando in the next three to five years, effective landscape maintenance will become a key element."

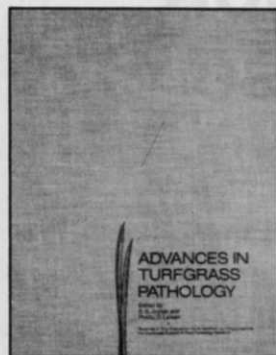
Many, too, are concerned about the integrity of their profession. One respondent felt there needs to be "regulation to limit participation to those that have chosen this as a profession, not fly by nighters." Another of his colleagues agreed.

"We need properly trained professionals. Many people can prune plants and mow lawns, but not many people do it properly. What about certification in the industry?"

Another was more pragmatic. "There seems to be more and more competition as time goes on, but I think I'm the biggest factor. If I don't do my job right, then I better worry." **WT&T**

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