

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.

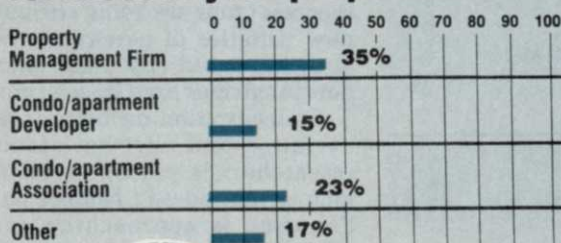
The quality of today's labor force, inexperienced staffers not paying attention to detail, and constant turnover of labor were all cited as trouble spots.

Another sore spot is integrity.

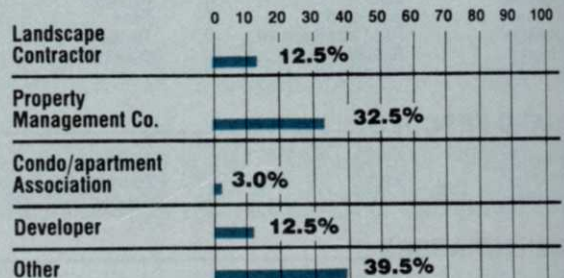
Says one manager, "Our largest problem is loosing large contracts to other contractors who we know are performing inferior work and not following specifications. Often cheaper chemicals or less quantity are used which may make a substantial difference in price. We hesitate to call this to the attention 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."

continued on page 70

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



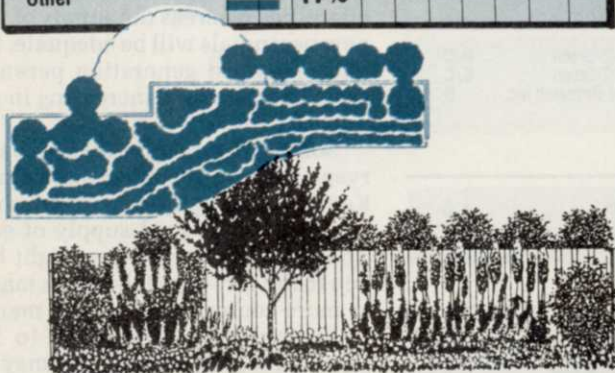
Who specifies the landscape program?



Do you plan and purchase chemicals?

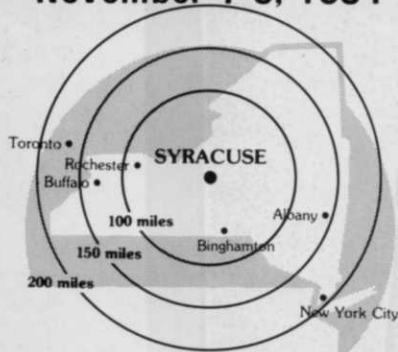


*Those surveyed were responsible for an average of 132.6 condominium and/or apartment landscapes.



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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."

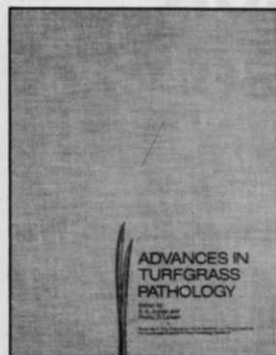
Many, too, are concerned about the integrity of their profession. One respondent felt there needs to be "regulation to limit participation to those that have chosen this as a profession, not fly by nighters." Another of his colleagues agreed.

"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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