



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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