

## Condo/apartment landscapes

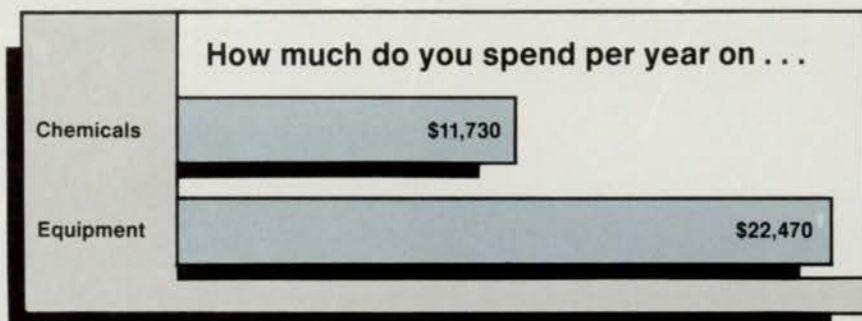
Increasing budgets can't help landscape managers conquer their number one problem: communicating with the customer.

The average condominium/apartment landscape manager saw his budget soar 10½ percent from 1985 to 1986, thanks at least in part to an increased perception among developers that a good-looking landscape will attract residents.

One respondent in a WEEDS TREES & TURF survey said that he thinks condo/apartment value increases by up to 25 percent with good landscaping.

The WT&T survey noted that budgets for those in condominium and apartment landscape management went from \$282,520 to \$312,140. Respondents also said that they will spend an average of \$11,730 each year for chemicals, and that they plan to spend an average of \$22,470 for equipment in 1986.

The key to putting that budget money to the best use? Over-



whelmingly, good communication with either the condominium association or apartment owner/manager. Other tips offered by respondents were:

- Treat all owners and renters the same. Don't do special favors unless you're willing to do them for everybody.
- Have a good knowledge of your grounds and profession, so that when management or the association asks for something you can tell them the feasibility of their request.
- Schedule in advance of upcoming events.
- Educate the customer concerning why the landscape was designed the way it was.
- Respond to complaints and queries within 24 hours.
- Define expectations of the owner/association.
- Conduct monthly site evaluations.
- Try to foresee problems before the management gets complaints.
- Make sure work is done on time and properly.

"You cannot keep them all happy," observed one condo landscape manager, "so keep the people in power happy."

The survey asked three specific questions of condo/apartment land-

scape managers, 25.6 percent of whom work for a landscape contractor and 28.2 percent of whom work for a property management company:

1) How likely is it that you will get maintenance work after the guarantee period of your installation expires?

2) From your experience, do condo owner associations appreciate the difference between professional quality maintenance and less professional seasonal bidders? and

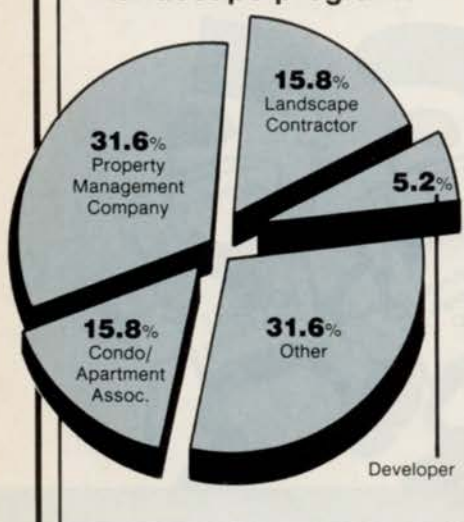
3) With condos, does the interest and budget in landscape maintenance decline after all the units have been sold?

Responses to the first two of those questions were overwhelmingly positive: 82.4 percent in the first and 73.1 percent in the second. Responses to the third question were, on the other hand, overwhelmingly negative with only 16 percent responding positively.

The typical condo/apartment landscape manager has eight small push mowers, four or five string trimmers, four or five spreaders, three or four large riding mowers, two or three turf spray units, and a couple tractors at his disposal. According to the WTT survey.

*continued on page 28*

### Who specifies the landscape program?





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Equipment ownership is divided almost exactly down the middle between the facility and the contractor, though contractors usually own tree movers and trenchers while the facility usually owns spreaders.

The average respondent in the WT&T survey is responsible for 114 condominium and/or apartment landscapes. In most cases (31.6 per-

### By far, finding good personnel was the most-cited problem by respondents.

cent), the property management company specifies the program. Only about 16 percent of the time does the contractor himself specify the program.

Typically, groundcover and flower care is done by the facility staff while all other services are just about split down the middle.

By far, finding good personnel was the most-cited problem of undertaking the landscape maintenance of a condo property.

"We try to keep workers' morale up by trying to always promote from within, and by letting different workers try different jobs," said one person. "We also have bi-monthly meetings to discuss problem areas and explain different maintenance methods."

Another problem is the tight-fisted owner who doesn't care about the landscape, just the interior. "You've got to show that person that, the potential buyer's first judgement is based on what they see as they approach the building," a respondent noted.

"The biggest problem," another said, "is finding customers to remain with you after you have proven your worth and ability. Everyone is out for the Cadillac job with the Chevette price tag."

Other evident problems with condo contracting are developing a properly trained staff, site problem detection and correction, accounts receivable, and insurance and pesticide-related problems.

Statistics were obtained from 39 valid responses from a mailing of 150 earlier this year.

WT&T

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