LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Distributors: optimistic but wary

Green Industry suppliers are becoming more aggressive in a business economy that promises good rewards, but also keener competition and tighter margins.

by Ron Hall, associate editor

The concerns—stiffer competition, shorter margins—are real. Distributors and dealers serving the Green Industry can't whistle them away. Even so, the coming months should be good ones, an informal WEEDS TREES & TURF suggests.

Our poll reveals strong distributor enthusiasm for the coming year, guarded optimism for the longer haul. It also shows distributors taking aggressive action to remain players. The stakes in the game are growing, but not fast enough to allow every would-be participant a financial score.

"We are in a growth market so business will be good," says the head of a $2.5 million dealer/distributorship. "However, margins will continue to be squeezed, particularly on our primary products: fertilizers, chemicals, and grass seed."

Almost 83 percent of those responding to the *WT&T* query (a surprising 35 percent of those contacted answered) anticipate increased sales in the coming year with 12 percent feeling business will remain about the same. Five percent see sales dropping.

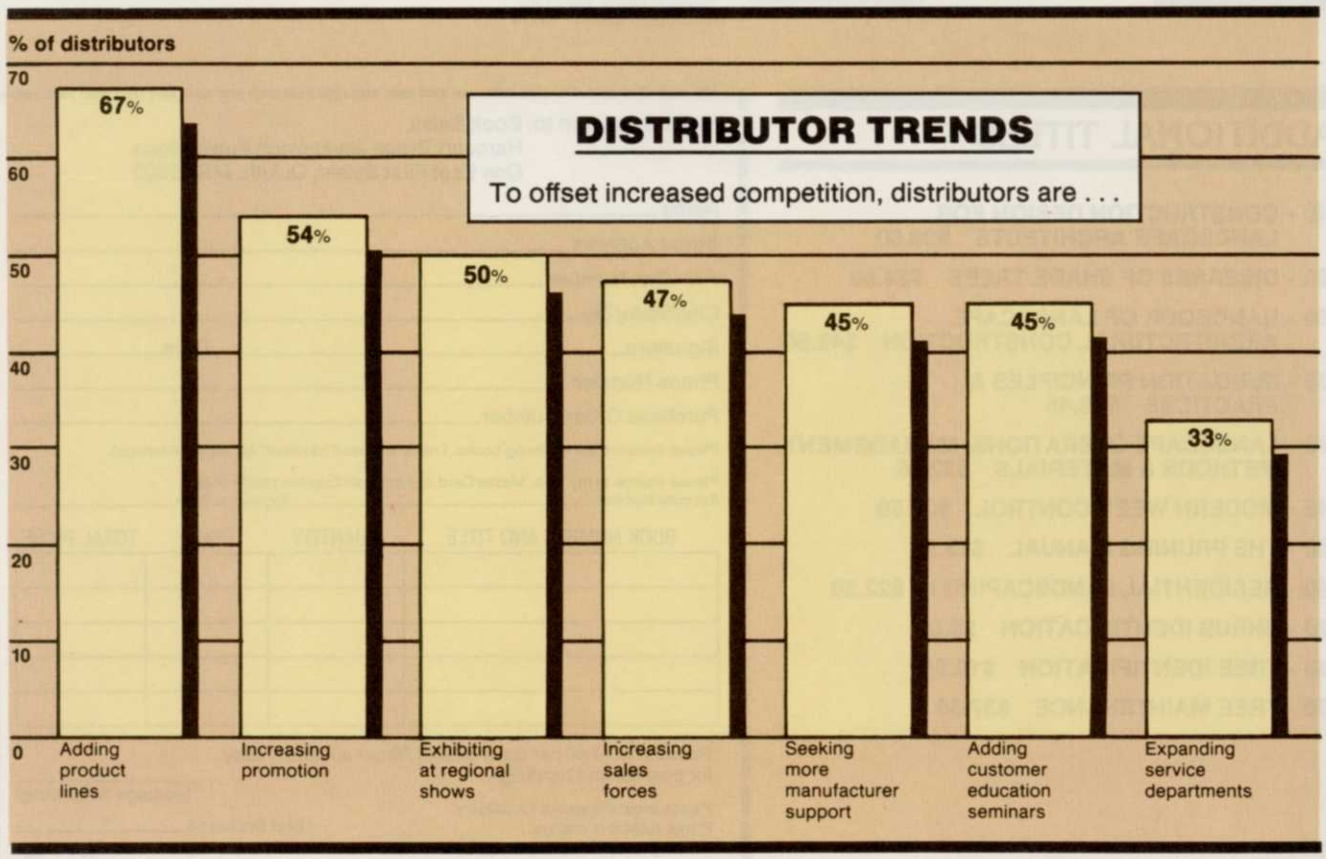
Two out of every three respondents beefed up inventories for the 1985-86 selling season.

Enthusiasm is tempered, however.

A chemical distributor writes: "More manufacturers. More models. More dealers. Not many more customers."

Concerns (listed in the frequency of their appearance in the poll) are:

1. Reduced margins.
2. Increased competition from a growing number of domestic manufacturers with similar lines and the impact of imported products.
3. Direct sales by manufacturers



FACTS ABOUT WT&T DISTRIBUTORS:

- ☐ Typically, is owner, president or general manager of a $2.3 million business.
- ☐ Half are distributors and dealers.
- ☐ 67% sell chemicals.
- ☐ 50% sell turfseed.
- ☐ 40% sell golf course equipment.
- ☐ 40% sell irrigation equipment.
- ☐ 33% sell consumer lawn equipment.
- ☐ 18% of sales is to homeowners.

and price pressure exerted by large national and regional operators.

4. Price cutting.

5. Government regulations and the specter of additional ones for chemical applicators.

None stands by itself. All are interconnected. Respondents to the *WT&T* survey fretted to a lesser extent about the growth of discount chains, credit problems with under-capitalized commercial accounts, and the lack of qualified personnel entering the distributor network.

Lower margins (specifically mentioned as a "trend" by 12% of our respondents) cause one special products manager to reflect: "Just how much service can I provide and still turn a profit?" An equipment distributor sees "some dropouts within the next two to five years. The volume is not there to support a replacement for the farm market or for the consumer market." While a third supplier predicts, "the industry cannot survive on the margins being made today."

Tied to reduced margins is price cutting. Four out of five distributors feel price cutting is "more common" now than a year ago although one distributor described the practice as "not more common, just more intense."

"Many distributors and dealers feel price cutting is necessary," the head of a $10 million firm notes. "This, of course, has gone on for years but I believe it is increasing due to the success (for a short time) of the retail discount stores."

The distributor-manufacturer relationship, like any marriage of interests, is not without its disagreements. Raising the ire of some distributors are direct sales by manufacturers to large national buyers. Customers benefitting from these sales "look for service locally or look for warranty locally and the local people get nothing out of the sale," says one businessman.

To offset these trends distributors are:

—Adding product lines. 67% in the *WT&T* poll indicate they will expand product offerings. Of the remaining 33%, reductions are most often being eyed for similar products from different manufacturers, or low profit items. 33% are expanding service/repair departments.

—Increasing promotion (54% of respondents).

—Seeking more manufacturer support (45%).

—Exhibiting at regional shows (50%).

—Adding education seminars for customers (45%).

—Increasing sales force (47%. Only 5% planned sales force reductions).

And, who are the best customers of the distributors and dealers? Golf course superintendents were near the top of the list for 60% of the respondents followed by landscape contractors (55%), parks and schools (52%), commercial lawn care (35%), general public (30%), and athletic field managers (28%).

Says the president of one $1.3 million distribution firm, "The business climate is excellent, particularly combined with the decline in interest rates, freeing up loan money and leasing money and at a better rate."

The message coming from the survey: as long as the national economy remains strong most distributors serving the turf and landscape industries are confident they will find ways to prosper.

The realities of increased competition and tighter margins, however, are causing distributors to reassess their offerings (with some expanding into turf-complimentary lines) and to rethink the amount of service they can offer to remain profitable—and competitive.

* * * *

The "typical" respondent to the *WT&T* survey was either the president, owner, or general manager of a business doing $2.3 worth of business with golf and landscape customers (high of $20 million, low of $30,000). Slightly under half described themselves as both distributors *and* dealers. Almost two-thirds of those we contacted handled chemicals; 50% dealt with seed, 40% golf course equipment and irrigation supplies, and 33% consumer lawn equipment. 18% of their sales is to homeowners. **WT&T**

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

On top north of the border

G.C. Duke Equipment Ltd. remains king of Canadian turf equipment distributors by keeping abreast of the newest maintenance equipment. Its reward? $15 million in annual sales.

by Ron Hall, associate editor

Salesman Dick Raycroft eases into the cushioned saddle of the tractor as the huge Dutch-built Verti-Drain aerifier, driving 16-inch spikes into the hardpan of sunbaked parkland, bucks and heaves behind him.

Thirty years of demonstrations like this make G.C. Duke Equipment Ltd. the largest distributor of turf equipment in Canada.

"We sell by demonstration," says Duke sales manager Jim Tanner. "The customer has to see what any piece of machinery can do under his conditions."

Big doings

This month, G.C. Duke Equipment expects to attract 2,000 visitors to its Lawn-O-Rama, a day of equipment demonstrations and displays wrapped around a fish fry at its five-acre Burlington, Ontario, headquarters. Lawn-O-Rama occurs every other year. Off-years are devoted to six weeks of customer service schools. "Hands on" is Duke Equipment's way of doing business.

The payoff is sales of $15 million (and growing) annually.

Sales boss *Jim Tanner shows off Duke's newest offerings in front of the company's headquarters.*

"Our range of equipment includes everything from a $15 string trimmer to an airport runway snow blower at $300,000 or a Snorkle, a piece of fire fighting equipment, at $400,000," says vice-president Richard Duke.

Richard is the son of company cofounder G.C. Duke, who at 80 is still a vigorous force in the business and well known in the Canadian turf industry. The elder Duke started as a commissioned salesman (the garage behind his home was his office), worked that into a dealership and eventually a distributorship.

Gravely was the first manufacturer he represented. He later sold that business to Studebaker.

Company expanding

Today Duke Equipment represents dozens of different manufacturers.

The airport runway equipment is new for the Ontario-based company. It could be profitable. To reflect the addition of heavier equipment several years ago, the company name was changed from Duke Lawn Equipment. "The name was getting us into trouble with some of our bids," Richard Duke recalls.

Turf, however, remains the backbone of the company and accounts for about 80 percent of sales. Says Duke, a big man with a ruddy complexion and 25 years in the business, "Our strength really comes from the golf course and parks industries."

The growth of the business had employees pumping inventory and sales figures into a new IBM 36 computer at the Burlington headquarters from last December to mid-summer. An attractive, young keyboard operator complains with a smile, "If they wouldn't keep adding data, we would be done by now." Duke Equipment has outgrown the capabilities of two previous computer systems.

The company headquartered in Lake Ontario-hugging Burlington (a city of about 100,000 an easy drive up from Niagara Falls) maintains an office in Montreal, direct lines to nearby Toronto, and sells to all of eastern Canada with dealers extending to the Maritimes.

It's a mobile and and aggressive sales force that drives Duke Equipment.

Parked outside of Richard Duke's office window is muscular green ¾-ton pickup with sparkling chrome wheels, one of a fleet of 12 that cruises the long but narrow band of the Canadian turf industry. Geography defines Duke's territory. The 12 salesmen are divided between municipal and dealer/landscape accounts in Ontario and Quebec, concentrating on that 80-mile wide strip containing most of Canada's population.

Dick Raycroft, *seated, conducts on-site demonstration for an interested onlooker.*

Selling turf equipment in Canada poses special problems.

"All our salesmen are commissioned and pay their own expenses," Richard Duke says. "We supply the salesmen with the basic trucks and they fix them up with all the options." All 12 trucks are powered by propane, offering a substantial savings in transporation cost.

Two tractor-trailer "traveling billboards" complement the company's road show at field days and demonstrations.

Selling turf equipment in Canada poses special problems.

The American dollar (as of press time) is worth $1.38 Canadian, and most imported turf equipment is subject to duties of 11 percent plus a 10 percent federal sales tax.

Says Duke: "For mowers and equipment up here, the American list price is the dealer's cost. It's a problem, and it isn't. Everybody up here is faced with the same situation."

Marketers often say that selling to Canada is selling just 1/10th of what you'd move in the States. Not true, says Duke. Professional mowing takes on more significance than the so-called 10-to-1 ratio would suggest.

Reel mowing popular

Says Duke, "I think there's a lot more reel cutting done here in parks and by landscapers. Reel mowing takes a lot less horsepower per inch of cut, and the maintenance of reel mowers has come down dramatically in the last couple of years."

He adds, "One of the biggest changes we've seen is when reel mowers went hydraulic. We were one of the first to jump on hydraulic mowing." Duke Equipment is the largest distributor of Ransomes reel mowing equipment in North America.

The sophistication of the Canadian turf market is also reflected in the growing importance of such practices as clipping removal and fairway mowing as short as 3/8th an inch. "The golfer is becoming far more demanding, and industrial customers are displaying more pride. They're becoming better corporate citizens," Duke says. "There is something new coming all the time."

When it does, Duke equipment will be there.

"We expect our salesmen to have demonstration equipment with them at all times," says sales director Tanner. "If a manufacturer comes out with a new product, they'll take that too." **WT&T**

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Growing in Florida

A second generation of leaders guide DeBra Turf & Industrial Equipment in the Sunshine State's expanding turf equipment market.

by **Ron Hall**, associate editor

Jud DeBra, tan and trim at 43, his dark hair graying, cranks up the big Chevy, snaps on cruise control and settles in for the 3½-hour drive south from Orlando. Destination: Hollywood, FL. Mission: to stay one step ahead of Florida's turfgrass industry.

DeBra the company official and DeBra Equipment the company are on the move. Hollywood is the busiest of three DeBra Turf & Industrial Equipment Company offices.

"We see things changing here in Florida," Jud DeBra says.

The V-8 bends coastward and miles of scrub pine and acres of grazing cattle give way to gleaming patches of white Florida sand—bulldozed sites of future residential developments and the businesses they spawn. South Florida creeps north. DeBra Equipment, the largest Jacobsen distributor in North America and guided by a second-generation of family members, will be pushing hard here soon with the addition of an office in Stuart, FL, just north of West Palm Beach.

New generation

Last May, Bill DeBra retired as president. He is one of the five brothers who founded the company. In 1946 he and brothers Don, George, Jack, and Jud, Sr., began selling Cushman scooters and three-wheel vehicles from Tampa and Atlanta, GA, dealerships.

"I guess there is no secret to the success of this business," Bill's son Tom says. "It was just good old hard work. They put their noses to the grindstone and got down to work."

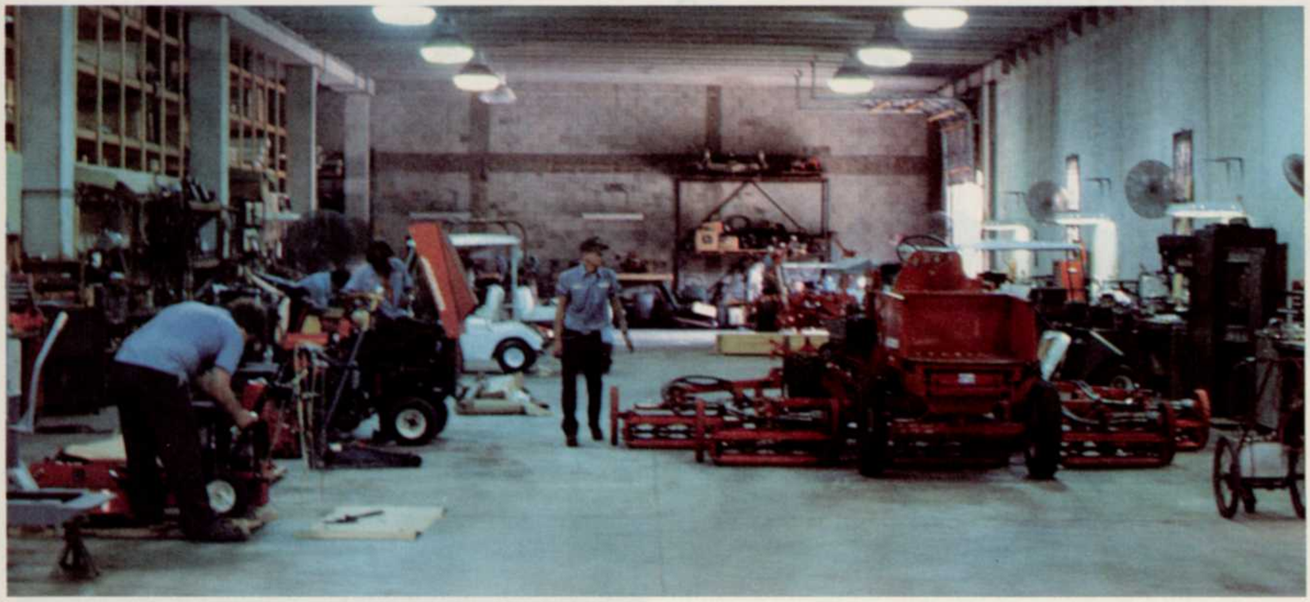
Dave DeBra (Jack's son) is DeBra Equipment's executive vice president. He and Tom direct the East Coast operation out of the Hollywood office. Jud (son of the late Jud, Sr.) is the corporate vice president and directs the West Coast offices of Fort Myers and Tampa. Dave has been with the business 20 years, Jud 17, and Tom, the youngest of the three cousins, four years.

This is the heart of a hard-working and visible management team that takes an active role in community and professional functions. Dave is past president of the Florida Turf-Grass Association.

Golf is king

Hard work is one reason for DeBra Turf's success. Florida golf is another.

Says Jud, "Of the 100 new golf courses built in the country last year, 24 were built in Florida. People come to Florida to be near the water or to be near green. Waterfront property is



Employees service *equipment in DeBra's vast warehouse*

Jud DeBra (sportcoat), Tom DeBra *with Jacobsen HF-15 reel mower.*

Service Manager Gary Foote, right, *helps mechanic Jack Moffat with a mower reel adjustment.*

getting expensive and scarce, so a lot of Florida development centers around golf courses. Developers can pay for a new course with the sale of lots."

In 1956 the company entered the golf business by leasing golf carts (a service it still provides with the lease of 150 carts to Dade County). Not until 1960—when Jack DeBra moved to Hollywood, FL, just north of Miami—did it plunge into the commercial turf market as a distributor for Jacobsen. The introduction of a riding greensmower by Jacobsen in 1968 made things happen for DeBra—and for Florida golf course maintenance.

Or as Jud says: "The growth explosion hit."

Latest figures show 770 golf courses in the state. Play is measured at about 34 million rounds annually. A two-year-old study described Florida golf course maintenance as a $177 million industry with more than 6,000 employees.

Other directions

DeBra Equipment, however, found opportunities in other areas, including government accounts. Although company officials describe this as a "maturing" market, it remains profitable. More exciting is the contract maintenance market flamed by the spread of turfed and landscaped properties up the coasts and inland.

"The biggest growth will be in the landscape business," Jud DeBra adds. "And as the caliber of maintenance is pushed up in the big developments and nice resorts, it will influence the rest of the state about what is the norm and what is acceptable." That tranlates into the need for professional equipment.

DeBra Equipment, with 15 pickup-truck-equipped salesmen on the road, tries to anticipate these client needs. "Our involvement with residential developments and condominiums opens new markets for us. It's a natural extension of the services we can offer," says Jud. That attention led DeBra to offer industrial equipment also, including the Clark & American warehouse and factory sweeper and the Netherlands-manufacturered Ravo street sweeper. Industrial equipment has shown a 150% sales increase over the past two years, a company spokesman says. Even so, the company picks its markets carefully.

"DeBra takes a conservative approach to growth," says Gary Foote, a Michigan State grad who began his turf career with DeBra, worked the Southeast for Jacobson, then returned to DeBra as parts and service manager. "DeBra doesn't take on lines just to be adding more equipment."

The Florida company, with sales expected to exceed $13 million this year, now represents more than 70 manufacturers (including Jacobsen, Excel, Smithco, Cushman, and Kubota in two locations). It backs its salesmen with 13 mechanics and a million-dollar parts inventory.

And its service schools are a model in the turf industry. Factory representatives from Jacobsen (which pioneered the idea of a service school) and other manufacturers visit DeBra Equipment offices on a regular basis to provide free hands-on training for client mechanics. Turnouts of 250 to 300 mechanics are common.

"We're working with the same customers over and over so what we do is build relationships with our customers rather than just making sales," Jud DeBra adds. "We know if we can build good customers, they'll be buying good products from us over a period of time." **WT&T**

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Ivy League player

Manager Phil Mowery put the Bunton Company back in the game in one of the nation's fastest-growing corporate centers—Princeton, NJ.

by **Ron Hall,** associate editor


Phil Mowery stands *in front of growing Bunton Turf Products.*

The ivy-covered walls, the tree-lined streets hadn't changed much in college town. But when Phil Mowery drove 10 minutes north from his boyhood home in Princeton, NJ, five years ago he saw a whole new world of gleaming corporate headquarters and acres of manicured turf. He saw *opportunity*.

Mowery, 25 years in the lawn and garden industry, says he was "hungry." So he acted.

"It all started over a phone call"—*Mowery*

He contacted Stan Byers, president of The Bunton Company, a Louisville-based manufacturer of commercial mowers. *Presto.* Bunton's putting up the money and Mowery's managing a business, a turf equipment distributorship in the middle of corporate boomtown that is alternately being touted as "the New Jersey Sunbelt" and the "next Silicon Valley."

Neither term is entirely accurate. But how do you describe a gold rush for corporate office space in central Jersey, in what had been potato fields and sod farms? We'll talk about that later, but more about the distributor, Bunton Turf Products.

A phone call away

Says Mowery, "It all started over a phone call with Stan (Byers). He set us up. We started with four people and grew from that. We worked out of our homes."

The founders were Mowery, his daughter Penny (who later left the business to move to Washington, DC), Stan Stevenson, a hefty gregarious man with bearpaws for hands, and slender, dark-haired Dave Walter. Stevenson is Mowery's top sales rep now, Walter the company's parts and service manager.

The distributorship now has 19 employees. It is located in a small rectangular masonry and glass building off narrow Quaker Bridge Road. Not in Princeton, but close enough for lunch.

Mowery's office is not a refuge. His door is open. Everybody—customers, mechanics, salesmen—poke their grins over his desk for greetings or guidance. The bespectacled Mowery, with the patient, polite demeanor of an accountant (he started his career as a clerk), is a good listener, and when he speaks he chooses his words carefully.

The first thing he wants to make clear is that Bunton Turf Products *is owned* by the Bunton Company.

New directions

For Bunton, it's a profitable departure and it's planning a second factory branch in South Florida. But, a manufacturer owning its own store isn't unknown in the turf industry.

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IVY LEAGUE *from page 48*

Yazoo Manufacturing, the Jackson, MS, manufacturer of "Big Wheel" and front-cut riding mowers, controls its own distribution in Memphis, TN, Houston, TX, and Birmingham, AL. It has for more than 30 years. Howard Day, Yazoo's marketing vice president, says Yazoo factory branches sell as well as its independent distributors. Other manufacturers, however, have gone in the opposite direction.

Stan Stevenson *helped start company.*

The Toro Company sold its three final company-owned distributorships in 1978, the same year that Cushman/OMC Lincoln dealt its store, Cushman Motor Sales.

The Bunton Company's decision to bankroll the New Jersey operation, although bucking recent trends, is working. Says Mowery, "we've grown anywhere from 20 to 30 percent each year and it's still growing." Later this year the size of the company-owned store will be doubled. In addition to Bunton products, the distributorship handles Sarlo and Ryan mowers, Honda engines, and Lo-Blo leaf blowers. Additional lines will be added, Mowery says.

The distributorship, Bunton Turf, sells from the showroom and through dealers. "Believe it or not, that hasn't been a problem," Mowery says. "When we set up a dealer we tell them we also sell direct. Selling direct has been profitable, but we want to be known as a distributor."

Bunton Turf's four salesmen cover almost all of New Jersey, including parts of Pennsylvania and Long Island. One salesman sells the golf course and municipal markets exclusively. These markets are new to Mowery's business and he's optimistic. "They will fall into place. We know enough about it. We've stayed on top of it," he says.

Boom times

Mowery credits much of the New Jersey distributorship's success to Bunton Company president Byers. "The man has great forecasting ability and he's willing to take a gamble," Mowery says. "He could see the growth that was going to happen here."

Growth? How about explosion?

The epicenter is the Princeton Corridor, an 18-mile-long stretch of U.S. Route 1 from Princeton north to New Brunswick.

Within the past 10 years more than eight million square feet of office space (enough to almost fill the World Trade Center) grew up along this highway. The total should jump to 10.6 million (more than downtown Milwaukee) by 1992.

This corporate office explosion, touched off when Princeton University set aside 1,600 acres for its Forrestal Center "corporate campus" in 1975, erupted with the addition of other neighboring private developments: Carnegie Center, 744 acres; Princetonpark Corporate Center, 650 acres; and Princeton Corporate Center, 98 acres.

Corporate bosses appreciate Central Jersey's sylvan settings, its proximity to New York and Philadelphia, and the Princeton mailing address which they see as prestigious. *Image.* It's important down to the turfed and landscaped grounds of the corporate buildings.

The Forrestal Center contains 500 acres (nearly one-third of the Center) of permanent open space. Other developers, eager to attract tenants and to head-off cries that they're gobbling up prime real estate without consideration for the the pastoral countryside, are following suit. That's a lot of manicured grass.

"I've seen peaks and valleys," says Mowery, "but this is probably the longest good period I've seen—and it hasn't peaked yet. Not in this area anyway."

Bunton boss Byers, although not downplaying the area's growth, puts the success of the distributorship in more personal terms. "We knew we weren't getting the market penetration we should in this area, and the right guy (Mowery) came along. He runs it like he owns it."

Mowery responds, "I think Stan found some people who were hungry enough to make it work." **WT&T**

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

A Distributor and Much More

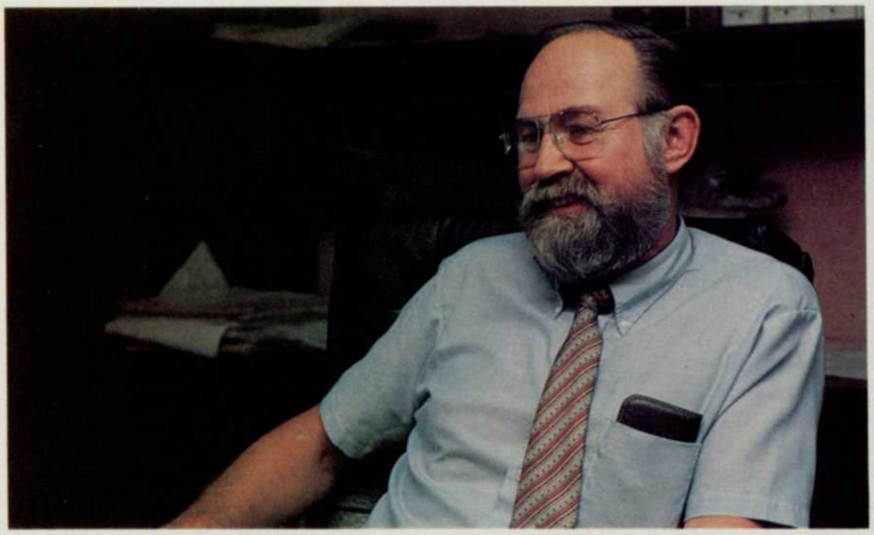
Reinders Brothers of Elm Grove, Wisconsin, has roots dating to the 1860s. More than 100 years later, the company's services are still expanding to meet the needs of its varied clientele.

by Ken Kuhajda, managing editor

When Bob Reinders talks about his business, he can't help smiling.

Yeah, he has the problems most turf equipment distributors have—customers with cash flow problems, problems with manufacturers, hot and cold sales and weather seasons. But company secretary Reinders, who operates Reinders Brothers Inc. of Elm Grove, WI, along with brother Richard (vice-president) and 80-year-old father Roland (president), takes the bad with the good. And the last 30 years have been mostly good for the Toro distributor.

The reasons? An ever-increasing list of services ranging from turf equipment and supplies to irrigation equipment and supplies, to consumer power equipment, to wild bird feed, to salt products, to retail garden supplies. Reinders Brothers, once Elm Grove's general merchandise store, continues as a sort of general supplier for those in the turf and irrigation business.



Bob Reinders *has seen his company grow from 20 employees when he started 30 years ago to today's total of 125. He's predicting continuous growth for the future.*

An aggressive company

Bob Reinders is an avid hunter and fisherman. His suburban Milwaukee office is lined with his conquests, including a tremendous muskie landed in a Wisconsin lake. A big man given to staccato speech and hand gestures, Reinders enjoys the public relations work involved in promoting a multimillion dollar operation. Far from pretentious—yet quick to point out his company's strength—he is quietly aggressive.

And so is his company. He and Ed Devinger, manager of the turf division, realize that the company's success ($11 million in sales in 1984) is due partly to that aggressive stance. Devinger, a friendly man with a booming voice, has been with the company since 1971. Before that he was a golf course superintendent in Iowa and then a five-year man in fertilizer sales. They agree that you can't relax and spend your time tallying profits if you want to make it.

"Yeah, we're aggressive," says Devinger. "You have to be to survive. It's survival of the fittest in this business." Adds Reinders: "I think our competitors would tell you that we're aggressive. We're hungry and I think we see some of our competition not being as hungry as they once were."

In the Reinders' turf division, six outside salesmen comb the eastern 2/3 of Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula. They're young, experienced in turf, and more than order-takers. They want to *survive*.

"Our sales people have a genuine interest in the customer," says Devinger, lighting a Newport. "Sometimes it's awfully difficult to convey that to the customer. The point I always try to make to them is that there's no way that getting their business today is going to make us rich. We have to get it tomorrow, then the next day, and the next day."

Devinger doesn't get out on the road much but handles much of the inside turf sales.

"We've got to do what's right by you and if we can't come back with a smile on our face and on the customer's then we don't want the business. No one order is that important," says Devinger.

Complementing divisions

When sales orders in Reinders' turf division slow down, sales orders in the irrigation division increase.

This summer has been particularly dry in Wisconsin. "There's been a drought," says Devinger. "I mean there is no grass to cut. But the irrigation division is absolutely knee-deep in work. When it happens the other way—it's raining and the grass is growing—we're selling equipment and the irrigation division's phone isn't ringing. There's a great complement there," he adds.

"...we're aggressive...we're hungry and I think we see some of our competition not being as hungry as they once were." — Reinders

Reinders Brothers occupies 10 acres of land in the sleepy town of Elm Grove (population: 6,735), a 20-minute drive from downtown Milwaukee. Irrigation equipment occupies a good chunk of the land. There's room for expansion and if the irrigation division continues to grow, it will occupy even more space.

Bob Reinders doesn't mind. With brother Richard directing the division, irrigation has turned into big business for Reinders Brothers. The company, offering full lines of both Toro and Rain Bird irrigation equipment, covers the same territory with its irrigation division as it does with turf.

"We'll take a job from A to Z," says Reinders. "We consult with contractors for installation purposes, we'll design an irrigation system for a golf course or condominium or you name it. We'll do it for the contractor, we'll do it as a consultant, we'll general the job if it has to be—the big jobs that run a couple hundred thousand dollars."

Reinders also functions as a manufacturer within its irrigation division. They build pumping plants and wholesale to other distributors.

The Turf Conference

Yet another service Reinders provides the customer is its Turf Conference, held every other year in neighboring Waukesha. In 1985, over 1,400 attended the March conference. It's not a cheap undertaking—cash outlays totalled almost $20,000 this year excluding labor.

After all attendee and exhibitors' fees are collected, it still registers red figures. But Reinders will continue to sponsor the event, with its well-known speakers and top-of-the-line equipment displays.

It's a standing joke among Reinders employees that the show is a hassle because of the work involved, but Devinger and Reinders know the service it performs.

"We know it's worthwhile," says Devinger. "We realize it has definite benefits. It's a lot of work, but it's worth it."

Reinders Brothers also hosts a series of one-day educational seminars each year throughout Michigan and Wisconsin. This year's events, held July 29-Aug. 9, took place in rural areas like Escanaba, MI; Franklin, WI; Bristol, WI; and Beaver Dam, WI.

Stick Cities, yes, but Reinders aims at serving all his customers no matter where their locations.

Still growing

Bob Reinders has seen "continuous growth" in each of the 30 years he's been with the company. Sales figures topped the million dollar mark in 1969 and grew to $9 million 10 years later.

Today's annual sales figures of $11 million indicate the company has sprouted nicely from its roots as a grist mill run by Reinders' relatives in the 1860s.

Three expansions, the most recent just completed, have increased building space to 100,000 square feet. A good chunk of Elm Grove is occupied by Reinders Brothers. Reinders gives most of the credit for his success to his customers.

"We feel we get our business from the quality of the people out there. They know their equipment, their chemicals, they know their business," says Reinders. "They're sharp, they're educated. That's one of the reasons we're successful."

Reinders cites a steady service organization as a second reason for his company's success. And finally, the product.

"We have good products to sell. We think we have the best—be it Cushman, Ryan, Toro, or Rain Bird. Plus our allied lines are super. Any allied line that comes out we normally can get hold of," he says.

Adds Devinger: "We set the pace. The competition looks to us." **WT&T**