

## 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

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.

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

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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



Phil Mowery stands in front of growing Bunton Turf Products.

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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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 distribu-



Stan Stevenson helped start company.

tors. Other manufacturers, however, have gone in the opposite direction.

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

## For Information Contact Your Nearest Ransomes Distributor

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**Brodner Equipment, Inc.** (Upstate NY)  
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### MIDWEST

**Baker Vehicle Systems, Inc.** (Northern OH)  
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**Ideal Mower Sales** (MI & Western OH) Ferndale, MI 48220, 313/541-4200

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