



David Frank points out the area where a new office addition will be located.

STRAIGHT SHOOTER

David J. Frank Landscape Contracting isn't among the top 50 landscape companies in the country—yet. But, with 60 percent annual growth, it might show up on the list soon.

by Jerry Roche, editor

In 1959, when David J. Frank was 10 years old, he started a lawn and garden service. Seven of the original clients are with him today.

In 1970, when David J. Frank was a junior in college, he was making more than \$20,000 a year in the landscaping business.

January 1, 1986, David J. Frank became president of the Milwaukee Chapter of the Wisconsin Landscape Contractors Association.

Today, his company—David J. Frank Landscape Contracting of Germantown, Wis.—has 19 crews and is growing at a 60 percent per

annum clip.

You should have figured out by now that David J. Frank is not your prototypical entrepreneur.

Slim, bespectacled and dapper, Frank is also a self-proclaimed straight-shooter...from the hip.

"When I started, I was exactly the kind of thorn-in-the-side business that I now sit around and complain about," Frank states frankly. "But in November of 1976, I went to my first ALCA (Associated Landscape Contractors of America) Landscape Maintenance Division conference in Lincolnshire, Ill. That meeting blew

me away. It really opened my eyes.

"Today, I can trace most of my business progress through things I learned from ALCA."

His company has evolved with the industry.

"One of the most exciting changes is that professionalism is improving," Frank notes. "Years ago, I used to get discouraged because the consumer had so little esteem of the intricacies of landscape contracting. That has changed, and the contractors and professional organizations have changed it. What the industry's doing, clients like."

Roots of success

The roots of Frank's success are deep.

"I was brought up in a middle-class family with a real work ethic," he says. And by the time he was in high school, the people around David J. Frank knew that work ethic would serve him well.

Upon his election as senior class president, Frank decided to operate the resources at his disposal like a business. The outcome was predictable.

LANDSCAPE PROFILE *continued*

"Our net income was \$25,000," he remembers, a big smile crossing his face now. "All those Dominican nuns couldn't believe it when we handed them the money at the end of the year."

"I've always kind of had a take-charge attitude. Four or five years ago, I realized I couldn't work for somebody. I'm afraid I wouldn't be a very good employee."

But he's not always been a good employer either.

"Because of my high standards," he admits, "I used to be an SOB at times. For years, my standards were way up here. Entry level people have standards, too, but there was just such a chasm. I had unrealistic expectations."

Turnover rates low

He has survived that challenge just as he survived some lean early years back in 1972. This last year, turnover at the important crew leader level was zero; a few years ago, it might have been 50 to 60 percent.

"I'm involving more people in decision-making now," Frank says. "I don't shove things down their throat any more. If people make decisions by themselves, they're motivated to carry the plan out."

The company has two vice-presidents: Mike Frank, David's brother, for the landscape construction division and Robert Heldt for the management department.

Frank himself likes to divide the business another way, though: into what he considers its three most important components—hiring, training, and managing personnel.

"First of all, you need the right person for the right job, and that's a big job in itself that consists of recruiting, interviewing, and selecting.

"Then there's training. If you want to teach effectively, your employees need to see, hear, write, discuss, and experience.

"Managing and motivating is the third thing: how you keep people on track and how you let them know they're a winner."

To that end, Frank recently established a new position: senior crew leader with a pay scale 50 percent higher than that of crew leader.

"One of the classic mistakes is taking the best crew leader and making him a supervisor. Some

don't do well at all," Frank explains. "The senior crew leader position is for people who want a career path in horticulture. We have one, Ken Plumb, who's been in the industry 16 years. He's a poet on a grading tractor."

Frank says that the position is not granted, but earned, based on three factors:

- costing consistently under budget;
- complaints and callbacks low or zero; and
- mastery of 70 percent of the skills in the job description.

"You should see the productivity of somebody like that," he claims.

Expansion

As you might expect, Frank sees a bountiful future for his company. As

'One of the classic mistakes is taking the best crew leader and making him a supervisor. Some don't do well at all.'

—Frank

a matter of fact, he is expanding his physical facilities this winter with the addition of one building (new total will be three) and 5,400 sq. ft. (new total will be 18,000 sq. ft.).

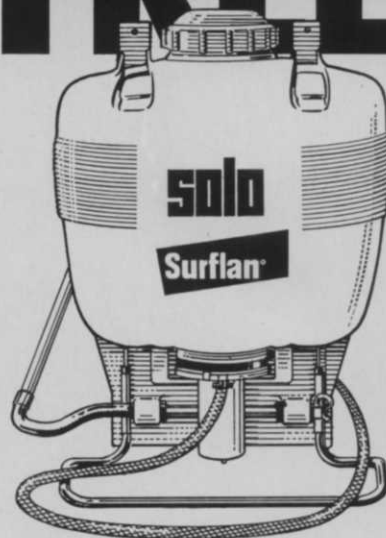
"The new facility will include a training center that seats 125 employees," Frank says. "We've spent the last couple of years getting our people resources in place. Now it's time to expand our facilities."

But he doesn't want to give away long-term plans. In one breath he says that there will be no branch expansion. "Despite the growth, my managers and I are clearly not doing as good a job as we could...so why consider branches?...we don't want to expand in errors and mistakes!"

Then, later in the conversation, he contradicts himself: "In the next 10 to 20 years, we're going to see some exciting things happen like the emergence of more regional landscape management firms...I want to make sure my company is part of that."

It will be, if past success is any indication. **WT&T**

FREE

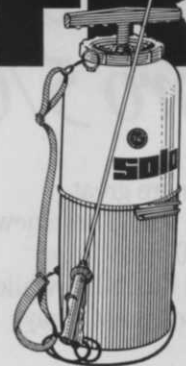


\$151.15 retail value; 4 gallon capacity; pressure regulator; two nozzle spray boom.

Solo Backpack Sprayer

with 50 gallon purchase of Surflan® AS herbicide.

FREE



\$34.95 retail value; 2.5 gallon capacity; rugged hand pump.

Solo Hanjet Sprayer

with 15 gallon purchase of Surflan AS herbicide.

Now you've got more money-saving reasons than ever to keep weeds out of ornamentals, shrubs and trees with Surflan. Free sprayers available with either Surflan gallons or quarts purchased by August 31, 1986. Contact your Elanco distributor now for details, order form.



Elanco Products Company
A Division of Eli Lilly and Company
Dept. E-455, Indianapolis, IN 46285, U.S.A.
Surflan®—(oryzalin, Elanco Products Company)