



LANDSCAPE MANAGER OF THE YEAR

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT magazine and the Professional Grounds Management Society present their first Landscape Manager of the Year award.

by Jeff Sobul, assistant editor

The drum roll, please! Ladies and gentleman, LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT's first Landscape Manager of the Year is Michael Ray Hugg, landscape supervisor for Metro National Corporation, Houston.

The innovative Hugg has been landscape supervisor since joining Metro National seven years ago. He oversees a staff of 22, adding eight during peak season.

That staff is responsible for 19 company properties from apartments to hospitals and 11 city street esplanades.

On-the-job innovation

Hugg is innovative, having designed a very efficient computerized sprinkler system tied into one of the company's energy management systems. "The automatic controller is replaced by tying the wires into a series of multiplexer boards depending on how many stations the system has, which in turn is tied into the building's energy management panel."

With this system, Hugg has the ability to set and change start dates and times from a portable computer in his office. "I can also turn any sprinkler system that is tied into an energy management system on or off without

Metro National pays for all construction and maintenance of five city esplanades.



leaving my office," he adds.

"I have almost unlimited power in start times. If a station normally has a 20-minute run time on a conventional clock," he explains, "I can have that station run two minutes at a time, with 10 different start times if I want to." This eliminates wasted water due to runoff and saves money, he says.

The operation runs through facilities management software and a modem used to access any sprinkler system in the company that is tied into an energy management system. For this, Hugg credits Metro National's construction management, which sets up the energy management programs. "The operation is similar to golf course irrigation programs run by computer," he says, "but with many more options and capabilities."

While the Houston area does experience drought conditions at times, Hugg says the local government has not set a permanent restriction on water usage. But, he adds, "I look for that to hit our area in the not too distant future."

Successful schedule

This efficiency has resulted in an effective turf maintenance schedule which Hugg developed for use on all of the property his staff maintains.

"The preventative pesticide program takes care of most of the problems," he says. "We go back and spot treat where necessary."

His program includes fertilizing five times yearly. The first application, in early spring, is done in combination with atrazine for pre-emergence weed control on the St. Augustinegrass which covers all of



1987 Landscape Manager of the Year: Michael Hugg.

the company's property.

An application in early June is supplemented with Dursban to take care of the first wave of chinchbugs, which Hugg calls a major problem.

In mid-July, he lays down Oftanol granules to finish off the chinchbugs and prevent grubs. His crews spot treat with liquid Oftanol if areas show signs of grub activity.

His fungicide program includes three applications of Chipco 26019, one every 28 days beginning in September. This takes care of the brown patch that occasionally attacks the turf. His ornamental care schedule includes two applications a year of a pre-emergence herbicide. The company employs one full-time sprayer to make all these applications.

Hard times

Unfortunately, Hugg can't do a lot of

the things he'd like, even though his work is good enough to have won four PGMS awards in 1985. Economically, Houston relies heavily on dollars from the oil and petroleum industry. With crude oil prices falling during the past five years, the oil companies have hit on hard times. As a result, the city economy has shrunk.

Metro National has felt some of this depression, which has forced it to cut back on its budget somewhat. Hugg has to present a pretty good case to get additional funds. He says that the company has been adding new property which he and his staff will have to maintain. He needs more labor but doesn't expect to get it.

"We have to compete with outside companies, yet we spend more than they do," he says. But Hugg does find a benefit from the lean times. After the labor cuts were made, he found his department ran more efficiently.

Meeting personal goals

Hugg lists a number of important future personal goals. They include obtaining a nursery license in order to buy plant materials wholesale; taking advantage of volume and early order discount programs when buying chemicals and fertilizers; setting up an in-house mechanic shop for daily maintenance and repairs of equipment; doing all of Metro National's new and renovation landscape construction in-house at cost; doing a majority of landscape design work to save the company landscape architect fees; and setting up in-house interior landscape maintenance and construction.

Hugg and Metro Landscape re-



A special trim crew is needed to trim shrubbery of four apartment complexes on four corners of two streets.

sumed interiorscape maintenance in January after having subcontracted to an outside firm for two years. He hopes to take the Interior Horticulture Certification exam soon. Technically, he says, he is not eligible to take the exam. A certain amount of time doing the interior work is required before the exam can be taken. After he is back into it for a while, though, he says he will take the test.

Hugg lists his most important accomplishment in the past year as "re-designing plans for Spring Shadows Pines, a nursing home, that a landscape architect had drawn but the owner of our company was unhappy with. I added in a lot of azaleas and annuals for color. I also directed the landscape construction for the four-acre facility."

Working with a crowd

"Metro National has nine different property managers who I have to cater to," Hugg says. "I also maintain the homes of 12 executives of the company who all have their personal tastes. Everyone, including myself, has their own ideas and desires, but many times all is overridden by the

Hugg found a benefit from the lean times: after labor cuts were made, his department ran more efficiently.

owner of the company, who has the final word."

Fortunately, Hugg says he has run into few problems with his supervisors. "The good thing is, all of the property managers work for the same company," he adds.

Looking ahead

In the next five years, Hugg wants to put all inventories and maintenance schedules on computer. He only recently has had a computer put into his office, but plans on computerizing inventories and schedules this year.

During the past year, Hugg has

been working on a feasibility study of costs to build greenhouses and hire a grower for growing annuals and interiorscape color programs in-house. "But I haven't convinced myself that it's worth it." The study was borne out of frustration from not having the plants there when they were needed, he says. It might be just as cheap to continue buying from outside growers anyway, he adds. Even if Hugg finds it cost-effective for the company to have its own greenhouse, he would still have to convince company management.

If financially possible, he would also like to open a nursery re-wholesale distribution center and a retail garden center on Metro National land. Last year Metro National seriously thought about building a golf course on some of its land, Hugg says. "The owner decided to table the idea, primarily because of the economy," he notes. "If the economy improves and the idea is reborn again, I hope to contribute to the design and outline and implement a maintenance program."

And almost certainly, bring in more awards for himself and the company. **LM**

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