

THE GRADUATE

Eldon Dyk left school to join Allen Keesen Landscaping. It was like 'graduating,' and Dyk is not sorry he made the switch.



Eldon Dyk (left) and Allen Keesen 'found' each other in 1981.

Eldon Dyk felt trapped. After 15 years as a teacher, coach and assistant principal on the high school level, he felt he wasn't getting anywhere. It was, he admits, his "mid-life crisis."

At the same time, Allen Keesen of Allen Keesen Landscaping, Denver, Col., was toying with adding a maintenance division to his already-successful design/build division.

Five years ago, Dyk and Keesen found each other. The result has been a growing company.

Dyk, who grew up on a Montana farm, visited Joe Marsh and Rod Bailey, both successful landscape contractors, before he even sat behind his new desk. The market was not easy to learn, but he had a head start because he knew how to deal with people.

"I'm a people person in terms of dealing with labor and clients," Dyk notes now. "That's something I did as a teacher, coach and assistant principal."

Most of the clients own office buildings, though the list includes some homeowner associations and three residences.

"Homeowner associations are the hardest to deal with," Dyk notes. "They complain about the little things, picky things. But if they've got a good strong president or one person who will really take charge, we don't have much of a problem. None of those picky things get to my door."

Not very many of the landscapes are large, but all have irrigation.

Because land is so expensive in the fast-growing Denver area, business owners hesitate to buy much more than they need, hence a minimum need for landscape maintenance. "I bid things by the square foot, not the acre," Dyk observes.

A lack of rain around the "Mile-High City" also creates the necessity

for irrigation. "If you don't have a sprinkler here, you won't have a landscape," Dyk says. "All our clients have sprinkler systems that we're totally in charge of."

One-trailer beginnings

The landscape division's growth has been steady since it was formed in 1981. It began with one trailer and two employees. Twenty-five people are now employed; seven regular crews, one remedial crew and one sprinkler repair crew.

"One thing that has surprised me—that I feel good about—is the amount of growth," says Dyk. "A lot of it has been on our reputation. I do some 'cold-calling' in the winter, but most of our jobs have been through management companies and developers who know our reputation."

Darrel Bolton, who has been Dyk's assistant for three years, handles the crews, plus assignments, hiring, scheduling and other personnel duties.

The company's inventory of equipment looks like this: ¾-ton four-wheel drive Chevy trucks,

HMC/Green Machine blowers and trimmers, Bobcat 21-inch walk-behind mowers, two F.D. Kees riders, one Toro Groundsmaster 52, and four 42-inch Walker riders.

"We recently purchased the Walkers," says Dyk. "We really like

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them for their mobility and grass-catching ability."

The company has three licensed pesticide applicators on its payroll, even though insecticide spraying of trees and shrubs is sub-contracted out.

No slack time

Well-organized three-person crews work four 10-hour days a week from

May through September.

"The foremen organize crews in such a way that all the members know exactly what their next task is. There's no slack time with people waiting until somebody else is done," Dyk boasts. "They're completely in sync."

The four-day work week creates a situation where holidays and rain can easily be accommodated.

Dyk will hire a minimum of summer help, especially after last year's experience.

"We had to replace seven really sharp kids at the end of August," he remembers. "In one month, we've gone through as many as 13 or 14 people trying to replace those kids. It's really frustrating. It's been a real struggle in the past."

Despite the problems, Allen Keesen Landscaping is a company on the grow. Eldon Dyk, now past his "mid-life crisis," is growing with it.

"This job has been totally different than anything I've ever done," he concludes. "But it's been exciting and challenging."

—Jerry Roche



Alan Keesen considers snowplowing a necessary evil—especially high in the Rockies.