

used to have a difficult time because of our tree work, but now carriers are more concerned about pesticides," McGinty says.

Things also changed drastically when ChemLawn started in the early '70s. Suddenly, family-run companies like McGinty Brothers had competition. And they had to find ways to compete.

Sales manager Pat McEntree and lawn manager Charles Meersman have designed and presented a company seminar/general training program. Management, office and production personnel are brought together for presentations on professionalism, safety, customer relations and possible problems in the field. "These seminars have had a positive impact in all phases of the operation," says McEntree.

"We used to rely on word-of-mouth and a little advertising in local papers," McGinty explains. "In the '70s we used direct mail. But the '80s demand new marketing strategies, some of which are winter telemarketing, trade magazine ads and—still most important—word-of-mouth."

#### Customer communication

Communicating with customers is perhaps what's kept McGinty Brothers in business. "We have an excellent reputation in this area among customers, universities and people in the industry. If that's success, I guess we're successful."

"But what I really attribute the success of our company to is the dedication of our people, especially our managers and office personnel."

JoAnne Hedrick and her office staff, Geraldine Opland and Jeanne Heinrich provide professional and personable first-time contact with prospective customers and handle any current customer questions. The company has 25 full-time employees and about 10 college workers in the summer. Last year, it laid off only one employee in the winter. The rest keep busy pruning trees. (The company has a full-service tree department that includes spraying, feeding, trimming, removal and land clearing.)

McGinty has expanded his training program so most workers are familiar with both the lawn and tree care businesses. Meersman observes that, "over the years, client awareness has increased appreciably, requiring more knowledge and professional field personnel."

#### The program

Meersman explains that the

company's full lawn care program includes five applications, but that there are variations because clientele range from 1000-sq. ft. lots to the whole Illinois tollway system.

McGinty Brothers uses both dry fertilizer from Lesco and Classens and liquid fertilizer from Nice 'N' Green and Tyler Enterprises. The company blends its own fertilizer for each application by time of year and current weather conditions. Lescosan is used for crabgrass control. UAP herbicides are also used, as is Dursban for insect control.

#### Seeding

Another growth area for McGinty Brothers has been in slit-seeding and overseeding lawns in the spring and fall. Slit-seeding is done in two directions in a diamond-shaped pattern with a blend of bluegrasses and ryegrass. Core aeration and dethatching are done if needed.

Hydroseeding are the fastest-growing area in the company.

McGinty Brothers is active in the year-old ANVIL (Association for the use of Native Vegetation In Landscapes). McGinty vice-president Jim Safron works closely with Chicago's Lafayette Home Nurseries in doing golf courses, commercial properties and residences with native plants.

Some of the material is drilled into the ground with a Rangeland Drill, others are hydroseeded with a mulch. "The key is using enough seed and enough mulch," Safron says. "We use wood fiber mulch with a tackifier from Conwed or Weyerhaeuser."

McGinty Brothers has worked with prairie plantings for more than three years and plans to continue that addition to the lawn and tree care operation. Expansion, customer communication and employee dedication could lead Charlie McGinty to even more success down the road.

Maybe someday, 1987 will look like the good ol' days. **LM**

---

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

---

# THE BEST POLICY

Honesty with customers is vital to effectively communicate with them. And communication is vital to a healthy business, as The Davey Company's Milwaukee regional manager knows too well.

by Jerry Roche, editor

**S**ome people don't realize that lawns, like people, get tired and need rejuvenation."

Bill Whitmire, white shirt spotless, tie knotted neatly at the neck, is giving you his softsell.

"We get a lot of residual customers who don't buy the hardsell," he says. "Here in Milwaukee, you have to try to build a relationship with lawn care customers. The lawn business has become so competitive that the lawn care customer is looking for expediency. It's service more than price."



Bill Whitmire

*continued on page 44*

Whitmire, from his suburban Milwaukee office of The Davey Company, has come a long way from his spraying days in Akron, Ohio. He's done it by knowing the customer.

"Even though people here are service-oriented, they're also extremely price-conscious. They like to buy a programmed service rather than a full annual service. A lot of them take only two or three applications a year."

Whitmire should know the customer. He spends 70 percent of his time selling Davey tree and lawn care services. That means talking to about 150 customers and prospective customers a month.

### Different sales

"Lawn care is a different type of sale than tree care," he continues.

"Usually, tree care sales are in more affluent economic areas—where people can afford to pay hundreds or even thousands of dollars for a major service."

When it comes to dealing with customers, Whitmire says those on the lawn care side are the more critical.

"Tree care is not as great a swing in the looks of the property as in

lawn care," he observes. "The (lawn care) consumer is oftentimes harder on our company. People have totally different expectations of what we can give them. Some want a total turnaround in environmental problems, and we can't do that.

"The problem is with the industry in general. The marketing approach has been too strong." Lawn care companies historically promise more than they can deliver just to make a sale, Whitmire contends.

"Davey's marketing thrust is to expound on the virtues of plant health care," he reveals. "That is, taking care of the property as a whole with a customized program." And, with both tree and lawn care services, Davey can do just that.

"We try to cover as many bases as we can with a client. Davey is one of the few companies in the country that can say 'we are an expert in both tree and lawn care' with conviction."

### The best policy

Whitmire says that, in dealing with clients, honesty is the best policy.

"Most of the people that we're approaching now have been with other services. So most have come down the same road, especially in

the lawn care field. If we need to do seeding, or if a lawn needs to be replaced, we tell them. And we are realistic."

Getting customers isn't the only problem in the Milwaukee area. Coping with anti-pesticide activity is another very real problem.

Two years ago, the city banned the use of the herbicide glyphosate (Roundup) in its park system. More recently, the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District came under fire as the media searched for a relationship between Milorganite (which MMSD manufactures) and Lou Gehrig's Disease.

"The Roundup thing was union-based. But the Milorganite thing really scared me," relates Whitmire, a distraught look washing over him. "I know how far-fetched a correlation that was, but I also know how reactionary the public is."

Indeed. When 2,4-D was under indictment for possibly causing cancer, The Davey Company was one of the lawn care businesses that decided to ban it from the program. Not because of any evidence of its toxicity, more as a public relations move. All Davey branches have substituted Trimec 900.

"Control seems to take a little longer with Trimec," says Whitmire. "But you seem to get good control in two or two-and-a-half weeks. You just have to let the customer know."

### Doing it right

The company slogan, expounded by company founder John Davey almost 100 years ago, is "do it right, or not at all." Reflecting that philosophy, Davey wires its branches—including the one in Milwaukee—into its national programs, one of which is employee training. "We're a seasonal business, but we don't like to hire seasonal employees," says Whitmire. That places a premium on training.

"Historically, all the Davey lawn people went to a technical institute in Kent, Ohio," he adds. "Now we've gone to sending people to horticultural-type training to give them a more broad-based background." People employed by Davey for two years are sent to the one-month-long Davey Institute of Tree Science. Also, the company's Research and Development department will supply, on request, a training videotape that covers the areas of safety, sales and lawn or tree care technology.

As Whitmire so succinctly states: "Basically, all Davey has is equipment and people, and we take care of them." **LM**



**Bill Whitmire (center), who spends 70 percent of his time in sales, believes that honesty with customers is the best policy.**