

## AERATION

Equipment improvements and greater awareness have aeration service penetrating deeper into the residential market.

by Jeff Sobul, associate editor

**F**or a long time, aeration was something golf course superintendents did, and few others. There were, of course, some reasons for this.

Most of the aeration equipment was geared toward operating on larger areas such as fairways, or smooth areas such as greens. Up until a few years ago, no aerators were designed specifically for lawns.

Early experiments with machines

such as the Ryan Ride-Aire found they really couldn't hold up to the constant pounding on grass areas that often had never been aerated before.

In addition, early machines for home lawns were expensive and weren't always reliable. Therefore, smaller contractors and lawn care companies which seem to have a lot of residential contracts couldn't afford the machines, which in turn made it difficult to offer the service.

Also, awareness of core aeration's benefits has only recently begun to spread as more research is conducted on the cultural practice, and as more golfers see the results on the course.

#### Shattering the core problem

Equipment manufacturers are finally addressing the problem of viable equipment shortages. Ryan led the way with its Lawnaire series and now, according to Milwaukee-area equipment distributor Ed Devinger of Rein-

ders Brothers, smaller service companies have 12 to 15 machines to choose from.

While that isn't exactly a flood of machinery, improvements and competition have brought the price of a home lawn core aerifier down to about \$1,000. "You paid \$2,000 five years ago for a similar machine," Devinger notes.

Low prices and good results are making aeration a cost-effective service. "It's an increasing part of our business," says Bob DeRosa, DeRosa Landscaping in Montvale, N.J. "I think this is the way to go."

One obvious reason for DeRosa's thinking is that the amount of aerifying his company has done in the last two years has grown by 50 percent. He sees no reason to slow it down. "In the Bergen County area, we're coming to realize aeration is the thing. It's a worthwhile service to sell." He believes his aeration contracts could increase by another 50 percent this year. He has about 40 clients now totalling three to four acres, but 80 clients is a reasonable goal.

DeRosa explains that Bergen County is about the second-most affluent county in the country, home to the headquarters of a number of large corporations. In his neck of the woods, houses start at \$250,000. Of course, with a house like that, a good lawn is a necessity. ("When we have a downturn in the economy, we don't feel it too much," he relates.) In addition, the potential for commercial contracts is excellent.

#### Propagating nationally

DeRosa's is not an isolated case. "Since people are becoming more attuned to its benefits, it has increased," says Bill Davids of Clarence Davids & Sons, Blue Island, Ill. The 38-year-old company has offered the service for at least the last 25 years, he says. The service has grown by 10 percent since 1986.

Prograss Liquidcare Lawn Service of Hubbard, Ore., began offering the service three years ago, according to manager Paul Bizon. "Some accounts were asking for it," he explains. They had heard about it through gardening



Smaller equipment built specifically for home lawns has fueled the growth of core aeration service as a money-maker in the residential market.

articles or had seen its effects on the golf course.

"It was a natural thing for our program," Bizon continues. About 10 percent of the company's customers have the service. Bizon expects that total to grow by another 12-15 percent this year.

Marketing efforts have gone a long way toward building the service. Companies only recently began to market the service. Clarence Davids & Sons offers the service as an extra to its regular management package. They sell the service with a brief description and some help from pamphlets by Ryan.

Bill Davids says the price for the service is based on the size of the job (more or less than an acre) and the estimated time per hour for the job.

DeRosa now sells the service as part of the whole package as opposed to an extra. He explains that commercial aeration holds the biggest growth potential for his company because of the direction it is taking. "But there is potential for residential aeration contracts," he adds.

Bob Berry of Lancaster Landscapes, Arlington, Va., has a similar forecast. Eighty percent of his company's contracts are large commercial/residential ones—housing or condominium developments. He has seen about 50 percent growth of the service in the last two to three years. Because of the size of his company, the residential market is not cost-effective for him, but "it has tremendous potential," he adds quickly. "In the metro Washington D.C.-area there's a need for people in this field.

"No question. I think someone coming into this area offering aeration as a service would do very well," he says.

#### **A few more obstacles**

Though home lawn aeration equipment has improved greatly during the second half of this decade, it still isn't perfect. "None of them take enough cores out," says Progress's Bizon. Having to go over a lawn in two or three directions is not cost-effective, either. "You can't afford to take a lot of time on it," he adds.

"I can understand the manufacturers' problems," Bizon empathizes. "They have to make a machine small enough to fit through a gate and fast enough to get the job done to make it worthwhile."

This challenge lays before the equipment manufacturers for this year and into the '90s. Given the rapid strides they have made in the last few years, it is not unreal to believe they can make the improvements. **LM**

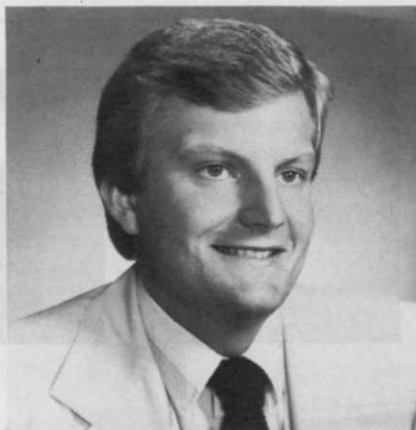


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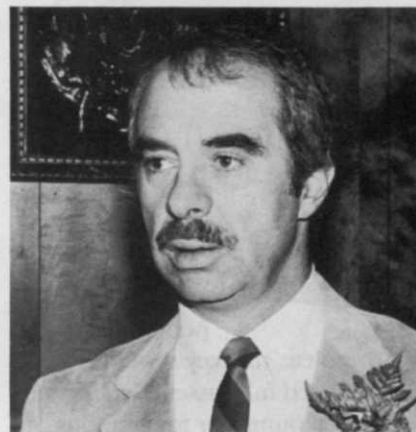


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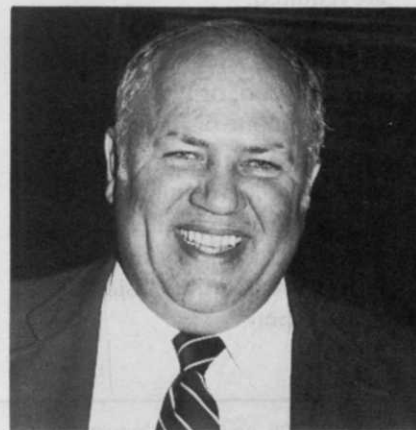


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—Bob DeRosa

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*'Aeration has become more cost-effective for smaller companies.'*

—Ed Devinger

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