

390

should put such a quality control system in place. If you do not, you will learn of customers' dissatisfaction with your quality when they cancel or do not renew a contract.

New offerings

For many years, landscape maintenance has meant mowing, edging and cleaning sidewalks and driveways. Today, consumers are asking their landscapers to do more:

- vacuum parking lots,

- aerate lawns,
- mulch decorative beds,
- provide vegetation control in beds,
- design and install flowering enhancement to their properties,
- prune small shrubs and trees under 20 feet,
- renovate part of a lawn that has been damaged,
- install and maintain irrigation systems, or
- re-do plant material that has become overgrown or just needs a new look.

Opportunities continuing to expand, and often are limited only by you not realizing that you could be providing the service.

So make a point of examining the opportunities and evaluating your

abilities to effectively deliver the services.

Beyond 1990

As new equipment continues to be developed, man and equipment will be more efficiently mixed to service customers. Today there is entirely too much labor needed to service landscape properties. That will need to change. In the future, property owners might ask you to design the property service, and then to provide those services. A standard of property management service for commercial sites might be developed on a national basis with individuals modifying the standard based on their budget.

Start looking at what property management associations are asking for, and work with them.



GOVERNMENT: PLAYING ENVIRONMENTALIST

Landscapers in the public sector have a lot to gain by educating the public on the importance of their work.

by Will Perry, managing editor

In many respects, landscapers in the 1980s never had it so good.

In this decade, the green industry has seen an avalanche of new and improved products that kept the lid on labor costs and bolstered the bottom line.

Two-cylinder, air-cooled engines; front-deck, hydrostatic mowers and the inventive use of hydraulics has made good turf equipment even better. And that equipment now borders on greatness, as manufacturers put more emphasis on operator-friendliness. More comfortable seats, better maneuverability, and improved speed and visibility continues to have a favorable, if immeasurable, impact on employees.

Chemicals too, have allowed landscapers to manage acreage that in the past would have been too substantial for today's smaller crews. The specificity of today's herbicides and

pesticides allow landscapers to better pinpoint targets, reducing rates while improving efficacy. Biologicals and integrated pest management (IPM) are making their presence felt as well.

Chemophobia's future

So what do landscape managers in the government sector have to worry about? Well, how about "chemophobia" or today's tax rollback climate?

"To be honest I don't think the future is too bright," says Allan Shulder, executive director of the Professional Grounds Management Society. Shulder says popular citizen movements to hold the line or reduce taxes (such as Proposition 19 in California) are a threat to government sector landscapers, since landscape management is too often regarded as an expendable municipal program.

"We're usually the first to go," says

Shulder. "I can't explain why that's the case, but it is. Right now, the climate in this country is to hold the line on taxes or cut them back. I'm not opposed to that personally, but when that happens our services are cut."

Other landscapers, particularly those caring for universities or school districts, are more optimistic. Jack Coffman, of Margaretta Local Schools, Ohio, says school board members today are more aware of the importance of well-landscaped building exteriors. "I've been getting real positive feedback for what I've done here," says Coffman. "The board realizes that only about 30 percent of the voters in this town have kids in the schools. The other 70 percent make up their minds about the quality of the schools by other means. By seeing well landscaped buildings they develop positive feelings about the school system."

Coffman also mentioned that parents and administrators are increasingly aware of the importance of quality athletic fields. "There's more of a focus on safety. Parents are going from school to school and comparing playing surfaces. If they see a better field across town, they want our field to look that good or better."

Daryl Smith, assistant grounds manager at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, couldn't agree more. He believes that as universities become more aggressive in their pursuit of shrinking student pools, more emphasis will be placed on the school's landscape.

"My feeling is that the landscape's quality has a huge impact on a person's decision to attend a particular university," says Smith. "You get mom and dad here and take in all the trees, the grass, and the pretty flowers and it's impressive."

Nearly everyone interviewed by LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT felt that the industry needs to do a better job addressing critics of chemical use.

Shulder, who has been in the green industry for more than 40 years, says, "I've seen tremendous strides made in the green industry, but the one thing I haven't see is increased public awareness."

Shulder notes that "we need to be more positive than reactionary,"

which is a primary factor behind resurrecting the Green Industry Summit as the Landscape Environmental Resource Council in 1990.

"We're the environmentalists," exclaims Shulder. "We're the ones out there day after day taking care of the landscape. Critics don't talk about the benefits of chemicals at all. They're tremendous. We've got to turn it around, and now is a good time to make a move."

Bill Johnson, North Carolina DOT, agrees that the climate is right

to bridge the gap between the green industry and its critics. "There's some middle ground out there. The radical element is there, but reasonable people are involved as well," says Johnson. "We should do a better job of communicating, of finding that middle ground. To insist that we abandon pesticides is ridiculous."

Adds Smith: "People's attitudes have changed. They're more aware of the fact that things are building up in the environment. For right or wrong, we seem to have put that out of our minds. Now we're opening up and taking closer look at it."

Smarter chemical use

The results of this reawakening, says Smith, are improved targeting of pesticide applications, the use of bio-controls and IPM, closer monitoring of chemical applications, a concerted effort to use adaptable species, and a back-to-basics approach toward cultural practices.

Tomorrow's labor pool may be shallow, but the employees drawn from it are likely to be better trained, according to Smith, who has five degreed employees on his 17-man staff.

"The labor market will be much better, even though it may cost a little more," says Dave Nelson, roadside development specialist with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation. "There's more training today in- and outside-house."

Government landscapers are fortunate to be outside the competitive labor pools of the open market. Allen Goldapp, Jr., manager of grounds and horticulture at Southwest Texas State University, thinks that the competitive nature of the landscape market forces company owners to rely on low-paid employees. "The landscape market in this area is very cutthroat," says Goldapp. "Business owners have to use low-priced labor rather than professionals if they're going to make a living. That's a situation that's going to have to change."

Landscapers in the government sector appear to be less affected by this competitiveness because their employees enjoy more job security and (usually) higher wage rates.

Resiliency will remain an important element for government landscapers in the 1990s. By increasing public awareness about the benefits of turf, chemicals, and well-maintained athletic fields and school grounds, landscapers will go a long way toward insulating themselves from budget fluctuations. **LM**



Allan Shulder



Bill Johnson



A major challenge for government landscapers in the 1990s will be to educate the public on the various values of well-maintained turf areas to our society.