

A real 'Easy Rider'

MILWAUKEE — Bill Smithyman, landscape operations supervisor for the City of Milwaukee (Wisc.), is the original "Easy Rider." He spends more time touring the streets than Peter Fonda and Dennis Hopper did in the 1969 motion picture.

Milwaukee, you see, has more than 119 miles of highway medians, most about 20 yards wide, 95 percent of which are irrigated. That's more than 450 acres, and it's Smithyman's responsibility to keep all those shrubs, trees and grass plants green.

He assigns one person to every two miles of boulevard. That person is in charge of weeding, edging, cultivating, picking up debris and manually turning irrigation on and off. Thirteen mowing crews of two

to three persons each supplement the one-person maintenance crews.

"Milwaukee's had this system for eons," the veteran landscaper explains.

In 1988, Smithyman's 160 summer employees planted 424 trees, 6,375 shrubs and evergreens, more than 180,000 annuals and almost 6,000 perennials and bulbs.

"If you look at a landscape and you just have turf that is well maintained, it looks great," Smithyman philosophizes. "But trees are a major-profile plant material. They are also the easiest and least costly to add. Then, too, shrubs are another element in your profile."

Smithyman has found that pinching a penny here and there pays off with the city administration when a



Milwaukee's Bill Smithyman at a flowerful boulevard.

special project is requested.

"We have been very fortunate," he notes. "That's not to say there aren't programs that couldn't use more money. But we operate on a first-class basis and it's paid off when it comes to bottom-of-the-line budget. I believe it's a result of our professionalism."

Plenty of chances to save money exist within the confines of the government

structure. For instance, a shredder was borrowed from Milwaukee County last year to shred leaves for composting. "We've got some pretty good stuff," Smithyman notes, saving the city money it would've spent on both debris disposal and buying mulch.

Fifteen miles of drainage slopes are mowed by the department's Hustler 602 mowers. Time and labor are



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charged back to the Sewer Department. More and more, Smithyman's crews help with snow removal in the winter. The boulevards are watered three times a week with water from Lake Superior; water bills are based on acreage.

Most importantly, training and incentives are a big part of keeping valuable employees.

"Bob Skiera, our city forester since the early 1970s, has a philosophy of bringing in the best people at all levels," Smithyman relates. "That gets back to professionalism."

Smithyman's smile reeks of pride. And justifiably so, judging by the work his department does.

"We want to enhance the quality of life in the city of Milwaukee. We feel that we're meeting that goal; it's a good place to live."

—Jerry Roche □

Forging a country club image

NORTH OLMSTED, Ohio — Bill Prest's current mission in life is a worthy one: to create a country club image while charging a public golf course price.

Prest is the superintendent of Springvale Country Club in this Cleveland suburb. He wants to give the club a distinctly professional look, regardless of the number of Sunday golfers who walk his fairways.

Part of the image upgrade has been accomplished by gradually adding sand traps. "There aren't many public courses with extensive sand," explains Prest. He is placing the traps in such a way that they don't slow down play. "There's nothing worse than a four-hour round of golf that turns into six hours," says Prest. "We've placed these fairway traps



Prest: "more players through each day"

so that 90 percent of the play doesn't hit them. They're more cosmetic. At the same time, traps will be in play for lower handicapped golfers."

Prest installed nine traps this past summer, which will bring the course total to

40. The course had 18 when he became superintendent 23 years ago.

Prest has done more than just add sand to the course. He began an overall renovation program five years ago which included an aggressive schedule: "300 new trees, 15 traps and four or five new tees," says Prest. "We've also started renovating the irrigation system and have done some mound building." Dirt for the mounds came from a company working on a housing project next door to the club. The developer gladly supplied Springvale with 100,000 yards of topsoil rather than pay for hauling it away.

Prest, a graduate of the University of Massachusetts, says all renovations are in line with presenting a

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Circle No. 112 on Reader Inquiry Card

Reader disputes architect's rule

To the editor:

In the July 1989 issue under your column "As I See It," you seem to draw the conclusion that the landscape architect is the project leader as it relates to landscaping and irrigation.

It is my experience in doing major landscape contracting that the landscape architect's roles are limited.

In theory, his work is completed (early on), unless he has a per diem contract with the builder.

I consider the contractor to be the key in completing a job in a fast, efficient and practical way to insure the builder's advertisement specials and certificates of occupancy.

We never install materials that are not specified by the builder. But to get hold

of a landscape architect (since they consider us to be beneath them) is like getting hold of the president. Some architects set themselves up on a pedestal. Because they wear a suit and tie and sit in an air-conditioned office, they have no concept of the 32°F in the freezing rain or 95°F without the wind blowing.

I would suggest that architects do not take an active part in projects, and force contractors to make their decisions on the spot in order to satisfy their customers who are paying them. We are being paid by the customer and not by the architect; therein lies the key! If the landscape architect wanted to stop a project, the contractor would be blamed.

James H. Taylor

*Taylor Made Landscaping
Farmingdale
New Jersey*

Wildflowers work in shade

To the editor:

In the July "Problem Management," Dr. Rao was not correct when he agreed that wildflower seedlings or sod cannot survive in the filtered sunlight of a forest. He accepted the Montana reader's comment that "wildflowers won't work" without questioning the statement.

Wildflower germination in filtered sunlight will occur, assuring reasonable soil conditions and some level of moisture.

Columbine, ox-eye, coreopsis and corn poppy are among those which can survive in less-than-ideal (but not impossible) low level sunlight.

We can offer Dr. Rao a few jobs, some recent, where success on a scale of 1 to 10 has been a 6 or 7. This

is not out of the range of acceptability, since turf (or ground cover), in many cases, does not reach this level under more ideal conditions than those described.

We, however, have always appreciated the good doctor's sensible and knowledgeable comments in the past and always look forward to his management page.

Norm Krisburg

*Agro Dynamics
Plainfield
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Correcting desert plant references

To the editor:

Thank you for the beautiful two-page spread on the landscape project at Sun Valley, Ariz. in the June issue. The photo on page 34 really shows off the Sonoran Desert in all its beauty, and one can envision the highway (shown on page 35) transformed into a setting of equal splendor.

Our desert plants are indeed exotic. So exotic, in fact, that your copy editor, in condensing a few paragraphs from my original story, combined my descriptions of the yucca and ocotillo. Many of your readers who know the desert will catch the error.

The plant you have described as a yucca is the ocotillo pictured on page 34 to the right of the photo; it's the spiny upright plant in the foreground with orange plumes. A yucca, on the other hand, is the type of plant you may recognize as "Spanish bayonet," which is one of its commonly-distributed varieties.

Thank you for the opportunity to write for your magazine.

Joan C. Risley

*Risley & Assoc.
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country club image. "We were a flat, wide open, boring golf course," he remembers. "A lot of young public golf courses in this area are like that." Prest has installed wall-to-wall cart paths, connecting all but two holes. A great advantage in wet weather, the paths enable Springvale to run carts on wet days when other courses dare not tear up the fairways with tire tracks. And carts are mandatory on weekends.

"That has allowed us to get more players on the course at one time and get more players through."

In parts of the course, Prest has gone to low maintenance flower beds, longer grass reminiscent of the Scottish courses, and mulch. Low maintenance areas also serve to divide the course into playable and out-of-play areas.

He's even started a small tree farm in a low maintenance, out-of-play area.

How's that for initiative?

—Terry McIver □