

WHITHER COMEST THE PEOPLE?

Look at workforce projections for the 1990s. What do you see? A lack of line-level employees, the green industry's bread-and-butter.

by Jerry Roche, executive editor

Rosabeth Moss Kanter of the Harvard University Business School has issued a stern warning to American business via *Business Month* magazine:

"Companies will have to figure out how to make work better. They will have to think of ways to give people careers they can be proud of."

This is the problem confronting the green industry as it heads into the 1990s. Why? Consider these facts, so boldly suggested by *Fortune* magazine:

- "The employment rate in the '90s will be lower than in the '70s and '80s.

- "As baby-boomers age, they will leave a demographic vacuum in their wake, confronting managers with a scarcity of entry-level job seekers.

- "Growth of the workforce will slow from 2.4% per year in the '80s to 1.2% in the '90s.

- "The Hispanic population will grow by 33%, the U.S. population by less than 10%.

- "U.S.-born white males will make up only about 15% of the net increase in the labor force.

- "Companies that can't learn to attract women, blacks, Hispanics or Asian men will face a shrinking pool of desirable employees."

The pendulum shifts

During the last 10 years, the green industry used much of its resources to address legislation affecting pesticide use and workers' rights. (Rightfully so.) But the 1990s bring new problems.

"It's a social issue, not a governmental one," says Alan Shulder, executive director of the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS). "How do we get the young people? They can work at McDonald's for \$4.50 an hour; they're in an air-conditioned setting with flexible hours. In the green industry, they



The aging baby-boomers have left a demographic vacuum in their wake, leaving many in the green industry wondering how they'll attract tomorrow's employees from a shrinking work force.

would be working in the summer heat at \$4.00 an hour and they'd have to be to work at 6 or 6:30 a.m.

"The industry is just beginning to realize it's got to be competitive. Did you know that in some parts of the country, you have to pay \$7.50 an hour just to hire a body?"

Shulder's key point: green indus-

try businesses compete not only with their kin for good workers, but also with other labor-intensive industries.

According to *Business Week* magazine, the National Restaurant Association (McDonalds and others) and the National Retail Merchants Association (K mart and others) both predict radical employee shortages in the

next decade.

"I've talked to four other associations," notes Terry Peters, formerly of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA). "Everybody sees labor force-related problems, and they've been exacerbated by the new immigration laws."

Peters says that ALCA will attack the lack of career-oriented landscape workers. The organization hopes to establish a national certification program which can be transferred between states. "It certifies demonstrable skills that can be used as a career base," Peters notes. "We're at the point of having a proposal ready,

Vegas. Almost six hours of educational sessions will be devoted to the subject, including part of a two-hour panel discussion, "Issues of the '90s," on Nov. 7.

The trained

ALCA, which cooperates with 18 colleges and universities, notes a significant decline in horticulturally-oriented students. The organization's annual field day—a two-day series of landscape-related tests given graduating seniors—is becoming what Peters calls "horrendous competition" for the services of able students.

According to Clarence Davids of

the junior and senior high school levels. They've recently received help from the Future Farmers of America (FFA).

"We have had insufficient emphasis in the turf/landscape area," says Dr. Alan R. McDaniel of Virginia Tech, FFA contest supervisor. A new contest, beginning in 1991, "represents an introduction to horticulture, landscaping and turf at the high school level.

"We must introduce more students to the personal and career rewards in landscape horticulture," McDaniel observes. "But we really need to 'turn on' these students (to horticultural careers) before they start college."

The untrained

Unskilled, untrained labor could be in even shorter supply than trained people. *Business Week* says that the number of 18- to 24-year-olds will fall nearly 10 percent by 1995 while jobs available will increase by more than 10 percent. Few occupations will be unaffected, it says. "In suburbs across the country, gas stations, fast-food outlets and retailers are already offering up to \$6.50 an hour for jobs that elsewhere pay the \$3.35 minimum wage."

Peter F. Drucker, a noted author of books on business management, has his own concerns:

"In all developed societies, the able, intelligent and ambitious members of the working class stay in school beyond the point at which they are eligible for manual work. Young manual workers of today start out with a feeling of failure, a conviction of being second-class citizens. They need responsibility to overcome their feelings of insuperiority.

"To make a living is no longer enough. Work also has to make a life (career)."

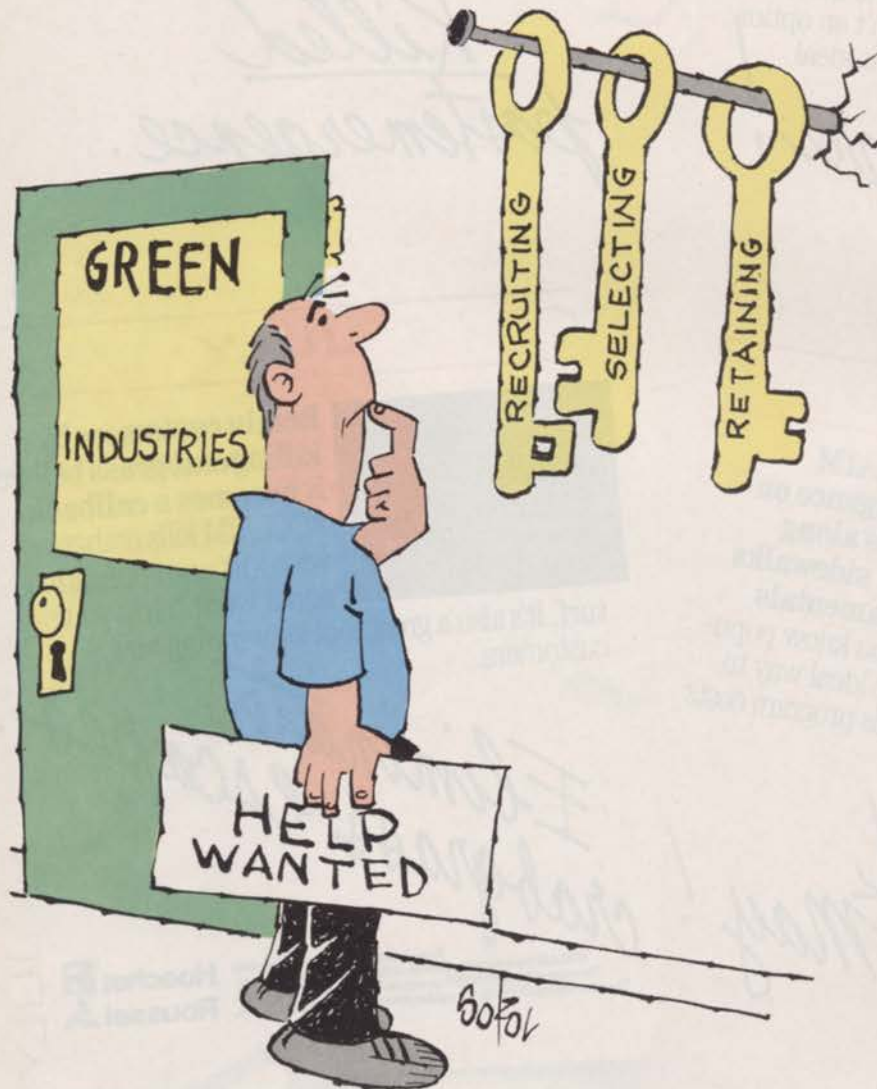
There is an additional factor, according to Jim Brooks, the PLCAA's executive vice-president.

"The people aren't coming from the farm any more," he observes. "One of the comments that I've heard is that, because (potential workers) are not coming from the farm, what they know about pesticides is what they've been reading. There could be some that choose not to even apply.

"I've heard of companies in the Northeast, where unemployment is at four percent, not getting any applicants after running newspaper ads."

Hands-on help

For individual green industry operations, the three keys are recruiting, selecting and retaining (see related article). Technology, too, will make a



and we could have it up and running in the next year or so."

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), meanwhile, will deal with the predicted labor shortage in great detail at its annual convention Nov. 4-7 in Las

Clarence Davids & Sons, Blue Island, Ill., "Many universities estimate that a student has an average of seven job offers upon graduation."

So, more and more, the professional organizations are realizing that young people must be called upon at