



The grounds at Leisure World have been planted with drought-tolerant plant life.

Runner-up: Managing a busy world

Milt Johns, first runner-up in our annual contest, is landscape director with Professional Community Management. He manages the landscaping and lawn care for Leisure World, a retirement community of 22,000 people in Laguna Hills, Calif.

Johns manages 750 acres of turf and shrubery, used by "very active adults, who play everything from checkers to lawn bowling."

A winner of a National Landscape Irrigation award, Johns recently completed a retrofit of the communities irrigation system to accommodate drought-tolerant plant life.

The retrofit involved splitting up stations, adding valves and controllers where necessary, and replacing and moving heads to accommodate the new design.

"It was very labor-intensive and costly in terms of trenching and material needs," says Johns. "Essentially we're working with the hardware we have in the ground. We're retrofitting to a point where we minimize water waste due to misting," or other water-wasting occurrences.

Johns recently came up with a new method of collecting waste from job sites, resulting in a six-man staff reduction. The company now processes compost into mulch and soil amendments, while saving \$200,000 per year in trash-related fees.

Work incentives

Like contest winner Vince Patterozzi, Johns believes in the positive effect work incentives have on the workers, smart enough to take advantage incentives. This past year, he devised an incentive-based productivity improvement plan.

"As we institute new mechanization, and as we increase services we provide," Johns explains, "we are obviously increasing our workload. We're trying to get our foremen to work more efficiently without adding staff. The ones able to do that and not compromise quality are evaluated and they are compensated accordingly."

Johns spends much of his time with the residents of Leisure World, "communicating why we do what we do, why we are changing some things, or how we can save them money and increase their services."

Johns meets with three committees and three boards each month, and uses audio-visual presentations, charts, graphs and financial information.

Safety, insurance big issues

Johns thinks worker safety and rising insurance costs are two of the significant challenges facing the green industry in the 1990s.

"We equip the men with as much safety equipment that we can find, including respirators and back supports. We mandate [safety equipment] use to be in front of any legislation or litigation."

"The successful grounds manager must have thorough education in ornamental horticulture or related, 'hands-on' experience,' in all areas of the green industry," says Johns, "as well as a 'forward-looking' attitude to move his business through the changing demands on the industry." □



Milt Johns: Pay workers well, and keep them safe.