

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Nice guys sometimes finish first

J. Martin Erbaugh's work with PLCAA, willingness to share with industry make him our 1991 'Person of the Year.'

■ Need proof that not all nice guys finish last?

J. Martin "Marty" Erbaugh, president of Lawnmark, Div. of Erbaugh Corp., is *Lawn Care Industry's* 1991 "Person of the Year."

"He's one of the most respected people in lawn care," says Jerry Faulring, president of Hydro Lawn, Gaithersburg, Md.

"He's easy to know, makes friends easily, and he's never been afraid to share what he knows about the business of lawn care if he thinks it'll help the industry overall."

This openness and readiness to work beyond his own business interests figured heavily in our choice of Erbaugh.

After all, his Akron, Ohio-based company was only six months old—and almost two years away from turning a profit—when, in June 1979, he and 22 other people, most of them small business owners, agreed to start a professional lawn care association.

They were among the growing number of would-be entrepreneurs wanting to make a living, if not a very good living, in the lawn fertilizing business. ChemLawn had shown that this type of service could be made affordable for homeowners and profitable to providers. ChemLawn was—to one degree or another—their model. Or their target.

Erbaugh was among the group of energetic newcomers recognizing opportunity.

Not that the concept of lawn care was foreign to him. After studying religion at Denison University, Granville, Ohio, and law at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, he worked for a while at Davey Tree Co. in Akron. The family of his wife Lynne, whom he'd met at Denison, was involved in the company.

In fact, Erbaugh helped Davey Tree's entry into lawn care.

But there was no lawn care industry as such, not then.



Marty Erbaugh says Lawnmark will remain a player in residential lawn care market.

Nor was there a forum for lawn company owners to share ideas or remedy common concerns.

In fact, for months after these business people met at Fort Mitchell, Ky., and summarily formed the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), they weren't convinced if anybody, other than themselves, saw the lawn application people as capable of coalescing into a recognizable industry.

It wasn't until about 700 other LCOs showed up for PLCAA's first conference and show—and surprised suppliers with orders—that the word *industry* took on any meaning.

Erbaugh was a part of this.

"A lot of the people taking part in these initial meetings were young and entrepreneurial. They were independent. That's why they were in the business. They had egos," recalls Faulring.

"Marty was particularly good at listening to these discussions—there could be some shouting—and then bringing all the points together."

Erbaugh became PLCAA's second president in November 1981, succeeding Faulring.

It was a memorable year for Erbaugh in other respects as well.

Earlier that year, competition drove his Lawnmark from the Milwaukee market

Hindsight always being 20/20, Erbaugh said in a recent interview: "If I had it to do over again, I would be more careful in my assessment of the competitive situation."

He refocused Lawnmark in Akron, Ohio, and in Rochester, N.Y., and by 1983 Lawnmark had turned the corner, he knew. This year Lawnmark will exceed \$12 million in sales, just over half coming from operations in New York, a state with strict lawn care regulations.

But Erbaugh's a pragmatist, not a Don Quixote. Lawnmark adapts to regulations, he says. That's business. (Note: Lawnmark was one of 10 lawn care companies which contributed several thousand dollars this past spring to start a "Federal Issues Management" campaign under PLCAA's umbrella.)

Says Richard White, ServiceMaster LawnCare: "Whatever happens, Marty seems to have the attitude that, well, we'll just find a way to overcome the problem. He just never seems to be daunted."

White also credits Erbaugh with being one of the top lawn care marketers he's ever met. "He never looks around at what everybody else is doing. He comes up with fresh ideas, his own ideas," says White.

Bob Earley, group vp of Edgell Communications and former editor of *Lawn Care Industry* magazine, says Erbaugh realized early on that lawn care was something customers wanted and that he, Erbaugh, could build a company to deliver it and make a fair profit too.

"He seemed to say to all of us that, 'hey, this is a real business and we can make money at this, but we have to approach it as a business, take care of the financial aspects, promote it.'"

At 43, Erbaugh says Lawnmark will remain focused on residential lawn care. Lawnmark's goal is \$20 million in sales by 1995, he says.

Erbaugh is the eighth person to be named *Lawn Care Industry* "Person of the Year." The others have been: Faulring (1984), Richard Lee Duke (1985), Ron Giffen (1986), the late Bill Fischer (1987), the late Jim Marria (1988), James I. FitzGibbon (1989), and James Brooks

STATES WHICH REQUIRE COMMERCIAL FIRMS TO NOTIFY WHEN APPLYING LAWN CARE PRODUCTS TO RESIDENTIAL LAWNS

State	Direct Notification				Posting	Registry
	In advance		When applied			
	Customer	Neighbor	Customer	Neighbor		
Arizona			X			
Colorado			X		X	X
Connecticut	X	X			X	X
Delaware	X	X	X	X		
Florida	X		X		X	X
Illinois		X	X	X	X	
Indiana			X		X	
Iowa	X	X	X	X	X	
Kansas			X			
Kentucky	X	X	X	X	X	
Maine		X			X	
Maryland	X		X		X	X
Massachusetts	X		X		X	
Minnesota			X			
New Jersey	X	X			X	
New Mexico			X			
New York	X				X	
Ohio		X	X	X	X	
Pennsylvania		X				X
Rhode Island	X	X	X	X	X	
Vermont	X	X	X	X	X	
Wisconsin	X		X		X	

Source: General Accounting Office

Let the EPA do it, GAO tells Senate

■ The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) is playing Washington D.C.'s version of "pass it on, no returns."

The GAO was asked last spring by Senator Harry M. Reid (D-Nev.) to determine the effectiveness of state pesticide notification laws. This fall, it reported back to Reid and said the job belongs with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

The GAO added that the EPA should pass on what it finds to *all* states, "thus helping those states interested in modifying existing programs or those states about to begin notification programs."

Reid is co-sponsor, along with Senator Joseph Lieberman (D-Conn.), of Senate Bill 849 which calls for nationwide pesticide notification by commercial applicators. The proposed federal legislation figured prominently in hearings before the Senate Subcommittee on Toxic

Substances last May, but has received almost no publicity since.

The GAO report said none of the 23 states requiring commercial applicators to provide notification when applying lawn care pesticides has "formally assessed the effectiveness" of their laws. Also, seven states maintain registries of individuals wanting notification when commercial firms apply pesticides within certain distances of their homes.

"EPA officials told us they were aware of state notification programs but did not have sufficient information to reach any firm conclusion regarding whether such programs are effective," said the report.

The EPA will seek out regulatory officials, individuals on state registries and lawn care professionals to determine how effective these notification programs are, said the GAO report.

Missoula voters 'just say no' to posting law

■ An admittedly poorly-written ordinance requiring the posting of properties sprayed with pesticides was defeated by the voters of Missoula, Mont. on Nov. 6.

Final vote was 5,814 against, 4,352 for.

This particular issue was of immediate importance to the green industry, according to Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (R.I.S.E.). Its loss signals to other communities that the voting public does not support over-regulation.

"R.I.S.E. cannot fight all local ordinances, but we have chosen Missoula because it...can be used as a precedent in other areas," R.I.S.E. executive director Allen James told LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT last month.

Brad Selstad, a Missoula lawn care operator, told the *Missoulian* newspaper that the ordinance was defeated because it was poorly written and lacked public support. Due to pre-vote compromises between green industry interests and the Montana Public Interest Research Group (Mont P.I.R.G.), the burden of posting would have been placed on the homeowner, had the ordinance passed.

After the election, Mont P.I.R.G. was not ready to give up the fight. Executive director Brad Martin told the *Missoulian*, "I'm not sure that with a little more work, this community might rise up in strong support of an ordinance."

'Day on Hill' is scheduled for Feb., 1992

■ The 1992 Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) "Legislative Day on the Hill" is Feb. 24-25.

PLCAA said DowElanco will provide speakers and some of the meals. There is no registration fee. Any lawn care company owner or manager can attend. PLCAA said it's making arrangements with a hotel close to the Capitol for attendees.

For more information, contact PLCAA at (404) 977-5222.