

# LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

## OLCA prez seeks LCO support

### Association-builder Phil Fogarty of Ohio says it's time to consider more state lawn care associations.

■ It's high time lawn care professionals start building their industry from the grassroots level.

So says Phil Fogarty, president of the Ohio Lawn Care Association, which approaches 100 members in only its first year of existence.

"Ohio has been the center of this industry and we should have an association," he says.

Indeed, the development of state lawn care associations which peaked in 1990, could heat again in 1992 as association-builder Bob Andrews becomes president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA).

Andrews, an LCO in Carmel, Ind., was a driving force in the development of at least five state associations. He recently told the directors of PLCAA that he's considering another regional association development seminar in Indianapolis this December.

It was at a similar seminar in 1989 that



**Phil Fogarty: every Ohio LCO should join**

regional issues as they appear.

Fogarty stresses that these associations must work closely with the PLCAA though.

"This industry needs the PLCAA," says Fogarty, owner of Crowley Lawn Service, Cleveland. "PLCAA's in a position to see the industry's bigger picture, and it has a presence we could never have."

But for any association—even a state association—to be attractive to potential members, it must offer something in return for their support.

Fogarty says industry suppliers generously support OLCA. This allows OLCA to give new members a "welcome package" of discounts and specials on products most LCOs already use.

"There's no reason why any lawn care opera-

tor in Ohio shouldn't belong to us right now. They're losing money if they're buying any seed or fertilizer," says Fogarty.

Apart from an immediate financial advantage for joining (OLCA's dues are \$50 annually), the association is making headway in getting a more realistic (and less costly) worker's compensation rating for Ohio LCOs.

So far, lawn applicators have been included in the general landscape rating. "The classification is wrong," claims Fogarty.

Given enough members in OLCA and an accurate accounting of the industry's safety record, the rates can be lowered, Fogarty believes.

He adds that OLCA is investigating an insurance package for its members as well.

But, most of all, he says OLCA's goal is to strengthen and help the legitimate operator, no matter how small.

"I'm hoping that the big company versus small company and the state (association) versus the national, and all that baloney stops," adds Fogarty. "We're all in this together and if the states can pull their acts together and they can get the small guys involved, with the big guys helping, we can all benefit."

—Ron Hall

## PLCAA seeks \$\$ for federal issues

■ The Professional Lawn Care Association of America's plea for contributions to its Federal Issues Management Fund attracted contributions from 28 members by September.

It's likely more LCOs, suppliers and state associations have contributed since, increasing the \$3,500 collected, as of late August.

PLCAA asked for the money in its Pro Source magazine, and in a separate mailing to members.

The fund was started in response to the

senate subcommittee hearings on lawn care this past April.

Prior to the hearings, some of the largest lawn care companies in the country contributed from \$5,000 to \$40,000 each to mount a strong industry presence in Washington D.C.

The 15 original contributors put up about \$130,000.

PLCAA, which is also helping putting money into the fund, says it will need similar financial help next year as well.

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## Capital trip is Feb. 24-25

■ The PLCAA's "Legislative Days" will be Feb. 24-25 in Washington, D.C. DowElanco has reportedly agreed to help put together the LCOs' working visit to the capital.

PLCAA President Neal DeAngelo has set a goal of 125 attendees, more than double LCO attendance at the 1991 joint pest control/lawn care legislative day.

The 1992 trip to Capitol Hill will be the third for LCOs. As it stands now, there will be no charge for LCOs to participate.

## Leaf miner busy in '91

■ Locust leaf miners did a number on locust trees in Ohio this summer, but it's too late to fret about it now.

Craig Weidensaul, a forest pathologist at Ohio State University, said the tiny insect has run its course and you should probably wait until spring before fighting back.

Weidensaul says if you determine treatment is necessary then, a powdered systemic insecticide applied through holes in the ground beneath the trees is probably most effective.

Locusts are tenacious and resilient, he says, and most should pull through.

Infected trees turned brown or bronze early in the growing season.

## Canadian LCO/rancher: 'Don't blame economy'

**John Robinson says the lawn care market is healthy—if a company's management is healthy too. The key is continually revamping to meet changing market conditions.**

■ Several hats fit John Robinson's head, but the one he stands most comfortably under is a cowboy hat.

What's more appropriate head gear for a lawn care professional who lives on—and oversees—a cattle ranch tucked neat as you please between Calgary and the Canadian Rockies? The peaks west of the city sprout handsome, and panel a vista of gold-green rangeland and fresh-mown hay.

From the ranch, Robinson and his lovely wife Katrina can see the mountains like a ribbon running north and south—if the weather's fine that is.

But the ranch, if it doesn't exactly run itself, is, in John's words, "streamlined, a simple operation."

A lawn care company is a friskier business, he says.

He's owner of Green Drop Lawns LTD, one of the largest lawn and tree care companies in Canada.

He thinks lawn care business people—

and he makes it clear he's speaking from his own experiences—should look at the internal operations of their companies before they blame anything else. That is, if they feel profit or growth isn't what it should be.

"The market is still there," says Robinson. "Sure, it's easy to say the homeowner doesn't want fertilizer anymore, but that's not the case here and I don't think it's the case across the industry."

Robinson is a product of the range. A third-generation Calgary rancher, he started selling fertilizers to grain and forage growers in and around the city in 1966.

In the late 1970s he began offering liquid fertilizer, and developed and patented a flow divider. His liquid customers could, with the new equipment, apply fertilizer evenly in strips to plant root and moisture zones during cultivation rather than broadcasting, and wasting, product on the soil surface.

The flow divider is now used by growers across North America.

When, about 12 years ago, Robinson looked to the homeowner fertilizing market in Calgary itself, he sought the help of Jim Mello, a Chicago-area businessman with vastly more experience in lawn care. Mello (he still travels regularly from Chicago to review Green Drop operations) helped Robinson put together a ChemLawn-like operation.

"It (Green Drop) took off," admits Robinson.

From a single tank truck in Calgary, the business grew to Edmonton in 1985 and, with the purchase of two companies, one in '88, one in '89, to Winnipeg. (Edmonton is a three-hour drive north of Calgary. Winnipeg is in Manitoba Province, maybe 100 miles straight north of the Minnesota/North Dakota state line.)

Meanwhile, as Green Drop expanded in the mid-1980s, Robinson revamped the company to meet changing market conditions.

By converting Green Drop's product delivery system to low volume, technicians could then use a third or less as much product as they had been using.

And, by equipping heavy-duty pickup trucks with dual tanks—one for fertilizer, one for control products—and equipping applicators with dual hoses for spot treat-



John and Katrina Robinson at their Calgary ranch. Robinson's Green Drop expanded into Edmonton and Winnipeg, and added tree services.



ments (weed control usually) instead of blanket applications, Green Drop significantly reduced both service delivery and product costs.

"The changes allowed us to get more production out of every truck and still carry about 70 percent less product," says Robinson.

If all Green Drop management's decisions had been as foresighted, Robinson admits he certainly couldn't speak from the perspective he now does.

For instance, the company's Winnipeg operation had "some rocky times" this past season, says John.

"We could blame the economy and other factors, maybe even the environmental factor, but I don't think we should use them as scapegoats."

Instead, he's looking for "hiccups" in his program.

The market's there, he's convinced, and Green Drop will find a way to satisfy it.

"After all, we bought two companies there (Winnipeg)," he says. "We changed the name; there was new management; we changed the program."

Tellingly, the Calgary and Edmonton operations had good seasons.

Says Robinson: "If you really look at the success of a business, really look deeply, it usually comes back to internal changes you make or you don't make."

—Ron Hall

## Turfed truck attracts the curious, new customers

**Here's a nifty idea that's used to attract possible customers. It's a product of a fertile imagination—not to mention some fertile grass.**

■ John Kroll wanted to show prospective customers that his Montane Landscape Company can grow grass just about anywhere.

So he "grew" a truck, a pickup truck covered with Kentucky bluegrass/creeping red fescue sod.



**This GMC (Grassy Motor Contraption) pickup truck generates a lot of interest at Montane Garden Center.**

"We might have 20 people a day stopping to photograph it, and maybe five of them stop in to the garden center to ask about it. It's good for business," says Cam McTavish, who works in the nearby Montane Garden Center.

Establishing nice lawns is difficult in the company's market area, the Canmore Valley which cuts through the east face of the Canadian Rockies about 30 miles west of Calgary. The soil is silty, basically glacial deposit.

"We wanted something to show how good we are with grass," he explains. "We thought about growing grass on plywood and we had some other ideas, but then we realized we could use this old beater of a truck—it's a GMC I think."

The truck ("Yes, I'm pretty sure it still runs," says McTavish) is parked near the Montane Garden Center on the outskirts of Canmore, Alberta, Canada, population about 6,000.

Montane Landscaping is a full-service landscape firm servicing several small communities just west of Calgary.

How did Montane Landscape get the sod to stick to the truck?

"It's a secret," says McTavish, "but the body of that truck must be perforated with a zillion screw holes."

The truck is watered three times a day to keep it green.

Yea, but, how often is it mowed?

—Ron Hall

## Airwaves to carry lawn/landscape tips

**John Deere's Bob Tracinski reveals an electronic campaign to rekindle pride in home lawns.**

■ An ambitious campaign to reinvigorate pride in home lawns sprouts this spring.

A by-product of the effort—indeed, its goal—will be to promote the Professional

Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) as a helpful and knowledgeable spokes-organization for lawn care.

The effort is informational and involves five 60-second public service announcements (PSAs) for radio and one for television. Production of the announcements began in September and should begin popping up on radio and television in early spring 1992.

PLCAA directors late this summer endorsed

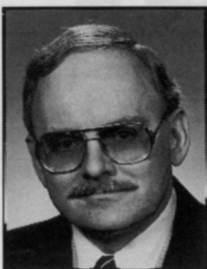


the program outlined by Bob Tracinski, long-time communications specialist with John Deere & Co. Tracinski spoke in behalf of PLCAA's Public Relations Committee, of which he's a member.

The campaign's message reinforces the idea that lawns are great. "People work very hard to buy and own properties with beautiful lawns," Tracinski said.

John Deere is reportedly financing the initial batch of PSAs, but Tracinski said the PLCAA committee seeks other sponsors to expand the program.

The radio PSAs discuss "Grasscycling,"



**Bob Tracinski says radio/TV messages can reach millions.**

Deere & Co were extremely well received

proper mowing techniques, mowing safety and landscaping tips. The television PSA deals with "Grasscycling," PLCAA's nationwide program to keep grass clippings from landfills.

Tracinski said similar PSAs generated by John Deere & Co were extremely well received

by radio and television. One produced in cooperation with the National 4-H Council was telecast a total of 4,200 times at 115 different television stations. It dealt with mower safety.

(John Deere benefits by having its equipment shown being used during the narration.)

Along with radio and television, the PLCAA committee also hopes to reach 1,050 newspapers and magazines with printed lawn care information.

"I think this idea of reinforcing pride in home lawns is very powerful," said Tracinski.

## Keep watering until freeze

■ Everyone knows how important water is to lawns, but trees and shrubs are sometimes overlooked.

Marianne Riofrio of Ohio State University's Consumer Horticulture Center says trees and shrubs that suffered through extended dry weather this summer should get a good weekly watering, at least until the ground freezes.

Signs of drought stress include:

- early fall color,
- fallen leaves and
- droopy foliage.

"The trees aren't dead," says Riofrio. "Leaves have been on the trees long enough for them to manufacture a good deal of food for the roots."

Even so, trees and shrubs will need all the help they can get before winter.

"A cold, dry winter would further weaken trees and shrubs," she explains. Those also suffering from disease or soil com-

paction could even die. Many trees and shrubs planted this past spring have already died because of the lack of rain.

Because one deep watering can take hours, start with the trees and shrubs most in need, she advises. Evergreens, especially ones with broad leaves, should be next on the list.

Because evergreens lose water from their foliage year-round, Riofrio recommends spraying them in early December (in Ohio) with an anti-desiccant spray. The spray can be reapplied in January or February according to label directions.

# "WE SPRAYED 62,000 ROSES WITH WILT-PRUF AND LOST LESS THAN 50!"

—Tony Notaro, owner, Larchwood Construction Co., Holtsville and Rochester, N.Y.

Tony Notaro's landscaping business has grown from zero to one of the 25 largest in the nation in just 32 years.



Tony and daughter Kathy inspect a juniper before planting.

Notaro was landscape contractor for the Levittowns, planting 14,000 homes on Long Island, 5,000 in Delaware and Virginia and 3,000 in Florida. He most recently completed a million dollar landscape renovation of the Flushing Meadow Zoo in New York City.

That landscape includes rare and exotic plants, plus wildflowers and other meadow grasses.

"We transport and plant lots of 12-to-24 inch caliper trees," Notaro said. "The nursery

digs and tags the trees. Our standard procedure is to require the supplier or grower to spray the trees with Wilt-Pruf before we start to dig. We like to hold freshly dug trees in the shade for about 10 days and keep the wrapped ball wet on each tree during the entire period."

Notaro takes pride in his landscaping business. That's just one of the reasons he uses and recommends Wilt-Pruf.

Wilt-Pruf is the proven way to reduce moisture loss and drying out when plants are under stress. Order from your distributor today.

A longtime member of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), Notaro encourages landscapers to join ALCA to stay up-to-date on technical knowledge and exchange information.

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