

## 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