

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Barefoot's stature as 'national' company grows with acquisitions

Management team headed by Pat Norton sees continued expansion of Worthington, Ohio-based company through development of franchises, 'branchises' and buy-outs.

■ Convinced the lawn care business no longer offers any entrepreneurial excitement? Shhh...don't let Patrick Norton know it.

He still thinks—silly him—that there's opportunity to grow a lawn care company. A really big company. A national company.

"I think that good operators—and we don't think we're the only good operators—will continue to prosper and grow," says Norton.

"There are a lot of markets still out there in the development stages. I think that portends well for the industry."

Say what?

What does Norton know? After all, Barefoot Grass Lawn Service, which he's helping to grow, has, since 1979, *only* spread from central Ohio into and across the Mideast and Midwest. Barefoot is now also represented on both coasts as well as in Florida, Colorado and Texas. Company revenues increased from about \$2 million in 1979 to about \$52 million in fiscal year 1991.

Reasons why the public is, seemingly, so eager to accept Barefoot services

include: its clean yellow and green vans (Barefoot's main competition uses larger, tanker-type trucks), its well-trained technicians, its customized, predominantly dry application program.

Just as significantly, Barefoot is adept in targeting its considerable direct mail and in-house telemarketing efforts to homes in neighborhoods that are able and willing to pay a premium price for the delivery of granular fertilizer and control products.

It's this attention to detail that's characterized the Barefoot management team which has been headed by Norton since



Barefoot's Pat Norton says there's still lots of room for growth for professional lawn care.

the mid-1980s.

Briefly: Pat Norton joined Barefoot in 1979 as its director of finance and administration. In 1981 he, and other top com-

Barefoot Grass® Lawn Service Markets



ELSEWHERE

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pany managers, bought Barefoot from Toro. Norton became company president in 1986. In 1989 the Chicago-based investment firm Golder, Thoma & Cressey bought a majority share of the privately-held company. This past October Barefoot went public.

Barefoot Grass is now the third largest lawn care company in the United States, and still growing at an annual double-digit rate.

Norton says it's attracting new customers for each location. "We are still growing in Columbus, Ohio," says Norton. "If that's not the most competitive lawn care market in the United States, it's certainly one of the most competitive."

But mostly it's growing because of the proliferation of its market-targeted franchise and "branchise" operations—and, most recently, its acquisition efforts. (A "branchise" is a Barefoot franchise which is owned by a separate corporation but nonetheless managed by Barefoot through a management agreement.)

Barefoot is definitely in a buying mood. Says Norton, "we would have growth with-

System-wide customers & average annual revenues per customer

1986—133,000.....	\$169
1987—173,000.....	\$177
1988—206,000.....	\$182
1989—229,000.....	\$199
1990—258,000.....	\$206

out acquisition, but to maintain the level of growth we want, we have to look at acquisitions."

On January 3, Barefoot bought lawn care operations in Cleveland, Wooster, Akron and Canton—former properties of Lawnmark which generated 1991.

To make that deal work, Barefoot Grass also bought its Canton franchise. Otherwise the company would have found itself competing against one of its own franchise operations.

"The ideal acquisition for us is going to be in a market where we already have a presence so that when we add revenues, we can do it profitably," says Norton, "where we already have existing facilities, where we're making money, where we can add revenues without adding too much overhead."

In separate transactions in 1991, Barefoot purchased its "branchise" in Newark, N.J., (for about \$1 million), and will likely purchase "branchises" in Fort Lauderdale, Long Island, Harrisburg, Pa., and Boston by the end of 1992. This past year also saw the opening of "branchise" operations in Portland and Norfolk, Va., and the opening of franchises in Topeka, Kans., and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

For the past several years about 88 percent of the company's net service revenues have come from standard lawn care services, and 12 percent from add-on services such as tree & shrub care, lawn aeration, liming and seeding.

—Ron Hall

10 easy steps in gaining a friend and supporter in the legislature

These suggestions from two experienced lobbyists can guide you to a successful meeting with your lawmaker.



■ Here's a recipe for meeting with and seeking the cooperation of your elected representative.

It's a step-by-step recipe built from the comments of Ed Graves and Norm Goldenberg. The two men advised lawn professionals who had gathered in Washington D.C. prior to meetings with their U.S. Senators and Representatives. More than 100 lawn professionals participated in these "Day on the Hill" events Feb. 23-24.

Graves is a senior consultant with Capitoline International Group, an issues management firm headquartered in Washington D.C. He's been lobbying on Capitol Hill the past eight years. Capitoline is employed the green industry

to present its case in the Capital.

Goldenberg, former owner of Alert Lear Pest Control, Miami, is chairman of the Government Affairs Committee for the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). He's been involved with Florida and national legislative issues involving pest control/lawn care for the past 10 years.

Their suggestions will help you through that all-important initial meeting

Goldenberg urges LCOs to establish mutually beneficial relationships with legislators.

with your legislator—more likely, legislative aide or staff member. And don't be disappointed if a legislator can't meet you in person, says Goldenberg.

Gaining the ear and, hopefully, the support of a staff member can be productive. Lawmaker schedules are incredibly busy. They rely heavily on staff members for

information. Says Graves, "If you are able to convince the staff about your position, you're halfway home."

If you've no immediate plans to meet with your legislators or their staff members soon, file these suggestions and refer to them prior to such a meeting.

1. Have a legitimate reason for seeking a meeting. Are you responding to pending or proposed legislation? Do you want your representative to oppose a particular proposal? Or support another course of action?

2. Identify yourself as a constituent. "The fact that he's your representative and you're from out of town gives you every reason to ask for a meeting," says Graves.

3. Be concise. You'll have, at best, 15 to 30 minutes to present your views. Start with a brief description of the nature of your business and industry. Progress to the two or three points you want to make.

4. Be prepared. Have the facts at your fingertips. If your concern is a legislative proposal, know its, name, number and sponsor. More importantly, know its provi-

Ask your legislator to take action, says lobbyist Ed Graves.

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sions. If you oppose it, suggest alternatives.

5. Make an accurate assessment of the benefits that your business and industry offer your community—environmental and economic benefits, including the number of jobs they provide. “That’s the kind of message that gets to a member of Congress,” says Graves.

6. Leave time for questions and answers. Your legislator or their staffer will almost certainly want to ask some questions. If you have literature to leave behind, keep it in hand until after your talk, then present it, says Goldenberg.

7. Never burn your bridges. “Sometimes a heated argument is appropriate but that’s very rare,” says Graves.

8. Ask for support. “Don’t just leave, ask them to take some action that supports your efforts,” says Graves. Co-sponsor a bill? Communicate your views to a committee or subcommittee chairman.

9. Write a thank you letter to the representative or the staffer you met. In the letter reiterate several key points you made during your visit.

10. Seek a long-term relationship. A single meeting with a lawmaker will not accomplish much, adds Goldenberg. Offer yourself as a continuing source of accurate and useful information concerning your industry to your representative and staff members.

“You’re only a telephone call away,” adds Graves. “You can establish an ongoing relationship with them over the telephone, having met them.”

—Ron Hall

BEFORE YOU MEET A LEGISLATOR: A CHECKLIST

I want to discuss: _____
(Bill number, amendment, issue, etc.)

I am meeting with _____ **at** _____

Office location: _____

Telephone: _____

Material to take: _____

Three points to make: 1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Supporting statements/ideas: _____

Action requested/desired outcome: _____

Response from legislator: _____

Thank-you letter sent (date): _____

Additional follow-up action: _____

Source: PLCAA

Coach Knight to speak at GIE/92

■ Bobby Knight, the sometimes controversial but remarkably successful basketball coach at Indiana University, will deliver the keynote address for the Green Industry Expo/92 in Indianapolis Nov. 16-19.

Knight, the winningest coach in Big Ten history, sought his 11th conference championship this season. Besides winning three national championships, he’s also coached gold medal-winning teams in both the Olympics and Pan American Games. In 1991 he was elected to the National Basketball Hall of Fame.

GIE/92 will be held at the Indiana Convention Center—part of the complex that houses the Hoosier Dome, home to the NFL’s Indianapolis Colts.

Coincidentally, PLCAA President Robert Andrews is an Indianapolis businessman, and a graduate of Indiana University.



Indy GIE/92 attendees will hear from Bobby Knight.

PLCAA instructs 'Capitol Hill' participants: let legislators know that we will inform customers



■ Some of the public demands that "squirt and split" professional lawn care vanish.

They clamor that they're being exposed to chemicals by profit-hungry chemical lawn application companies. They say that without adequate warning and/or information they can't protect themselves, their children, or their pets from unwanted and potentially harmful chemical exposures.

Their complaints are emotional.

Lawmakers are listening, and acting.

That's why, says the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), the image of a professional applicator cruising into a neighborhood and hosing down lawns with fertilizer and chemical controls—then leaving behind little else other than invoices—must change.

To that end, PLCAA drafted "Customer Right-to-Know Provisions." These provisions were handed out to the 100-plus lawn pros who traveled to Washington D.C. for the third annual "Day on the Hill" gathering this past February.



Sen. Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.), who owns a farm in Indiana, supported PLCAA's call for sensible pesticide legislation. Bob Andrews, left, PLCAA president, introduced Sen. Lugar to the audience of 130 lawn care pros at the "Day on the Hill" breakfast.

The PLCAA policy statement urges professional lawn applicator companies to provide their customers with a written Customer Service Agreement containing the following information:

- ✓ the property address;
- ✓ number of applications over a 12-month period;
- ✓ general time frame in which chemical product applications will be made;
- ✓ statements informing the customer of the right to be pre-notified one day before products are applied, and to receive information on the products to be applied on the day of application;
- ✓ the annual cost of the basic service;
- ✓ a statement of what additional services may be necessary but are not included in the basic cost;
- ✓ a statement informing the customer of the right to be informed in advance of any price increases for services in subsequent years;
- ✓ the signature of the commercial applicator;
- ✓ the company name, address, telephone number, business registration number and, where applicable, the applicator's state license number.

PLCAA's members also believe that the following information should be provided to customers at the time of an application:

- the brand name or common name of the chemical lawn-product applied,
- the general reason for use as stated on the label,
- the maximum concentration of end-use product and the rate of application,
- any special instructions relating to the use of the lawn by the customer after the application is made, and
- on request, a copy of the product label.

Notification Registry—PLCAA says the idea has worked in seven states and supports creation of a registry in each state. People wanting to be notified prior to nearby chemical applications could sign up for the registry. Applicators, on a regular basis, could be informed of the people signing up for the chemical application registry.

Pre-notification—PLCAA supports a proposal to require commercial applicators to pre-notify the following people one day in advance of intended applications: customers (if applicable); people on the Notification Registry that are adjacent to the customer's property; or an appropriate school authority.

Posting—PLCAA supports national posting requiring commercial applicators and do-it-yourselfers affix a posted marker at the primary point or points of access to a property at the time of chemical application.

Don't let your next dig be your last.



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Circle No. 132 on Reader Inquiry Card

Industry urged to keep pressure on Congress to get pre-emption on fast track in fiscal 1992



■ The Federal-State Pesticide Regulation Partnership Act of 1991 may remain buried in committee in 1992.

Thousands of professional pesticide users—from lawn applicators to farmers—would rather see action, now. But 1992 is an election year. Issues such as health care and the state of the nation's economy hold the public's attention.

Admittedly, the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) is not a glamorous vehicle for attracting voter attention and support.

Bluntly, FIFRA is dull—even if it is up for reauthorization this year. (Look for a one year extension, instead, say sources in Washington D.C.)

And the Partnership Act is a pesticide pre-emption proposal to amend FIFRA, to keep (pre-empt) cities and towns from passing their own pesticide use regulations.

In the U.S. Senate, the pre-emption proposal is referred to as S. 2085 (sponsored by Sen. David Pryor, D-Ark.), and in the House as H.R. 3850 (sponsored by Rep. Charles Hatcher, D-Ga.). The measures are identical.

Passage of the Partnership Act could end the uncertainty



Richard Tice, left, of Greenkeepers/T&L Lawn Service and fellow lawn care professionals from Connecticut sought pesticide pre-emption support from Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.). Twenty-five representatives traveled from Connecticut to Washington D.C. to also meet with Sen. Joe Lieberman (D-Conn.), lawn care's harshest critic on the Hill.

caused by the the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in June 1991 that FIFRA does not prevent town and cities from passing their own pesticide-use laws.

At least that's what the green industry—particularly applicators and chemical suppliers—believe will happen. And hope for. The intent of S. 2085 and H.R. 3850 is clear: "A local government shall not impose or continue in effect any requirement or regulation regarding pesticides or devices."

But its passage is not imminent.

"Our goal is to put enough pressure on through co-sponsorships on the senate and house side for the committee chairmen to realize something should be done now, instead of waiting a year," says Allen James, executive director of Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), a pro-industry group.



These lawn care professionals from Ohio—left to right, Mark Laube, Lawnmark, Bill Clutter, TurfGard Company, and Phil Fogarty, Crowley Lawn Service—discussed pre-emption with a veteran staff member of Senator John Glenn (D-Ohio).

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