

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



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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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