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## AS WE SEE IT

RON HALL, SENIOR EDITOR



### Big deals open lawn care season

There's nothing so predictable in the green industry as change. The significant change in the lawn care segment of the industry can come from only one of two directions.

It can come from above, from the big boys, the really big and visible lawn care companies.

Or, it can—because of ever-growing client knowledge and interest—seep up from the consuming public.

Well, the big boys *have* been busy.

That's good news for us journalists—more grist for the mill and all that stuff.

It's also encouraging news for the professional lawn care segment of the green industry.

It demonstrates that somebody continues to care a lot about the application business. Somebody (lots of somebodies?) still thinks there's enough opportunity in it to invest a few million dollars, a *mere* few million dollars.

Early in January Barefoot Lawn Services Inc., headquartered in Worthington, Ohio, added to its 280,000 customer base by buying three Ohio branches from Lawnmark, based in Hudson, Ohio. It acquired Lawnmark's Akron, Canton and Wooster operations. Only Wooster didn't already have Barefoot service.

"We already had a presence in northeast Ohio," Patrick Norton, president of Barefoot Lawn, tells LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT magazine. "This will solidify our presence there."

Lawnmark, now about 20 percent smaller than it was before the transaction, will grow again, but mostly in New York State. Says Marty Erbaugh, Lawnmark president: "We've enhanced our financial position, put ourselves in a position to expand in the Northeast."

This wasn't a blockbuster deal, not considering that Barefoot, with sales of

over \$50 last year, paid \$2.6 million for the business. It does show that industry leaders are still out there pitching. They're still hungry.

The bigger deal—about \$33 million, sources say—involved industry giant ChemLawn.

FirstService, headquartered in Toronto, bought ChemLawn Canada and Green Lawn Care from EcoLab, Inc., Minneapolis.

This makes FirstService the top lawn care company in Canada. It picks up 110,000 lawn care and 20,000 tree and shrub care customers from 11 company-owned branches in Ontario and Quebec.

It also gives FirstService President Jay Hennick visions of using the company's marketing and franchising expertise to build a much larger network of related lawn care companies across Canada. But, that's probably down the road a few years. FirstService is a very young company.

Hennick—he's come a long way since starting Superior Pool, Spa & Leisure in 1972—seems to be genuinely excited about the lawn care market in Canada.

The ChemLawn operation—with revenues of \$23 million in 1991—is a model of service delivery, he tells LM. And FirstService (or, more accurately, its newly formed lawn care subsidiary Greenspace Services Ltd.) has the added advantage of retaining the ChemLawn Canada management.

FirstService owns 80 percent of Greenspace Services; senior Chem-Lawn Canada management owns the rest. Dr. William Black, former head of CC, is now president of Greenspace.

"FirstService's demonstrated franchise expertise coupled with our industry knowledge will allow us to reach into many more markets than we have to date," says Black.