



Marino: wants to build home owner awareness in southwest Missouri.

and seed, Van Noord's W&F tries to slip in as many aerations as it can during the dog days of summer, on those days when wind

or other conditions don't favor fertilizer or chemical applications.

"We follow basically the same routes as we do for the other rounds," says Van Noord.

George Marino of Greenlawn Fertilizer of Springfield, Springfield, Mo., says this season he'll add an optional two rounds of aeration to his basic five-application program.

Says Marino. "I think the message I want to get across is for them to realize,

yes, this needs to be part of the program and it (aeration) will help the other things that we're doing benefit them more."

In spite of the turfgrass industry's familiarity with aeration and its benefits, Marino doesn't think home owners have gotten the message yet.

"I think a lot of our market is still uneducated when it comes to aeration," he says.

—Ron Hall

Adaptable DC-area firm offers virtual 'menu' of lawn services to customers

Partners Dan Henneberg and Bern Bonifant say it would be nice to be 'all natural,' but you've got to make a living, too.

■ Good lawn care programs, good name, good new location: these are some of the reasons Dan Henneberg and Bern Bonifant feel good about 1992.

Henneberg is president and Bonifant vice president of Natural Lawns, Inc., Fairfax, Va. They've been together since founding Natural Lawns in 1986. Last year, recession or not, was the company's best ever.

What they, through NL Inc., do—and do well—is offer clients a choice of programs. Then they deliver the type of service the customer wants.

They feel that, as a small company, they have to be flexible to compete in the Northern Virginia residential market. Or be squashed. The competition includes most of the industry's national heavyweights, and several top-flight regional companies, too.

Henneberg and Bonifant aren't intimidated though. They're too busy.

When potential clients get a Natural Lawns' brochure, they almost get a lawn care menu. The partners know their suburban D.C. customers, for the most part, are educated professional people. But these same people also probably don't know the subtleties of keeping green, healthy lawns during the area's hot, humid summer. That's one reason all NL programs are listed and explained in easy-to-understand language.



Bern Bonifant, left, and Dan Henneberg are proving that the Northern Virginia lawn care market is still strong.

Prospects can choose from an "All Natural Program," a "Modified-Organic Program," a "Lawnplus-IPM" offering, or, perhaps, a "Zoysia Program."

Says Henneberg, "we'll even make adjustments *within* a program."

Adds Bonifant, "some customers don't like the cookie cutter approach. They may want one aspect of a program customized to address some particular concern they have."

In spite of the company name, no more than 10 percent of the company's clients choose an all natural lawn care program.

"The more research we did, the more we realized that—sure—it would be nice to offer strictly all-natural lawn care," says Henneberg, "but we have to make a living too."

He says most NL customers choose a modified organic program, consisting of a soil pH test, the use of high-quality, slow-release fertilizer, application of a pre-emergence crabgrass control, and spot weed and insect controls, if needed. A winter application of lime (a common feature

of all NL programs) provides the sixth round for this program.

The company also offers a shrub care program, core aeration and seeding (mostly done together in the fall), overseeding, and a small amount of mowing.

Henneberg and Bonifant are digging deeper into the Fairfax-area market. In fact, they started 1992 by moving their headquarters from Falls Church to Fairfax County, about a 25-minute MetroRail southwest from downtown Washington, D.C.

"This puts us absolutely in the center of the Northern Virginia market," says Bern. "We think this is going to help us keep our routes tight. I know it's not always an easy thing to do, but we intend to concentrate on small areas and still expand our customer base."

Adds Henneberg, "many households have both parents working and they just don't have much time for lawn work, but they still want a nice lawn."

—Ron Hall