

Everybody talks about the weather; Bailey's doing something about it

Mike Bailey, owner of Super Lawns of Gaithersburg, seeks ways to work with weather, rather than against it.

■ The newspapers are soggy. Some are in yards while others are on driveways.

It's obvious to Mike Bailey, driving to his office in Montgomery County, Md., just north of Washington D.C., that many of the newspapers were delivered *after* residents returned home from work, *before* the rain.

Every copy of the newspaper is wrapped with a printed advertisement—a wet advertisement—for Mike Bailey's lawn care company, Super Lawns of Gaithersburg Inc.

"Even if I get just a percent or two response, we can close enough sales to make it worthwhile. But, now I think we're looking at a percent of a percent," he says with a touch—just a touch—of disappointment.

Even from the cozy fabric seat behind the wheel of his shiny gray GMC sport truck, Mike can't see any good coming from wasted advertising dollars. A lawn care business can go broke hoping for ideal weather, he knows.

Rather than wait for perfect conditions, Bailey, 35, a man of medium build with smoky blue eyes and, seemingly, inexhaustible energy, this past winter immersed himself in two weather-related business projects; this in addition to running the lawn care franchise he bought 14 years ago.

Weather station—On one hand, Bailey is putting the finishing touches on computer software for a portable weather monitoring system he will, later this season,

begin offering to other lawn/landscape professionals.

The model weather station, located in the yard behind his headquarters, is tied into his personal computer. At a keystroke, the station displays the barometric pressure, wind speed/direction, rainfall (daily and cumulative), air/soil temperatures, etc. Bailey's technicians access this information through the two-way radios in their service (pick-up) trucks. They record the data on the back of every service ticket.

Says Bailey, "This is the direction lawn care is going."

Increasingly, regulations require professional applicators to tailor and adjust

tion service to improve his company's growing seeding and sodding activities.

The heart of this service is a custom-built, wooden, crate-sized unit, a meticulously engineered collection of hoses and valves, controlled by a computerized, electronic timer. The company is building eight or 10 of these units, each about the size and weight of a full box of groceries. These irrigation devices will allow Super Lawns of Gaithersburg to keep clients' turfgrass green and alive, even in summer's heat.

Last summer's localized drought again demonstrated the importance of being able to work through unfavorable conditions, says Bailey. His company, in its full-service programs, says it will do all it can to keep clients' lawns attractive.

"Last summer we had to fess up. We had to deliver on our promises. And we had to do it at no extra cost to our customers," says Bailey.

That translated into a record-breaking season of aeration and seeding, mostly turf-type tall fescues. (Bailey, who has established turf plots adjacent to both his office and home, is particularly impressed with the continued performance of certain hard fescues for shady problem areas.)

Indeed, Super Lawns' full-service program (the so-called *Super Program*) is what, Bailey feels, sets

his company apart. It includes seeding, aeration, rolling, weed/insect controls, organic-based fertilizers—as many visits as it takes.

Bailey admits that 1991, mired as it was in recession, wasn't strong. He says his company grew. Barely.

This season, providing Mother Nature cooperates even moderately well, should be stronger, he's says.

"People aren't going to pave over their lawns," says Bailey.

—Ron Hall



Mike Bailey says the two-way radios he installed in every service truck have paid for themselves many times over.

their treatment programs to meet specific environmental conditions. They'll need more accurate and immediate local weather data, believes Bailey.

From a practical standpoint, charting and recording local weather conditions helps lawn pros better target weed, insect and disease controls, as well as improve irrigation efficiency, he says.

Portable irrigation—The other service he's initiating will, he's hoping, bring financial returns yet this season. It's an automated, portable, above-ground irriga-