

JOB TALK

Landscaping as a marketing tool

It's the trees, shrubs, turf and seasonal color that bring visual 'life' to a property.

by Andy Hull

■ Scientific studies show that office workers have more positive attitudes and outlooks when creative landscaping sets a tone of order and tranquility. Their motivation is higher; their performance is greater; and they are more efficient. As a parallel, there is less employee turnover, more company loyalty, and greater corporate effectiveness and profitability over the long haul.

In such circumstances, intelligent landscaping becomes a "living" relief valve for the firm's personnel. Compared to other efforts and investments, imaginative landscaping can be reasonably priced and easily acquired.

Consider these not-so-hypothetical scenarios. With slightly less effort, a modern office park's foliated courtyard with pool and fountain might, alternatively, have remained a vacant, weed-infested lot. A commercial building's gracefully curved, graveled entrance, with a cozy seating arbor, could have just as well become a non-descript concrete slab. A suburban shopping mall's flagstone, fern-bordered drainage swale—often creating an intriguing wet-weather creek—might have easily been supplanted by a masonry trench with rusty mesh covering. In less thoughtful hands, the orderly treelines and manicured hedge rows that frame a medical complex could have just as well succumbed to an asphalt apron.

Instead of neglected, ho-hum surroundings, the exteriors of these structures have become harmonious collections of "value-added" amenities: places where a computer programmer can take a break; where a businessman can pause for a breath of fresh air and fresh point of view.

Sell the beauty—Well-ordered, visually arresting landscaping also gives customers, prospects, suppliers and visitors a more positive impression of the building's developers/owners and clientele. The first impression is often the lasting one—the long-held attitudes that form about a company's corporate culture, its sense of order and decorum, its taste level and operating style.

Yet, over the past 20 years of land planning, landscape design, landscape installation and maintenance for the 16,000 apartment homes of our parent company, Post Properties, we've discovered even more benefits. For Post's apartment residents, the lush landscapes and colorful year-round foliage stands as a corporate trademark. While a beautiful label cannot sell an empty package,

a quality product assuredly cannot sell itself with an ugly one.

Strategically placed trees not only provide protective shade from the sun, but their foliage serves as air filters and purifiers. Properly installed ground covers and turf tend to filter rainwater impurities before they reach the ground water systems.

Using existing surroundings—In developing Parkwood Circle of Atlanta, the main office facility was strategically placed near the bottom center of the tract to accommodate the semblance of a white water creek tumbling past its entrance into a manmade lake below. A nearby hillside was deeply graded to allow the partial subterranean placement of a three-level parking plaza. The front of the structure was planted with lush foliage which hung downward in a Tivoli Gardens effect. The back wall was literally buried into the hillside.

Other hilly terrain was systematically terraced and implanted with culverts and drainage swales which prevented surface flooding and erosion. A mile-long semi-circular roadway was strategically placed to transverse the inner borders of the development, with two landscaped entrances/exits on Powers Ferry Road.

The entire property was planted with a profusion of trees, shrubs, ground covers and seasonal color selected to visually enhance the natural appeals of the terrain.

As the newly-controlled surface water filled the lake, a recirculating pump keeps the water flowing through the shoals at the building's entrance, providing an intriguing focal point for tenants and visitors.

Added value—Apart from the resale value that landscaping adds to real estate, it also puts the property—and your role in it—in a more positive public light. These are the types of properties pointed out by city fathers on VIP tours, the landmark references used in media reports on local happenings, the photos in Chamber of Commerce catalogues.

In these associations you become a community booster, an environmentalist, a concerned corporate citizen whose efforts to "put something back" nets you even more.

—The author is vice president of Post Landscape, Atlanta, Georgia

Beautifully landscaped property makes a good first impression on any potential buyers, tenants and visitors.

