

# JOB TALK

## Client demands, site challenges not for the timid contractor

**Large maintenance accounts like Smith Ranch Homes separate the great landscaping firms from the average companies. Redwood's a great one.**

■ Smith Ranch Homes is an exclusive condominium project for senior citizens, located near Terra Linda in Marin County, Calif.

The 25-acre site includes 10.4 acres of landscaping maintained by Redwood Landscaping, which is headquartered in Santa Rosa.

It's easy to see why the Smith Ranch Homes contract offers plenty to keep the Redwood crew, company President Lebo Newman, and Operations Manager Dave Penry alert and well-practiced in the arts of preventive maintenance, planning, and communication with the customer.

The Smith Ranch Homes landscape features two putting greens of 10,000 sq. ft.; a lawn bowling surface of 2500 sq. ft.; several large water treatments; a greenhouse/garden area; and hiking trails through existing natural areas.

Smith Ranch Homes managers expect their own high standards to be followed by all service personnel who visit the property. Redwood therefore designed a measurement system to quantify those high expectations, and a management system to provide consistent quality. But it doesn't end there.

"We are continually redefining what quality is to the client," says Newman.

**Total satisfaction**—Redwood's area manager for Smith Ranch Homes is Denis Pelley, who is in regular contact with the property manager, four homeowner committees (for landscape, putting greens, garden and bowling greens); the developer; development sales staff; a horticultural consultant; and/or building maintenance staff.

Pelley visits the site daily. He walks the grounds with the property manager or committee representatives, and strives to satisfy their varied landscape expectations.

Newman believes Redwood plays the role of facilitator as it works in cooperation with each of the Smith Ranch interest groups.

**Water, plants, geography**—Smith Ranch Homes is irrigated with reclaimed water. Plant selection is therefore limited to those varieties which tolerate high concentrations of nitrates and chlorides, and low soil pH.

Originally, the Smith Ranch Homes landscape was to contain exotic tropical plants, such as papyrus to bird of paradise. The site's Zone 14-15 dry oak pasture has made that largely unattainable. Redwood is therefore trying to find more compatible plants to add to the property.

A plant inventory determined which species could best tolerate existing soil and water quality. Plants are replaced incrementally, as the tropics gradually become stressed out.

"Smith Ranch Homes wanted a program they could use to anticipate landscaping needs," says operations manager David Penry, "rather than just reacting to what happened. It's not the kind of place that you can allow to deteriorate then make better again. You have to maintain it at a high level all the time, and that means monitoring very carefully."

The water budget is tight; Marin County is one of the nation's most regulated water districts, with weekly monitoring and a multi-tiered payment schedule that encourages wise water conservation. Water use is monitored weekly.

"We have to stay within the budget allotment, or the client will have to pay much more," says Penry. In fact, Redwood saved the ranch quite a bit of money after it corrected some previously hidden problems in the water management hardware.

**Colorful changes**—The annual color program is planned at least three months in advance with input from the homeowners' garden committee. Redwood has a contract with a grower to assure the plants they need are available at the peak of color.

Rae-ellen Robertson, Redwood's annual color expert, visits every week. A special challenge has been to find a way to choose colorful plants without appealing to hungry deer.

Redwood Landscaping has realized the importance of being able to anticipate client needs rather than waiting for something to happen. Newman and his managers identify a problem area—such as the water's nitrate and chloride content—and solve it before it becomes unmanageable.



**Newman: Meet client quality standards.**



**Two putting greens at Smith Ranch—a feature unique to condominiums—pose added challenges. Plant selection must be compatible with soil conditions and water quality.**