

mistakes later on."

**Setting standards**—Bud Stephenson, owner of Caretaker Landscape Management, Inc. of Mesa, Ariz., and current president of the Arizona Landscape Contractors Association, recently began a training program in his maintenance-heavy company.

Initial training will be for crew leaders, and will show "how we want things done," says Stephenson. He says he realized the need to have some operational standards in place after six years in business, "before we get any bigger."

Continuity of work from one account to another is important in an industry where it's not uncommon to lose a contract to a lowballing competitor. The more professional and disciplined the crew, the better are your chances of retaining accounts from year to year.

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**Stephenson believes a good training program shows that the company cares about employee advancement. It also helps reduce or eliminate turnover.**

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Worker safety is part of the Caretaker program, which Stephenson has culled together from industry literature and videos, and some material offered by various suppliers.

Stephenson plans to videotape his own training program, custom-made for Caretaker personnel.

Leker, Frank and Reeve all spoke at the ALCA annual convention in Indianapolis this past November; Stephenson spoke from his office in Mesa, Ariz.

—Ron Hall, Terry McIver

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**Exchange programs provide peer group interaction**

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■ An interesting twist on employee training is the tried-and-true method of learning from others in your peer group. It's accomplished at the Chicago Botanic Garden through an exchange program.

Cindy Baker, director of education, says the program was started in 1989, "based on the premise that whenever two professionals meet, they have knowledge and experience to share with each other."

Participants in the program usually hail from area arboreta, zoological parks or universities, but just about any green industry professional is welcome.

"We invite (organizations and companies) to send their staff members here for two weeks, and so far 18 have participated."

According to Baker, having an opportunity to interact with someone from a different work environment is akin to re-learning or reinforcing some concepts and ideas that may have staled with time.

"And," adds Baker, "we find that people integrate new ideas into what they're already doing."

"The people who come to us wear many hats, so we try to specify what they do here. They spend two weeks in two different areas of horticulture."

The Chicago Botanic Garden staff is itself a group that's ready, willing and able to participate in continuing education. A recent poll by management revealed a need for training in basic "horticultural Spanish," and the classes were given soon thereafter.

—Terry McIver

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## Before you pick up your next pick-up

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■ Dealers say emphatically that price is not as important as some other considerations when small businessmen purchase a pick-up truck.

"Service is probably number one to the buyer today," says John Kessen of Southwest Ford in Parma Heights, Ohio. "But service and trust run right together. It's important to the dealership that people come back again and again."

The overriding features that small businessmen look for in their trucks nowadays are, according to Kessen:

- 1) ruggedness, durability, "quality;" and
- 2) investment: how long it will retain a value.

Before you head to the showroom, try to picture how your new truck will fit into your overall operations over the next several years. Scratching out a list of jobs your new vehicle will perform will save time and confusion at the dealer.

"The first thing I want to know is how the truck is going to be used," notes

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### Landscape managers who run their trucks 'long and hard' need to be prepared before buying replacements.

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## 'No-dicker' dealerships

■ No-dicker dealerships—where the sticker price is the only price—are catching on. They could revolutionize the way cars and trucks are sold, according to a new study.

The market research firm of J.D. Power & Associates of Agoura Hills, Calif. says new-vehicle dealers who skip the haggling are better liked and busier than traditional dealers.

Ninety-two percent of the dealers surveyed said their sales have increased since they adopted the system.

Among the differences customers like is avoiding the negotiation process with sales people while trying to sort through a maze of rebates and incentives, says Doris Ehlers, the J.D. Power account executive who conducted the study.

"We gave people the statement: 'I dread negotiations' and asked for a yes or no answer," she says. "Sixty-eight percent of the people answered yes." (The corollary: 32 percent of buyers don't mind haggling.)

No-negotiation car prices are like any other retail item: subject to frequent change. The J.D. Power study showed 33 percent of one-price dealerships changed prices as factory incentive programs changed, 29 percent changed based on inventory conditions, 14 percent changed weekly, 14 percent changed to sell more vehicles, and 10 percent changed every two or three days.

However, the J.D. Power study also showed that 54 percent of one-price dealers still haggle on trade-ins.

Kessen. Total miles per year, how many drivers, and what it will be hauling are key, he says.

"A lot of landscaping and lawn care companies are running their pick-ups long and hard," Kessen observes. "The length of service you get out of your vehicle depends on the number of drivers and amount of regular maintenance. I've had people destroy a truck in one year and others that get 150,000 miles or more."

**Other considerations**—Some other things to consider:

**Size selection:** Don't pick the truck that can handle those giant loads you haul three or four times a year. It's more economical to select the size suited to average loads, and then rent for the occasional large payloads.



**Kessen: How are you going to use your pick-up?**

Watch when you're comparing payloads to compare "apples to apples." Some manufacturers will give you the vehicle's payload capacity, others will give you Gross Vehicle Weight Rating

(GVWR). Here is how they compare: Payload equals GVWR (found on inside left door panel) minus Curb Weight (in manufacturer's specs) minus Passenger Weight (including driver).

**Driving area:** Suburban stop-and-go driving versus highway hauls makes a big difference when it comes to selecting transmissions, gear ratios and axle sizes.

**Body type:** The cheapest tailgate won't save you any money if it takes your crew longer to load the truck. Considering the cost of labor and workmen's compensation today, it may be more economical to spend more for an easy-loading model.

**Simplicity:** Are tilt-away steering columns and exotic engines really necessary? How much extra time and money will it cost to fix these items if they break down?

**Ease of handling:** Does the model make backing into driveways a major project? You want the truck that's wide enough for your loads, but not so big that it's a tricky ride down narrow streets.

**Trade-in value:** Unless you're into the habit of running them into the ground, some day your truck will end up on the market. Which models best retain their resale value?

**Dealer reputation:** The best "bargain" often isn't. What do other customers think of the dealer's service and reliability? He's the most crucial link between you and Detroit.

**Lease or buy**—Whether you choose to purchase the vehicle outright or lease it over a period of months will make a difference on your next income tax statement.

"Leasing programs have become more popular," notes Kessen, "mainly because, then, businesses know exactly what their program is. When leasing, though, annual mileage is a big factor."

Lease payments in a non-financing lease for equipment purchases are all deductible as they are paid or incurred, so cash outlays match expense deductions.

If purchased, however, equipment is generally depreciated over five years, regardless of the down payment amount. You are also usually allowed to deduct up to \$10,000 of the price in the first year. The remainder is conventionally depreciated like this: 1st year=20%; 2nd year=32%; 3rd year=19.2%; 4th year=11.52%; 5th year=11.52%; 6th year=5.76%.

—Jerry Roche

## Accessory costs

■ Here is an approximation of what you can expect to pay for certain non-standard equipment:

Air conditioning .....	\$800
AM/FM stereo .....	\$300
Anti-sway bar .....	\$75
Auto trans. air cooler .....	\$100
Automatic transmission .....	\$800
Bed liners .....	\$250
Extended cab .....	\$800-\$1700
Heavy duty shocks .....	\$100
Larger engine .....	\$300 and up
Limited-slip rear axle .....	\$200
Upholstery & trim .....	\$1,100