

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Bio Green believes in quality service; making the sale, too

Northern Virginia firm growing in spite of being on high end of prices.

■ Until a customer signs the check, you really don't have a customer.

That's true even in lawn care—especially in lawn care—believes David Schrader who's keenly aware of the cosmic connection between getting paid and staying in business.

"You have to look at lawn care from two ends at once—quality service and sales. You need both," says Schrader.

Some other Schrader tenets include:

● **Charging enough to make a profit.** "There probably are only one or two companies in our market more expensive than us," he says.

● **Giving customers exactly what they want.** "We offer organic programs, pesticide-free programs and traditional programs, but 99 percent of our customers still want nice, green lawns," he says.

● **Having the same technician treat the same lawns whenever possible.** "How else is a technician going to know that that same south-facing, sunny slope in a client's lawn is going to have that grub problem," he says.

Schrader and Mark Stoeckel operate Bio Green Lawn Care which, this season, will treat more than 2,000 home lawns in addition to providing tree/shrub care and sprinkler services to several hundred other northern Virginia property owners.

Of the two, Stoeckel has more lawn care experience. He worked with several other firms prior to helping start Bio Green Lawn Care six years ago. Schrader, a 1984 University of Maryland graduate (agronomy specializing in soil conservation) likes sales. It shows. He thinks \$1 million in sales is realistic for Bio Green this season. It served about 2500 lawn and shrub customers in 1992.

"We try to drill the concept of quality, quality, quality into our company. Certainly, we want our customers to recognize the quality of our service, but we've still got to sell and sell," says Schrader.

That means no estimates dangling from door hangers. No vague price quotes over the telephone.

The best way to sell a quality, higher-priced service, says Schrader, is face to face. "If a prospect isn't going to sit down for 15 minutes and talk with us, they're not going to hire us," he says.

In other words, if Schrader walks a lawn with a potential client and gives them



David Schrader, left, likes sales, while Mark Stoeckel oversees production.

all the reasons why they should hire Bio Green, then he's most definitely going to ask for the check.

Similarly, Bio Green technicians develop friendly, workable, face-to-face relationships with customers, to the extent that time and schedules allow anyway.

"People hire lawn care companies because they don't know what to do," says Schrader. "That's why our technicians always try to do three things with each customer. We tell them what we did. We check off what they should do, and we tell them what's supposed to happen.

"That's always a lot better than leaving behind a computer printout of your visit."

Schrader's optimism is genuine and growing. His older brother, Steve, until recently a restaurateur, is joining Bio Green. "He's going to be pushing a spreader. We want him to get to know what we do," says Schrader with a wicked grin.

Also, the company, with offices in Manassas and Ashburn, eyes an expansion south into Fredericksburg, Va., in 1994.

—Ron Hall



BioGreen Lawn Care staff must be able to give clients a 'menu' of programs.