

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

PLCAA courts regional/state groups: ARAs gain momentum

Allied Regional Associations are growing in numbers and influence—and providing leaders.

■ Robert Ottley doesn't wear the crusader's mantle comfortably. He's a more deliberate and soft-spoken individual as president of One Step Tree & Lawn, North Chili, N.Y.

Ottley admits he didn't realize what he was getting into when he said "yes" to a request that he chair PLCAA's Allied Regional Association (ARA) Committee. Even so, he's determined, in his soft-spoken way, to steer the committee toward a written document that spells out the relationship between the Professional Lawn Care Association of America and ARAs. More on that later.

ARAs: what are ARAs, you ask?

Surprise. If you're a member of any one of 19 state or regional lawn care/pesticide user organizations, you're also a member of an ARA. You may not know this because none of your dues goes to the PLCAA, and your membership in the state organization is entirely separate from PLCAA.

But your state or regional association communicates and cooperates with PLCAA. It keeps PLCAA informed of state and local issues, usually regulatory or leg-

Don Tannehill, Tridon Lawn Service, Inc., Olathe, Kans., ARA liaison from Kansas told PLCAA that 14 hort groups in state are measuring impact of green industry there.

islative, and PLCAA lends support where it can. The partnership, actually just worked out the past three years, hasn't been that perfect. But that's the plan.

That's what Ottley has been stressing too—more communication and cooperation between PLCAA and ARAs.

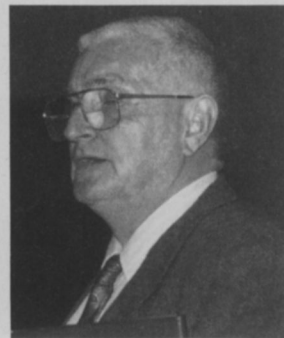
"I think there's been a feeling on the PLCAA board that, yes, we really want the ARAs out there. But, on the other hand, maybe we don't," says Ottley.

This is significant because:

✓ The combined membership of the 19 ARAs exceeds 3,000 companies, about three times larger than PLCAA's membership.

✓ ARA numbers are growing faster than PLCAA's.

✓ Local and state pesticide-use issues have had a more immediate and direct affect on LCOs' businesses than national issues, particularly evident since the U.S. Supreme Court, in its interpretation of FIFRA, ruled against federal pre-emption in 1992. (See related article on pre-emption.)



✓ PLCAA's leadership, itself, gets drawn from ARAs.

PLCAA, of course, literally grew out of its skin in the first six or seven years of



Robert Ottley, center, meets with Henry (Pat) Voges and his wife, Patricia, during ARA meeting in Washington D.C. The Voges represent the Nassau-Suffolk Landscape Gardeners Association, a Long Island-headquartered ARA.

its existence, until about 1986. Membership climbed, staff grew, so did the services it offered.

Then, figuratively, PLCAA hit the wall. It quit growing.

Its membership continued to sag alarmingly through the late 1980s. Until then, PLCAA's attention only fleetingly focused on state associations. What little attention they did receive seemed tinged with PLCAA's wish that state groups, somehow, bend toward becoming PLCAA chapters.

After all, PLCAA was *the* voice for the lawn application industry, and projections that it could attract 2,000 members by 1990 didn't seem unreasonable.

But the industry's continued maturation and consolidation stopped PLCAA's growth.

Faced with a growing membership and

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financial crisis four years ago, the PLCAA board lured executive director Ann McClure from the Irrigation Association, chopped PLCAA's staff, and launched into annual self-examinations. These measures, coupled with more persistent membership marketing, stabilized the trade group.

About 1990 also, PLCAA 'rediscovered' state and regional lawn care groups which it eyed as potential "chapters."

PLCAA, after inconclusive debate, tacitly backed board member Robert Andrew's efforts to help grow a new crop of state lawn care associations.

Andrews, who owns The Greenskeeper, Carmel, Ind., hit the road and succeeded admirably, particularly in his home state but also in Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. (The Ohio Lawn Care Association, in just four years, has 400 members alone.)

But how many of the member companies that belong to ARAs also participate and pay dues to PLCAA? Proportionally, not many.

Still, Andrews feels PLCAA could form state chapters, particularly where ARAs

don't already exist. (Texas and Illinois are obvious choices.)

"Perhaps, PLCAA can go in and, using its membership base in those areas, begin a true chapter concept. It would help get the state organization off the ground. Also, if it's worked right, it can generate additional members for PLCAA," says Andrews.

Regardless, Andrews says ARAs certainly haven't harmed PLCAA. That's because PLCAA deals with national issues, ARAs with state and local issues, a clear division.

"I've never believed the old argument that state groups detract from PLCAA. Now, after having served on the PLCAA board and as PLCAA president and after having started some of these groups, I feel even more strongly about it," says Andrews.

Mona Bond of the Iowa Professional Lawn Care Association, says ARAs still need "a more defined, structured" relationship with PLCAA. The flip side: PLCAA deserves more support, including financial support from ARAs. An ARA pays only \$150 annually to PLCAA.

"In my view, we reap a lot more benefits from PLCAA than that," says Bond

who, along with 23 others, met with Ottley this past February in Washington D.C.

Dale Amstutz of Northern Lawns, Omaha, Neb., was at that meeting. A charter member of the Nebraska Professional Lawn Care Association (NPLCA) and a PLCAA board member, he supports the growing link between ARAs and PLCAA.

"We got tremendous support from Norm Goldenberg (board member and TruGreen/ChemLawn vp) and Tom Delaney (PLCAA government affairs). They helped us put together a sample bill," says Amstutz of NPLCA's effort to get FIFRA into Nebraska. "PLCAA is most valuable in the legislative arena."

Not coincidentally, Amstutz, Andrews, Ottley—even PLCAA's president, Lou Wierichs of Appleton, Wis.—joined PLCAA's board after participating in ARAs.

Board members won't be too surprised when Ottley, on recommendation of this committee, asks for stronger ties with ARAs. But he's going to ask that ARAs take work harder to entice member companies to also participate in PLCAA.

—Ron Hall

Allied Regional Associations

(U.S. states in **boldface**)

Association of **Montana** Turf & Ornamental Professionals, Dennis Roberts, P.O. Box 90331, Billings, MT 59108; (406) 256-9499.

Association of Turf & Ornamental, Kermit Throckmorton, 8511 Walnut Hollow Cove, Cordova, TN 38018; (901) 753-6481.

Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals, Judy Maurer, P.O. Box 102502, Denver, CO 80250-2502; (303) 777-1578.

Grounds Management Association of **Wisconsin**, Lou Wierichs, Jr., P.O. Box 566, Appleton, WI 54912; (414) 739-5615.

Indiana State Lawn Care Association, Pat McGrady, P.O. Box 143, New Castle, IN 47362; (317) 836-4866.

Interstate Professional Applicators Association, Dan Behey, Eastside Spraying Service, P.O. Box 681, Kirkland, WA 98033; (206) 823-2600.

Iowa Professional Lawn Care Association, Mona Bond, 1051 N.W. Greenwood, Ankeny, IA 50021; (515) 963-1395.

Kentucky Turfgrass Council, Dwight Barkley, Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, KY 40475; (606) 622-2228.

Lawn Care Association of **Pennsylvania**, John D. Wanner, 908 Second St., Harrisburg, PA 17102; (717) 236-2050.

Lawn Services Association of **Michigan**, Kay Ruffino, P.O. Box 608, New Baltimore, MI 48047; (810) 598-7158.

Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals, Karen Connelly, 1620 Sudbury Road, Suite 6, Concord, MA 01742; (509) 287-0127.

Nassau/Suffolk Landscape Gardeners Association, Patricia Voges, P.O. Box 489, Brightwaters, NY 11118; (516) 665-2250.

Nebraska Professional Lawn Care Association, P.O. Box 1197, Hastings, NE 68902; (402) 462-6161.

New York State Lawn Care Association, Robert Ottley, 4343 Buffalo Road, North Chili, NY 14514; (716) 594-1095.

North Central Turf Grass Association, Betsey Smith, P.O. Box 10444, Fargo, ND 58106-0444; (701) 232-0215.

Ohio Lawn Care Association, Ken Guenther, 2999 Silver Drive, Suite 200, Columbus, OH 43224; (614) 261-1221.

Professional Lawn Care Association of Mid-America, Olivia Golden, P.O. Box 35184, Kansas City, MO 64134; (816) 765-7616.

Professional Lawn Care Association of Ontario, P.O. Box 375, Mount Brydges, Ontario, N2C 2K6 Canada; (519) 471-2620.

Professional Lawn Maintenance Association of **Connecticut**, Gary Steward, P.O. Box 11, Watertown, CT 06795; (203) 274-0608.

Vermont firm lives with city regulation

Peter Harrison opposed Burlington, Vermont's pesticide regulations, but they passed anyway. Then he grew his Lawnmark site in spite of the roadblock.

■ If they didn't plow Main Street in Burlington, it would make an incredible ski jump. Launch from the picture-postcard hill of the University of Vermont campus and rocket down through a mile of bustling, European-style stores and shops. *Whoosh*, given a stout heart and a steady backwind, who knows, even the green, quiet hills of New York across frozen, blue Lake Champlain seem almost reachable.

But at least one person in this community in northern Vermont—expert skier that he is—says things could be better.

Peter Harrison, 33, is learning to live with a ridiculous pesticide-use ordinance. A slightly built, athletic, intense man with bristling energy, Harrison manages the Lawnmark operation in Burlington, one of several Lawnmark locations in the Northeast and New England purchased by, and being folded into, \$100-million-a-year Barefoot Grass very soon.

Harrison—it's his Yankee upbringing—doesn't mince words.

"It's a real pain in the butt," says Pete of the ordinance the city adopted, over his strenuous objections, prior to the start of the 1993 season. "The ordinance says we have to pre-notify, by letter and at least 24 hours in advance, any abutting neighbor of any property we're going to treat."

Even so, the company he manages grew last year.

The regulations, in fact, cover *anybody* applying pesticides within Burlington, leading to the curious spectacle of one of the ordinance's chief sponsors himself being discovered breaking the law. "Can you believe it?" asks Harrison rhetorically.

Many homeowners, says Harrison, disregard the ordinance. But Harrison says his branch won't test the law. He intends to work within its requirements. He keeps records to prove that he does.

He says he warned his 500 or so customers inside the city limits that the ordinance, if passed, would result in higher prices. "I sent two letters to our customers



and informed them about the ordinance and what it meant. I asked them for their support, and for them to voice their concerns too," he recalls. But the controversy stirred little community interest. Efforts to raise a pesticide users group never really materialized either.

Few customers within the city seemed to care at all—that is, until Harrison informed them that he had to charge \$8.75 more per application to fulfill the requirements of the ordinance. The company, then known as Nature's Helper, had to do all the paperwork and extra mailings by hand, says Harrison. Once it had been acquired by Lawnmark and computerized, however, he could drop the extra cost down to \$2 extra per application.

"Vermonters won't waste money," says Harrison, a native himself and a 1983 graduate of University of Vermont. "They definitely want to see some value when they spend their money."

As if the prenotification clause weren't bother enough though, the ordinance also prohibits using any pesticides within 500 feet of Lake Champlain. Some of the city's nicest homes sit on the scenic lakeshore. Homeowners there can select an all-natural program, a fertilizer-only program, or they can do their own lawn care.

Harrison says the city added the provision in spite of being informed of research done by Dr. Tom Watschke at Penn State (and others) documenting turf's role as a biological filter.

In spite of the turmoil of the ordinance, the branch that Harrison manages remains healthy and growing, with sales of

Snow usually doesn't leave the University of Vermont campus until late in spring. When it does, Peter Harrison and his Lawnmark crew arrive at daybreak to fertilize and treat the UVM Commons before a.m. classes start.

\$½-\$1 million. That's in spite of three name changes involving two different owners the past three years. Consider also that Harrison, in lawn care nine years, converted the program from liquid to primarily granular.

Harrison's branch market extends northeast over Lake Champlain to Plattsburgh, N.Y., and to Montpelier about 40 miles in the other direction. Harrison says his seven employees (including two office workers) cover a lot of hilly, rural territory.

He credits the growing popularity of the company's tree and shrub program, and stronger commercial sales for the branch's success. Most of all, he says the branch thrives because of the "tremendous effort" of its employees.

"Everybody puts in more than their time," says Harrison who, himself, regularly logs 14-hour days once the season starts. (The last two years his location couldn't even start its first round because of snow until April 20.)

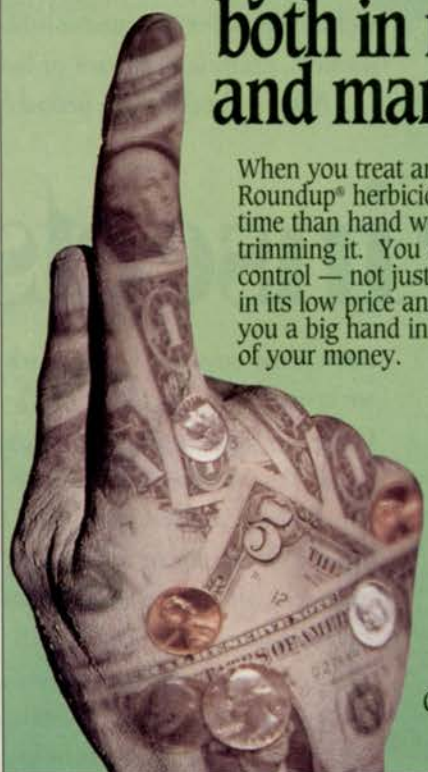
That's another reason why neither he, nor his comrades, could defeat the pesticide laws. They were stretched too thin.

"It was a learning experience," he admits with a shrug. "I got to see how the political process works. I found out you need all the help you can get."

—Ron Hall

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User coalitions score with pre-emption ruling in Washington state

■ When the King County Board of Health tried to regulate commercial lawn and landscape applicators just over a year ago, it didn't expect much of a tussle.

After all, the Interstate Professional Applicators Association (IPAA) isn't a household word in the Seattle area. It has only about 40 members in the entire state of Washington, about that number in Oregon, and its new chapter in Idaho has, maybe, a dozen members.

But just before this past Christmas, the tiny IPAA filed a lawsuit in Superior Court seeking to overturn the health board regulations. Members vow to oppose the regulations, and resolve the issue even before the suit is heard.

"We tried to convince the Board of Health that it didn't have the legal authority to regulate landscape applicators," says Ed Walter, Washington Tree Service, a leader in the legislative fight for the IPAA. "In fact, the state attorney general even wrote that the state has primacy in this matter. We feel the King County prosecutor's office will come to its senses and write us out of the ordinance."

Adds Dan Beheyt, Eastside Spraying Service, Kirkland, Wash.: "If King County can get away with this, the next step is that every little jurisdiction in the state will also want to write their own regulations."

This legislative brushfire in the Pacific Northwest mirrors

dozens of others ignited (some still simmering) after the U.S. Supreme Court ruled two years ago that FIFRA does not preclude states from enacting their own pesticide-use regulations.

The trouble was, many local officials felt that they should be able to regulate pesticide use, too.

State governments in all but about 10 states have since ruled that localities don't; they've decreed that the final say on pesticide-use regulations resides in state capitals.

These successes resulted when coalitions of pesticide-user groups worked with and educated state lawmakers, says Thomas Delaney, legislative affairs director for the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA).

Wisconsin passed pre-emption this past December, and Michigan in January. Pooling their efforts in Michigan were the 90-member Lawn Services Association of Michigan and the 300-member Michigan Pest Control Association.

Pre-emption efforts continue in Kentucky (already in place for agriculture but not lawn care), Idaho, Utah, Massachusetts and Maryland.

Here, and probably elsewhere as well, lawn/landscape applicators will continue finding themselves bumping heads with local lawmakers convinced of their *right* to pass pesticide legislation, sometimes in conjunction with the anti-pesticide factions that the green industry has long debated, says Delaney.

"Some people do see it as a home-rule issue. Then it
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becomes an emotional issue," adds Karen Connelly, director of the Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals (MALCP).

In these instances, it's wiser to start with education rather than confrontation, she believes. Sometimes local authorities aren't even aware of state and federal pesticide regulations already in place. Usually they don't even know much about the industries they're thinking about restricting.

But even Connelly admits this doesn't always work. Case in point: Mansfield, Mass., where several LCOs, several years ago, spent dozens of hours trying to reason with sponsors of restrictive pesticide laws. When this failed, the LCOs spent tens of thousands of dollars in legal fees before being vindicated. Winning carried a high price.

But MALCP, with its 85 members, is just one of a dozen or so participants in a statewide Green Industry Alliance. Other pesticide-user groups round out the coalition. All add their collective expertise and weight to local issues.

Recently, some of these pesticide users met with officials of Boxford and Wellesley, Mass. Both local health boards are mulling pesticide-use regulations.

"We were pleased to be able to gather a large grassroots organization to meet with them," relates Connelly. "Fortunately, most of the people (board members) were open to reading the literature and research material we provided them."

In spite of these efforts, and the strong informational ties

the green industry has to Massachusetts state government, it remains one of about 10 states still unwilling to forbid local governments from passing pesticide laws.

"We (MALCP) know what our focus is," adds Richard Ficco, president, Partners Quality Lawn Service. "It's to lobby for our big bill, the pre-emption bill."

—Ron Hall

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