

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Design/build...



**for the
high-end
markets**

**'The industry needs
to...start telling our
clients about their
outdoor living
spaces just like
building architects
tell them about in-
door living spaces.'**

—Gary Kinman

■ Last summer, on a whim, Gary Kinman bought a pony. It was a real miniature—tiny enough, he reckoned, to coax and shove into the family minivan and take home to the kids. Strawberry (the name Gary's two children later gave it) rode to the Kinman household with its wet muzzle poking over Gary's right shoulder.

The arrival of the pint-sized gray, with blond mane and tail, elicited the hoped-for response, delighted yelps from the kids and Gary's two, huge yellow dogs. Never mind that the minivan no longer has that new-car odor.

Sometimes impulsive. Usually outspoken. Never boring. Kinman, 36, with his

stocky, powerful build and square jaw, looks like a boxer. Or maybe a middle linebacker.

He's really a pushover, though. A bonafide softie.

When he claims that his Kinman & Associates regularly designs and builds residential landscapes costing \$250,000 and more, he can almost convince a listener that customers always get the better of him in the process. Shame on them.

"We have a reputation—which, I guess, isn't necessarily good—for being expensive," pleads Kinman. "We're not expensive. For the product we deliver, we're inexpensive—which I can prove by our

financial statement."

A handy market—Kinman's K&A is located in quaint Dublin, Ohio. It's a good town to be doing what Gary likes to do best, top-of-the-market residential landscape design and build.

Just outside of Dublin, which is itself just northwest of Columbus, is golfer Jack Nicklaus-built Muirfield Golf Course. It's a gem, and site of his annual Memorial Tournament. In fact, Nicklaus's new home will be going up nearby soon.

Kinman may or may not get the Nicklaus landscape. But it's the type of residential project that K&A has earned an enviable national reputation for designing and building: the big residential job.

"A small project for us is in the \$25,000 to \$30,000 range. But I think even that's a lot of money and we can do some really beautiful stuff with it," says Kinman. "Certainly we'd like to do more of that, but our problem as a company is that people in our market think, 'Oh, my gosh, Kinman & Associates, they're too expensive and they work on bigger projects.'"

Plant selection and installation. Patios. Walkways. Retaining walls. Decks. Swimming pools. K&A does it all, says Kinman. Or it'll find a top-notch sub-contractor that can.

"Actually, planting is one of the last things we usually do. There is so much more to the business than jamming a bunch of bushes next to a house. I think our industry pushes that too hard," says Kinman. He calls the process "super shrubbing."

"I think we (the industry) need to be putting in more beautiful, front sidewalks, designing home entries that work, installing stone walls that enhance properties. We've got to start telling our clients about their outdoor living spaces just like building architects tell them about indoor living spaces."

One job at a time—Kinman figures K&A has put in over \$30 million worth of

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Project managers Sharon Halldren, foreground, and Julie Taggart see big projects to completion, from initial design to planting.

landscape projects. That's a lot for his small operation that stays so close to home. "I think I almost have enough callouses to prove it," he says opening his rough, workman's hands.

Gary insists size doesn't preoccupy him though. It never did, not even when he decided to start a landscape business almost 14 years ago. He was studying business and finance at Ohio State University then. "By the time I was a senior, I already knew that I wanted a company to put in

the best residential landscapes in the area," he says.

K&A, he insists, is doing just that, in large part, because K&A is a team effort, involving five project managers and supporting office and field crews—even Gary's wife Lori, who works the phones.

As soon as K&A gets a recommendation, Kinman builds a team to work with the client and building architect. Gary's always on the team, along with a project manager. He says he deals with the bigger

client picture, the concept, while the project managers do the actual designs and track construction details.

"I'm kind of associated with every job. I wish I wasn't as much," Kinman admits.

Everyone's busy—Actually, each of the five project managers (three men and two women) may have a dozen landscape projects bubbling at once. They guide each through a 22-step process. They can tell at a glance where each project stands because all are recorded on a huge, white board on the wall in front of their drawing boards.

"We're trying to develop a system where each job will have an on-site project manager as well as an in-house project manager," says Kinman. "Then, everything that we're doing on a project—from the beginning design to the end of the job—is being looked at by two people."

When operational, Kinman thinks this system will meet his clients needs even more precisely.

Then, he insists, his clients will get an even bigger bargain.

"The money they spend with us is like money they invest and get high interest on," he claims.

—Ron Hall

Sell the benefits of service

To win commercial accounts where there are in-house crews, stress cost, efficiency and expertise.

■ Laflamme Services of Bridgeport, Conn. has found a way to convince commercial prospects to switch from in-house crews to an outside landscape contractor. Judith Guido, director of business development and marketing for the 24-year-old company, says persistence has paid off—in the form of new commercial accounts eager to sub out the work. And that's because Laflamme knows how to sell the benefits of what Guido calls "outsourcing." And it's

not a very hard sell when it's done right. Just let the numbers do the talking.

Laflamme's message to mid- and large-sized commercial prospects is simple: it's more cost effective and easier to contract out than to subsidize an in-house crew.

Recent new clients include headquarters for Clairol, Champion Sporting Goods and Aetna Insurance.

Guido says area competitors try to sell the idea, but lose something in the translation.

SHADES of GREEN
AN INFORMATION BULLETIN BY LAFLAMME SERVICES, INC.
AUGUST 1993
VOLUME 3 / NUMBER 6
Eyes On The Landscape

New England, if you don't care for the weather, wait five minutes and it'll change. Well, Mr. Twain, we could sure use a bit of that change right about now. The July stats are in and we received less than two inches of rain for the month, leaving the 1993 season a full six inches short of the norm. This puts us in a bit of a pickle, horticulturally speaking, for the already tough growing month of August. The water company serving the Westchester area has placed a ban on all non-essential water use and

At this time, reducing the use of fertilizers and pesticides needs consideration. The intent is to slow the growth of the plant reducing its need for water and reducing the stress caused by constant mowing or pruning. Furthermore, the application of certain pesticides during dry spells can cause serious damage to the plants they were meant to save. Adjust mowing heights to provide some needed shade to the crown of the plant and the soil surface itself.

overseeds, that allow new seed to be introduced into the soil without radically reworking it. (Many of these are available through rental centers.) If the season takes its toll on your lawn, now is the time to reseed with drought tolerant, disease resistant varieties. Some of the new rye grasses are ideal for this application and require less fertilizer per season to keep them looking green and healthy, an added bonus.

"There are people who have contacted these companies, but nobody told them *why* it would be better (to contract out)," she says.

Laflamme gives the prospect a list of 26 reasons why it makes sense to contract out (see sidebar). Closing a sale was never so easy!

Most of Laflamme's newly-contracted accounts buy all the important landscape services: landscaping, lawn care, flower planting, waste management and snow removal.

Reminders help—As an extra way of staying in touch, the company's single

page newsletter, "Shades of Green," goes to all customers, all past customers and any prospective customers. The reasoning is simple. Past customers may someday want another look at Laflamme, and the newsletter keeps them up on company progress. Current customers are impressed by the extra attention, and prospective customers are just that—prospective customers.

It's how they got the Clairol account.

"We had been sending the newsletter (to Clairol) every month," says Guido. "They never forgot about Laflamme."

A short time later, Laflamme had a large maintenance contract in hand. The Clairol buyer credited the newsletter and Laflamme's willingness to stay in touch.

"Shades of Green," is a cinch to produce, and even though it's only one page long, they fit in a lot of copy by going with a smaller type size.

The newsletter has been spun off into radio and television advice programs, starring company president Ed Laflamme.

As a last word, every newsletter has a section called "Welcome Aboard" which announces new or renewing clients.

Simple, but it works.

—Terry McIver

Why sub it?

1) Employee productivity. Usually, in-house crews are not as productive as contract labor because contracted labor crews are not distracted by other jobs. In-house forces sometimes become tradition-bound. They want to stick to a comfortable routine and resist program changes.

2) Inventory. It's eliminated, including materials, parts, tools, equipment and operating costs. That's money to invest elsewhere.

3) Storage concerns are eliminated.

4) Supervision is provided by the contractor. One man reports to the business owner or plant manager on a weekly or monthly basis.

5) Labor concerns—hiring, firing, reviewing, scheduling, and seasonal ups and downs—belong to the contractor.

6) OSHA compliance. Judith Guido of Laflamme Services says one complaint to OSHA by an in-house employee could result in a complete investigation in which all facilities are inspected. Fines, as a result of such visits, can be high. A competent contractor meets all of the OSHA guidelines and therefore protects himself and the client. For example: If a gas can isn't clearly labeled "Gasoline," a \$2100 fine could be levied on the business. Why not let the contractor carry the ball?

7) Overtime availability. Not always so easy in-house. Contractors have the benefit of a larger labor force.

8) Liability. Direct liability for an accident, chemical spill, injury or any of the other potential accidents will fall directly on the contractor.

9) Insurance costs. The contractor has his liability spread over more dollars and accounts. Therefore, the contractor can better absorb a serious injury/accident.

10) Innovation. Many new ideas—like computer-aided landscape designs—can be generated at no cost to the owner. With a "constant improvement program," money can be spent at the highest visibility areas.

—T.M.

Iowa LCOs chip in for hurt friend

It took Doug Tyrrell 10 years to build a lawn care company, and it almost ended in an instant on July 10th, 1993.

■ There's a place where people still know how to help each other. It's just about smack in the middle of the country. It's called Iowa.

Doug Tyrrell knows it as home.

Belmond, pop. 2500, in fact, is Tyrrell's home, which isn't too close to anything other than a handful of equally small north-central Iowa towns. This has allowed Tyrrell to build up a thriving little lawn care company over the past 10 years. "These towns are too small for the big guys to even think about," says Doug.

When Tyrrell starts talking about the area and his small-town customers, there's a smile in his voice. The rest of him doesn't feel too much like smiling though. That's because Tyrrell, owner of Tyrrell Lawn Care, and his wife Marilyn got banged up pretty bad this past July 10. They were riding Doug's custom soft-tail Harley-Davidson when it crashed into the front of a car near Columbus, Neb. Ironically, It was their 20th wedding

anniversary. They were on their way to a motorcycle tour of the Rocky Mountains.

"There was so much traffic, I didn't even know there was a corner there; I didn't see the guy sitting at the corner and he didn't see me," he tells LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT.

Tyrrell, who broke just about every bone in his left leg (except for his knee) and lost part of his foot in the accident, figures the cycle was traveling about 40



Daryle Johnson of All American Turf Beauty, Van Meter; Shawn Edwards of Lawn of Leisure, Ankeny; and Les Wilshuson of Mike's Lawn Service, Storm Lake, were lauded by PLCAA for assisting Doug Tyrrell, Tyrrell Lawn Care. Also thanked was Myron Groat of ABC Lawn Care, Fort Dodge.

LM GRAPEVINE

mph on impact. Marilyn broke an ankle. She's back to work as an x-ray technician, but Doug's still disabled with a full-leg cast. He's probably facing more surgery, and won't be mobile until June or July 1994.

This is finally the part where some good things finally start happening for the Doug Tyrrells.

A few of days after the accident, at the Iowa State Turfgrass Field Day, Mona Bond of the Iowa Professional Lawn Care Association (IPLCA) told other lawn pros about the mishap. Pretty soon offers to help started coming in, says Doug, a founding member.

"Three companies donated a truck, a man and product, and came up here and did my mid-summer applications," he says. "In fact, I had calls from people from four hours away asking if they can help."

Then, in the fall, another operator sent three trucks, applicators and equipment and helped complete Doug's season for him.

Marilyn and college-age daughter Sharon did all they could to keep the business going, too. In fact, Sharon mowed until she had to return to nursing school in Des Moines. Then Doug's father helped out.

Tyrrell will not be able to do much lawn work starting the 1994 season, although he hopes to be off crutches sometime in March. But fellow lawn care operators—even competitors—keep offering support.

"I've had several operators tell me to figure out what we need to do and they'll help us figure out how to do it," he says. "Everybody's been a great help."

As for himself?

He's hoping to be able to work again early this summer. "Cranking out a few lawns is going to be pretty good therapy," says Doug.

He also says he's considering becoming a motorcycle safety instructor.

—Ron Hall

NEXT MONTH:

**Early-season
turf fertilization**

**LM Reports
on dethatchers**

The artificial turf in Philadelphia Eagles' Veterans Stadium is "unsafe," says turf consultant **George Toma**. According to an item in *USA Today* that was brought to **LM's** attention, Eagles owner Norman Braman asked Toma to take a look at conditions on the five-year-old turf. Toma said the fake field had been neglected. "There is so much dirt on the field, it makes it slippery and hard," said the Super Bowl turf expert. "There are ridges near the baseball sliding zones and football end zones." Recreation Commissioner Michael DiBernardinis plans to ask the city for \$1.6 million for new turf in 1995. 1995?!

The turf industry received sad news with the death of **Howard E. Kaerwer** on Nov. 10th. Kaerwer, 73, was a longtime contributing writer to **LM** and an excellent resource for its editorial staff. Northrup-King's retired director of turf research and development won the Distinguished Service Award from the GCSAA in 1988, and was named 1993 Man of the Year by the Minnesota Golf Course Superintendents Association. His breeding efforts yielded NK100, NK200, Goalie, Delray and Rugby. Memorials to the University of Minnesota's Landscape Arboretum Foundation are suggested.

Will 2,4-D become the Alar of the Clinton administration? "There's a damn good chance that if there's one product they go after, this will be the one," **LM** hears. The Administration may view the herbicide's continued use as a test case, an opportunity "to humiliate" a pesticide, and to placate anti-pesticide factions. More than 300 turf managers heard the prediction at the recent Ohio Turfgrass Conference.

A very determined lawn/landscaper has finally returned to the industry after a serious bout with cancer. **Vincent J. Acierno** tells **LM**, "I have fought my way through illness and recession." Acierno, owner of Environmental Maintenance Services, Staten Island, N.Y., twice had radical surgery to remove 30 tumors. After three years of chemotherapy treatments, Acierno can now market three of his business operation manuals and a proprietary computer program. If you're interested, see this month's classified ads.

Mark Light Stadium is another high-profile baseball field converting from synthetic turf to natural grass. **LM** hears through McGovern Construction that Light Stadium, home of the University of Miami Hurricanes, will have a sand-based field, under-drainage, automated irrigation and Bermuda 419 turf. McGovern Construction also built seven similar fields in Fort Myers, Fla., spring home of the Boston Red Sox.

Got an item for "LM Grapevine"? Phone us at (216) 826-2830, 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. EST, M-F.