

LAWN CARE INDUSTRY

Emergency relief!

Mid-season rescues of dying lawns are grounds for good customer relations, to say nothing of new customers!

■ It's rounding June, heading for July.

You think you've got control of the summer schedule, when you get a frantic call from some guy who says his lawn is a mess. The reason his name doesn't ring a bell is that you've never worked on his lawn. He was always one of those "it's-too-expensive-and-I-enjoy-doing-it-myself" guys.

But what a summer. Too much rain. Disease. Insects. It was all too much for the average do-it-yourselfer. If only he had hired you in the fall to rejuvenate his tired old turf and put him on a preventive program, it wouldn't look so bad now.

But you agree to help, in the interest of human relations.

Like new—"That's the nature of our business," says Jim Anderson, All-Seasons Service, Itasca, Ill., when asked about mid-season lawn rescues. But the results aren't always the same. The amount of life a crew can breathe back into a damaged lawn, says Anderson, "depends on the time of year they get the call."

"Every year is a little bit different," says Kathy Juntgen of Emerald Green, Fort Wayne, Ind.

"[Homeowners] call when the dandelions get out of hand, and they panic; or else they had another company that mistreated the lawn, or they themselves made a mistake," says Juntgen, who's in business with her husband, Steve. "There have also been times when chinch bugs were a serious problem."

The usual plan of action for a lawn rescue involves slit seeding, fertilizing, and plenty of water, which is the biggest mistake homeowners make. When high utility bills threaten, people just don't water

enough in hot, dry weather. For weed or insect problems, standard practice is to use the appropriate control product.

"Within 60 to 90 days, we can have it back in shape," says Anderson. "Some lawns are totally gone, but that doesn't mean we can't do anything to revive them."

"Lawn care has come a long way, so you don't see lawns in that bad of condition in this day and age," explains Juntgen. "People will call for advice, we tell them

what to do and they they go out and do what they wanted to all along."

Winning them over—Anderson has had great success in keeping these mid-season converts as long term customers. He says every one whose lawn he saves remains a customer "for years afterwards."

Emerald Green also has a good conversion rate. "We're a smaller company," says Kathy, "that goes more on service than volume." So it can easily find room on its roster for new acquisitions.

—Terry McIver

COMPLAINTS AS OPPORTUNITIES

■ If a customer—a landscape client, a member of the golf course, a citizen using one of your athletic fields—has a complaint, you have a tremendous opportunity to build customer loyalty.

A survey by the U.S. Office of Consumer Affairs shows that when complaints are successfully resolved, 73 percent of the complainers would buy that product or service again.

Conversely, when customers had minor problems but did not complain, nearly 67 percent would not buy the same product or service again. The three reasons mentioned most often for not complaining were:

- It wasn't worth their time and effort.
- They believed complaining wouldn't do any good.
- They didn't know how to or where to address complaints.

To handle complaints successfully:

- 1) Listen.
- 2) Sympathize.
- 3) Avoid justifying or making excuses.
- 4) Ask questions.
- 5) Agree on a course of action.
- 6) Inform and involve others who need to know.
- 7) Monitor the progress in resolving the complaint.

Composting offered to contractors

Acts as 'holding company' for land used to process landscape debris.

■ GreenCycle, Inc. of Northfield, Ill., has mastered the science and business of composting, just in time for the projected increase in the need for alternatives to landfill sites.

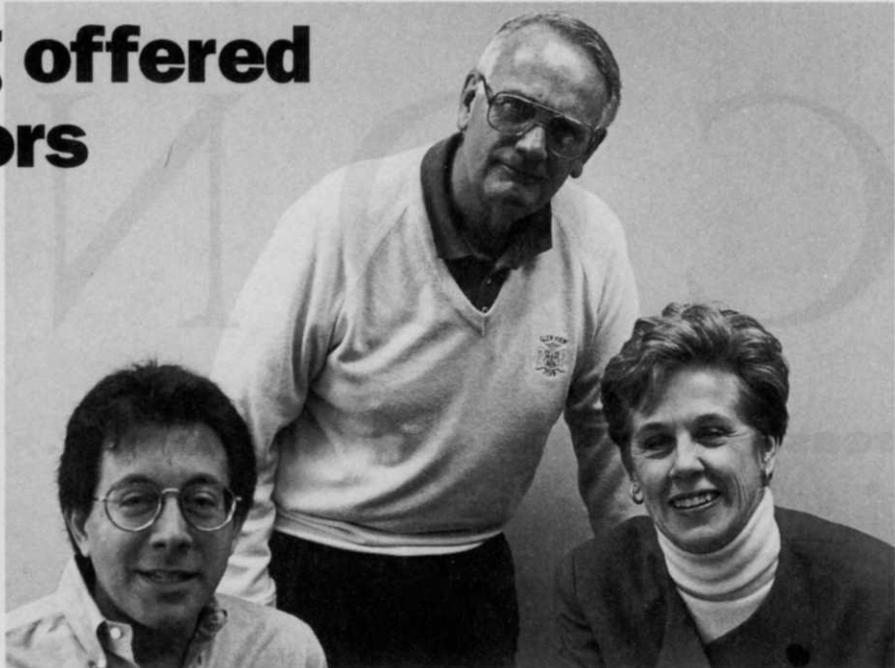
Along with the belief that landfill sites are becoming depleted is the realization that yard waste, by its very nature, is reusable.

GreenCycle began its service in July of 1992 and has grown to where it now operates composting sites in Missouri, Massachusetts, Georgia, Connecticut, Illinois and Indiana. Proposals are pending for several other sites throughout the U.S. The company services primarily municipalities, private landscape contractors and waste disposal companies.

The company expects to process about 600,000 cubic yards of material into approximately 150,000 cubic yards of high-quality compost in 1994.

Sites are as small as five acres, and tipping fees are competitive. And it's important they blend in with the community, lest the citizens complain about odors, as has happened to other composting companies.

The actual time it takes to process debris into usable compost is about 120 days. The resulting mulch or soil amendment is sold to farms, greenhouses, nurs-



David Wagner, Peter Repenning and Caroline Repenning (left to right) form joint ventures with local operators.

eries, landscape contractors, sod farms, golf courses, parks, home gardeners and other associated industries.

A family affair—GreenCycle is run by Caroline Repenning, president; David Wagner, vice president of marketing; and Peter Repenning, vice president of operations.

"A well-managed composting site quickly reduces yard waste to useful, environmentally-safe humus," says Caroline Repenning. "When sites are planned properly and managed correctly, it costs less to turn yard waste into valuable compost than it costs to employ other disposal methods. And using the correct technology eliminates the overpowering odor which often results from stockpiled yard waste, a com-

mon phenomenon of poorly-run facilities."

To eliminate odors, waste is formulated, mixed and shredded before it has a chance to rot and begin emitting odors. The byproduct is clean: no viable weed seeds or pathogens remain, and virtually all the pesticides in the initial material are broken down into benign, inorganic carbon compounds.

Even though pesticide residues are unlikely, the company goes ahead and tests for them anyway. Any which might remain are broken down into benign, inorganic compounds by the heat and microbial digestion of the composting process.

Joint ventures—GreenCycle has formed joint ventures with local operators who chalked up years of experience on their own prior to this association.

One is a former owner of a solid waste disposal company; another has eight years of experience in the composting business.

But don't confuse this arrangement with a franchise approach. Repenning says these are not franchise agreements. The local operators help GreenCycle in its search for land, which the company then leases.

GreenCycle arranges sufficient project funding for site development and operation, and provides each site with necessary general management and financial skills, a uniform operating plan and a national corporate identity.



GreenCycle will produce 150,000 cubic yards of compost in 1994.