

JOB TALK

Retirement community landscaping a challenge

■ Coordinating the landscape management of a facility as large as John Knox Village in Lee's Summit, Mo., is a task similar to being responsible for a small city—and the lawn care of each residence. As America's largest retirement community, John Knox Village is home to more than 2,000 retirees. The 400-acre complex includes houses, duplexes, garden-type cottages, and large continuing-care facilities and recreational facilities.

There's even a bowling alley, three restaurants and a nine hole golf course.

When planning for year-round maintenance, Warren Brown, vehicles and grounds manager, must consider many variables.

"John Knox Village is a beautiful environment for retirees," says Brown. "It has more than a thousand trees, hundreds of acres of grass and dozens of flower gardens and shrubbery areas."

In addition to the golf course, Brown and his crew manage the landscape at Lee's Summit Hospital and several private soccer fields adjacent to John Knox Village.

Residents who live in the cottages and duplexes individualize their fenced-in outdoor areas with bird feeders and bird baths, for example.

This not only makes the tenants live more comfortably; it also prevents a maintenance challenge to Brown and his crew.

"By the nature of the facility's philosophy and design," says Brown, "we must mow in a lot of very tight areas with numerous obstacles. And with the number of trees and intricate flower beds and shrubbery we have, open areas are equally challenging."

"Northern Missouri has four very specific seasons," says Brown. Our maintenance program—by necessity—must be prepared for all seasons and all weather conditions. In fact, it affects the equipment we choose as well as the timing of our fertilizer and weed program."

The first fertilizer and pre-emergent weed control application takes place in late March. This preliminary application utilizes a combination product that both fertilizes and fights crabgrass at once. The second application of fertilizer and weed control takes place seven weeks later, and includes an herbicide that is designed for late summer weeds. Both applications use a measuring standard of $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. per 1000 sq. ft. of turf. Broadleaf weed control products are applied in April, May and late July.

Fertilizer is also applied in September and early November. These late-season applications use a combination of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium in a ratio of 10-3-6 at a rate of 1 lb. per 1000 sq. ft. of turf.

"We used to have different equipment for every season," says



Many obstacles in the landscape at John Knox Village require zero-radius maneuverability from mowers.

Brown. "Today, we use nine, 21-hp diesel Grasshopper zero-radius front mowers that allow us to mix and match cutting decks and attachments for year-round versatility.

According to Brown, zero-radius maneuverability has reduced the hours required for virtually all maintenance operations—from mowing, trimming and weeding to leaf pick-up and snow removal.

To collect clippings, five of the nine Grasshopper mowers carry a Quick-D-Tatch Vac grasscatching system and 25-cubic foot Trail Hopper collectors. The large collection systems make it more convenient to catch clippings, according to Brown, because clippings are not emptied as often.

The grasscatching systems are also used often in the fall, to collect leaves from the facility's thousand-plus trees. Crews also use the grasscatching system's powerful vacuum action for fall dethatching. The Wand Vac, a hand-held vacuum device that attaches to the Grasshopper Quic-D-Tatch Vac is used to pick up the shrub clippings during the three-week long job of trimming the shrubbery around the complex.

In the winter, cab enclosures are attached, along with the snow blades and snowthrowers.

"We use the dozer blades for light snows and when we get more than three inches, says Brown. "The snowthrowers can clear up to 12 inches of snow very efficiently."

Randy Wright is the lead mechanic. With so much equipment, repair and service time must be kept to a minimum.

"A side benefit of year-round versatility has been to simplify our equipment maintenance by eliminating the need for a lot of different machines for different jobs," says Wright. "That means our parts inventory is reduced significantly, too."