

# Labor woes cause industry shift

by RON HALL / Senior Editor



**DAVIS:** Give quality employees a reason to stay.

Continued low unemployment, good news for the U.S. economy, is making it tough for the green industry to find reliable labor this season.

Contractors, in particular, aren't waiting for good workers to find them. They're actively recruiting employees, and sometimes—our survey shows—they have to recruit outside of the traditional young/white/male labor market.

There are probably many reasons for this, but one of

them might be the demise of the family farm. There just aren't that many young people familiar with, or eager to do, manual labor. That's what Joe Munie of Munie Outdoor Services, near St. Louis, believes.

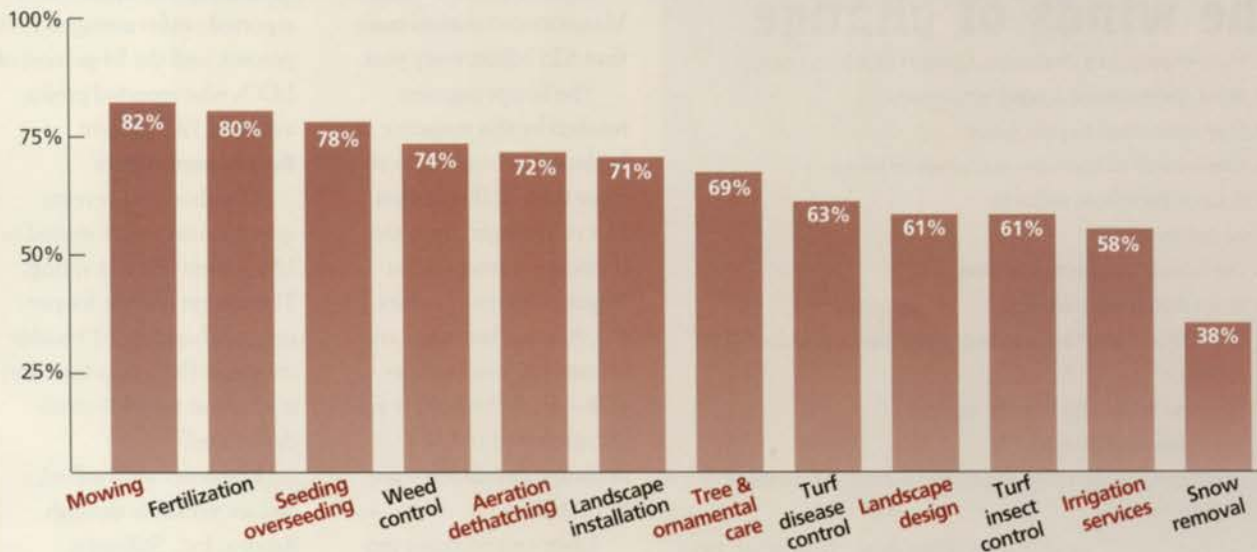
"When we started our company, we were able to get some people with a farm background. We don't see that segment of the labor force anymore," says Munie.

The problem is most acute for entry-level positions. Many potential employees in that particular job pool appear

**REEVE:** "People want to be challenged."



## SERVICES PERFORMED



# STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

## ANNUAL INCOME

Golf course superintendents	\$54,100
Landscape contractors	\$42,400
Lawn care operators	\$47,700
Grounds managers	\$47,700
<b>INDUSTRY AVERAGE</b>	<b>\$49,600</b>

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*— Landon Reeve*

ently feel that there are less strenuous ways to make \$6.50 to \$7.00 an hour, which is about the industry starting average.

But both contractors and other segments of the industry, including professional application companies, are on the lookout for strong managers. These are in short supply, too, our survey suggests.

The Washington D.C. labor market may or may not be typical across the nation. But in 1996, that market has more jobs than people to fill them.

"For four or five years it was fairly easy to get help. This year we're seeing a tight labor market," says Landon Reeve IV, whose Chapel Valley Landscape has two locations in the D.C./Baltimore market.

"I think the issue of labor is an on-going problem. The main thing that we have to do as a company is to try very hard to keep people," he adds.

"We have to create an environment where our people have something to achieve. People want to be challenged."

Reflecting the findings in our survey, Chapel Valley Landscape, like other contractors, hires and retains an increasingly larger percentage of non-English speaking employees, typically Hispanic.

Tom Davis, president of Bozzuto Landscaping Company, Upper Marlboro, Md., says that staffing his landscape company—the fourth largest in metro D.C.—is a two-pronged effort. First, you attract the quality employee. Then you have a plan to retain the quality employee.

### **His company finds employees by:**

- ▶ offering present employees incentives for bringing in other good workers,
- ▶ advertising in trade magazines,
- ▶ recruiting at universities,
- ▶ participating in field days,

## Superintendents' pay is highest in green industry

Salaries of golf course superintendents have increased \$4,800 over the past two years, according to statistics from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America.

In 1993, the average supers' salary was \$44,500, based on a 1993 Salary Report; in 1995, that figure had risen to \$49,300, based on a 1995 Compensation and Benefits Report.

▶ as a last resort, advertising in local newspapers.

### **To keep good employees, his company relies on:**

- ▶ careful hiring and screening,
- ▶ competitive wages,
- ▶ weekly training,
- ▶ English/Spanish tutoring,
- ▶ regular employee recognition,
- ▶ an "open-door" management philosophy,
- ▶ periodic company "fun" events,
- ▶ incentive programs based on meeting quality and

production goals,

▶ attempting to reduce off-season layoffs.

"We want to remain a company that new employees would want to come to, and our existing employees would like to stay a part of," says Davis.

Landon Reeve and Tom Davis met with members of the Turf and Ornamentals Communicators Association recently, and talked about labor.