

RESIDENTIAL UP-GRADES get an 'A+'

When these home owners decided their property needed a facelift, they called Green Thumb to restore its landscape, too. The final package greatly increased the home's worth but—more importantly—provided the family with a more pleasing and functional living environment.



by RON HALL / Senior Editor

R
Green Thumb Nursery of Canton, Ohio, renovates and replaces landscapes that homeowners have outgrown.

Residential design/build is one of Green Thumb Nursery's strengths: a few big jobs and lots of challenging residential work.

The landscape division of this full-service company in northeast Ohio was at its busiest in 1995 and looks for a better 1996, designing and installing landscapes but updating many more residential jobs.

Managers feel this is mostly because of a quirk in their primary market area which includes Canton (pop. 90,000) and its sister city to the north, Akron (pop. 200,000). Because home building there has been strong in recent years, developers often don't partner with Green Thumb—or any other quality landscaper—before starting their next development. They're too busy building houses.

"Since the landscape is the last thing done on a new home project, sometimes its budget is cut if, for instance, the homeowner wants better kitchen cabinets or a better grade of carpeting," says Duane Klein, a Green Thumb designer. Consequently, the landscape doesn't get the consideration it should, he believes.



"The best way to give homeowners what they want is to work with them from the very beginning," explains Klein. "Although we'd love to do every project like that, unfortunately it doesn't work that way—not enough anyway."

Even so, Green Thumb, 40 years in business, is doing quite well in this niche of the design/build market.

In 1995, about half of its \$2 million in revenues came from landscape installations and maintenance, the remainder from its garden center/retail nurs-

cont. on page 12L

cont. from page 9L

ery. The renovation business was so brisk that a third designer, Craig Richmond, was added in mid-season.

Tom and Alice Dennis founded Green Thumb in 1956, but it's now run by sons Dan and John, and grandson John Jr. It's located on 16 acres about three miles from the Professional Football Hall of Fame (Canton's most famous attraction), and employs about 65 in peak season.

Most of the company's design/build projects are relatively small, usually in the \$5,000 to \$20,000 range. Even so, prospects are qualified by charging an hourly design fee.

Experience counts

Experienced foremen like Dean Dennis, 24 years at Green Thumb, and Vincent Depasquale, 10 years, oversee three-person build crews.

Says Klein: "After we (designers) do the drawings and put together the specifications and go over the project with the foremen, we know that the design will get in-



Green Thumb's design team of (from left) Craig Richmond, Vicki Kirkbride and Duane Klein specialize in residential landscapes.

stalled in a quality manner.

"The foremen are experienced enough to know when they need to make minor adjustments on site to make the design work better," he adds. "They have some freedom to do that if the client agrees."

But responsibility for client satisfaction remains with the designers who stay with their respective projects until each is completed.

"I think that's why people are loyal to us year after year after year," says designer



Designer Duane Klein (left) and president Dan Dennis insist on quality whether the job is a build or a renovation, large or small.

Vicki Kirkbride. "They're not seeing so many different faces."

Although Green Thumb tackles one or two larger commercial installations each season, Green Thumb president Dan Dennis says his heart has always been, and remains, in the residential market.

"We like the relationships we can build with homeowners. Generally we can communicate with them better," says Dennis.

"And it's a lot more fun." **LM**

Remember...
how chain and bearing problems used to steal your profits?
...back before you bought your first Turfco® Aerator.



Turfco's exclusive
externally housed chain
and sealed bearings...
slash costly downtime!



Slash Downtime!

Choose the durable Standard Aerator **2 Models**
or the High Production Pro-Series Wide Model!

TURFCO

MFG. INC. • 1655 101st Avenue NE • Minneapolis, MN 55449-4420 • Phone: (612) 785-1000 • FAX (612) 785-0556

AERATORS • SOD CUTTERS • EDGERS • DRILLING UNITS • POWER RAKES • PIPE PULLERS