

# Industry healthy, but costs rising

Results from LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT'S 1997 reader survey show that rising costs for both materials and labor are forcing turf and landscape professionals to become more budget conscious than ever before.

On-going issues like pesticide use and government regulations remain, but concerns, such as the need for reliable labor, have come to the forefront as new challenges. The green industry, like about every other industry in the United States, is screaming for honest, reliable labor, but at a price it can afford to pay.

There is also a concern about the growing shortage of skilled and experienced equipment technicians.

The survey was conducted by Readex, Inc., and is based on 574 usable responses from a sample of 1000 recipients, for a 57 percent response rate, in line with accepted standards for representative survey response.

—The editors



*More than half of landscapers surveyed by LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT say cost of materials influenced pricing, and they had experienced trouble finding dependable help.*

by SHARON CONNERS/Contributing editor

**F**or landscape contractors, preparing a bid is not as easy as a stroke of the pen. Project cost is a mixture of issues. A LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT reader survey by Readex Inc., Stillwater, Minn., indicates that 52 percent of landscapers are concerned with the cost of materials while another 27 percent are taking competitor pricing into consideration.

Most landscapers interviewed by LM say that the cost of plant materials have risen the fastest. Materials that are highest in demand are the ones experiencing the highest increase.

"Architects tend to design in a trend towards particular plant materials," says William Canon, president of Canon Russeau Landscape Inc., Carleton, Mich. "Then those plant materials will get in a short supply and that will cause the cost of those materials to shoot up."

"Certain varieties (of plants) that are very high in demand have gone up 10 percent," adds Tim Korte, vice president of operations, The DiSanto Companies, Inc., Cleveland.

According to Korte, ash, pears and locusts increased the most because of lack of availability. Most shrubs were available, but larger, 36-



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inch and up, were quite pricey.

"Certain trees such as Japanese maples are always a hot item, but again it's more of a cost factor because of the

*Half of the landscapers surveyed expect their overall prices to increase in 1997.*

periods they take to grow," says Garry Ward, owner of Tropical Decor Inc., located in Cincinnati.

Some stone products have risen as much as 30 percent. Equipment costs have increased by about 10 or 15



**Richards: efficient supply operations, product applications.**

percent as a result of conforming to noise and pollution regulations.

Other materials that incurred price hikes include irri-



**Canon: high demand, high cost of plant materials.**

gation materials, PVC and wood, and some hardscape products—by a few percent. Insecticides and herbicides have also increased six or seven percent.

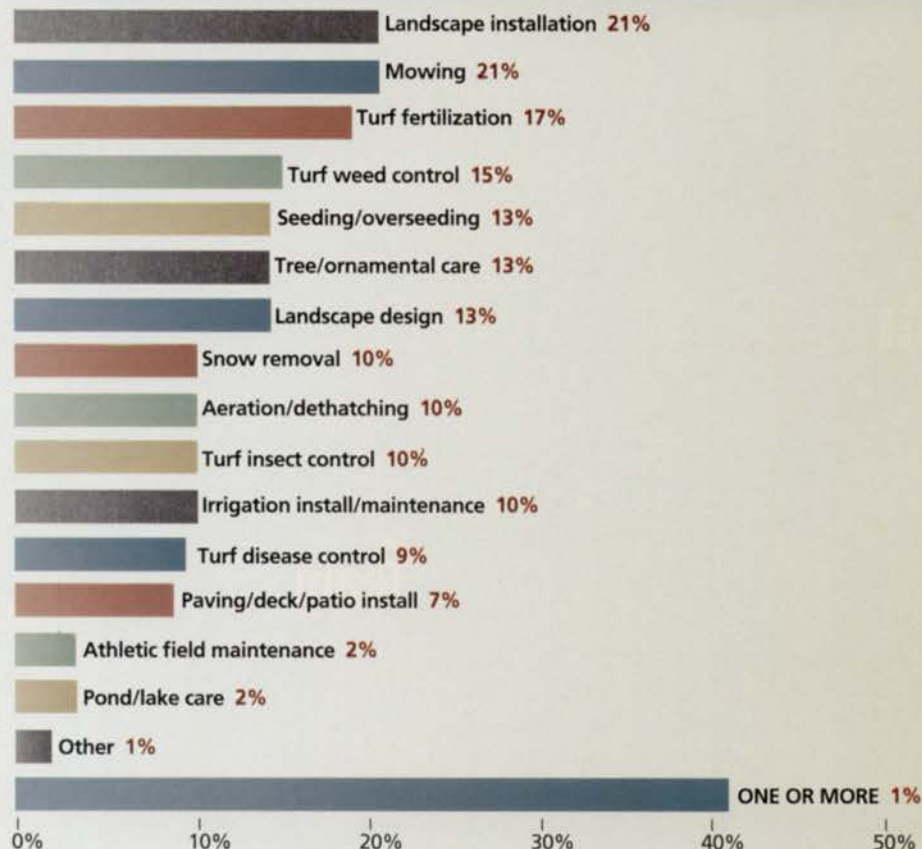
## When to pass cost along

Half of the landscapers surveyed expect their overall prices to increase in 1997. They have found that when their prices increase the easiest thing to do is to pass the cost along to the customer. Some were unable to pass cost along to customers due to the competitive nature of their market. In some cases, those that talked to LM were able to offset costs in other areas.

"One of the things that we're doing now so that we don't have to pass anything on to the customer is working with the suppliers to see what we can do to streamline their operations and reduce their costs of processing," states Wayne Richards, principal owner and CEO of Cagwin & Dorward Landscaping Contractors, Novato, Calif.

"Secondly, we're looking in-

## LANDSCAPE-RELATED SERVICES ORGANIZATIONS LIKELY TO RAISE PRICES FOR IN 1997



ternally at our usage of those materials and getting more efficient with the applications," says Richards.

Bruce Bachand, vice president & COO, Carol King Landscape Maintenance Inc., Orlando, Fla., stays current with the "how-to" aspect of the business.

"We've tried to stay abreast of the technologies and utilize herbicides for weed control instead of manual weeding," says Bachand, "and we also use bigger mowing equipment where possible and zero turn equipment which is coming out more prevalently in the marketplace and does increase productivity in some cases."

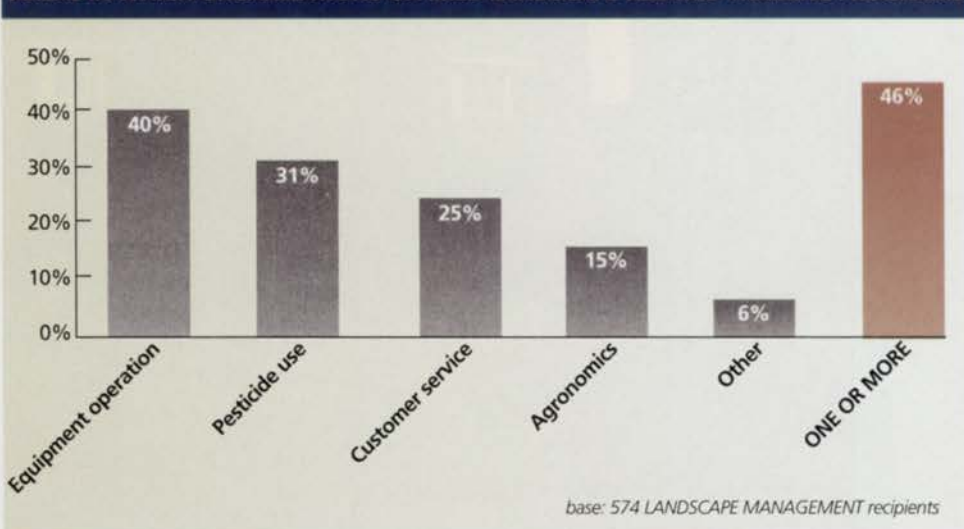
Many markets are made up of hundreds of landscaping



**Erbesfield: Hispanic labor most reliable worker group.**

companies, but the contractors say they don't compete with all of them. In most cases there are anywhere from six to a dozen that they compete with. They don't consider the "mom and pop" operations competition. But competition continues to grow.

#### AREAS IN WHICH ORGANIZATIONS OFFERED LANDSCAPE-RELATED TRAINING PROGRAMS



"This is one of the if not the most competitive market in the United States. When the Olympics came to Atlanta, it brought a lot of competition for us. We had no national companies prior to the Olympics, now we have all of them," says George Morrell, CEO, The Morrell Group, headquartered in Atlanta.

Contractors seemed to be split as far as whether or not competition was fair. The ones that felt it wasn't said it was because of the unprofessional companies out-pricing them. The ones that felt it was fair said they stayed away from open bidding situations and only bid where customers knew them.

Because of the newly-built Mercedes plant the area around Tuscaloosa/Birmingham area is growing like crazy. There's a lot more competition, and most of it is poor competition.

"There's one other contractor, probably two, in the

Tuscaloosa/Birmingham area that price like I do and the rest drop the bottom out every bid. I've got a chance when I bid against those two fellas, but anybody else I don't even have a prayer," explains Paul Guthrie, owner of Guthrie Landscape, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

"There's so much work in our area, that contractors are working tremendous hours just trying to keep up," exclaims Guthrie "Everybody has gotten greedy after many lean years. We're still main-



**Morrell: everybody's in Atlanta thanks to Olympics.**

*The ones that felt competition was not fair said it was because of the unprofessional companies out-pricing them.*

taining quality. Instead of working 10 hours we're working 15 hours," according to Jeffrey Sheehan, president of Confidence Landscaping Inc., Campbell, Calif.



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## Recruitment tips

Sometimes recruiting help is not just as easy as placing a newspaper ad.

"If we're looking for a more experienced job title worker, we'll go to the paper and run ads and conduct interviews. If we're looking for just general labor, we have a sign that we put out in front of our office or referrals," comments Sam Benson, vice president of Southeastern Landscape Inc., Huntsville, Ala.

Tim Korte, vice president of operations of The DiSantos Cos. Inc., says, "We found the best recruitment is through our own people. . . We've had no luck at all with newspaper ads. We also go through various college programs—both at Ohio State and the Agricultural Technical Institute in Wooster."

Bruce Wilson, president of Environmental Care Inc., Calabasas, Calif., says, "This year the competition has gotten pretty stiff for employees and the unemployment rate is fairly low so we've gone to more national advertising in trade magazines and 800 numbers for telephone interviews."

Nick Dennis, owner of Pro Lawn Plus, Jacksonville, Fla., explains, "We have even gone so far as to go out of state with national magazines and then pay for their expenses to move down here. We've had them get into Florida and they take off. Twice that's happened to me."



**Wilson: national ads, toll-free calls for job applicants.**

### Digging for help

Fifty-five percent of those surveyed said that their organizations experienced difficulty in finding dependable workers over the past two years. Many seemed to be in agreement as far as what made a worker reliable. Honesty and trust were high on the list. Other characteristics included dependability, work

interest and pride. Many were looking for a worker who has experience, no police offenses, and a decent driving record. At the technician level they look for someone who has technical abilities.

Mark Erbesfield, owner of Greenmark Landscaping, Atlanta, has an almost 100 percent Hispanic workforce. "I got completely tired of the unreliability of the worker force that I was dealing with. We could not get any of the locals to show up. If we did they were not sober or clean."

*One Fairfield, Ohio, landscaper offers a headhunter reward for employees. If a new employee lasts 60 days, the person who brought him in gets \$50.*

The ways of recruiting new help varied from company to company, but one consistency stood out in most cases. The best workers were the ones that were recruited by existing employees or word of mouth. Most agreed that the newspaper is the worst and least productive way to find employees. Some have found other methods that work such as university job fairs, participating in local schools on advisory councils and supporting institutions that are training future employees. Another source is the state unemployment office.

Mike Glowacki, owner of Albert Glowacki Landscape,

Nantucket, MA, is in a unique situation because of his island location. "We have to recruit people from other areas and bring them here. There is no labor force where we are. We scout around, beat the bushes, go to colleges, tech schools and resort areas during seasonal changes," says Glowacki.

Frequently landscapers will call people back for a second and sometimes third or fourth interviews. Many spend at least an hour in the interview process. Most seemed to have a probation period whether it

was two weeks or 90 days.

Most actively search for career employees.

"That's why the company goes to the colleges to recruit. We've got a really good shot at having a really good quality employee as opposed to somebody who just wants to work outside as a summer job," says Korte.

Landscape contractors hire about two to three workers per year. Those companies that are in cooler climates with harsh winters hire anywhere from 5 to 40 summer employees.

### Room for growth

Many companies try to promote from within. Train-

ing programs and opportunities for advancement are often times part of employment. Help with continuing education and time off from work to attend class is often an option. Richards says the current president of his company started out as a gardener and is now his partner.

However, most workers don't stay more than six months. "In our industry we can't pay them enough to compete with others around here. Some of these contractors are paying \$12 per hour for someone to push a wheelbarrow. In our business we can't compete," states Guthrie, who

points to an average labor cost in his region of \$7 to \$8 per hour as the ceiling rate.

## Customers pay the price of increases

Many contractors are passing the cost of materials on to customers.

"If the cost goes up, the price goes up. . . We're in a pretty tight competitive business and there isn't a lot of room for absorbing cost," according to William Canon, president of Canon Russeau Landscape Inc., Carleton, MI.

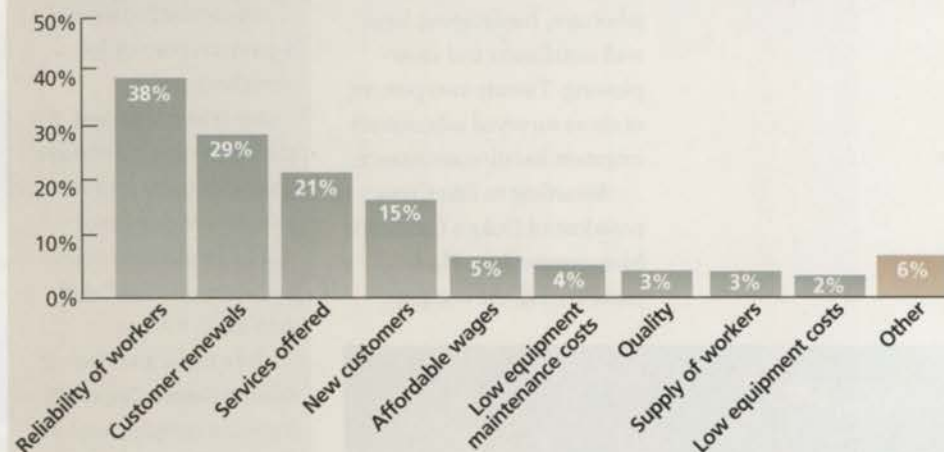
Fred Anderson, owner, Anderson Landscape Const. Inc., Lancaster, MA, says, "You can find other vendors that might get (material) for less money. You can pay for the material up front that saves money.

Nick Dennis, owner of Pro Lawn Plus, Jacksonville, FL, says, "From just cancelling the alarm service to just canceling the cable and weather. I've nickled and dimed this place just so we don't have to increase the cost on to the consumer.

Bruce Bachand, vice president and chief operating officer of Carol King Landscape Maintenance Inc., Orlando, FL, commented, "We've cut costs by trying to be more efficient in how we route our maintenance division and in our equipment purchasing practices.

Garry Ward, owner of Tropical Decor Inc., Cincinnati, OH, says, "You don't want to cut salaries on your employees because if you want quality employees you've gotta pay the employees. You've gotta give them benefits.

### AREAS MOST RELATED TO SUCCESS OF ORGANIZATIONS' OPERATION



base: 265 landscape service providers

"To keep people punctual and reliable we have a monthly bonus program," says Bachand. "We also have an employee-of-the-month award in each division."

He says there is a downside to the makeup of the green industry culture.

"The pressures of our industry still do not lend to a good career. Many of the companies work very long hours

## Twenty-two percent of landscapers surveyed subcontract irrigation installation and maintenance.

and pay low wages."

### Branching out

Most landscapers that LM interviewed describe themselves as full-service. They provide services like design/build, installation, property management, snow plowing and de-icing.

Some of them subcontract



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services such as landscape maintenance and irrigation, arborcare, hardscaping, large wall installation and snowplowing. Twenty-two percent of those surveyed subcontract irrigation install/maintenance.

According to Eric Cross, president of Duke's Landscape Management Inc., Hacktstown, NJ, the company



Cross: subcontracts tree work, snow removable to avoid large investment in equipment, training.

subcontracts a small amount for snow and for major tree care work.

"It wouldn't be feasible for me to buy 20 front-end loaders so it's really out of necessity. To have an experienced climber and invest in a bucket



Drake: an 'awesome' year.

## Subcontracting services

Subcontracting services is common practice for some landscapers.

Joe Drake, president, JFD Landscapes Inc., Bainbridge Township/Auburn, Ohio, says, "We're capable of doing everything in house, but we're pretty jammed with work."

Mike Rorie, president of Groundmasters, Cincinnati, states the company subcontracts, "Typically because it's a specialty area. Something that we don't feel that we can either do a volume in or do well."

Sally Griffin, human resources manager, Gibbs Landscape, CO, Smyrna, Ga., says the company subcontracts irrigations and fertilization of the lawns. "Those people are experts in those areas. Irrigation is just not something that we specialize in."

Gary Kinman, president, Kinman Associates Inc., Plain City, Ohio, says "We sub out the big heavy equipment like a big dozer that might cost \$150,000 because we don't have to work with it all the time. We sub out for specific uses with more expensive equipment and unique situations."



Kinman: sub out the big jobs.

truck wouldn't be feasible," says Cross.

### Brighter days

Revenues are expected to increase in 1997 for 42 percent of those surveyed by LM, 22 percent expect them to stay the same and three percent expect a decrease.

Joe Drake, president of JFD Landscapes Inc., Bainbridge/Auburn Township, Ohio, feels that 1997 will be an awesome year.

"The backlog that we have is probably the biggest that we've ever had. There's a number of factors. This is our eighth full season of business.

We finally established a reputable reputation. I don't even have time to chase all the leads coming in."

Dave Rykbost, president and owner of Dave's Landscape Co., Hudson, Mass., says, "We're swamped pretty much as always in the spring. It'll be a good year landscaping-wise. It was a terrible year for snowplowing. We're very busy and I expect it to be a good year."

Landscapers rely on good weather, but whether or not some landscaping businesses thrive in 1997 is just as unpredictable as that next rainstorm.



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# Edging the competition

*Company acquisitions and tough markets are keeping lawn care companies from raising their prices and passing cost to the consumer.*

by SHARON CONNERS/Contributing Editor

In some cases material costs have increased as much as 100 percent over the previous year, but contractors' hands are tied. They are having to absorb those costs. The industry has grown more cut-throat as acquisitions take place causing contractors to think twice before passing cost along to customers, which could hurt their business.

Only 21 percent of those surveyed for Landscape Management by Readex Inc., Stillwater, Minn., say they will increase mowing prices in 1997. Seventeen percent say they will increase fertilization prices. Competitor pricing af-

fecting 27 percent of the companies' pricing structure.

"One of the big concerns that I have as a fairly small company is the acquisitions and buyouts that have taken place in recent years. I'm not really sure where that will take the industry," says Craig Martin, vp of Greener Lawn Care, Cumberland, Md.

Jack Robertson, owner of Robertson Lawn Care, Springfield, Ill., explains, "A small company has to do what it can to make a profit. A larger company that has significant funds behind it can actually put pressure on the smaller companies because of that. They can control prices more



**Pool: spot apps to cut costs.**

than a small company can."

Sam Lang, owner and president, Fairway Green Inc., Raleigh, NC, says, "Unfortunately, in a market like Raleigh there's been some acquisitions made by the bigger companies. As we get into more intense competitive mode, we see the price soften some with the larger companies trying to buy a piece of the market."

"It's very difficult to compete with the competition," says Gene Pool, vice president of Emerald Green Lawn Care, Van Wert, Ohio.

"As it is now, we use a quality product which means we're already higher than our



**Lang: prices soft with big guns.**

competition. If we passed a 14 percent increase along to our customers, the cancellation rate would just be exorbitant. Right now, we're just trying to bite the bullet and make changes in the program as the year goes on. Hopefully we can just run spot insecticide on an as-needed basis and hope to recoup some costs. We have down-sized a little on labor and tried to get more out of what people we have."

### **Mixing cost and customers**

Most told LM that their costs have gone up 2 to 4 percent on fertilizer, seed and weed control products. However, some have seen increases as high as 100 percent, for ex-



**Munie: work harder in the interviewing process, make effort to find the best workers.**

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ample, on seed. Fertilizer has increased as much as 14 percent. Many are absorbing those price increases.

"I don't see that we can really pass on more than 3 to 4 percent to the client. Contracts are set for the year. Therefore, if we see any cost increases, we've got to internalize it and make up the difference on our margins," according to John Debell Jr., president of Clippers Inc., Chantilly, Va.

"If you start cutting costs, the perception that you give is you're cutting services or scrimping on product," adds John Buechner, director of technical services, Lawn Doctor Inc., Marlboro, NJ.

Jon Cundiff, president of

## 21 percent of lawn care companies surveyed say they will increase mowing prices.

Turf's Up Lawn Service, Lee's Summit, MO, says, "part of the increase in price comes from the latest technology and the latest products that give us better results. By doing that we are able to get them better results and better service, which enables us to justify the slight increase."

### Worker woes

Not unlike other areas of the green industry, lawn care employers are having a hard time finding employees.

Nineteen percent of those employers surveyed said it was due to lack of a readily-available supply of labor.



"The pool of available workers has shrunk to nothing. It's extremely difficult to get good people," says Lang. "When you get them you have to pay them more and give

them better benefits."

Joe Munie, president of Munie Outdoor Services, Belleville, Ill., says, "we've had a tough time finding the right people. One of things we're doing is working harder on interviewing and taking more time and effort trying to find those people."

Adds Nick Dennis, Pro-Lawn Plus, Jacksonville, Fla., "we had a good year hiring this year. We kept most of our people. But we hired two extra people this year just to make sure that we had backups."

Buechner of Lawn Doctor suggested hiring more people

on a part-time basis or fewer people, but paying more money—hoping to attract a more reliable employee.

In his 17th year of business, Pool said, "Now, if you hire someone 18 to 25, it's my experience that they want to walk in the door and make more money than I do and

late 40s early 50s. They walk in the door with a benefit package," says Pool.

Lang says, "We have benefit packages that only much larger companies could afford to offer. We're having to do those things to attract employees and keep them. In the summer when it's so hot, we shut down at noon on Friday."

This year lawn care contractors will be searching for that special formula to combat overgrown competition they face when it comes to hiring and pricing. Trimming back some of their services or applying good marketing techniques might help them stay in business.

Buechner adds, "it's the age-old struggle, you have low price and poor service. Or, you try to provide good service at a competitive price. Hopefully the marketplace makes a decision to buy quality, not price."



Dennis: hires back-up help.

want to have as much authority and power as I do. My philosophy is not to hire anyone under 30. I'm having excellent luck with finding people that work for factories taking early retirements or buyouts in their



# Golf course equipment care a growing concern

**G**olf course superintendents are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of equipment managers and mechanics. Equipment operation is so important that 40 percent of those surveyed for LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT by Readex Inc., Stillwater, Minn., said they run equipment training programs.

"It's very difficult to find good people who are trained in the green industry as mechanics. Good mechanics are not hard to come by, but good mechanics that are trained in the golf course business are very hard to come by.

Typically when they find a job, their superintendents pay them well enough that they don't want to leave where they are," says Steve Cook, CGCS, Golf Course Manager, Oakland Hills Country Club, Bloomfield Hills, Mich.

"We need mechanics in the industry and technicians as much as people with degrees trying to get superintendent's jobs," says W.P. Montague, MG, CGCS, superintendent, Oakwood Club, Cleveland Hts., Ohio.

Bob Foos, superintendent of Lake Shore Country Club, Rochester, NY replies, "At our club we're real big on educa-

*With good golf equipment mechanics in short supply, rough turf may be ahead for golf course superintendents.*

by SHARON CONNERS/Contributing Editor

tion so any time we can send somebody away to a seminar or a school we like to do that. We're finding out that an equipment manager is probably more important than an assistant superintendent just because equipment is so expensive, it's so sophisticated now, you have to have good maintenance for equipment."

According to Dave Radaj, superintendent of Wokanda Club, Des Moines, Iowa, "The majority of the mechanics I see are coming from other parts of the industry. Our mechanic came from working on farm equipment. . . . The biggest asset to the mechanics are the manufacturer schools for their education."





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Although most say their equipment is maintained on site, occasionally it is sent out for repairs such as grinding.

### Drive for support

Some superintendents speaking to LM are dissatisfied with manufacturer/distributor support.

"The people that sell the (equipment) are weak in technical support or in support after you buy something. They spend more money at selling something than making sure it's right after they sell it," says Dan Williams, golf course superintendent of Riverview Country Club, Appleton, Wisc.

"Parts availability is really getting tough. Nobody stocks the parts that we used to be able to get pretty quickly a couple years ago. We've got a cart sitting on the hoist right now that's been here almost two weeks."

In contrast Radaj says, "There's probably three or four major players as far as equipment goes and they're all fighting for our business. They all have good equipment. They know that service will make the difference. For the amount of money that you spend on most of the equipment they should do what you need to have the equipment work right. I've found that all of them that I've worked with will bend over backwards to get the job done right."

### No putts about safety

Many golf courses subcontract tree planting and large landscape projects like railroad tie walls. Some subcontract pruning and spring prep on ornamental beds. The top reasons for subcontracting are safety and cost.

Corey Eastwood, CGCS, Stockdale Country Club, Bakersfield, Calif., says, "I don't



Superintendents such as Daryl Decker, CGCS, of Arrowhead CC in Canton, Ohio, help out in a pinch, but they still need good help.

want my guys up in a high lift or climbing trees. It's a combination of expertise and safety. The workman's comp rate on a tree man is pretty high. He would have to have a helper. So we contract out between

\$15,000 and \$25,000 a year to a tree service."

Mark Wilson, CGCS, Valhalla Golf Club, Louisville, Ky., says, "You don't have the expense of gearing yourself up with some of the equipment that these (contractors) use. Usually you're getting an operator that uses this equipment every day."

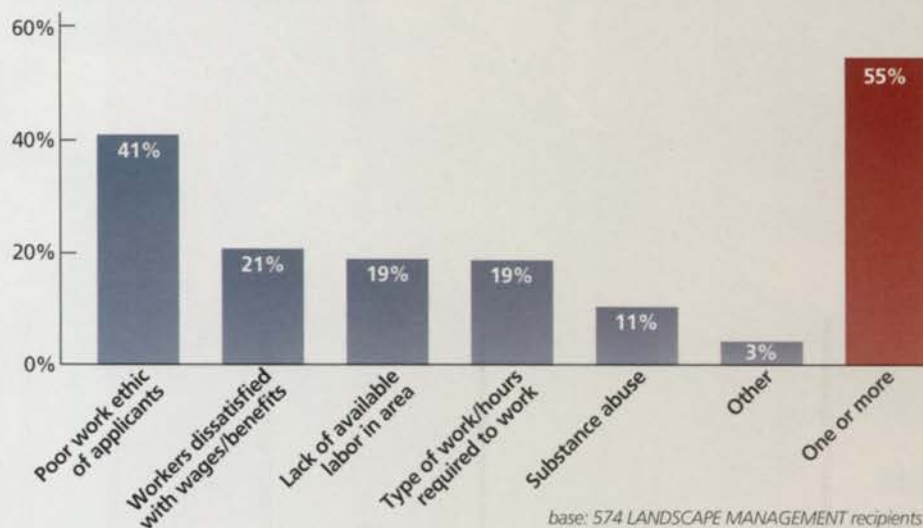
### Teed off with wages

Trouble finding good help was a complaint for more than half of those surveyed by LM. Twenty-one percent say it is because workers are dissatisfied with wages and benefits.

Williams says its a problem finding reliable workers. "As the market's dried up, it's so competitive. It's not just wages that's the issue, it's benefits that go with it." Beginning pay is \$6 or \$7 an hour.

Montague says, "In our job market they would rather go

### REASONS FOR EXPERIENCING DIFFICULTY IN FINDING DEPENDABLE WORKERS





work for McDonald's and Wendy's where they can work their own hours and be around their friends and not have to deal with [the weather] like we do outdoors."

In contrast, Wilson doesn't find getting reliable workers hard. "I created a system of working a lot of college interns whereas they want to get a career in turf management. The other reason is, I got a pretty strong full-time staff. Also, my third group of people is retirees that have been returning every year."

When asked what their secret to success was, most credited their employees. It's also a matter of managing their time. Radaj says it's important to make sure that employees know what they're supposed to do. "To know what's going on you have to be out on the course a lot during the day," says Radaj.

#### **Budgets are fair**

On average superintendents received a three to four



**With near full-employment, the need to find workers who take direction well and follow through on the job is especially great.**

percent cost-of-living budget increase. They seemed to be content with that.

Eastwood has the same budget as last year. "It's never enough. But, we can work with that to the satisfaction of most members."

LM's survey revealed labor costs accounted for 41 percent of total operating budgets. "The biggest part of any budget is the labor and that is the hardest part to control," says Radaj.

Wilson says he has less

money to work with than last year. "Last year, we hosted a major championship, but we also had a new clubhouse and a lot of construction. We're

different from the average course in several ways.

"A high-caliber golf course is much more artistic, as far as in the maintenance. It's really not

### *LM's survey revealed labor costs accounted for 41 percent of total operating budgets.*

doing less major projects and doing more just maintenance." Wilson feels that Valhalla is

a job, it's more a compassion, a competitive nature, to be good.

"The average golf course doesn't get the support from the committees they're involved with or the financial backing to be competitive. It's in major sports where you have general management that backs it," says Wilson.

With budgets finally up to par with what they need to be, superintendents will likely be spending more time trying to find good mechanics. Who knows there could be a good mechanic out there who is training right now to be a superintendent.



**Equipment care is especially crucial in light of high equipment costs.**



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## Playing the budget game to win

*With the same amount of money or less in their budgets compared to last year, athletic field managers told LM they are stretching their dollars to make it work.*

by SHARON CONNORS / Contributing Editor

In the field of budget increases, athletic managers struck out. Annual operating budgets for 1997 are the same as in 1996 for 36 percent of LM's readers polled by Readex Inc., Stillwater, Minn.

Six percent said their budgets were cut.

Some field managers were forced to postpone new equipment purchases while others reduced seasonal help. Whatever the case, they wanted to make sure that their fields did not suffer.

Although Mike Andresen, athletic turf manager at Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, had a budget cut he remains committed, "Because I'm dealing with athletes and coaches, recruiting is a big issue. Good game fields and good practice facilities are vital to getting good athletes in here," says Andresen.

"Iowa State took a big step a year ago and took out the artificial turf and put in grass. Once you get good athletes, you have to take care of them and make sure that they're

playing on fields that don't have holes"

### **Pitching for dollars**

The number one argument that field managers used to get as many dollars out of the budget as possible was need for safe playing surfaces. They tried to point out to management the severity of any unsafe field. Aesthetics was another reason to push for money.

"You've got to be able to show (management) what it's going to be used for and how it will look," says Todd Whitrock, sites maintenance technician at Sierra High School, Colorado Springs, Colo.

"You can show them what the safety factors are. You have to have safe fields for playgrounds and athletic fields."

Gil Higgins, parks foreman for the City of Prescott, Prescott, Ariz., adds that, "If you've got liabilities out there,

spending \$20,000 to fix something instead of having a \$5 or \$6 million lawsuit against you, it's pretty easy to convince people."

Roger Bowman, grounds supervisor at the University of Delaware, Newark, Del., believes it helps to pair safety concerns with appearance factors.

"You have to look at it not only from a safety standpoint and the importance of maintaining safe playing surfaces but, also you need to convince them from an aesthetic standpoint. With a higher level of funding not only do you increase the safety of the field, but you also increase the appearance of the field."

### **Time out for aerating**

Many sports turf pros maintained anywhere from five to 52 fields ranging from



**Andresen: athletes depend on field crews.**

soccer, football and softball to multi-purpose. No matter the sport, managers emphasized the need for core aeration. Most stressed the cooperation of coaches was vital to successful aeration.

"Springtime is our difficult



time of the year," says James Flynn, superintendent of parks and grounds, Wilton, Ct.

"We'll try to take a field or two out of service every year and give it a season to rejuvenate itself. We aggressively aerate it and seed it, let it grow back and keep people off of it for a while."

Tom Burns, director-major league field operations for the Texas Rangers, Arlington, Texas, says work on that major league field is set for when the team is out of town.

"This is a brand new field, we just replaced it last year," says Burns. "A lot of times at the end of a home stand we'll have a day game. The last few weeks, as soon as the game's over we're out there with the aerifiers and the verticutters. That gives us that much more time before the next home stand."

Pat Boyer, superintendent of parks/city forester for Morgan Parks Department, Fort Morgan, says soccer fields are the toughest to maintain.

"We do a core aerification twice per year," says Boyer. "We developed a sports blend turf mix with two Kentucky bluegrasses and three perennial ryegrasses. We will overseed the entire area twice a year. We try to look at those areas that receive the most wear such as in front of the goals and around the goals. If possible we move those goals on a weekly basis so that wear goes into other areas. We try to overseed those areas on a continual basis," he adds.

Bowman explains the reasoning behind a recent equipment purchase as one of saving time.

"We've just purchased a plug pulverizer so that when we aerify fields we can come back and pulverize the plugs. We can put that field back into play within a day and the coaches don't even know we've been on there."

Most of the athletic field managers that spoke to LM do not subcontract work out because they liked having

one high school are under construction. "It gives us a chance to get geared up for the following year for manpower and equipment," Fordyce says.

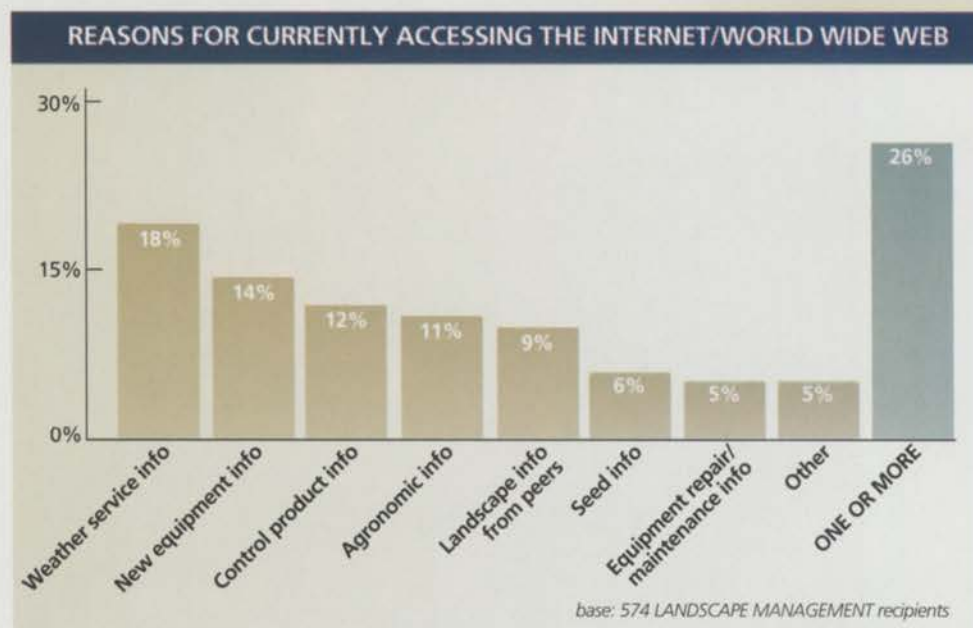
"Right now I have two sites that are under maintenance contract and I'm going to have one more."

#### Good catches

Unlike most other areas of the green industry where employees are concerned, sports facilities are finding employees with relative ease. Most

sity and taken an intern," says Andresen, who also employs athletes who have student aid that needs to be used up, or work/study people. There's always good hardworking students at the university looking for jobs."

Adds Higgins, "Where we're at, as hard as it is to find a job, if we post an opening for a permanent full-time position, regardless of the pay, we have anywhere from 50 to 250 applications for that job. A job with vacation, benefits



control of it themselves. One did subcontract because of new construction.

Bill Fordyce, grounds foreman for Douglas County School District, Castle Rock, Colo., has been subcontracting for the first year only on new sites. Located between Denver and Colorado Springs, his is the fastest growing school district in the nation. Three elementary schools and

comes from word of mouth from other employees.

"We're able to get a lot of people who have day jobs to work for us. A lot of times you end up getting better quality employees because of that," says Mike Boekholder, head groundskeeper for the Durham Bulls Baseball Club, Durham, NC.

"We've gone to the turf grass program at the univer-

and sick leave is pretty attractive to a lot of people."

While concerns for finding reliable workers are low, athletic field managers concentrate on getting budgets where they need to be. With more money to work with, fields are bound to be safer, better looking, and in the long run, will require less maintenance.

# Staying competitive in changing times

by DICK HOLZSCHU/general manager, Urban Pest Management, DowElanco

**W**ith continued growth in the turf and ornamental industry comes change. Newer products, label and formulation changes, and novel ways of accessing information all require your attention.

However, tending to the daily tasks of hiring employees, maintaining equipment, and dealing with erratic weather can make keeping abreast of changes challenging at best.

For consumers, the demands of everyday life lead them to outside sources—such as lawn care professionals—to not only get the job done, but to answer their questions about products and services.

In turn, lawn care and landscape companies look to manufacturers for information and support for the products that meet their customers' needs.

It is up to manufacturers, such as DowElanco, to educate, inform and provide informational training—not just in response to crisis, but to help our customers survive times of change and thrive.

Our stewardship efforts are concentrated in three areas including: developing new products, continuing support for current products and providing information.

#### **New products for the millennium**

First, we press forward with new products that respond to current needs. In that vein, I'm proud to announce our newest product—Conserve® SC turf and ornamental insect control. Conserve just received an accelerated federal registration for sale in the United States



under the Environmental Protection Agency's Reduced Risk registration program this past June.

Conserve is the first turf and ornamental product in the new spinosyn chemical class and offers professionals a "Caution" signal word. It uniquely combines the efficacy of synthetic insecticides with the benefits of biological insect pest control products. It's highly active at very low use rates and offers excellent control of sod webworms, armyworms, cutworms and a variety of ornamental insect pests.

The launch of Conserve is just one result of our continuous and extensive research designed to stimulate innovation. Currently, several other new products are nearing the final phases of the 10-year introductory development process.

#### **Customer support immediate**

Developing new products isn't enough. In today's fast-paced world, busy professionals need information about products, packaging, and applica-

tion techniques.

With that in mind, we support our current products with over 20 sales and technical representatives dedicated solely to the turf and ornamental marketplace, and we reinforce this team with corporate-based research and development specialists. Together, these people work to create a support structure that provides technical and research information, and training. They also serve as a liaison between our customers and our 400 scientists and researchers at corporate headquarters.

#### **Reaching out to the industry**

Educational support is also a part of our work. To that end, DowElanco maintains a strong presence in industry-wide associations, such as Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA), Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) as well as many other associations that work to educate the public and the government about the proper use of specialty pesticides in the environment.

By fostering the innovation and discovery of new products, supporting our current products and cooperating with others in our industry to educate consumers and legislators, DowElanco plans to help raise the service standard throughout the 21st century. Our goal is to not only foster change, but rather, help make the transitions necessary for change a little smoother.

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