

# Working the contract

*A look at how an Erie, Pa. company went into action to fulfill a supermarket contract through a rough winter.*

by JENNIFER FAILS

**I**n June of 1993, Allin Companies, a \$2 million landscape company based in Erie, Pa., was awarded the \$75,000 landscape construction bid for the Wegmans Food market, also in Erie.

## The specs

The bid specs for the project stated that the landscaping had to be completed by the opening date of March 1, with no exceptions. Bids were due by October 18, 1996.

Allin received the project on October 25. Owner John Allin realized that bad weather was probably approaching. After a review of the blueprints, it was recommended that 44 poplar trees be substituted with maple and ash. The site was exposed to heavy northwest winds and there was some concern that the fragile poplars could possibly break off and damage customers' vehicles.

Working closely with Lake County Nursery in Madison, Ohio, the plants and trees were ordered and scheduled for delivery. Lake County supplied 90 percent of the plant material needed for the project.

Arrangements were made to dig the required material late in the season to accommodate the projected opening date. Some plants were dug "at customer risk" due to the time of year. Plant material was scheduled to arrive in early November.

## Irrigation subbed

Allin Companies subbed out the irrigation portion of the project to Rain Makers, a local company that has worked with Allin before. By November 1, most of the irrigation mainlines and lateral were in. Rotor and sprinkler head pipes were stubbed out and taped off.

Allin hauled 250 cubic yards of topsoil from the site back to Allin Companies, where it was stored inside one of the warehouses. Using a bulldozer, the soil was stacked under the roof to keep it dry so that it could be used later in the winter to topdress bed areas.

Landscape installation work began on site November 4. Five days later, a tremendous snowfall hit. By November 11, the Erie lake shore had 48 inches of snow and 55 plus at the Wegmans site. Installation work was stopped till November 18, with

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a foot of snow still on the ground. Snow removal work then began at the 95,000 square foot site.

In early December, Allin Companies was also awarded the turfgrass installation portion of the contract. Taken away from the site development contractor, the hydroseeding would need to be complete by the March 1997 opening. The stored topsoil back at the warehouse was definitely going to be put to good use.

Installation work progressed between snowstorms throughout the winter. Allin employees found themselves planting viburnum and juniper one day, and shoveling off the planter islands the next.

#### Protection for planters

Working closely with the site civil engineer from Urban Engineers of Erie and Wegmans, obstacles were met and overcome. Aside from the snow piled on the planting islands, the main planters against the building needed support and had to be prepped so that freezing temperatures would not damage the planters.

Planting areas had to be built in as soon as possible. Trees had to be planted and staked before the ground froze. Ed Kris from Lake County Nursery visited the site regularly throughout the winter to help Allin in properly protecting the plants and trees from the wind and snow.

Towards the end of the year, Wegmans requested flowers on-site for the grand

opening. A grower was called, and several hundred mums were "forced" so they would be in full bloom for the opening. Allin Companies told Wegmans that the mums would last only a few days, but the client insisted on color for the opening.

#### Time for the grassing

By mid-January, most available areas were planted. A significant space near the building was not ready for planting because of the building construction.

It was now time to begin the grass the areas. Crews began the long process of raking the island areas to remove the large pieces of frozen soil. At the same time, crews were back at the warehouse breaking down the stored pile of top soil. As the islands became ready the dry pulverized unfrozen top soil was hauled to the site and used to topdress the islands.

As areas became ready for seeding, a Bowie 900 gallon hydroseeder was used to seed with a bluegrass and ryegrass mixture.

The hydroseeder then had to be winterized for the cold nights and prepped again for morning.

#### Weather delay

The winter conditions provided hardships for the landscape contractors, and also for some of the building contractors. The grand opening date was pushed back to March 16.

This was both good and bad news. The later date gave two more weeks for installa-

tion work. However the mums were scheduled for March 1 delivery.

Crews took the mums to a vacant company office, placed them on plastic and set the room temperature at 65° F. The flowers were watered each day, and a window was left open at night to simulate normal fall conditions in the Erie area.

The weather worsened as March 16 neared. On the 14th, Allin Companies hydroseeded previously seeded areas so everything would be green. The mums were to be planted at 4 o'clock in the morning on the 16th to be in before the 7 a.m. grand opening.

On the 15th, the temperature hit 15° F, and a hard snow began to fall. At 8 p.m. on March 15th, Allin and Wegman officials decided not to plant the mums till Easter.

Instead of planting mums at 4 a.m., the Allin crews salted the lot, touched up bark mulch and removed plow stakes. Every grass area not covered by snow was hydroseeded again. All planting was complete and on time.

By mid-May, only two trees and six plants had died from the weather.

President John Allin says the Wegmans project was an exciting challenge, but he would prefer not to do many more winter projects.

"Because we could not predict the snowfalls we had to work around," says Allin. "It was nerve racking and a logistical nightmare."

Allin Companies employees were glad to be working, but conditions were certainly not what most landscape contractors are used to.

Allin credits the work of his site foreman, Jerry Kunco, and the teamwork among the Wegmans personnel for the success of the project.

"It was a classic example of everyone working together to get the job done," says Allin. The company has been asked to bid on future Wegmans construction sites in New York. □