

# STATE of the INDUSTRY

## Landscapers like go-go economy

*Healthy economy means lots of work, clients with better budgets, and more competition for labor.*

By RUTH E. THALER-CARTER, Contributing Writer

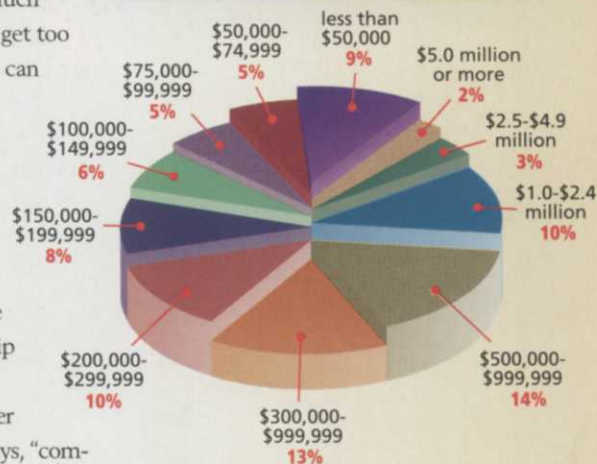
**A** healthy national economy means work, generous budgets and growth for landscape professionals, the downside being that it's harder to find and keep good workers.

### Market growth

"The market absolutely is growing," says Don Skradski, Omaha, NE. "It's booming here. If anything, I have too much work, but I don't want my company to get too big; I try to keep things streamlined so I can keep control over quality. People have more money so they're spending it. They used to just put in grass; now they're doing a whole landscape. There's a healthy economy, so clients need us; they have no time to do their own yard work. We don't have any ocean or mountains, so they worship their lawns here."

Eric Christiaansen, landscape manager of Sylvan Nursery Inc. in Billings, MT, says, "com-

**1997 REVENUES FOR  
LANDSCAPE/LAWN CARE**



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Bruner: an 'unbelievable' amount of work.

petition is not even an issue. We aren't taking more work for the season, and we're working a year in advance.

"People are blending the landscaping costs into the mortgage, a trend that is migrating north from Colorado. We're designing and selling before they even break ground on a property."

Commercial work is booming, too, Christiaansen says. "I thought we'd see an end to this but it hasn't died down yet."

**John Bruner**, owner of Bruner Construction Ltd. in Kansas City, KS, says "Businesses are relocating here due to its convenient central time zone. We're in a boom that's feeding on itself."

Bruner's does mostly street and highway work, and maintenance on large commercial tracts of ground, reservoirs, dams and military sites. The amount of mowing and maintenance opportunities are "unbelievable," says Bruner.

**Bruce T. Moore, Sr.**, CCLP, president of Eastern Landscape Management Co., Stamford, CT, says the market in the Northeast has improved a lot in recent years.

"We're seeing an upturn," says Moore. "Our area is just coming out of a severe economic recession and there's a lot of construction and real estate because people have money now, and landscaping is growing."

#### Where are the workers?

"It's always tough to find employees; it's perhaps the toughest part of the business," says Christiaansen, who has had success with local college students who want to work.

Labor is, indeed, hard to find, Moore in Connecticut adds. "This is a high cost-of-living area with the influence of a large metropolitan area, New York City. There is a definite lack of middle-management-level people, because the cost of living means they don't live here," he explains.

"There is no unemployment here, so finding help is hard," Skradski says of the Nebraska region.

"We don't have trouble finding help; we have a problem finding good, qualified workers," says Woods, whose company is headquartered near Hartford, CT. "We do the training ourselves."

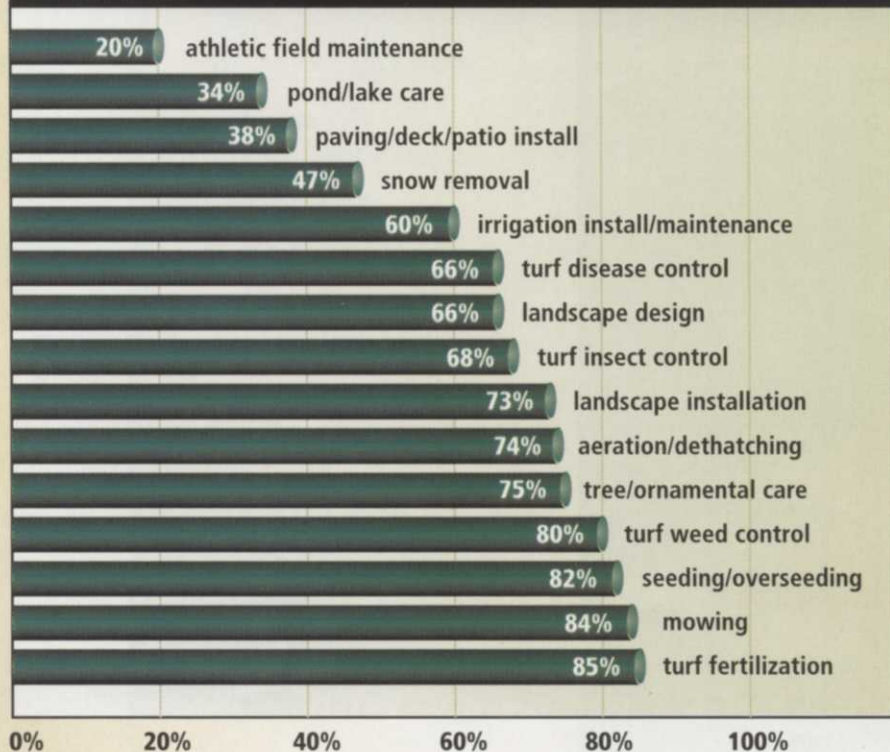
Woods has also had good luck with college students as summer workers, although they're rarely available early in the season and leave before it's over. "Our biggest problem is finding people with transportation and legitimate drivers' licenses," he says.

#### Pay vs. quality of work

Landscapers are always debating the relationship between pay and work quality, and 1998 is no exception.

**Russell Schmidt**, president of Schmidt Landscaping, Hillsboro, MO, says he used to believe that paying more brought in better workers,

#### SERVICES PERFORMED IN 1997 BY LANDSCAPE/LAWN CARE COMPANIES





but "now I think it's in how you treat people, above and beyond money," he says. "I take a keen interest in my employees' families and provide good benefits, vacation time and so on."

Christiansen's company is "right in the middle of the heap" in terms of salaries, he says. To him, the relationship between pay and worker quality is proportional. "The good ones will move on (if you don't pay enough). What I dislike about our industry is that we lose good guys due to the seasonal nature of our work," he notes.

"We do snow removal in the winter to keep some of those people with us."

"Right on target," is how Woods describes his company's pay scale. "I communicate regularly with five or six other local companies to see where they are on pay rates, and try to be consistent with them."

"When I was younger, I thought there was a direct correlation between paying more and getting good work," says Woods. "As I get older, I'm less convinced of that relationship. If someone is doing a poor job, more money won't change them," he adds.

#### Purse strings a bit looser

Client purse strings are loosening up, says Moore, but not too much, landscapers tell LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT.

"It's not like the 1980s, where you could ask almost any price and get it," says Moore. "The only way you

can justify price increases is by providing added value and personal attention."

Budgets are a mixed bag, says Woods. "General contractors shop the budget to death, although they are seeing the results of that approach; you get what you pay for. Saving \$5,000 on the price may cost the client or contractor \$10,000 in the long run. We just stop bidding on the work if the contractor has that attitude."

His company often gets urgent calls to fix something or step in when a client realizes that his bid translates to better-quality work, Woods

notes, but "I'm not a gouger. I'm looking to build ongoing relationships, not do one-time projects."

"I used to be fiercely competitive, but I realized that everyone was a lot happier if we worked together," says Bruner.

"Now I have several colleagues in the landscape industry and we share business, employees and equipment as we need."

#### Diversification

Pressure of the marketplace can push companies into trying to offer more services than they can maintain at a quality level, contractors tell LM.

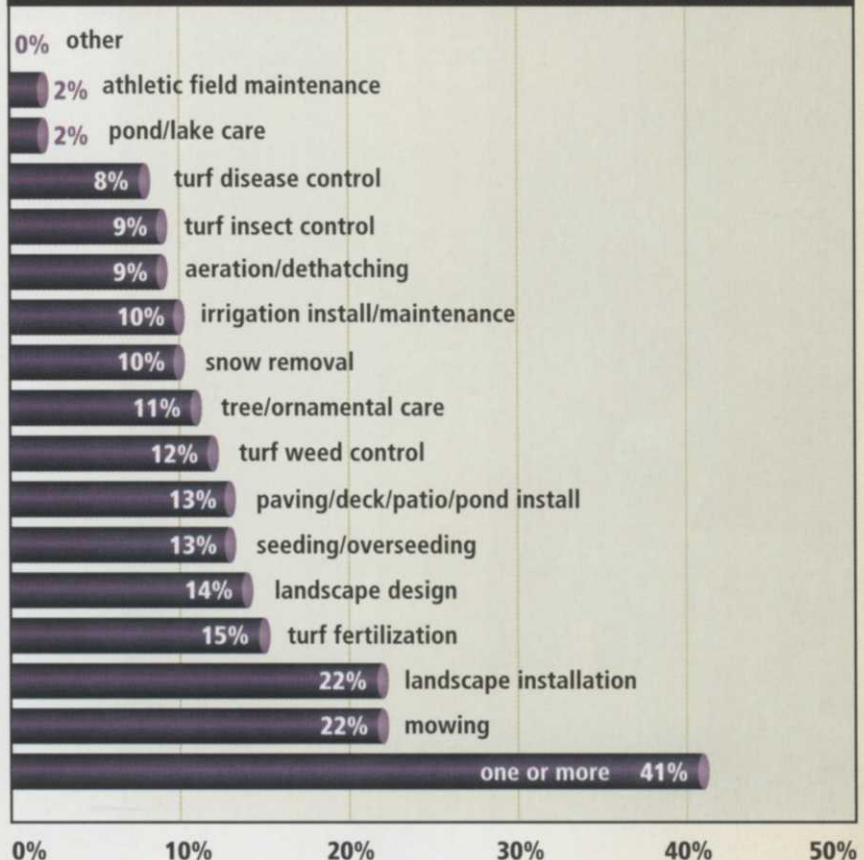
"Our company has a retail garden center, design/build team and pretty large maintenance division, so we are diverse to an extent," says Woods.

"There are limits, though. We don't do any tree work or irrigation. We refer that to others," he says.

Woods' company has found a lucrative niche in golf course work, rebuilding bunkers, tees and providing maintenance, reconstruction and modification.

"It's a tough business to break into. Golf course superintendents tend to think of the courses as their own

### SERVICES FOR WHICH PRICES WILL BE RAISED IN 1998



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homes and you have to get work by word of mouth." He secured a contract when the Professional Golfers Association (PGA) came to town in 1990 and since has parlayed that into work for the developer that owns property abutting the golf course and with the Jaycees, who run the tournament.

"This started out as a small

"Diversity is a good thing," he says. "Sod, trees, concrete, snow removal; I do everything. It's how I became successful."

#### Distributor relations

The LM survey revealed that many industry members use more than three distributors for their equipment and materials.

Woods does use several distributors. "That happens

buying from their competitors. I believe in spreading the wealth and don't like to burn bridges with any distributors."

On the other hand, "I can't say enough good things about my vendors. They're always there, providing training and service. Without their dependability, I wouldn't be where I am."

Moore also only uses a few "preferred" vendors for better service. "We test-market early every spring and late in the fall to comparison shop and make sure our vendors are cost-effective," he adds. It works: "We are getting what we need, for the most part. Our distributors give feedback and ask what they can do to work out any problems."

Bruner also uses several different distributors. He buys seeds and fertilizer locally to save on transportation and storage costs. On the whole, he says, he gets the service he needs. "If you have a breakdown, price is meaningless," he notes. "Most people in business for a number of years have learned that there is a real obligation to be of service to their clients; if they don't meet it, they'll be out of business."

#### A healthy industry

"The industry is quite healthy, although I'd like to see the quality of help improve. It would make life easier," says Woods. "Some companies must be on Planet Mars. They charge so little that they simply can't do the job and that makes everyone

in the industry look bad."

"I don't see anyone starving in our area," says Schmidt. "The amount of work I turn down is staggering. My concern is with people who take work they can't do, don't show up or otherwise make the industry look bad, which creates ill will. What also needs work is involvement in trade organizations. We all should get involved and leave our petty differences behind. It aggravates me when I see people who aren't sharing information."

To Christiaansen, the industry is growing and healthy, but "the lack of accepted standards in techniques is a real issue. I think we're kind of wishy-washy in that arena," he says.

Moore finds the industry "basically healthy, but with lots of room for improvement." He feels that consolidations will increase the level of professionalism in the Green Industry and reflect a positive trend of moving the industry from being "a sort of cottage industry," providing more standardization and visibility.

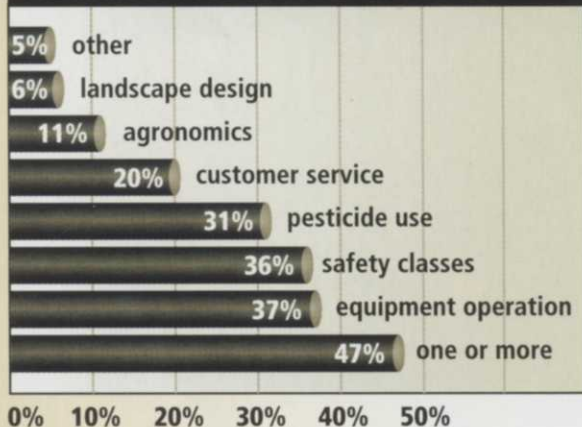
*Survey data by Readex, Inc.*

*State of the Industry survey*

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## TYPES OF LANDSCAPE-RELATED TRAINING PROGRAMS OFFERED



job for the tour and ended up a major business," says Woods. "We saw an opportunity and took on something nobody else wanted."

Schmidt says, "Smaller companies are dying on the vine because they are trying to do too much. It's easy to get locked into thinking that you've got to do everything for your customers or they will find someone else who does; it's hard to say 'no' but you have to know your limits."

Skradski says it's impossible for the industry to ever become "too diverse."

with chemicals, because we buy them through stores and need variety," he explains.

"With a garden center, we have to be diverse. We have to get plant material from the West Coast if we want to make money on it."

He deals with one Case dealer for equipment and one sod dealer, because of great service.

That service element is critical. "I don't just shop price, although I wouldn't pay a premium," he says.

Schmidt has several distributors. "Most know I'm also



# Parks, grounds pros gain in smarts

*Skillful grounds managers insist on training and technology to raise recreation grounds management to a higher level.*

By ROBERT E. REAVES

**T**he parks, recreation centers and sport complexes of today are experiencing exciting growth and quality improvement thanks to training, technology, emphasis on quality and smart management. The state of this industry segment is strong. The old image of the custodial groundskeeper has changed, attracting many new sharp and skilled people.

#### More certification, training

A strong commitment to training continues to enhance

the professionalism and safety record of the parks and recreation industry. Most budgets now include training for both full-time and part-time employees. Why is that? Much of the reason can be attributed to federal and state regulatory agencies that mandate safety training.

However, there's more to the story. The parks and recreation industry has learned that training and certification equals professionalism, quality improvement and employee career enhancement. The Irrigation Association (IA) and Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) have played a major role in getting this message across.

David Chapman, Parks Superintendent for the City of Tallahassee Parks & Recreation District believes in training. We've been sending our employees to classes in communication, conflict resolution and planning, as well as sponsoring a Floyd Perry seminar. Each year employees in our horticultural division attend Disney's Color Magic and the Spring Garden Expo at Callaway Gardens. Chapman tries to utilize every training resource possible, such as the Florida Cooperative Extension Service and the Tallahassee

Training Institute.

Tom Dew, Superintendent for Landscape & Pavements Maintenance at Texas A&M University at College Station is another big proponent of training. Not surprising, Dew is also the Southwest Regional Director for PGMS.

"Right now we are looking at the PGMS Groundskeeper Certification Program," says Dew. "We also take several benchmarking trips each year to other campuses and places like Moody Gardens in Galveston, TX. Benchmarking allows us to measure ourselves

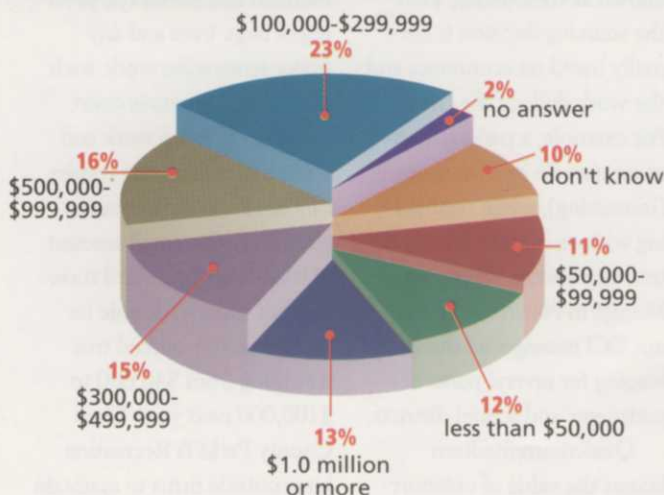


**Dew: workers will leave over 50 cents, but Texas A&M crew is stable, efficient.**

against others in order that we can improve our quality."

"We have \$20,000 in our budget earmarked each year for training," says Chuck Ainsworth, Park Project Coord-

#### 1997 ANNUAL BUDGETS (FOR LANDSCAPE, LAWN CARE, GROUNDS & GOLF)



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**Shorney: good benefits attract 50 applicants for one job opening.**

director for the City of Fort Collins, CO, Parks Division. Right now we are stressing certification in landscape maintenance, irrigation and backflow testing for our full-time people." Crews will train seasonal workers. Each seasonal employee has a half-day of training. About every second Thursday is held training sessions on safety, equipment, restroom maintenance and playground equipment.

"We have a horticulturist on staff that goes out to each of my zones and conducts training. The same goes with

our own irrigation specialist who trains our irrigators," explains **Jerry Royther**, manager of parks for Clark County in Las Vegas, NV.

"For safety, we utilize OSHA trainers as well as training materials on the equipment we buy. We also ask the manufacturer or distributor to come in a train our people

when we buy a new piece of equipment."

"Our safety training continues to be very positive. We've seen a marked reduction in the number of severe accidents, adds **Jerry Shorney**,

Sr., Superintendent of Operations and Lincoln Parks & Recreation in Lincoln, NE. We have our own safety committee made up of employees from every area of responsibility. This committee reviews all the accidents over the past month and recommends ways to eliminate injuries."

#### **Outsourcing**

More and more parks & recreation departments and sports complexes are turning to outside landscape management companies to maintain landscaping. This trend is called industry consolidation or outsourcing. One such company is Environmental Care, Inc., based in Calabasas, CA. When a client does not have the time or the skills to perform landscape management, they use outsourcing to get the job done, says Tom Moore, vice president of Environmental Care, Inc.

#### **Co-sourcing combines strengths**

A middle-of-the-road approach to outsourcing is known as co-sourcing. Here the sourcing decision is normally based on economics and the work skills of the crew. For example, a parks department may do its own mowing (insourcing), while contracting with an outside firm to do tree care (outsourcing), adds Moore. In Northern California, ECI manages all the landscaping for several parks departments and school districts.

Qualcomm Stadium knows the value of outsourc-

ing. "We use outside management companies to maintain the trees and outside perimeter landscaping. In many cases, these firms offer better economics and better quality," explains Wightman. "We have very busy stadium with an event every three days. Outsourcing gives us breathing room. However, when it comes to the sports field industry, Wightman does not see the complete elimination of the head groundskeeper.

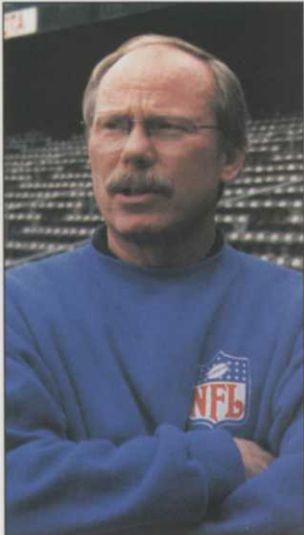
Tallahassee Parks & Recreation Department has contracted with a local pest control firm to handle all of its major pest control needs for the past three years. We started this because we found it more cost effective, since much of the work had to be done at night, says Chapman. We also use a tree service firm for our electrical line trimming and contract out mowing and all routine maintenance at two of our smaller parks.

Fort Collins outsources medians and parkways, pruning of large trees and any major renovation work such as asphalt and tennis court resurfacing, fence work and some major irrigation repairs. Lincoln Parks & Recreation contracts out a small amount of island and boulevard mowing, but plans to double its budget on outsourced tree trimming from \$40,000 to \$100,000 next year. Clark County Parks & Recreation hires outside firms to maintain

## Common themes across the USA:

- ▶ Green industry is healthy;
- ▶ Part-time labor is the foremost concern;
- ▶ Outsourcing and cosourcing on the increase;
- ▶ High emphasis on certification and training;
- ▶ Multiple number of distributors used;
- ▶ Distributor selection usually based on lowest bid;
- ▶ Good wages and benefits attract and retain employees;
- ▶ Land acquisition for new parks and sport complexes on the increase;
- ▶ More greenbelts and natural no-mow areas decrease crew workload





**Wightman: formal training supplemented by weekly 'tailgate' meetings.**

right-of-ways and other situations where it makes economic sense.

#### **Business with suppliers**

For parks and sports complexes that fall under local and state government jurisdiction, bidding by chemical and equipment suppliers is a way of life. We use many distributors, probably a total of 30, says Wightman. "Price is number one, but if a distributor is providing poor service, we go somewhere else. But for the most part, I'd say our distributors are holding up their end of the bargain."

Lincoln Parks & Recreation has around 14 vendors.

"Our distributors generally give us very good service. If they don't, we deny them from bidding next year," says Shorney. He says distributors are required to supply Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all deliveries.

Equipment vendors are asked to supply some training and supply a video on servicing the equipment.

Fort Collins deals with many vendors five irrigation distributors and five seed and chemical suppliers. In the past, not everyone carried the same products. Now, more and more distributors carry most all items even the same brands, adds Ainsworth.

"Don't let distributors rest on their laurels and assume they will continue to get your business. A distributor should add value by keeping you informed about price increases and reductions, new products and information about the green industry."

Ainsworth says much of the training offered by distributors does not meet the crews needs, comes at the wrong time of year or is redundant.

Not everyone deals with large numbers of vendors, as is the case with Tallahassee Parks & Recreation.

"We've become more comfortable with certain distributors and brands," says Chapman. "We get most of our fertilizer from one distributor and have a preference for one brand of mowing equipment which we buy from usually one distributor. Right now we have three different irrigation distributors and prefer to have fewer."

#### **Regional factors**

If you talk to different parks departments and sports complexes in different regions

of the country, you'll notice that each has its own challenges or factors that make life easier. In Las Vegas, the biggest challenge stems from a booming population growth and 24-hour activity. This places an extra burden on the parks department with no room for sports field rehabilitation.

In Nebraska, property taxes are a big issue. This has led to a reduction in budgets throughout the state. Downsizing is another big challenge at Lincoln.

"During the early 1990s, we lost about 36 percent of our full-time staff, while at the same time we had a 54 percent increase in the number of acres we manage," says Shorney.

"It's just the opposite story in Fort Collins, where budgets are strong," says Ainsworth. We are in a boom area. Money is fairly flush for the city and we've been able to keep up with the need for new parks, explains Ainsworth.

Sometimes the makeup of a city can make things easier for a parks department, according to David Chapman.

"The areas strong economy allows us to maintain our budgets with a highly-skilled labor force," says Chapman.

#### **The future**

Pressure from insurance companies and lawyers will continue to nudge districts into upgrading sports facilities.

"The trickle-down effect

from major league to little league facilities will continue to generate activity in playing field renovation," comments Wightman.

"Our industry needs to come up with new and improved plant materials," says Ainsworth. "In the desert Southwest, many plants have been taken off the approved planting list because of allergies, leaving us with a limited list of plant materials. We need more deciduous trees and new grasses that can withstand the high temperatures of the desert. We also need bermudagrass varieties that spend less time in dormancy and more time in active growth, says Royther. This could help us decrease the amount of overseeding.

"The Green Industry is booming," says Jerry Shorney.

"City planners will continue to look at adding additional green space and trails. Natural trails will continue to be a huge issue in new subdivisions. However, I believe there must be a public acceptance of no-mow areas and less formal landscaping. We would rather maintain one or two areas very well than six areas that are just average."

*Survey data by Readex, Inc.  
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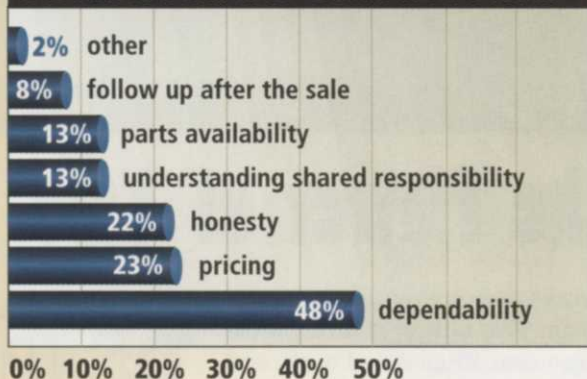
# Golf industry booms, supers step up

*Golf course management is a business today requiring individuals who can make good decisions, people willing to learn science, motivate and manage people and keep an eye on the bottom line.*

By BRUCE SHANK

**S**alaries for superintendents are rising as success in the field is based increasingly on a combination of experience, management performance, education and certification. Ironically, there is less job security as golf courses attempt to meet higher standards to maximize play and membership fees. Today, even the most recognized superintendent faces the harsh realities of the "Business of Golf."

## FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO GOOD DISTRIBUTOR/END-USER RELATIONS



### The universe is expanding!

There are about 16,000 courses at 14,600 facilities serving 26 million golfers in the United States, says **Jim Kass**, research manager for the National Golf Foundation (NGF). Last year, 429 new golf courses opened for play.

"This level of growth is expected to continue into the next century," Kass says.

Course renovation is up dramatically as well. Golf course architects spend much of their time on refining or expanding older courses. The renovation effort has been helped greatly by the financial and technical expertise of management companies such as American Golf Corporation, Club Corporation of America, Environmental Golf and others. Management companies are estimated to own or operate nearly five percent of all golf facilities in the US and the percentage continues to grow. Group buying and volume sales discounts are tilting the scale in favor of management companies.

As the industry has expanded, so has the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA), the certifying agency of the industry. Roughly two-thirds of all golf facilities have a

GCSAA member as superintendent, and 100 are currently enrolled in the association's certification program, either as certified or working toward certification. A total of 1,677 GCSAA supers now carry the CGCS appellation.

The United States Golf Association (USGA) protects the rules of the game in the U.S., and provides a means of comparing golf courses through its slope rating system. For this purpose, the USGA lists 8,300 courses in its Yearbook. The organization also provides a turf advisory service and regional seminars for superintendents through the USGA Green Section, in the USGA's Far Hills, NJ headquarters. According to **James T. Snow**, national director of the Green Section, 1500 superintendents used the advisory service in 1997.

Despite the growth of golf, the educational support system at four-year public colleges and universities for the golf industry has not grown since the 1970s. Two-year associate degree programs have picked up the slack in some states.

Clearly, the value of superintendents capable of handling the challenges of today's





fast-paced golf industry is rising. Those who are professional and knowledgeable are promoted rapidly. But those who rise the fastest have a grasp of both turf *and* business management.

"Many people don't have an accurate concept of what a golf course superintendent does," says Paul Latshaw, Jr., superintendent at Merion Golf Club, Merion, PA.

"He is the CEO of a multi-million dollar operation who is responsible for budgets, personnel, scheduling, purchasing and productivity, in addition to the final product."

After starting his golf course career at age 12, the second generation superintendent earned a four-year degree in business at Penn State prior to enrolling in the school's reputable turf program. Now, Latshaw works on his masters degree in management at Rosemont College in-between the six-day weeks managing the 36 holes at leg-

endary Merion.

#### **Science and stewardship**

On top of running a business, today's leading superintendents are leaders in environmental stewardship.

"We are doing a better job with fewer chemicals, less water and more responsibility," says Paul Cushing, superintendent at Granite Bay Golf Club near Sacramento, CA.

"When environmentalists asked for our cooperation, they not only got compliance, they got leadership. The reason we can do these things is because we have advanced our technical knowledge to the point that we recognize problems, prevent them when possible and cure them at the right time. By understanding science, you are able to balance one scientific challenge with another. If you look closely at the Top 100 courses in this country, you'll find a solid foundation of science."

Cushing views golf course management as a mixture of

business and science.

"You apply science to meet business objectives," he adds. However, you can't apply this science all by yourself, he warns. You have to train your assistants and crew to do it. Furthermore, you alone have to meet the bud-

**The landing area to green #13 at a Tom Fazio course at scenic Barton Creek in Austin, Texas**

ertain areas during the 1990s. Credit is easy to get in the golf industry. Two strong golf markets have led the way during this decade: Florida

### *Those who rise the fastest have a grasp of both turf management and business management.*

get. And, since no man is an island, working closely with other superintendents is very wise.

"It boils down to soil science and personal experience," says Cushing. "How do you make your course appeal to a wide spectrum of golfers, attract tournaments, and satisfy members?"

#### **Easy credit industry, big audience**

Real estate has provided octane to the golf market in

and Texas. While the PGA, Nicklaus, Palmer and McCumber kept Florida hot with construction, Hogan, Crenshaw and Kite kept the Lone Star State in contention. The Hogan Tour became the AAA of golf with tournaments hosted by courses across the country.

More tournaments mean more opportunity for superintendents. With the PGA and Hogan tours healthy, and the seniors and LPGA getting



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pretty powerful, there are more ways to get your course on television. Rankings mean more, and compliance with tournament guidelines is paramount. Smart golf professionals know the rules and that superintendents make tournaments successful.

A golf pro who found a home as a golf course superintendent in Texas is a great example of golf in the '90s.

"It took four years for me

to be a golf pro. At the age of 18, I got a job on the crew. When the superintendent I worked for didn't get a job he wanted because he lacked a college degree, I woke up. I applied to Texas A&M and devoted my career to being a golf course superintendent."

Miller hit the fast track, building and growing-in signature courses from Arnold Palmer-designed Hidden Hills in Austin to Marsh Creek in

Hills in 1991. The development-based project included construction of three more courses, one by Ben Crenshaw and two by Tom Fazio. Two are complete with the second Fazio course opening soon.

The disadvantage of real estate courses is the uncertainty of the golf course staff once the homeowners take possession of the course following buildout. CCA not only provided the expertise to build the additional courses, but provided security for the staff following buildout.

A big part of that security results from management. By operating the courses more wisely, CCA turned an annual loss into an annual profit. Miller reduced costs by almost 20 percent without a loss in quality.

"When we're done, we'll have 90 holes operating as a unit. That gives us buying power and economies of scale."

Whenever there is a problem he can't solve, Miller calls CCA's Resort Group Superintendent Brad Kocher at Pinehurst. He also maintains close ties with experts back at Texas A&M to help him solve soil and other lab questions. When asked if he had to

choose between attracting a tournament and staying within budget, Miller didn't hesitate to pick the latter.

#### Management company clout

At the same time, it takes financial clout to keep a golf course competitive.

An example is the Tony Lema Golf Course in San Leandro, located on the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay between San Jose and Oakland. Poor soil, sodic well water and a municipal budget were restricting the potential for this course located just north of the Silicon Valley. Superintendent **Ken Schwark** has the knowledge, having built Oakhurst in Clayton and other high-end courses, and served country clubs across the country as superintendent and a soils specialist for Brookside Labs.

"This course is the only one in the area and there is no land to build more," says Schwark. There were tough decisions to make and a lot of investment required for Tony Lema to reach its potential. San Leandro wasn't prepared to take such steps on its own. In the end, the decision was made to let American Golf Corporation take over the course and make the changes.

In the coming months,



**Miller cut costs by 20 percent with no loss in quality of work.**



**Granite Bay GC: (l. to r.) Paul Cushing, superintendent; Erik Ostlund, Kyle Dystra, assistants**

to become a scratch golfer," says Dale Miller, director of golf course maintenance at Barton Creek, Austin, TX.

"There was no place else I wanted to be other than on the golf course. At first, I tried

St. Augustine, FL., to Trairborne in Durham, NC. It was Hidden Hills, later to become Barton Creek, that beckoned Miller home to Texas. Club Corporation of America (CCA) took over Hidden



Tony Lema's current 27 holes and another nine-hole executive course will surround a new conference center and hotel with 200 rooms, made possible by a \$9 million investment by AGC.

Things have already changed. The crew was enlarged from eight to 22, largely by advertising in a local Hispanic newspaper. Schwark and AGC Regional Manager Mike McCraw, have laid out a plan and have started to implement it, from employee training to new irrigation.

"This would not have been possible without the resources and expertise of American Golf," admits Schwark. "They are looking at what's best for the course 10 to 20 years from now, not from the standpoint of protecting government employees. If the course doesn't succeed, those jobs will disappear anyway."

"A golf course can take a lease agreement with AGC to a bank and get a loan for needed capital," explains Mike Heacock, the company's regional manager for Southern California. "That can solve lots of money problems facing all types of courses."

Developers with capital can achieve some of the same economies of scale as management firms.

"When a golf course helps sell the real estate around it, there are no excuses for not being top quality," states Matthew Taylor, superinten-

dent at Bonita Bay Club in Bonita Springs, FL.

"That doesn't mean money is no object. Instead, it means you must use money wisely in a competitive environment."

Bonita Bay is a 2,400 acre master-planned community consisting of five Audubon-certified golf courses. Three of the courses: The Marsh, Bay Island and Creekside were designed by Arthur Hills. Tom Fazio designed the Cypress and The Sabal, which are located on 1,400 acres just 20 minutes from Bonita Bay. The Sabal is under construction, due to be completed by the end of October.

Taylor graduated from Lake City Community Col-

lege and apprenticed under Superintendent Tim Hiers at Collier's Reserve. Taylor is working on his certification.

#### The Hispanic effect

Spanish speaking personnel make up 20 to 80 percent of golf course crews across the nation. In many respects, Hispanic labor has enabled golf to progress to a higher level. Although to the definite disadvantage of unionized crew members, courses can hire nearly two Hispanic laborers

for the wage of one former crew member.

"We have to face the fact that much of our progress has come from being able to reduce labor costs," admits Schwark.

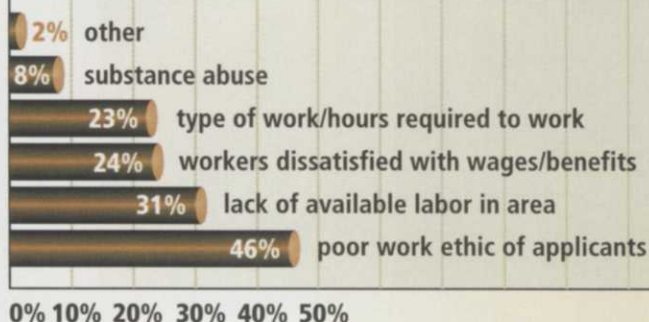
"That would not have been possible without a skilled labor force ready to work for less."

#### Digital reality

Increased knowledge and use of computers is another reality of today's superintendent. Almost all functions of operating a golf course, from scheduling tee times to syringing greens, requires a computer. E-mail enables superintendents to chat with their peers over the internet, and virtually every association and supplier has a web site.

*Survey data by Readex, Inc.  
State of the Industry survey  
sponsored by  
Dow AgroSciences.*

## REASONS FOR DIFFICULTY FINDING/RETAINING WORKERS



Taylor: use money wisely in competitive environment.

## STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

# Active associations get member 'OK'

*Activism motivated by need for fair legislation is appreciated by memberships at both local and national levels.*

By JAMES E. GUYETTE

Associations that serve lawn/landscape professionals are generally considered to be healthy, productive and cost-effective. Business owners say they appreciate the opportunities that they offer for talking shop with their colleagues. They equally appreciate their role in monitoring and dealing with government regulations.

"They benefit the industry in general, and that's the return-on-investment I'm looking for," says Kevin Killmer, president and CEO at Environmental Earth-

scapes Inc., dba The Groundskeeper in Tucson, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Palm Desert, CA.

"They provide networking opportunities and they provide credibility to our profession," says Killmer. "Goodwill and

public support is important." Killmer is most concerned with laws involving immigration, pollution, and noise involving outdoor power equipment. Thus, the Groundskeeper holds membership in both national and regional green industry organizations.

Killmer says that associations give the industry its voice. "We've been successful in getting state and local governments to acknowledge our plight," Killmer says.

Members of the Nevada Landscape Association (NLA) have had a similar battle. For example, some legislators in Nevada object to the very notion of having lawns and shrubs. The NLA has worked to help educate them otherwise. While the NLA supports water conservation, in general, it opposes restrictions on the planting of lawns and ornamentals.

"We've worked to have a role to play over water restrictions," reports NLA president Paul Flint, owner of the Reno-based Lawns, Etc. "It's served

us exceedingly well here."

Oddly enough, in some parts of Nevada there are laws still on the books that prohibit even the installation of water

meters. The NLA is pushing for the metering of water use; then people who want green in their yards can simply pay more green for the privilege. "We're currently taking steps to implement that plan," says Flint.

"On a cost-benefit basis there's so much more that

we can gain with local organizations."

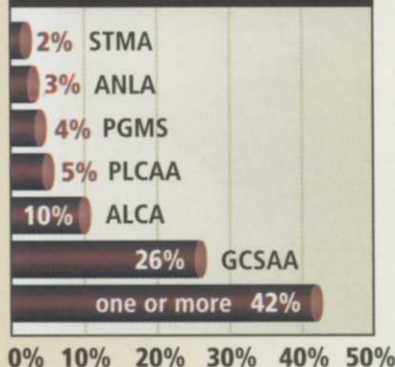
Having the backing of a national organization is a big boost for Daryl Kirkland, Better Lawn and Garden in Phenix City, AL. He values his membership in the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). "Being affiliated with PLCAA helps solidify my company and make it a better operation," he says.

Kirkland reads all the PLCAA mailings to keep abreast of equipment technology and advances in chemical developments. And he uses the PLCAA logo and that of the Alabama Nurserymen's



Amstutz: in PLCAA at start of company.

## MEMBERSHIP IN GREEN INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS



0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%



Association to advertise his company's commitment to excellence.

PLCAA is a valuable resource for **John Wagner**, of the GreensKeepers Inc., Muscle Shoals, AL. "They've helped me to make the transition from the golf course to lawn care," says Wagner a former golf course superintendent.

ALCA is appreciated in Erie, PA, where **John Allin** employs more than 40 year-round employees at his Allin Companies landscaping and snowplowing enterprise. "It has raised our level of professionalism several notches since we joined five years ago," he says.

"The first time we visited one of the shows we got an eye-opening experience as to how the other companies see themselves as professionals, and we have changed our opinion of ourselves," Allin explains. The workers now strive to win ALCA safety awards, management's marketing strategies are more coherent and employees' attitudes are more business-like and client-oriented.

"The money we spend (on dues, traveling and hotels) is minor compared to the return that we get; ALCA satisfies my needs in a big way."

Allin has also been instru-

mental in forming the national Snow and Ice Management Association, based in Erie, PA. The association offers information on how to run a profitable winter business.

**David P. Harris** of Illinois is considering joining ALCA after 18 years in the lawn care industry. He previously belonged to PLCAA, but has since sold his Liqui-Green Lawn and Tree Care and focused his attention on the Bloomington-based Harris and Associates, a design-build firm.

"ALCA looks pretty good to me so I'll probably be joining that," Harris says. "I don't join associations unless I think it's necessary," he says adding that PLCAA served him well in lawn care. Opportunities for networking, attending seminars and walking the trade show floor are significant, and Harris especially values the roundtable discussions featuring out-of-town businesses owners and their insights.

"And you weren't giving away trade secrets to your direct competition," he says.

Education is what **Becky**



**Harris: valued PLCAA membership**

**Turner** wants from the Perennial Plant Association.

Turner. "They cover the whole gamut of growing, maintaining and selling," says Turner who owns Perennial Point in Wilkes Barre, PA.

The green industry can use some sharper teeth

when it comes to policing its own ranks, according to

**Michael Martin**, commercial division manager at Outside Unlimited Inc. of Hampstead, MD. "I think there needs to be some kind of governing body that looks over the industry," Martin says.

"There should be some type of industry standards to regulate lowballing and other aspects of business competition."

Nothing extreme, mind you, but Martin suggests that some sort of ethics system is needed. "I don't want to have 'Big Brother' looking over our shoulders, but sometimes things are too loose." A plant inspection or certification program would be helpful to review the problem of too-small root balls and other aspects of unfair competition, Martin believes. "If I'm putting in a 2-inch caliper

maple, I want to see somebody else's 2-inch caliper maple look the same way."

Allowing established business owners to share their expertise with up-and-coming landscape managers via PLCAA's new mentoring program is great idea, says **Dale Amstutz**, who owns Northern Lawns Inc. in Omaha, NB. "They're lining up people to help each other," he reports.

The association-based contacts and friendships formed by Amstutz have been a great

help to this industry veteran. "I think we were in business one year when we started attending, and I haven't missed a national meeting since," he says.

To Amstutz, anyone in this industry—even a start-up operation—should be-

long to associations. "This is not the place to cut corners," he advises. "That's a lot of money for a small business to shell out, but once you go you'll find yourself coming back year after year."

"It's not a direct business profit and loss type of thing. You've got to go with an open mind and a willingness to make things happen," he points out.

"You have to be out there shaking hands and passing out business cards."



**Flint: devotes energies at state level**



**Allin: ALCA a big help to his firm**