

Green Industry focus goes beyond volume of work done



Terry McIver

TERRY McIVER
Editor-in-Chief

The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and well in the Green Industry. Landscapers continue to move forward at full speed. Some have more work than they can handle without outsourcing. Business is good, thanks to a robust economy. Quality and training standards are still too diverse, and only 10 percent of our State of the Industry survey respondents belong to an association. (Our report begins on page 19.)

Commercial work is booming, says Eric Christiaansen of Sylvan Nursery, Billings, MT. "I thought we'd see an end to this but it hasn't died down yet," he says.

"The amount of work I turn down is staggering," says Russell Schmidt of Hillsboro, MO.

"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."

Can a company be too diverse? The pressure of the marketplace pushes companies into more services than they can maintain at a quality level, contractors tell us. When a contractor doesn't know how to calculate total costs, he loses money. Work is not fetching the right price, according to some. Consultant Frank Ross will tell you that the industry has never known how to make a profit, just get the job done. If they take work just to get work, they lose even more.

"General contractors get what they pay for," says Stephen Woods, Stonehenge Landscaping Co., Newington, CT. "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."

The golf industry seeks to raise the business acumen of the modern superintendent. To be a "professional" superintendent today means you can handle all the business aspects of turf management, from buying to budgeting to payroll, to recruitment to public relations.

This is a lofty goal, but let's not discount those superintendents whose first and best strength is in turf. Some of our best "self-made superintendents" have never balanced a budget, but have successfully maintained some of the world's finest golf courses.

The new era superintendent, "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," says Paul Latshaw, Jr., at Merion Golf Club, Merion, PA.

A question to ask, however is, How much of this emphasis on "superintendent as businessman" has more to do with image and public relations ("Our superintendent would never misuse pesticides, he's an MBA!") and not wanting to pay an accountant to handle the books? Is the golf industry downsizing, and we just don't recognize it amid all the talk about the "growth of golf"?

In the parks/grounds segment of the industry, the majority of the managers we spoke with say their corner of the industry is experiencing exciting growth and quality improvement thanks to training, technology, emphasis on quality and smart management. This industry segment is strong, in spite of pockets of downsizing. Yesterday's image of the custodial groundskeeper has experienced a metamorphosis, attracting many new and skilled people, writes author Robert Reaves. Those who begin without experience and training are sure to receive it, as it seems training programs have gotten better.

"We are looking at the PGMS Groundskeeper Certification Program," says Tom Dew of Texas A&M. "We also take several benchmarking trips each year. Benchmarking allows us to measure ourselves against others in order that we can improve our quality." **LM**

What's your opinion? Address comments to: tmciver@advanstar.com or 800-225-4569 x709.