

# Community heros, how you can qualify!

*By being a 'contributor' to your community, you can make great things happen for your neighbors, your organization and yourself.*

By RONALD HALL/Managing Editor

**S**urprise, Mr. Green Industry Pro, the public doesn't seem to know how important you are. It is not aware of the positive role that your company or golf course plays in your community.

Why should it? What have you done for it lately? Have you spoken out?

If you've been letting others be the business or environmental heros in your community, get off your duff. You'll discover that the rewards for participating in your community (apart from just doing business in it) are enormous. You'll meet and get to know other business and civic leaders. You'll generate good will for yourself and your operation. You may reap some positive publicity too, the kind you

help improve that long-neglected community ball park? How about that shabby garden in front of the elementary school? (Ask to put a plaque with your company name at the site.)

And there's always a charity looking for sponsors. A student career day that needs speakers. The positive ways to involve yourself with the public are unlimited.

Ron Keefer admits that his heart always melts a little when a neighborhood youngster looks up at him and, wide-eyed, asks if he's going to have his Halloween hay ride again in the fall.

"That's really all the reward I need," says Keefer who owns and operates the Clean Lawn application company. "I say, 'of course, we're going to have the hay ride again.'" For 20 years he's said that. So, every Halloween he converts his yellow tanker work truck into a hay wagon, and makes the rounds in and around his Pennsylvania neighborhood. When the truck bed is packed with costumed youngsters (and a few parents as chaperones) Keefer takes the noisy group from house to house, making sure that everybody gets candy—lots of it.

This is just one way that a green industry professional reaches out to his community. There are many, many more. For instance, Keefer also allows the American Red Cross to use his truck as a billboard on wheels at local blood drives. While his support of the Red Cross is sincere, he says, "when you have a lawn care truck parked inside a mall or in front of a church, people are going to notice it."

The Groundskeeper is one the largest landscape firms in the Southwest. When it offered to help beautify a quarter-acre park and adjoining entrance to the Tucson City

Dale Woulf, Northwest Grounds Maintenance, below, helped make this youth ballpark a reality.



can't buy at any price. But, best of all, you and your employees will build a growing satisfaction and pride in yourselves, and in the communities that you serve. These are great payoffs no matter how you figure it.

Where to start? How about something that will show immediate and lasting results? Can your expertise





**Ruppert Landscape Company at the grand re-opening of 'La Polvosa' (the dust bowl) in D.C. Work is done by the company but the re-opening lets everyone contribute to their community.**

Hall, it didn't realize how much excitement the project would generate.

"There had been a parking lot there," says Dave Ramsey, a regional vice president with The Groundskeeper. "The community wanted something there that embodied the spirit of Tucson and its founders."

The company, founded in Tucson about 22 years ago, donated labor and materials and worked with community groups—committees, councils, and artists—to complete the garden/landscape project.

"As we started working on it, more and more people became interested in it. It really snowballed," says Ramsey.

This wasn't the first time (and certainly not the last, says Ramsey) that The Groundskeeper tackled a special project.

The community involvement at Lied's Landscape Design & Development, Sussex, WI, goes beyond volunteering labor or materials for special projects which, of course, it does. The 52-year-old company encourages employees to participate individually in volunteer, civic and church activities, says company spokesman Judson Griggs.

In fact, anyone serious about progressing as a manager with Lied's *must* be active in his or her community. This might include speaking to service groups or garden clubs, participating in high school career days, or helping organizations like The March of Dimes or the MS Society.

Besides distinguishing Lied's and its employees from its competition, community involvement helps Lied's personnel develop enriching personal and professional contacts too, explains Griggs.

Company personnel participate in organizations like the Rotary Club, chair events like the Easter Seals, and speak before school groups or help out in Earth Day programs and cleanup days.

One of the big events in the Ruppert calendar each year is the company's annual training day. These day-long, hands-on training exercises for field personnel often involve a specific community project.

While not all of them are as dramatic as in 1992 when 300 Ruppert employees renovated and resodded a soccer field (known locally as 'the dust bowl') at the Lincoln Multicultural Center in downtown Washington D.C., all are greatly appreciated.

"The company does benefit from the visibility provided by the publicity but, ultimately, the benefits to Ruppert are in the building of relationships: in the community, with clients and among our own employees," says Ruppert's Kathleen Sheetz.

So, you don't run a big operation like Ruppert, Lied's or The Groundskeeper, and can't pull off the big project, should you bother to get involved too? Yes!

Actually, Dale Woulf of Northwest Grounds Maintenance near Seattle wasn't thinking of the thanks he'd get, or the publicity, when he raised more than \$7,000 to rebuild a Little League field; he was thinking baseball. As a founding

Ruppert Landscape Company, headquartered in Ashton, MD, considers itself "a resource" to the public within its many market locations.

member of the Fall City Little League, Woulf saw where his know-how could make a big difference. And it has.

His efforts led to a new properly draining diamond with dugouts, benches, and a new backdrop. Years later Woulf and his company continue to maintain the field as a service to the local ball players.

"The green industry can play an important role in the beautification of our communities," says Woulf. "I wanted to apply my skills to make a difference in Fall City."

—additional reporting Nancy Stairs

## Bug mobile touts IPM

Broccolo Tree and Lawn Care has a bug that weighs a ton and drives around Rochester. The new model VW beetle is painted in a ladybug pattern, and is meant to highlight the need for 'beneficial insects'.

"The Good Bug is another way for us to emphasize our commitment to Integrated Pest Management," says company President, Laurie Broccolo.

Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care's other community outreach activities include a traveling puppet show for children; GardenScape seminars and an annual Field Day at the Tinker Nature Park/Hansen Nature Center in Henrietta, NY.





## 'Ambassadors' get a warm welcome

"It's fun, it really is," says Bill Prest, superintendent at Sweetbriar Golf Club, Avon Lake, Ohio.



Bill Prest enjoys speaker's role.

"I've probably given 15 to 20 talks, and my experiences have been very, very positive."

Prest is one of a growing, but still small, group of "ambassadors".

These golf superintendents and lawn care professionals speak in front of civic and school groups within their communities. They explain their professions, and talk about products and equipment they use.

The Ambassador Speakers Program is jointly supported by GCSAA, PLCAA and RISE.

"I've incorporated some information about the environment and about pesticide use into a slide program," says Tom Gray, CGCS, superintendent at Franklin Hills Country Club, near Detroit. "I start with a slide of Augusta National and show them what we try to achieve. Then I talk about the responsible use of pesticides and, and about our efforts to protect the environment."

So far there are about 35 ambassadors. They all participated in one-day training programs before they began taking speaking assignments. The first group received instruction in Cincinnati in November 1996. The second group trained in Atlantic City, NJ, this past December.

Prest says he's talked to civic clubs (Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions) and to local school groups. While all are attentive, the response from the youngsters is usually more spirited. They particularly enjoy learning about the wildlife on golf courses. Then he helps them build bluebird or bat houses.

Prest says audiences seem to be genuinely interested in his message. Even so, he acknowledges that some of the people

he's spoken to "have some real concerns" over the use of pesticides.

"These concerns are usually unfounded, but they're there," he says. "You have to be prepared for this."



Tom Gray focuses on environment.

"I've had no negative reaction whatsoever," adds Randy Zidik, CGCS, superintendent at Rolling Hills Country Club near Pittsburgh. "I've been surprised by how interested people are in golf course maintenance."

Jon Cundiff, owner of Turfs Up Lawn Service near Kansas City, MO, focuses on the benefits of turf.

"I try to reaffirm the importance of what we're doing," says Cundiff. "As long as I can help them understand the benefits of what we're doing, they will better appreciate it."

Cundiff enlivens his presentation with true-life experiences from his days on the grounds crew of the KC Royals baseball team and the KC Chief football team.

"The time that I've spent in giving these talks has been minimal compared to the good I think they're doing for the industry," adds Cundiff.

Representatives from GCSAA, PLCAA and RISE met in May to discuss expanding the Ambassador Speakers Program. To learn more, contact either: Kristi Frey, CGSAA, 800/472-7878; Karen Weber, PLCAA, 800/458-3466; or Elizabeth Lawder, RISE, (202) 872-3860.

—RH

## Can you answer these questions?

One way to serve your community is by providing it with answers to questions on pesticide use.

In the eyes of some of the public who don't know the full story, pesticides are a villain. This Q&A from Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) will help you and your crews face difficult questions.

**Q:** What is a pesticide?

**A:** A pesticide is any natural or synthetic substance that can be used to control or kill pests of any sort, including insects, fungi, rodents and weeds.

**Q:** Do pesticides cause cancer?

**A:** There are a few specific pesticides that have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory rodents. Pesticides do not cause cancer in people. In 1997, a panel of international cancer experts evaluated more than 70 published stories. The panel concluded that it was not aware of any definitive evidence to suggest that synthetic pesticides contribute significantly to overall cancer mortality.

**Q:** Are environmental levels of man-made pesticides and other synthetic chemicals an important cause of cancer?

**A:** No population studies and studies of the harmful properties of synthetic pesticides and other industrial chemicals do not support a cause and effect relationship between exposure to low levels of these materials and cancer.

**Q:** Do pesticides cause cancer in children?

**A:** Pesticide exposure is only one of many potential causes being investigated. To be able to say with confidence that no association exists between pesticides and childhood cancer, the potential for such an association must be thoroughly studied. Many of the studies looking at these questions have been underway since the late 1980s. The findings from these studies are being evaluated and should be available by the end of 1999. Other potential environmental causes of cancer are being investigated.

For more information on how to answer these and other pesticide related questions, contact RISE at 202/872-3860.

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