

Bill Clutter says that all he really expected to do in lawn care was make a living. And, for 25 years, he did. In fact, he made a darn good living as he built his business, Turfguard, into one of the best lawn application companies in Ohio.

You pay the price

But the effort took its toll. Bill's a hearty, robust man with a booming voice, and he's as quick with a firm handshake as he is with a laugh. But, his ticker can't stand the strain of 60 and 70 hour work weeks anymore. What's the good of having

friends, if you don't have time to go fishing with them, he recently told me. Hey, that makes sense to me.

Bill put himself on the sidelines in March, at least for the next couple of months for some extended fishing with his buddies. He called me in March to tell me he'd sold his operation in Dayton, OH, to TruGreen-ChemLawn (TGCL).

Who are those guys?

Uh oh, there they go again. Those folks at

TGCL in Memphis, TN, seem to be intent on breaking up that old gang of mine, making it harder and harder for me to snag a free lunch with every passing industry event.

Not only did TGCL pick up Clutter's company this spring, but they also bought the lawn application business of Gene Pool, another long-time acquaintance here in Ohio. Bill and Gene were among the small group of business owners that got the Ohio Lawn Care Association off to such a fine start a decade ago. They've both been excellent ambassadors for the lawn care industry, and I'll never forget trekking along with Gene to the office of our congressman, Rep. Paul Gillmor (R-OH), at PLCAA's annual Day on the Hill. Rep. Gillmor even seemed to enjoy our visits.

I learned about Bill and Gene's decision to sell

their lawn application businesses about the same time that I heard that TGCL had also acquired Idaho-based Perma Green. That was another independent lawn care company with a lot of good memories behind it and a fine reputation.

Say what you want about the folks in Memphis, TGCL's headquarters, but they're one busy group. And, it doesn't look like they're going to slow down anytime soon either.

Shop until you drop

Some of my remaining independent lawn care buddies keep telling me that they think that TGCL is going to run out of cash. I remember having similar conversations in 1992—just after TruGreen gobbled up ChemLawn. And then again a few years ago at the Ohio Turfgrass Conference when we found out that TGCL had acquired Barefoot. Is TGCL through? As the late, great Jackie Gleason would say: "Hardy, har, har."

This past year, ServiceMaster (NYSE: SVM), parent company of TGCL, recorded sales of \$4.7 billion, its 28th consecutive year of growth. Revenue of ServiceMaster's Consumer Services, of which TGCL is a part, increased 23% and exceeded \$2 billion for the first time. After-tax profits for the Consumer Services group were up 27% to \$157 million, representing 3/4 of all SM profits for the year.

While I'm glad my friends were in a position to trade in their years of hard work for some of that ServiceMaster cash, I'm beginning to wonder who's going to be around to talk about how TGCL is going to run out of money at the next GIE. **LM**

Agree? Disagree? What's on your mind? Give Ron the business at 440/891-2636; fax, 440-891-2683; e-mail, rhall@advanstar.com

Adios to that old gang of mine



Ron Hall

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