

# 'Fantastic' display

**The grounds at Missouri's Fantastic Caverns have to be immaculate.**

**Otherwise, over 130,000 people visiting yearly would take the maintenance crew to task**

## Fantastic Caverns

**Property size:** 400 acres, 30 acres maintained as "front lawn" and five acres of lush fescue and bluegrass at entranceway; thick stands of trees and split rail fences require precise mowing

**Equipment:** International 2400 series tractor with 6-ft. Bush Hog flail mower, Grasshopper 720K, with 60-in. deck and grass catcher

**Man-hours saved using Grasshopper:** 28 hrs. per week

**R**arely do grounds maintenance crew members get to say that 130,000 people see their work every year. But most grounds crews don't have ancient caverns running underneath their green space.

Doug Campbell, maintenance supervisor at Fantastic Caverns, does. The caverns lie beneath the rolling Ozark hills just north of Springfield, MO. Thousands come each year to ride the jeep-drawn trams on a one-mile, 50-min. tour of the caverns.

"The visitors base their feelings about the Caverns on their first impression," says Kirk Hansen, public relations director. "And that first impression is the condition of our grounds. They have to be immaculate."

While there are several miles of known passageways through the caverns, only about a mile is accessible by tram.

"That is a large part of what makes Fantastic Caverns so unique," Hansen says. "There are many beautiful caves in the United States, many of them right here in Missouri, but we are the only cave system in North America that is large enough to allow a riding tour. Not only is the riding tour less detrimental to the delicate balance of the cave ecosystem, but it also makes Fantastic Caverns accessible to people in wheelchairs and families with small children who aren't up to a lot of walking, lots of steps and steep climbs."

Maintenance supervisor Campbell says that a Grasshopper 720K mower has saved his crew time and helped them meet their lawn-cutting goals. "We used to mow liter-

ally 40 hours a week. We had one person who mowed the grass eight hours a day, every day, to keep the property looking the way it needs to. The Grasshopper mower lets us cut the whole property in a day and a half. That leaves a lot more time for equipment maintenance, remodeling and servicing the jeeps and trailers."

"Part of the look we are trying to achieve is a clean one," he adds. In the fall, he attaches the Quik-D-Tatch Vac® collection system to the mower to collect all the leaves.

As public relations director Hansen says, the aim of the grounds crew is to make Fantastic Caverns a vacation place. "That is why we are so meticulous in our groundskeeping. We want to make Fantas-

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tic Caverns the kind of place that we would want to visit on vacation. And being so close to Branson, we have to keep up with the professionalism and image that the attractions down there project. If we want people to make us part of their Missouri vacation, then we have to look as good as we possibly can. You don't get a second chance to make a first impression."

For more information about Fantastic Caverns contact Kirk Hansen at 417-833-2010. **LJM**