

BY SUE GIBSON / EXECUTIVE EDITOR

## They don't know you

I like to call them "landscape's stakeholders." They're the interest groups who can make or break this industry, yet many don't have a very good picture of the services you provide, the expertise you apply in your work or the value you bring. These stakeholders are residential and commercial customers, industry suppliers, the general public, the media, the business community and large institutions, current and potential investors, regulators and politicians, students and potential employees.

Individually and with your peers, you need to give these stakeholders a good image of landscape work as an admirable profession providing work of great value. After all, you're trained and skilled. You enhance outdoor spaces. You're environmental stewards. You have a career with unlimited financial potential and creative opportunities. You know that, but many of those stakeholders don't.

If there was an industry-wide public relations program, they'd understand. If there were days when several of you worked together to build the Evergreen Foundation's greenways, renovate veterans' cemeteries, or enhance local public areas, they'd see your professionalism. If there were even modest but coordinated efforts on both the local and national basis, those stakeholders would see you in a different light.

I would love to see one or two enthusiastic people in each of this industry's professional organizations (local and national) encouraging members to support one strong public relations program. I would be so happy to see my media colleagues devise ways we can jointly promote this program within our pages, Web sites and seminars. I would be thrilled if the associations, industry suppliers and educational institutions decided this project is worth their time, energy and dollars.

Finally, I would be proud if landscape organizations from large franchises to institutions to smallest family firms contributed annually to such a program.

### The impossible dream?

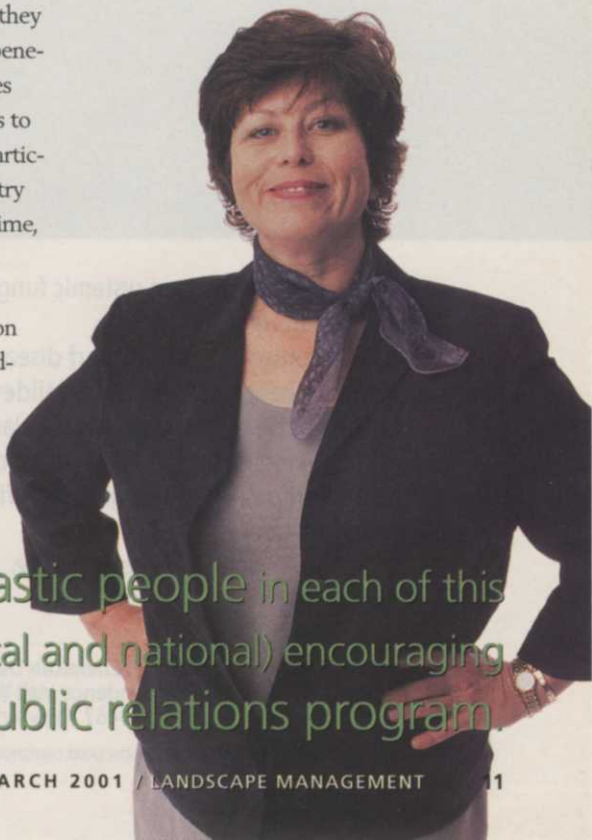
Is this realistic? I've seen the associations coordinate their efforts for the annual Gallup poll of homeowners, so I know they can work together for something that benefits their members. My media colleagues have plenty of wonderful, creative ways to encourage landscape professionals to participate. In the past, many generous industry suppliers and institutions have shared time, energy and money for good causes, so I know it's possible.

And despite tremendous competition and fragmentation, I've seen lots of landscape organizations work together on projects with a lot less direct benefit than this would bring.

It would be fun to see even a

modest and very limited version of the milk lobby's "Got Milk?" campaign for landscape. It could have politicians, movie stars, sports heroes, business leaders, children, even grandparents telling how much they enjoy their landscape service. As an industry, we could have a lot of fun appealing to potential employees, young students, property owners, even regulators. We just need a solid program, a clear plan and a willingness to work together. Can we start soon?

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