

Rethink your labor needs

In spite of the awful events of the past several months, the grass in my yard kept growing. Soft autumn rains and cooler temperatures made it a chore to keep it mowed. The trees at my home needed trimming and my wife's flower beds still required prepping for the winter.

Regardless of the latest disquieting news from the media, the sun will continue to shine, the rain to fall and grass, trees and gardens to grow.

Some of you who have been through tough times before tell me the public will want our services, regardless of the economy. You say that was the case during the 1981 recession, the nation's worst since The Great Depression, and also during the 1991 recession.

Among the reasons you expect clients to continue to ask for our services include:

- During uncertain times, families cut back on travel and extended vacations and seek the security that their homes and landscapes provide.
- Retail and commercial properties, facing stiffer competition for tenants or off-the-street traffic, *must* maintain curb appeal.
- Security concerns will make our services even more necessary for maintaining public properties such as power plants, right of ways and easements, highways and, because of recent events, commercial and industrial properties, too.

But not even the most optimistic of us expect next season to be "business as usual." Some of our largest clients are suffering financially, and they'll likely consider cutting their grounds budgets. We need to stay on top of this in order to retain these accounts and also to budget for next season's labor.

Consider these new labor realities as we work out our manpower needs for the approaching 2002 season:

✓ Chances for a new Guest Worker Program evaporated with the tragic events of Sept. 11. Discussions between President George W. Bush and Mexican President Vincente Fox stopped.

✓ Talk in congress for an amnesty program also ceased. It would have legalized as many as 3 million illegal residents. (If your immigrant workers weren't "legal" last year, guess what? They won't be this year, either.)

✓ The INS has dramatically strengthened U.S. borders. INS funding, at least in the short-term, is no longer an issue for congress, which had already quadrupled the INS's budget during the past decade. Expect a fiercer effort to find and deport illegal immigrants.

✓ Displaced U.S. workers are unlikely to join the hourly payrolls of labor-strapped landscape/lawn companies. Many of the downsized workers have come from white-collar ranks — at least so far.

✓ On the plus side, the H-2B program that allows U.S. businesses to import seasonal migrant workers remains intact, and initial indications from government agencies are that they don't plan to enforce the 66,000 worker cap.

Times are tough for a lot of your clients and may get tougher. Stay in contact with them, and begin budgeting for your 2002 manpower needs pronto.

Contact Ron at
440/891-2636 or e-mail at
rhall@advanstar.com



Some of our largest clients are suffering financially, and they'll likely consider cutting their budgets. We need to stay on top of this in order to retain these accounts and also budget for next season's labor.