

industry almanac

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Simplot buys Eco Soil products

SAN DIEGO, CA — Simplot Partners acquired more than 40 products from troubled Eco Soil Systems Inc. with the purchase of Eco Soil's Specialty Products line.

Bensumec recalled

KANSAS CITY, MO — PBI/Gordon Corporation has recalled Bensumec 4LF preemergent herbicide from distributors, dealers and end users. One lot of the herbicide was found to be contaminated with small amounts of phenoxy and dicamba herbicides. For more information, call 800/236-5411.

Deere to sell Homelite

MOLINE, IL — Deere & Company will sell its Homelite consumer products business and restructure its Construction and Forestry Division to improve financial and operating performance. The company's line of professional handheld and portable power equipment for commercial users will still be available.

NTEP spared brunt of tornado's wrath

BELTSVILLE, MD — The tornado that killed two University of Maryland students in nearby College Park, MD, Sept. 24, also caused an estimated \$41 million damage to the government's largest agricultural research facility here. The National Turfgrass Evaluation Program is headquartered at the station, but escaped damage.

Landscape pros reassess business after attack

BY JASON STAHL & SUSAN G. PORTER

CLIPPINGS

It was only this summer that landscape professionals reported 10% to 30% growth to *Landscape Management* and a continued surge of business that had most of them backlogged.

Last month's attack on America no doubt forced them to reassess their business prospects. The effects of a sagging economy they said would take awhile to reach them might reach them more quickly.

"I find myself being more guarded with spending and projections," says Bruce Allentuck, owner, Allentuck Landscaping, Gaithersburg, MD. "We were considering buying a property but now I'm not going to do it."

Allentuck says his company may not be hired to do as many big projects as before, but insists his customers will not start mowing their own lawns. "And since most people will be canceling their vacations, maybe they'll put that money toward landscaping."

Economy news



"We're still shell shocked," says Bill Hoopes, director of training and development at Scotts Lawn Service, Marysville, OH. "While we've moved from 'exuberance' to 'cautious optimism,' we're still growing strongly." However, he said, "It makes sense to have contingency plans in place."

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STRONG WORDS

"The work we do and spaces we create are so very versatile. They function in times of joy and in times of sorrow. They allow us to come together in extremely emotional times. They allow us to connect with nature and feel that we are connected to a greater spirit beyond. I feel so very proud of what we do. The examples of our work are serving to help in the recovery and healing process this past week. It is a reaffirmation of how important a role landscape architecture plays in creating a sense of community and in strengthening society."

— **Len Hopper** / ASLA president, quoted from a letter he sent to ASLA members after witnessing in person the attack on the World Trade Center.

"When the attack happened, we were in the middle of our budgeting process. Everyone's taking a new look now and toning down their goals, and rightfully so."

— **Rick Randall, president, RBI Companies**



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"The economy was already under lots of pressure before the attack, but we thought it was okay because it wasn't affecting our markets," says Rick Randall, president of RBI Companies, Littleton, CO. "But with this disaster we're really taking another look. We're increasing our marketing because we think they'll be less work out there for the same amount of contractors."

Randall adds, "When the attack happened, we were in the

middle of our budgeting process. Everyone's taking a new look now and toning down their goals, and rightfully so."

New market pressures

"All segments of our industry will be affected, but not equally," predicts George Gaumer, vice president of commercial grounds management, The Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, OH. "I expect construction-related segments to be affected the earliest and most noticeably. Second, the more discre-

tionary the service, the earlier it will be affected. These effects will be felt similarly across both commercial and residential markets."

While some locations may feel more effects than others, the general unease in the marketplace has savvy landscape professionals planning new strategies for 2002, and even the end of 2001.

"Our market (DC-area) has not experienced the slowdown other parts of the country have experienced," says Tom Davis,

president of Bozzuto Landscape, Laurel, MD. "But we are always looking for new opportunities and just acquired a pressure washing company as an add-on service line. It's two months old and doing very well."

Ed McGuire, president of The Lawn Co., S. Dennis, MA, has seen past downturns in the Green Industry and adds, "History tells me the residential customer base will be stable while the commercial business is less stable."

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4 ways to make your operation stronger

"The bad news," says Don Willig, president of Consortium Management Services, Cincinnati, OH, is that things will never be the same as the "good old days." What does this mean right now for Green Industry operations? He says that companies cannot operate as loosely as they have in the past, that prices will get more competitive, that every company will have to be more efficient and that labor costs may increase as a result of both economic pressures and war efforts. There may also be fallout with current immigration programs that will limit available workers.

Willig sees plenty of opportunities right now, though. "The good news is that for the few who prepare for the future, they will reap good benefits for their efforts," he says. "They should follow these four rules:

- 1 evaluate your business and run it by the numbers,
- 2 follow common sense and don't wait to act,
- 3 remain active in your communities, especially now,
- 4 stay the course and continue to focus on building business.

"Believe and do not fear!" Willig adds.

— Don Willig can be contacted at 800/483-1668 or www.cms-dlw@home.com.

"Since many people may be canceling their vacations, maybe they'll put that money toward landscaping instead."

— Bruce Allentuck, owner,
Allentuck Landscaping



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Run it by the numbers

"Do not take more clients on than you have the ability to develop relationships with," says Troy Hall, owner of Halls Horticulture Design Inc., Charlotte, NC. "We have been anticipating the economic changes for about a year now. We set out to target the specific clients we work with and had to trim the fat in the way of excess labor, vendors, equipment, vehicles, etc."

McGuire also anticipated a slowdown and recommends classic strategy for a downturn: "When the economy is stagnant...the biggest challenges anybody in business has to learn is controlling expenses. We have been in a conservative

mode since spring. Going ahead, we will be concentrating on gaining and retaining customers, operating more efficiently and controlling expenses."

For Ed Wandtke, though, previous downturns offer solutions to current problems. This Columbus, OH-based consultant says there are reasons to be positive on future business, as long as you're able to adapt quickly, operate profitably and seek new opportunities. "Leaders plan and execute," he adds, "while employees or weak owners follow."

For more reaction to this fall's economic and national events, and for ideas on how to develop a cautionary business strategy, see www.landscapemanagement.net.

www.landscapemanagement.net

WHAT'S NEW ON-LINE

This month at www.LandscapeManagement.net, check out "Surfin' for deals," an exclusive on-line sidebar to this month's feature on "Win big with used gear." You'll find additional live links to all the companies mentioned in the article and tips on which used equipment Web sites offer the most value for your time.

Keep up with the latest news from all around the Green Industry with our weekly on-line-only newsletter, "Week in Review" (WiR). WiR captures the essence of the most important news about business, economic trends, disease/pest reports, new Web sites, upcoming events and recent products. You can even browse or search our archive of previous WiRs. If you want to be sure not to miss an issue, sign up for our free e-mail service, which sends you just the headlines so you can pick and choose the stories that are important to you.

Other things to do online this month:

- Check out the e-GreenBook searchable product directory.
- Send an "Ask the Expert" question to our panel of web advisors.
- Contact LM's editors to propose a story or sound off on industry issues.