

Bring profits in from the cold



BY VICKY POULSEN

▲ PHOTO COURTESY: WALKER MANUFACTURING, INC.

BY VICKY POULSEN / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**These companies
have learned how
to plan and stay
productive all year
long**

Successful snow and ice operations don't just happen. It takes a tremendous amount of planning, marketing and the right equipment and supplies. If done correctly, snow and ice removal can outdo your other profit centers in gross revenue.

In fact, for operations like the Allin Companies in Erie, PA, gross profits in 2001 are expected to double thanks to increased growth in snow revenues. We asked company president John Allin how his company does it, and here is what he and two other contractors had to say about running a successful snow and ice removal operation:

LARGE CONTRACTOR

Name: Christopher M. Aldarelli

Title: President

Company: Aldo 1 Landscaping & Lawn Service, Inc.

Location: Ocean, NJ

2000 revenue: \$12.1 million

Business mix: 20% lawn maintenance; 20% landscaping, irrigation and paver work; 52% complete site development; 8% snow removal. Provides full services for both residential and commercial clients. Around 80% of snow removal accounts are commercial, with 20% residential.

Employees: 150 (including three full-time mechanics on site)

Company profile: "I began my business in 1988 doing lawn maintenance and landscaping work. Over the years, I expanded

to provide trimming of shrubbery, concrete work, pavers, irrigation, machinery work, complete site development, snow removal as well as continued maintenance and landscaping."

Equipment arsenal: "The machinery and equipment we use for snow removal ranges from snow shovels to backhoes and front-end loaders. We use our pick-up trucks as well as our Tandem trucks."

Purchasing decisions: "We own all our equipment and don't need to rent for snow services. We don't subcontract any of this work because we have all the equipment and labor needed."

Planning/pricing: "We usually begin planning at the beginning of September. We price this service at a per-storm charge. A good storm accumulates at least four inches of snowfall. Any percentage over, we charge them more due to the wear and tear of the equipment and length of time it takes to remove the snow."

Get it in writing: "We provide all our commercial properties with current contracts for the season. Customers also contact our office around this time if they are pricing contractors. A well-written contract is important, especially with snow removal services."

Ice control: "The only product we purchase is the ice melter and/or salt (potassium chloride)."

MEDIUM CONTRACTOR

Name: John Allin

Title: President

Company: Allin Companies

Location: Erie, PA

2000 revenue: \$6.55 million

Business mix: Installation landscape contracts are 70% commercial, 30% residential. Landscape maintenance is 95% commercial. Snow management services are 98% commercial.

Employees: 70-plus people at peak

Company profile: Founded in 1978 as a snow removal business and beginning landscape work in 1982, Allin Companies has grown into a full-service landscape contracting and snow management business. Of its \$6.55 million revenue in 2000, \$4.73 million came from snow/ice management and snow removal services. Allin Companies does residential design/build, general construction (prevailing rate), maintenance and snow removal. The company's revenue is expected to reach \$12.5

million in 2001 due to an increased growth in snow revenues. Usually run two- or three-man crews.

Equipment arsenal: "We actually only own seven plow trucks, two loaders, 100 snow pushers, five salt trucks and six skid steers. We have five sidewalk crews in winter; the rest are subcontractors. This past winter we utilized 4,300 'units' (any equipment used in snow removal) and had over 2,000 sites in 12 states. This season we will run 5,500-plus units on 3,000 sites in 17 states. We have two full-time mechanics in our Erie operation."

Purchasing decisions: "We look for dealer support and backup as well as backup from the manufacturer. With our size, we have relationships with manufacturer and rely on their dealer network to assist our subcontractors in keeping them operable."

Planning/pricing: "We currently have six individuals working 'snow' year round."



We never stop planning. Selling and signing up new business takes place from January to December. Our work is priced 'per push' or 'per season' for the most part. We have only a few customers who demand hourly rate pricing. They are usually "national" accounts with large sites. We shy away from hourly rate structures because they normally generate the lowest margins."

Get it in writing: "The difference between a well-written and structured contract and a poor one can mean the difference between going broke or making a profit. Liability exposure needs to be dealt with closely so that all parties share in the exposure, or so that the contractor is assuming liability exposure for only what they are responsible for maintaining. Some exposure is inevitable. Even with a poor contract, proper record keeping can be key to success. Even with a well structured contract, poor recordkeeping will destroy any good contract document's language."

Ice control: "All ice control products work. However, they must be used as they are designed. Most are used improperly due to ignorance on the contractor's part, and even on the supplier's part at times. Rock salt works everywhere, but only under the right conditions. The alternative deicing products also work everywhere, but also only under the right conditions."

SMALL CONTRACTOR

Name(s): John Wernis & Sam LaGrasso

Title: Owners

Company: United Lawnscape, Inc.

Location: Shelby Twp., MI

2000 revenue: \$4 million

Business mix: 35 percent residential/65 percent commercial in the lawn division/100 percent commercial in snow division

Employees: 95 people

Company profile: "United Lawncare came into existence in November 1977 when two companies, Excel Lawn and Sam's Lawn Care merged. Currently, the company offers numerous services in landscaping, lawn maintenance and snow removal. Each division is an integral part of the success of our company. Landscaping and lawn maintenance each produce 40% of our revenues, while snow removal accounts for 20%."

Equipment arsenal: They have 31 snow plows in various makes and models, snow throwers, dump truck tailgate salt spreaders and CaC12 spreaders.

Purchasing decisions: "Whether it be plows, trucks or snow blowers, we look for a proven track record — positive performance in the field, durability, versatility, maintenance requirements and specifically with plows, the ease of removal and mounting. When purchasing products, specifically ice melter, we take into consideration contents (percentage breakdown), safeness for vegetation and concrete, effectiveness, price and packaging."

Planning/pricing: "We begin preparing for the snow season around July 4th each year

by submitting bids. In October and November, we evaluate our systems from the previous year, make improvements, develop zones, assign zone managers and start forming crews. Of the services we offer, the only part we subcontract is plowing. We have 30 of our own trucks on the road and about 20 subcontractors with their own trucks and plows. When pricing



John Wernis (left) and Sam LaGrasso, owners of United Lawnscape Inc.

our services, we take into account our operating costs per man hour. We prepare our contracts including a set number of labor hours per season. Any additional services required are billed accordingly as they occur."

Get it in writing: "A well-written contract protects you against unnecessary legal suits, misinterpretations of services to be rendered and costs per service. Also, our contracts, having equal monthly installment payments, provide us with consistent income to cover our overhead expenses during the winter months."

Ice control: "We've had the best results with Professional Ice Melter in our area. It performs well in our climate and is priced affordably."

What's 'hot' in snow and ice

Manufacturers want to keep you warm, dry and happy

BY VICKY POULSEN

Manufacturers in the snow and ice arena are pretty resourceful when it comes to designing and developing products that are multi-task oriented, less-fatiguing and can save the contractor time and money in the long run.

They also know that contractors want equipment that is accessory-friendly, so they can switch blades and other attachments in no time at all.

Fortunately for today's contractor, there is a huge array of equipment, attachments and products to choose from.

America West Environmental Supply, Inc.

Jason R. Mallon, Marketing Director
Product: Liquid de-icers

Key points: "ALL CLEAR is a clear liquid made from all natural sources that are non-hazardous that has no odor and indefinite shelf life."

On the horizon: "I believe you will see other points in the non-traditional liquid deicers but also upgrades of the standard material to reach to higher levels of performance."

Ariens Company

Carol Dilger, Corporate Marketing Services Manager
Product: Sno-Thros

Key points: "Cast iron gear case which prolongs the life of the machine, differential lock-out that locks both wheels for traction and dual handle interlocks for hands-free turning."

Hot picks: "The Ariens 1332 and 1336 professional model Sno-Thros are the most popular with landscapers. The 1332 clears paths 32" wide and the 1336 clears 36" wide walkways. The quick-turn chute rotation helps direct blown snow up to 45' away."

Ariens Sno-Thro ▶

ASV Inc.

Brad Lemke, Director of New Product Development
Product: RC•30 All Surface Loader

Key points: "We heard more and more people talk about smaller machines that could fit into smaller, urban areas but still had an enormous amount of work potential—all at cost they could afford. Also, the smaller you can get, in terms of machinery, the easier it is to supplement hand labor."

Hot picks: "Our RC•30 is a powerful workhorse that is small enough to get into tight areas and won't damage any turf."

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The "Secluded Beach Vacation" you booked yourself!

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On the horizon: "I see rubber track machines getting to point where you have multiple models to choose from in terms of size and horsepower."

Boss Snowplow

Rick Robitaille, Marketing Manager

Product: Snowplows and accessories

Key points: "Dealers back their products by staying open when it snows. Dealer who stock parts and can service the product when the contractors are out plowing are patronized the most."

Hot picks: "Landscapers like multiposition plows because they save time. Many contractors claim that they cut their time in half but we think its more like 25% to 33% depending on what kind of jobs their doing. Lately we have been

seeing contractors buying more poly multiposition plows."

Uniqueness: "We offer a full line of multiposition plows in both multiposition and straight blade configurations and we offer both configurations in poly and steel."

Purchasing/finance trends: "Smaller contractors tend to own and operate their equipment. Larger contractors generally subcontract the work out but they oversee the work. The reason they do this is to keep their equipment costs down."

John Deere

Sean Sundberg, Lawn & Garden Product Manager

Product: WBSBs

Key points: "Crews are asking for a reliable product that starts on the first or second pull, that clears snow down to the pavement in a single swath and that is very simple to operate."

Hot picks: "The TRS21, TRS22 and the 724D are popular units for sidewalk clearing because they are smaller and more maneuverable."

On the horizon: "Toro is introducing their Snow Commander, which is a single-stage design that rivals the snow throwing capacity of a dual stage machine. You will see new engine options, smaller more powerful machines that are much easier to operate."

Dixon Industries

Mike Kadel, Marketing Manager

Product: Zero turning radius mowers

Key points: "Many landscapers survive the winter with snow removal work."

Hot picks: "Our zero turning radius mowers are highly maneuverable, and equipped with snow removal attachments, are perfect for moving snow, especially in areas where tight turning is beneficial like sidewalks and driveways."

DTN Weather Services

Dave Oberle, Director/Turf and Recreation

Product: Supplier of weather solutions,

providing data, forecast services, accurate real-time weather, and display systems

Key points:

"With our Storm Guard, a customer can download real-time radar to his Palm

Pilot or pocket PC. Users can use mobile phones when on the road to show them exactly where they're at in the storm or snow arrival and snow forth."

Hot picks: "Our DC7000 weather monitoring station is our most popular product. Users can instantaneously view real time radar right down to county level."

On the horizon: "New this month is our Weather Century which is a PC-based product which will sit on an individual's PC or laptop."

Fisher Engineering

John Murphy, Director, Sales & Marketing

Product: HD Series and EZ-V Snowplows

Key points: "Professional landscapers and property manage-



ment organizations are not afraid to pay more for products that they can rely upon to do the job."

Hot picks: "Our HD Series and EZ-V plows all for trucks in the 3/4-ton and one-ton segments continues to be our most popular selling models."

Uniqueness: "Unlike trip blade designs, our trip-edge blades won't dump their load of snow once the blade is full or an obstacle is encountered — requiring the operator to make a second pass."

On the horizon: "With the help of organizations like SIMA, the industry is becoming better organized. Members have a higher expectation of the equipment that they use, and we're gearing our product development to meet or exceed those expectations."

Grasshopper Co.

Ruthanne Stucky, Marketing Director
Product: Zero-turning radius commercial lawn mowers and all-season implements

Key points: "Landscapers ask for equipment they can use year round, that is equally maneuverable and productive in snow and on turf."



Hot picks: "Equipment that can adapt for sidewalk and driveway clearing is in demand. A system with interchangeable snow thrower, rotary broom and dozer blades provides the versatility required to deal with the vagaries of winter weather and enables the contractor to respond quicker."

Uniqueness: "Grasshopper's QuikConverter design creates ease of implement attachment."

On the horizon: "A combination of effective compact implements with zero-turning-radius maneuverability is the wave of the future."

Hiniker Co.

John Berlowski, Sales Manager
Product: Snowplows

Key points: "Plow designs have changed to meet those needs and improve profitability. There are more specialized plows than ever before including V plows, backdrag plows and snow boxes."

Hot picks: "Our C-Plow combines the functions of a conventional reversible plow and a backdrag plowing system into a single unit."

Uniqueness: "When configured in the backdrag mode, the cutting edge of the C-Plow has a rearward angle of attack improving surface cleaning. As with all our snowplows, the Quick Hitch is standard. The system allows the complete snowplow assembly to be mounted and removed from the truck in one piece."

On the horizon: "Efficient electrical systems

will be needed on snowplows. The increased functions available on the new plows create a higher draw on the truck's system."

JRCO

Jim Schweigert, President
Product: Commercial mower attachments

Key points: "Landscapers use our attachments on their zero-turn mowers to decrease time and increase productivity."

Hot picks: "One of our most popular attachments is the JRCO electric broadcast spreader that can be used for ice melt products as well as fertilizer, seed and insecticides."

Uniqueness: "We offer seven front-mount attachments for commercial mowers that quickly attach with clevis pins to the same JRCO mount bar."

Natural Solutions

Mike Klasek, CFO
Product: Ice Ban and liquid anti-icers and deicers

Key points: "Many people are learning about environmentally friendly liquid anti-icing and deicing products. These products allow landscapers to put product down in advance of, during, or after the snow storm. The obvious appeal is the ability to spread out the work and acquire more customers with the same equipment. That's money in their pockets."

Hot picks: "Ice Ban products to pre-treat rock salt for anti-icing and deicing purposes. They are also asking for liquid anti-icers and de-icers such as IceBan Summit, Performance Plus and Ultra which can be used in direct spray applications in advance of an approaching storm."

On the horizon: "The PNS and ASSHTO environmental standards for deicing products have been adopted throughout the highway and municipal markets and are raising the bar for everyone."

Venture Products

Lloyd Shankel, National Sales Manager

Product: Ventrac Compact Articulating Tractor (C.A.T.)

Key points: "The landscaper today wants a machine that will do more than mow and still be fast and efficient."

Hot picks: "Our Ventrac Compact Articulating Tractor C.A.T. not only will mow quickly and efficiently, but can be used 360 days of the year. It can perform all the jobs required by a landscaper, from mowing, mulching, seeding, tilling, trenching, snow removal, ground preparation and more."

Uniqueness: "Armed with an arsenal of over 25 Quick-Attach attachments, landscapers now have a machine that works for them every day all year long."

On the horizon: "The industry has available to it more technology than any other time in history. In the next year

you will see many new designs and changes."

Simplicity Manufacturing, Inc.

Troy Blewett, Corporate Communications Manager

Product: Snow-clearing attachments

Key points: "Landscapers cannot afford downtime."

Hot picks: "Landscapers use the Simplicity single-stage walk-behind snowthrower to clear walks or to clean-up in front of garage doors, etc., after they've finished plowing. The single-stage works efficiently and is light enough for one person to load and unload from a truck. Ferris Industries offers a commercial three-wheel rider with an out-frontdeck that changes out for winter use to either a snowthrower, snow blade or snow broom."

On the horizon: "Operator comfort is becoming more important. A comfortable Operator stays on the equipment longer and is more productive."

Daniels Box Plow



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Circle 124



Snowman Snowplow, Inc.

Ed Altheide, President

Product: Snowplows

Key points: "Landscapers are looking for products that offer productivity and are dependable."

Hot picks: "We see contractors running trucks with the front and back blade combination because of the efficiency they gain by adding a back plow. The driver eliminates all backdragging and turnaround time when they have a backplow. It's great for driveways, condos, circle drives."

Uniqueness: "Our Snowman models have a patented spring trip release that protects the plow and vehicle when encountering hidden objects."

On the horizon: "Closer attention by the auto industry will be given to trucks and SUVs that can have front snowplows mounted on them. Light front axle weight capacity trucks will become accustomed to using power angle pull plows that hook up to the vehicles' receiver hitch. Snow removal with these vehicles will be done without a front plow."

Walker Manufacturing, Inc.

Bob Walker, president

Product: Zero-turn radius riding mowers

Key points: "Landscapers want mowers that can be used for a multitude of tasks."

Hot picks: Versatility is key because landscapers want a piece of equipment they can use all year round."

On the horizon: "There are interesting advancements going on with engines. We

were fortunate to start with Kohler engines, introducing fuel injection in small engines. These small, fuel-injected engines improves starting in cold weather."

Western Products

Dan Bousman, Sales and Distribution Manager


Product: Western Snowplows

Key points: "Landscapers are looking for snow and ice equipment that is both durable and can perform multiple tasks."

Hot picks: "The Western MVP is an adjustable V-type plow that allows operators

to tackle many different snow removal jobs and finish them much quicker than a traditional straight blade plow. When put in the scoop position it can carry a large amount of snow the full length of a run and significantly reduce the number of passes needed to clear a parking lot."

Uniqueness: "We recently introduced our new UltraMount attachment system. Because of the UltraMount's unique pivot bar construction, the operator can drive into and attach the plow, even if the plow or the truck are on uneven surfaces. Also the attachment process is extremely simple. It takes only seconds, and there are no loosepins to deal with."



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DTN Weather Services' Storm Guard is a PDA-(Personal Digital Assistants) based weather sys-



Traction to spare

All Season Vehicles, Inc. (ASV) features its RCo30, a driveable, all-surface loader that fits in the back of a pickup and features rubber-tracked technology that significantly reduces hard labor, works with power and traction and goes just about anywhere — all without harm to sensitive terrain. The track system gives the RCo30 the power and traction to dig, grade, backfill, remove snow and perform a variety of other tasks. For more information contact ASV at 800/346-5954 or www.asvi.com / circle no. 303

tem and goes anywhere a cell phone does. Dialing in to an internet service provider, via the cell phone, allows the user to automatically download weather information to his or her PDA. Call DTN at 800/328-2278 or www.dtn.com / circle no. 304



Quick position plow

Fisher Engineering's EZ-V multi-position snowplow's adjustable V-plow configures to scoop, straight or "V" position in seconds. Insta-Act hydraulic system locks blade wings to act as one while Fish-Stik hand-held control operates all blade functions. For more information log on to www.fisherplows.com / circle no. 305

Attach and throw snow

Kubota Tractor Corp.'s versatile T-series tractors can be fitted with a belt-driven, single-stage snow blower with a 38-in. cutting width, a standard mechanical lift, replaceable skid shoe/cutting edge and manual-rotating discharge chute. Contact Kubota at 888/4KUBOTA, ext. 900 or www.kubota.com / circle no. 306

Don't get iced in

Natural Solutions Corporation's Ice Ban deicers have a melting power to -78°F. Ice Ban products are less corrosive than rain water, yet they melt snow and ice on contact. Applied with your existing equipment before, during or after the snowstorm, they add flexibility and sales volume to your snow removal business. Call Natural Solutions Corporation at 888/423-2261 / circle no. 307

Quick on/off

Western Products' Ultramount System makes the on/off attachment procedure on plows simpler by incorporating a pivot bar which ro-

Western's Ultramount System ▶

tates, allowing the drive in points to remain level — even when the blade is not. Two receiver brackets on the vehicle are easily removable for better off-season ground clearance. No tools are required. Call Western Products at 414-354-2310 or www.westernplows.com / circle no. 308

Sassy brat

Country Clipper's Brat is more compact, with most of the features of its Zeton "Big Brother." It has Zeton's stand-up deck for easy under deck maintenance, and your choice of either joystick or conventional twin stick steering. Drive is total hydraulic, with Hydro Gear Pumps and Parker Ross wheel motors. Twenty-three-in. rear drive wheels assure full traction. Choose between rugged 42- or 48-in. decks with 17 hp or 19 hp Kawasaki V-Twin engines. Contact Country Clipper at 800/344-8237 or www.countryclipper.com / circle no. 309

Look Ma, no hands!

Simplicity's two-stage, commercial duty snowthrowers are available in eight (860DLX), nine (970M) or 11 (1180M) hp models. Designed to make snowthrowing easier and faster. Contact a Simplicity dealer nearest you or www.simplicitymft.com / circle no. 310

Load or blow snow

The Bobcat skid-steer loader can blow snow off driveways, sidewalks and tight places. A rotating chute and deflector point the snow in any direction. With an attachment control kit, the user can hydraulically control these functions from the operator's seat. High-flow models are available for 753H, T190H, 773H, 863H, T200H, 873H,



and 883H. The two-stage design eliminates metal-to-metal contact between the blower and the rotating chute base, helping prevent freeze-ups. For more information, contact Bobcat at www.bobcat.com / circle no. 311

Stay cool spreader

JRCO, Inc.'s electric broadcast spreader features a polyethylene no-rust hopper with 130 lb./2.2 cu.ft. capacity. The spreader improves productivity by maintaining a constant spread pattern at increased ground speed, reducing operator fatigue. A variable speed drive controls the width of spread from five to 24 ft. Call JRCO, Inc. at 800/966-8442 or www.jrco-inc.com / circle no. 312

Cut down turnaround time

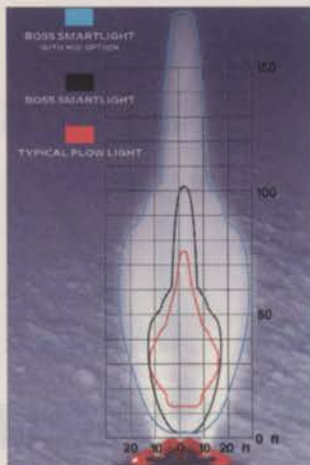
Snowman receiver hitch models are designed for commercial use with full size 1/2- to one-ton four-wheel-drive trucks. The Snowman pull plow eliminates back dragging and turnaround time. Add extension wings to the 7-ft. moldboards to increase blade width to 8-1/2 ft. for high volume jobs. Contact Snowman Snowplow Inc. at 888/766-6267 or www.snowmansnowplow.com / circle no. 313

A broom for all seasons

Walker Manufacturing Company's rotary broom with 47-in. sweeping patch and five-position angle head is ideal for lawn dethatching and raking and for sweeping debris or light snow on hard surfaces. Contact Walker Mfg. Co. at 970/221-5614 / circle no. 314

Versatile rotary cutters

Woods Equipment Company's BrushBull single spindle cutters are available in 10 models with cutting widths from 48 to 84 in. The series includes rotary cutters for a variety of applications. The BrushBull series features the sloped, clean-top deck design and contoured rear frame, with a two-in. round tubing rear



Light for dark mornings

BOSS Snowplow's plow light package, called SmartLight, projects light wider and further out in front of the vehicle. The light output of the SmartLight features a custom-designed composite light with dual halogen bulbs and has been specifically designed for snowplow use. The High-Intensity Discharge (HID) option will provide up to six times the light output of the typical snowplow light for even greater nighttime visibility. For more information, contact BOSS at 800/286-4155 or

www.bossplo.com / circle no. 315

bumper. Contact Woods Equipment Co. at 815/381-6028 / circle no. 316

Wide spread

TrynEx International's Micro Pro 375 tailgate spreader features a material flow gate that, with a standard 10-ft. control cable, calibrates

and controls material flow. Hopper holds up to 3.25 cu. ft./225 lbs. of dry, free-flowing material spread up to a 40-ft. width with a 10-in., powder-coated steel spinner. No belts, pulleys or chains allows for trouble-free operation. Call TryNex International at 800/725-8377 / circle no. 317

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