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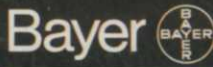


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Landscape MANAGEMENT

AUGUST 2002 / #8 / VOLUME 41

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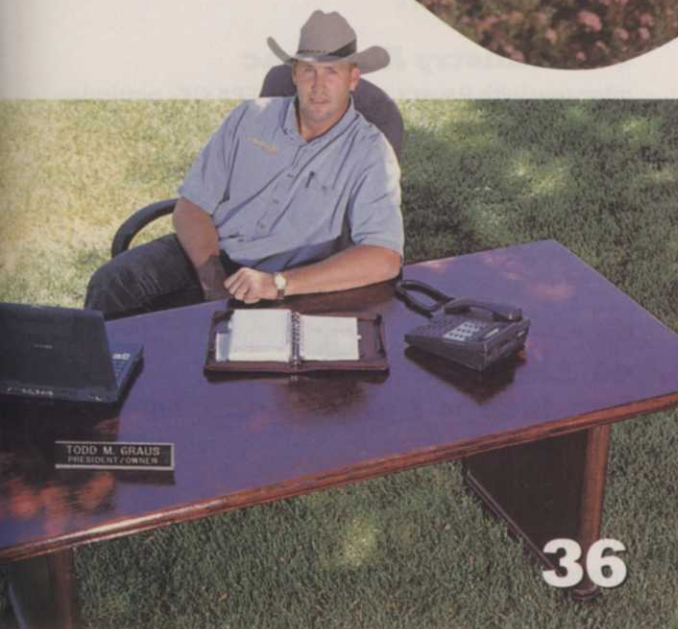
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COVER PHOTO: BARRY MORTON (ON RIGHT) AND BARRY MORTON, JR., OF MORTON'S LANDSCAPE DEVELOPMENT. THE PHOTO WAS TAKEN BY ERIC P. MULL.



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A fresh look at what residential clients want for their landscapes and gardens

■ Buying seed/sod

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■ Expo '02 mowers

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■ Tractors & loaders

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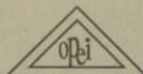
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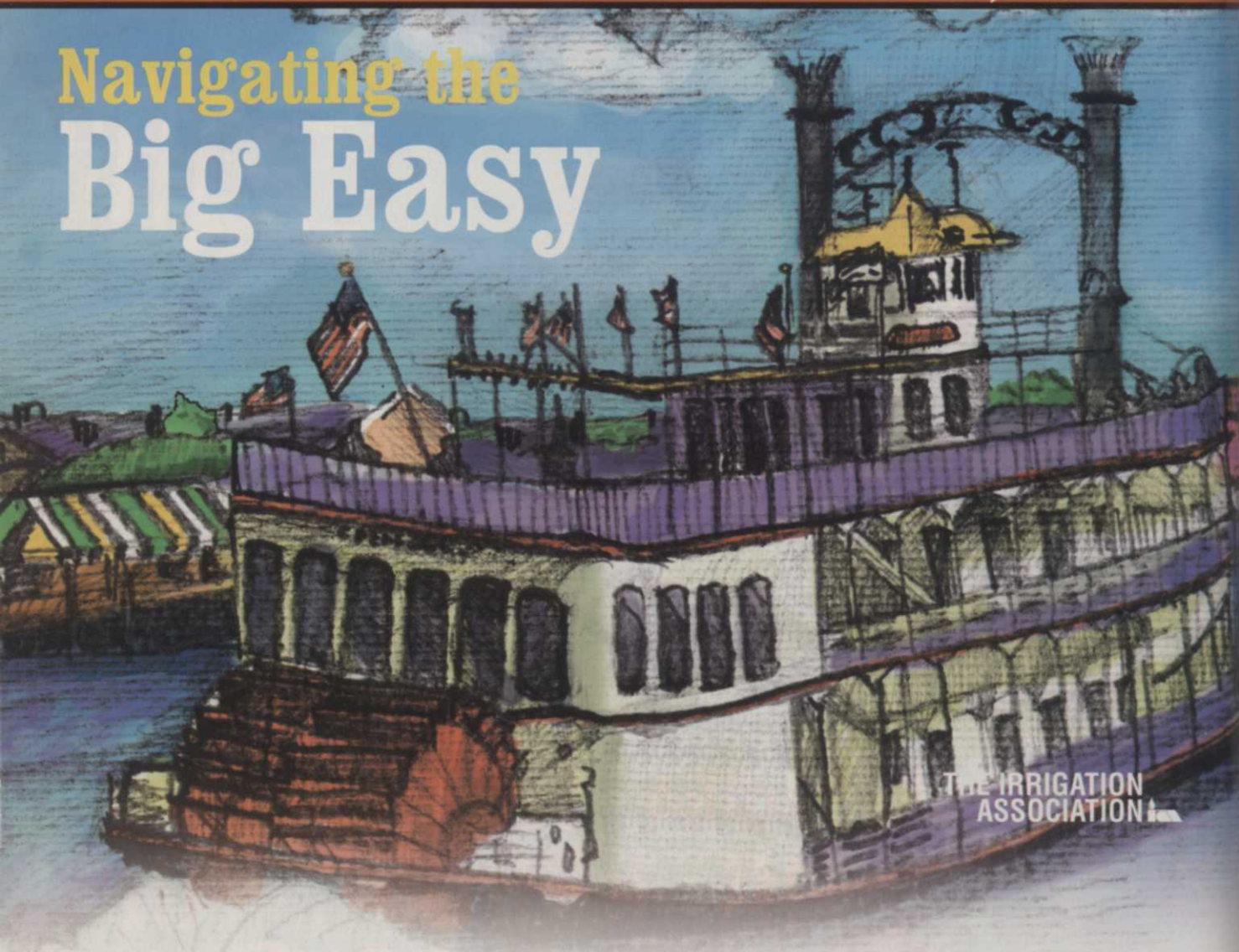
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BY RON HALL / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Upheavals mark seed trade

Turfgrass is the green thread binding the diverse Green Industry. Its utility and versatility is the cornerstone of our industry. Turfgrass is essential to our livelihoods — reason enough to keep track of what's happening with the turf seed business.

But let's start at the beginning.

Catastrophe strikes

Did you know that a cataclysmic event occurred 15,000 years ago, defining the regions of our country that developed into our prime seed production areas?

Imagine the volume of water flowing in all the world's rivers. Multiply that by 10 and put it into a lake on a high plateau stretching across northwestern Montana. Now picture a 2,500-ft. tall glacial ice dam holding back this lake. Picture the dam collapsing under the pressure of the lake, producing a wall of water 2,000-ft. high traveling at 65 mph sweeping away everything in its path.

Geologists say that just such an event shaped the landscape of much of the Inland and Pacific Northwest.

As the deluge rushed west, it stripped the soil from the earth, leaving behind bedrock and gravel. Some soil was deposited in Oregon's Willamette Valley, 400 miles west. Today, the "scablands" in northern Idaho and eastern Oregon, which are 80% gravel, grow much of the nation's bluegrass seed. In the Willamette Valley, farmers produce most of the nation's ryegrass, fescue and bentgrass seeds.

Another big blow

A more recent upheaval in the same regions, this one economic, is easier to picture: the collapse of seed consolidator AgriBioTech in 2000. Its failure rocked the turf seed market and left growers with tons of seed in their fields with no place for it to go. This was a big

blow for the seed business, coming in a period of overproduction. Seed prices have been in a funk ever since.

When we toured the seed producing areas of northern Idaho and the Willamette Valley in Oregon several weeks ago, we learned that suppliers and farmers there have plowed under thousands of acres of perennial ryegrass fields to balance supply with demand. Taking into account 2001's short crop, the ryegrass surplus could be history by spring of 2003, and prices will likely rise.

But, the turf seed business is complicated. As seed producers meet one challenge, another always arises.

More challenges still ahead

Insiders say a bumper crop of K-31 tall fescue is being harvested in the Midwest this year. K-31 is a pasture grass, no match for the quality turf-type tall fescue seed grown in Oregon. But it will keep producers there from getting the prices they want, considering that thousands of acres taken out of ryegrass ended up as tall fescue fields.

The price of turf grass seed, many varieties of which have remained unchanged for decades, is one of the biggest bargains going. It looks like it's going to remain that way.

Contact Ron at 440/
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Farmers have plowed under thousands of acres of perennial ryegrass.



Living hand-to-mouth is for rookies and those of you who want to lose your business, not grow it.



Go with the cash flow

One of the biggest challenges facing any business is the careful management of cash flow. While difficult for all companies, cash flow management is even more challenging for seasonal businesses. The equation is pretty simple: the shorter your actual work year, the longer you must stretch your available cash. After over 21 years of facing this challenge, here are some things I've learned along the way.

Sales aren't cash flow

First, understand that sales aren't cash flow. Sales ultimately result in cash flow, but don't count it as cash until money is transferred from the customer's account to yours. Until that happens, the amount sold is really an account receivable, and a consistent collection policy should be implemented and maintained to make sure the account receivable actually becomes cash flow.

Keep close records

Maintain close records of your operational costs and cash deposits by month. If you do that, you'll quickly learn how much of your seasonal cash flow needs to be set aside in order to even out both cash flow in and cash flow out.

Studying these cash flow records will help you:

1. Establish a system to conserve cash. Such a system will help you plan payment of rent, utilities, insurance, payroll, and other amounts usually set in stone but often scheduled so that payment of them can be spread over the month.
2. Constantly update or increase your equipment inventory without jeopardizing your ability to meet standard monthly expenses.

3. Establish a budget.

Share these cash flow records with your banker. This is particularly important during the early development of your business when you may not have cash reserves to carry you through the off-season and may require a line of credit until cash flow resumes.

Money first, please

Many of us in the Green Industry have the ability to collect "pre-pays." These come from service customers who would rather pay their entire annual bill up front rather than pay five or six times each season as you service their property. Be careful of how and when this money is used — misuse of it is one of the most common ways that firms in our industry self-destruct.

Remember, a pre-paid account is actually an amount of cash that needs to be systematically placed in your operating account as the customer is serviced. For example, if the total pre-paid is \$200 for five evenly spaced services, it's incorrect to treat it all as immediate cash flow when collected at the first of the year. If you do that, you'll create a distorted financial picture of your firm. Also, using that cash at the beginning of the season when your operational costs are at their lowest may result in a lack of adequate cash later in the season when your operational costs are at their highest.

For a rainy day

Finally, as your business develops, begin setting aside cash reserves or "rainy day" money. Living hand-to-mouth is for rookies and for those of you who want to lose your business, not grow it.

— The author is president of *The Greenskeeper*, Carmel, IN, and past president of PLCAA. He can be reached at 317/846-7131.

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inside the owner's head

BY JASON STAHL / MANAGING EDITOR

When you budget, you win

Nick DiBenedetto and Manuel DeSouza took their company, ND Landscaping, Topsfield, MA, to the next level, but it took them 15 years to do it. Their "next level" was the \$1 million mark, but when they got there, there wasn't much cause for celebration.

Problems galore

The company was having employee problems, it wasn't making any profit and DiBenedetto and DeSouza found they had to micromanage every project. These were the same type of problems the company had been having since DiBenedetto started it in 1982. When DeSouza partnered with him in 1986, the company listed gross revenues of \$375,000, but, as DiBenedetto says, "We probably spent \$374,980."

When ND Landscaping hit the million mark, its two owners realized changes needed to be made. One of the first things they did was become a member of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, which opened their eyes to industry experts who could be helpful outside resources.

One of the benefits of hooking up with industry experts was that DiBenedetto and DeSouza gained access to industry benchmark statistics. For instance, they found out that most landscape companies retain 90% of their maintenance contracts annually.

"If we would have known we had \$1.2 million in maintenance contracts with pretty good retention coming through the door already, we could have focused on another area for growth," DiBenedetto says. The areas for growth turned out to be up-

selling their existing maintenance contracts, adding new services, and growing the design/build division.

Time to budget

The two owners admit they never had a budget prior to achieving the million mark, which is why they desperately needed help.

"After a million, the budget process is huge," says DeSouza. "You look at it weekly, monthly and quarterly."

"It alleviates the pressure," adds DiBenedetto. "It tells you where you're at, where you want to be and where you're going."

The budget process also allowed the duo to see that growth isn't simply based on targeting a revenue amount, it's based on production hours. It wasn't until the company was grossing between \$2 and \$3 million that they started to break everything down according to manhours.

5 steps to growth

- ▶ Create systems
- ▶ Establish a budget
- ▶ Use outside resources
- ▶ Train employees
- ▶ Set right culture

"That figure started to determine how many people we needed aboard to do the work we had on contracts," DeSouza says. "Now, as each contract comes in, we break it down to manhours sold for the season."

Share the wealth

Creating a profit-sharing plan with employees also helped ND Landscaping get to the next level. In fact, it went hand-in-



Vitals

Company name: ND Landscaping

Owners: Nick DiBenedetto (above left) and Manuel DeSouza

Location: Topsfield, MA

2001 gross revenue: \$3.4 million

Employees: 48

Services: Full-service landscape

hand with the new budget process to make the company more profitable.

"We weren't a profitable company until three years ago when we became extremely profitable," DiBenedetto says. "It was directly related to our budget process — getting really fine-tuned, implementing a strategy that allows our budgeting process to trickle down into our core group of people, then creating an ownership with those people."

This year, ND Landscaping is aiming for gross revenues of \$4.6 million. Next year, the company hopes to hit \$6 million. All because the owners realized their company was in trouble and they had the courage to turn it upside down.

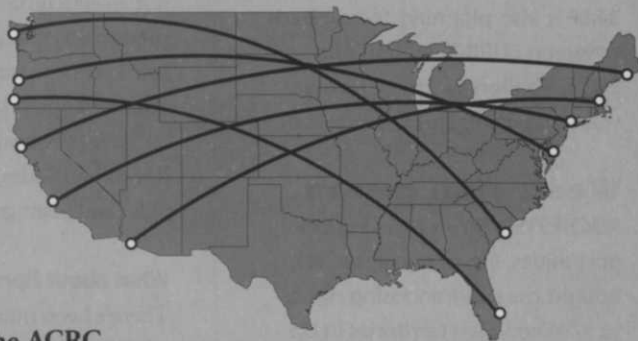
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BASF seeks billion dollar acquisitions

FRANKFURT — Chemical company BASF is seeking four acquisitions worth up to EUR2.5 billion. One of the company's targets is the insecticide business Bayer is being forced to sell as part of its takeover of Aventis CropScience. BASF is also planning to buy back between EUR800 million and EUR1.3 billion-worth of its own shares, starting this year.

Weed Man grows

ROCHESTER, NY — Growing Opportunities, Inc. of Rochester, NY, bought the sub-franchising rights to 32 Weed Man territories in Upstate and Western New York State. Bob Ottley, co-owner of Growing Opportunities, Inc., and partner Phil Fogarty of Cleveland, OH, also own Weed Man sub-franchises in Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Weeks: 'We're a specialty company'

BY LARRY AYLWARD

Josh Weeks has heard from lawn care operators and he says their feedback regarding Bayer AG's acquisition of Aventis CropScience has been positive.

Bayer AG's long-awaited purchase of Aventis was finalized in early June. The deal led to the creation of Bayer CropScience, which is divided into three business groups — Bayer Environmental Science, Bayer Crop Protection and Bayer Bio Science. Weeks, who served as vice president of Aventis Environmental Science's Chipco Professional Products group, is the new head of the professional products unit for Bayer Environmental Science in North America, based in Montvale, N.J.

"I received phone calls from lawn care operators who just felt the need to say something," Weeks said. "In general, they asked what [the merger] means to them. What I said, and what we believe at Bayer, is that we're still structured in a focused way to serve the specialty markets. We're not an agricultural company providing products to the specialty markets. We're a specialty company serving [lawn care operators and others]."

Bayer Environmental Science offers a line of herbicides, insecticides, nematocides and plant growth regulators.

What about fipronil?

There's been much speculation to what Bayer's acquisition of Aventis will mean to lawn care operators, especially regarding fipronil. As part of the deal, the Federal Trade Commission required that Bayer divest two active ingredients — fipronil and acetamiprid — over the next several months. But Bayer Environmental Science will have the chance to license back fipronil rights

for turf segments. "This will allow for the potential for a co-exclusive arrangement between Bayer and the new company that purchases the product," Weeks says, adding there is "significant and vigorous interest" in the product, although he wouldn't reveal what companies are interested.

Weeks said the divestiture should occur by Thanksgiving. (Reportedly, BASF AG is interested.) "In the meantime, Bayer will continue to make and market fipronil in all its forms," Weeks said. "Clearly, there should be an uninterrupted supply to customers."

Weeks says the consolidation of the two companies means more focus on research and development, which adds up to new products. He wouldn't say whether increased consolidation the past few years has helped or hurt the specialty chemical markets.

"In terms of customers, beauty is in the eye of the beholder," he said. "However, I believe

that what customers are looking for are products at reasonable prices and new technology to help them be more effective in their jobs."



Josh Weeks will head Bayer's U.S. professional products unit.

CLIPPINGS

Clopyralid lost to home lawns

INDIANAPOLIS — A widely used herbicide for control of invasive, noxious and other hard-to-control weeds will no longer be used on U.S. residential lawns, as a result of an action taken to address regulatory concerns by the product's primary manufacturer, Dow AgroSciences LLC.

Clopyralid products will continue to be used on golf courses and certain other forms of nonresidential turf. However, Dow AgroSciences has petitioned the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to delete residential turf uses from the clopyralid product label. Additionally, under the amended label professional applicators will now be required to notify property managers not to compost clippings from treated grass.

"This action is based on a few isolated reports of plant damage..."

— **Elin Miller,**
Dow vice president

"The decision to discontinue residential turf use of the herbicide was made to address regulatory concerns about the potential for damage to sensitive plants from clopyralid residues in compost," said Dow AgroSciences vice president for urban pest control products Elin Miller. "This action is based on a few isolated reports of plant damage, not on concerns about human health."

A premium herbicide, clopyralid controls noxious and invasive weeds at very low rates. The product breaks down readily in the natural soil environment but appears to degrade more slowly in compost.

EPA says most organophosphorus pesticides safe

WASHINGTON, DC — The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) signed off on the safety of 28 of 30 organophosphorus pesticides it studied to look at whether they're unreasonably dangerous to human health when combined.

Over the past few years, EPA has reviewed 44 of 49 organophosphorus pesticides. Fourteen have been or will be pulled from the market.

The EPA's review came about from a settlement in a 1999 case brought by NRDC, environmentalists and farm

workers, who challenged a missed deadline for reviewing the most dangerous pesticides.

It's the first time federal regulators have studied how an entire class of chemicals might react with one another and be dangerous in the human body.

The review left out information from controversial human testing by the industry, since EPA is temporarily banning its consideration until the National Academy of Sciences analyzes the subject a year from now.

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 **PROVEN AND DEPENDABLE**

Circle 111

Deere closes two production plants

BY JASON STAHL

MOLINE, IL — Deere & Company announced June 17 it will shut down two plants that make commercial lawn equipment and streamline operations at a third, resulting in 300 job cuts and a \$50 million charge in the third and fourth quarters.

Ken Golden, Deere's manager of public relations, said the move had to do with production capacity and a soft economy.

"We overall as a company have focused on asset management over the last 1-1/2 to 2 years — production capacity, and how much you're building and leaving out to dealers before it's sold. We simply have too much production capacity," Golden said. "It's also somewhat related to a softer economy in the consumer and commercial division. We believe equipment sales will still be down 5 to 10 percent."

The two plants, which will be closed by Oct. 31 (the end of Deere's fiscal year), are located in Williamsburg, VA, and Jeffersonville, IN. The Jeffersonville plant is where Deere produces Great Dane commercial equipment. Golden said the Great Dane product line will continue, but production will shift to Deere's primary turf care plant in Fuquay-Varina, NC.

The company said the changes, plus the addition of Home Depot as a sales outlet, are expected to improve the divi-

sion's operating performance by about \$25 million pretax on an annualized basis starting next year.

Surfin' Turf

Truck parade

Don't look now, but there's a truck parade cruising through a portal near you. Anticipating a steady stream of Mitsubishi Fuso vehicles coming off closed-end leases throughout the year, Mitsubishi Fuso Truck of America (MFTA) announced that cus-

tomers can visit the company's Web site, www.mitfuso.com, to access a list of available used vehicles ready for resale.

There are currently over 100 used Mitsubishi Fuso vehicles posted on the Web site. Prior to Web site posting, used vehicles will undergo an inspection by the National Truck Protection Company (NTP).

To access the listing of used vehicles, a new link has been added to the home page of the MFTA Web site that takes you directly to a sec-

tion devoted to used vehicles. A photo of the vehicle will be included, when available, to give users a better idea of what a particular used vehicle looks like. Photos will be indicated via a camera icon. When you click on the icon, a window will pop open, displaying the currently selected vehicle. Another enhancement to the Web site is an e-mail capability that will allow you to communicate directly with the dealership where the vehicle is domiciled.



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A close-up, low-angle shot of the front grille of a red GMC truck. The grille is made of a silver, diamond-patterned mesh. In the center, the GMC logo is prominently displayed. The logo consists of the letters 'GMC' in a bold, blocky font. The letters are filled with a dark red color and have a silver, metallic outline. The truck's body panels, painted in a vibrant red, are visible above and below the grille, with some highlights from ambient lighting.

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The all-new GMC TopKick. It's what happens when professional engineering is driven by heavy duty attitude.



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* Excludes other GM vehicles.

† When properly equipped; includes weight of vehicle, passengers, cargo, and body equipment.

FOR MORE



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Take a look at the all-new professional grade GMC TopKick. Engineered with a dramatically sloped hood and larger windshield, it gives your drivers an impressive view of what lies ahead, like people and equipment. In fact, the GMC TopKick provides a forward field of vision as near as 13 feet from the front bumper. That's twice as close as its nearest competitor.* Smartly designed with larger fold-in mirrors providing 126 square inches of surface area (including a 6" x 7" convex section), the new GMC TopKick offers a remarkable view all around. Add to that the tightest turning diameter in its class,* and your drivers can safely maneuver around things like loading docks and garbage dumpsters. Not to mention the competition.

* Based on comparison of 2003 GMC TopKick C4500/C5500 to 2002 Ford F-450/F-550. Excludes other GM vehicles.

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* Based on comparison of 2003 GMC TopKick C4500/C5500 to 2002 Ford F-450/F-550. Excludes other GM vehicles.

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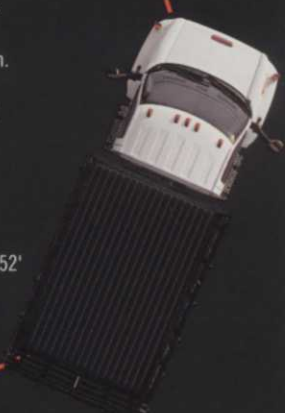
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Fast, easy, and safe deliveries are a real advantage in the real world, where tight alleys and cramped loading docks are often the norm. Added maneuverability minimizes hazards and increases efficiency.

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A driver can't avoid what can't be seen. The TopKick's dramatically sloped hood helps increase forward visibility—and margins of safety.



F-450/F-550: 26'

GMC TopKick C4500/C5500: 13'

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Vehicles throughout this brochure shown with optional equipment. See dealer for details.

People & companies



Environmental Industries promoted **Kelly F. Duke** to vice president, pre-construction services of Valley Crest, its landscape and site development company.

Jacobsen Landscape Design and Construction hired **Chris Raimondi** as director of property management and business development.



Becker Underwood named **Brian Buckallew** product manager for its distribution sales business unit

The **L.R. Nelson Corp.** named **Chris Pine** sales manager for the northeastern U.S. and Canada, and **Tom Kane** sales manager for the mountain states region.

The American Society of Irrigation Consultants appointed **James Barrett** president, **Dan Benner** vice president, **Dave Davis** secretary, **Bob Scott** treasurer, and **Brian Vinchesi** immediate past president.

Clarence Davids & Co. received a grand (first place) award for the 600 N. Michigan Ave. building and a merit (second place) award for Hybernia Homeowners Association in the 32nd Annual Environmental Improvement Awards Program sponsored by ALCA.

Davey Tree acquires National Shade

KENT, OH — The Davey Tree Expert Company has acquired Houston, TX-based National Shade L.P.

The acquisition makes Davey the largest tree moving company in North America.

"Adding the specialized equipment and experienced staff of National Shade to our extensive network of existing Davey operations will create exciting new business opportunities," said Karl Warnke, president and chief operating officer of Davey Tree. Warnke also calls the acquisition "a strategic move to expand our markets and services to those markets."

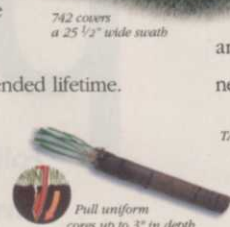
The acquisition of National Shade will now allow Davey to move trees exceeding 60 in. in diameter. In addition, the company's large-tree moving operation expands from its current bases in Wooster, OH and Jacksonville, FL to cover all of the U.S. and Canada.

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The new 530 features free-wheeling outer tines for greater maneuverability.

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Circle 113



THREE paths TO profit

The staff of Morton's Landscape Development, from left: Barry Morton, Linda Morton, Chad Heidecker, Barry Morton, Jr., and Melinda Heidecker.

Follow the journeys of these three landscape company owners in different regions of the country — Ohio, Georgia and New Jersey — and discover that not everybody has to travel the same path in building a profitable operation. While each company is unique, learn how they share traits common to all successful companies.

Wanted: 'big ugly jobs'

Barry Morton's grin is as wide as his sun-reddened face. It's a picture-perfect morning in June, the kind of morning that you dream about if you've got a big outdoor job that needs doing.

Wheeling his Caterpillar loader into a mountain of dark-brown mulch, he's as animated as a kid with a new Lionel on Christmas morning. An earthy fragrance fills the empty parking lot. "I love big equipment," he says over the purring of the big loader.

Morton, the boss on this job, has to keep the big Cat running, loading and dumping mulch to feed the hungry mulch blowers. A pair of red-shirted employees mans each of the three truck-mounted units — two Finn blower units and a shiny new Express Blower. While one worker at each truck directs a stream of dark, finely shredded mulch in and around nearby beds, the other works the hose, keeping it free of obstructions and doing minor cleanup behind the operator.

Not pretty, but profitable

This is a big job. Before it's done, over the course of several workdays, Air-O-Mulch, a division of Barry's Morton Landscape Development Company, will have gone through 1,000 yards of material in grooming the beds and entranceways of this 20-year-old planned community. And — virtually un solicited — his company will also have been hired to renovate several landscapes there.

The president of Morton Landscape loves big, tough work "toys," and this affection is turning out to be one of the keys to the kind of growth that he's been seeking for his company for years.

... to turn into beautiful landscapes. Labor-saving equipment, skilled foremen spark Morton Landscape's growth

BY RON HALL/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

This enviable combination — well-trained personnel and big, labor-saving equipment — allows him to tackle time-consuming, sometimes messy jobs that other landscapers find hard to do profitably.

He calls them "the big ugly jobs." He admits though that it took him a long time to find this niche.

"We've grown too fast in the past and it's hurt us. We've stumbled and had to regroup," says Morton. "We try to keep control and grow smartly and grow with good accounts, not with whatever we can get. We pass on a lot of work."

For instance, he's had to back away from residential maintenance.

"Over the years, I've struggled back and forth with this. It does not work for us. We're not profitable doing it," he says. "I don't know what it is and I've quit trying to figure it out. That's enough. I've tried it four or five times and I won't do it again."

The answer might have been staring Morton in the face all along: the jobs weren't challenging enough. Used to working with farm tractors as a kid, then as a young union carpenter climbing around big steel, rebuilding bridges in northeastern Ohio, the scale of the landscape jobs wasn't right for him.

That began to change in the mid-1990s. Tired of seeing his employees spend hour

AT A GLANCE

Morton's Landscape Development

Mission statement: "Morton's Landscape Development Company is a friendly team of trained individuals dedicated to customers through superior communication and focused on being the most respected company in the Green Industry."

Headquarters: Columbia Station, OH

Years in business: 25

2002 sales: \$2+ million

Full-time employees: 13

Key officers: Barry Morton, President; Barry Morton, Jr., Vice President; Linda Morton, Secretary; Melinda Heidecker, director of human resources; Chad Heidecker, Air-O-Mulch Manager; James Ross, Landscape Manager

Service mix: Installation/mulch blowing 75%, maintenance/snow 15%

after hour carting and spreading mulch by hand, he purchased a Sterling 8500 truck in 1997 and had it fitted with his first Finn mulching unit.

"Our guys were busting their butts mulching. They didn't like doing it and, when you need to mulch, you need to be mowing too," he explains. "And, I had confidence in Finn. I'd bought and been using one of their hydroseeders, and it worked well."

Air-O-Mulch takes off

Soon after getting the mulch/bark blowing unit early in the spring of 1998, other landscape companies began hiring Morton's new division, Air-O-Mulch. He was used to those kinds of calls. His company had done dozer and other subcontracting for fellow landscapers for years.

"We've done a lot of work for a lot of other landscapers, maybe 40 or 50 other companies," explains Morton. "It's a good setup. We can help them make money and we can make money in the process, too."

What was surprising was the demand.

"I didn't anticipate that it (Air-O-Mulch) would grow this fast, but it was a natural because everybody's been putting down mulch by hand and they're doing this little pile every day and we're doing a mountain a day and only using two guys," says Morton.

Because of the demand, Morton says that his workers "were back to putting mulch down by hand," causing him to purchase a second Finn unit for the spring of 2000. Again, calls for Air-O-Mulch's services grew.

This past December he made his largest purchase to date. He flew to the Pacific Northwest and had Express Blower, Eugene, OR, fit out a new computerized Express Blower capable of holding and dispensing 36 yards of material. It can be used to apply mulch, topsoil, rocks, in fact, many different types of material. Barry admits that his company secretary (wife

Linda) was more than a little apprehensive about another major capital expense.

"She's the conservative one in our operation," he laughs.

Because of the considerable capital expense, Morton has to keep the machines busy. "They have to pay for themselves those couple of months when they're not busy," he explains.

This season, his Air-O-Mulch division cranked up the Finn units in February and convoyed south to Kentucky, doing contract work for landscape operations there and in Dayton. By the time the weather improved in northern Ohio, they were ready to tackle several big jobs in their own market area.

Morton and his crews kept Air-O-Mulch busy seven days a week for much of early and mid-spring. Morton's mind was on something else, though: The primary reason for fitting out the hi-tech Express Blower unit was to enter the erosion control market. He wants to have equipment and crews in place when the federal government mandates stricter erosion control regulations in 2003. Landscape companies like his own, he's convinced, will help developers and local governments comply with them.

Has Air-O-Mulch resulted in growth for Morton Landscape Development?

Yes and no, says Morton, but it's key

to his company's long-term "smart growth" plan.

"It hasn't necessarily grown the landscape company but it's helped because revenue starts coming in earlier in the year," he says. "The season here in the Cleveland market can sometimes be very short."

Rexius Express Blower timeline

1950 — First "blower trucks" for blowing wood chips and sawdust used for fuel for steam heat.

1960 — Blower trucks introduced to landscaping after development of the tree debarker that produces clean bark.

1994 — Remote-control sensor-driven devices, making the spreading of organic materials a one-person job.

1995 — Rexius Express Blower becomes Rexius Forest By-Products, Inc. division

1996 — U.S. Patent issued to Rexius for the automated feeding system.

2000 — U.S. Patent issued for Supplemental Injection System, allowing seed or other granulars to be injected into the blow stream with any mulch or soil product. U.S. Patent Pending for Colorant System.

2002 — DHG, Inc. becomes majority owner of Rexius Express Blower. Express Blower, Inc., created. DHG holdings include Finn Corporation.



This project ultimately demanded 1,000 yds. of mulch in the beds.

For more of our cover story, please turn to page 28 ►



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*Approximate cubic yards based on using an 84-inch Construction bucket on average worksite and day.

*Payload capacity includes 200-lb. operator and 200-lb. passenger.



JOHN DEERE



One-stop growth plan

Most landscape company owners can only dream about operating in a market that's expanding as fast as the City of Atlanta.

Even so, Rob Estes, 30, a native of quaint Newnan just southeast of the city, can tell you that nothing comes easy, even when you're running the largest company in booming Fayette and Coweta counties.

In fact, when your region is growing that fast, it's hard to resist letting go and expanding just as fast. But experience taught Estes, owner of Estes Landscape and Estes Maintenance, that it's better to grow with a plan.

Be more selective

"When I was trying to make a name for myself, I was going after every client possi-

Young Georgia entrepreneur surrounds his landscape company with related services to compete in a hot market

BY RON HALL/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

ble. Now, I'm being much more selective," he says of his separate but related firms.

And that means setting your own course, even if it's different than competitors', he says.

"The bidding for a project here can get ridiculous," says Estes, shaking his head. "I know what my break-even point is on these jobs, and I'm in business to show a profit. But I have competitors saying to customers, 'Tell us what you're paying now and we'll

do it for 10 percent less.' This has been especially true for maintenance."

To combat this, Estes nurtures a unique

AT A GLANCE

Estes Landscape & Estes Maintenance

Headquarters: Sharpsburg, GA

Years in business: 30, purchased by Rob Estes in 1996

2002 Revenues: \$2.5 million combined (estimated)

Full-time employees: 30 (combined)

Key officers: Rob Estes, president and owner; Annette Bowman, lead designer for Estes Landscape; Jerry Terrell, operations manager for Estes Landscape; Jimmy Simpson, operations manager for Estes Maintenance; Clay Culpepper, office manager

Service mix: Estes Landscape, design/build/install, 2 crews, 90% commercial/10% residential; Estes Maintenance, 7 crews, 70% commercial/30% residential



Rob Estes (left) and Nickey Whitley at Estes Landscape site.

relationship with five other Green Industry service providers. They are literally door-to-door on his 14-acre property. This "partnership" allows all of the independently owned firms to offer clients and potential clients "one-stop" shopping.

"My goal when I bought the property was to provide everything in the way of landscape services for customers without having to tackle those businesses myself," explains Estes. "I've surrounded myself with people who share the same work ethic and sense of professionalism that I possess."

Location, location, location

Unique? You bet. It starts with Estes himself. A 1995 graduate of the University of Georgia with a degree in landscape architect-

ture, he operates both Estes Landscaping, a design/installation service, and Estes Maintenance, a mowing/trimming company. The businesses are headquartered about two miles from Peachtree City, a 40-year-old planned community of about 37,000 people. Estes Landscape designer Annette Bowman is, in fact, the former city planner for Peachtree City. Peachtree City serves as the unofficial hub of the southeast Atlanta Metro area and is only 20 miles from Atlanta's Hartsfield International Airport.

"A lot of out-of-town commercial clients moving into the city don't know what to expect when it comes to ordinances and rules," says Bowman. "We can tell them what to expect and what it takes to develop here. We're a great resource for them."

This proximity to the one of the world's busiest airports, coupled with verdant, gently rolling countryside, makes this corner of Georgia particularly attractive to businesses. Predictably, residential development has followed it.

Plenty of company

Estes and his two companies have plenty of company at their 14-acre site. Sharing these facilities — in addition to Rob's operations — are Whitley's Lawn Care, owned by Nickey Whitley; White-Meadows Tree Service, owned by David Meadows (formerly Rob's partner in the maintenance business); and a branch of Tennessee-based Vining Stone. Ernie Hernandez, Vining's branch manager, sells decorative stone and

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Circle 114

pavers, retaining wall materials and mulches from the site.

Also maintaining a presence there is Georgia Professional Sprinklers, while Southeastern Wholesale Nursery uses an acre of the property as a holding yard. He's trying to convince the nursery to establish a retail location on his property, also.

"The more people and potential customers that we can attract to this location, the more exposure that our companies will get," says Estes. "I know that once they use our services, they'll want to keep them."

All the service companies at the site use similarly designed logos and marketing material. This unusual "business-park" arrangement is in line with Rob's philosophy of not being all things to all people.

Quality employees key

The biggest lesson Estes says he's learned is that you must attract and keep quality employees. To that end, he now provides them with benefits such as health insurance, pay above the local scale, a retirement IRA and upgraded operations' equipment, including five new air-conditioned service trucks to the maintenance business.

"My employees are the most important thing to the continued growth of the company," he continues. "When I first bought these companies in 1996, most of my employees were older than me. I had to earn their respect and prove that I was capable of leading and selling the jobs at a profit. It was a challenge, but we're going to continue to grow with this great core of employees."

Not in my backyard, you don't

The bankruptcies of Kmart and Owens Corning Illinois bit Estes Maintenance this past season. Both have large properties the company maintained.

"When Owens Corning Illinois filed Chapter 11, they froze a lot of vendors, and we got froze," explains Jimmy Simpson, operations manager for Estes Maintenance. "It was a surprise. We had been working with them for over 15 years."

Simpson says that Estes Maintenance worked extra hard to pick up other accounts to make up for the lost account and, for the most part, was successful.

Simpson says that his company can't compete with mom-and-pop operators on price, so its position is to be a quality service provider that focuses on the high-end commercial market. "We hang right in there with some of the big companies that come down here from Atlanta," he says. "We've lost accounts to them, but we've probably taken as many from them, too. We keep them on their toes."

In spite of the loss of several big accounts and budget cutbacks in several other larger properties ("We started feeling it even before 9/11," says owner Rob Estes) and intense competition, the maintenance firm should approach \$1 million in revenues again this season.

"You know how it is when you're in your own backyard?" adds Jimmy Simpson. "You try double hard not to let a competitor get the best of you."

—RH

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Slow and steady

In July, Jason Sponzilli, brother Daniel, father Richard, and other key decision makers in the trio's \$4 million landscape company, the Sponzilli Landscape Group, took a trip out west to talk business away from the business. Some might have called this a foolish decision, given that July is one of the company's busier times. Daniel would have agreed — at least with the busy part. "That's why we chose to get away," he says.

Fleeing the office

Not many people would have the guts to walk away when business is at a frenetic pace — it takes an insightful, future-focused group of people to realize that such a maneuver can be a smart move, not a crazy one.

Sponzillis' attitude toward growth simple: don't sacrifice quality for the sake of higher revenues

BY JASON STAHL / MANAGING EDITOR

The Sponzilli Group made a similar move a few years ago, when business was equally brisk and revenues were popping at a 10% to 20% growth clip per year. Instead of plugging away, they decided to step back and address some issues imperative to the company's future growth.

"The business was run by one or two people for such a long time, with only a few minor changes in a 30-year period," Jason explains. "All of a sudden, there were

a few more decision makers involved. Plus, there were a lot of differences, which is especially the case in a family business."

Jason specifically referred to he and his brother Daniel's entrance into the business. When they joined along, they had ambitious plans, but wanted to make sure their father and others wanted to follow along with those plans. So, they took three initial steps by:

1. Analyzing their business plan,
2. Identifying what good things had made the business successful, and
3. Figuring out whether those good things would be the same things that would get the business to where they wanted it to go.●

They identified three things that had made the company advance and, if they continued to focus on them, would allow the company to grow even more: customer service, high quality, and quick response time. "That was our basic strategy," Daniel says. "We wanted to work on those things that got us here but then focus on 'x' market and decide what needs to be done."

Easy does it

Jason and Daniel also realized that taking things slow and steady had also been a key to the company's success. The last thing they wanted to do was rush the company into a higher gross revenue number and watch their reputation as a high-quality

Leaders in the Sponzilli Landscape Group (from right): Jay Sponzilli, Dan Sponzilli, Ron Conforth, Jason Bruno, and Rich Sponzilli.



AT A GLANCE

Sponzilli Landscape Group

Location: Totowa, NJ

Gross revenue: \$4 million

Employees: 13 full-time, 35-40 seasonal

Client mix: 75% residential, 25% commercial

Services: Full-service landscape, plus hydroseeding and lighting

company disappear. Rich Sponzilli continually states that care, concern and consistency will always prevail in business.

"We were aiming for steady growth, and to make accurate, educated decisions," Daniel says. "We wanted the 'ladder effect' — going one rung at a time, without losing focus on our end goals. Then, if you hit a tough period, you don't fall 15 rungs, you only drop one at a time."

Looking at all the services the company offered, Jason and Daniel both saw the potential for increased growth. Maintenance, they knew, had never been a high profit area, but saw it as way to sell clients on other services.

"We want to serve our clients on additions," Daniel says. "We want to take on customers who are looking to invest in their



The Sponzilli Landscape Group emphasizes quality work.

properties and increase the value. We want to service customers on everything possible."

Still, if the company was going to take on an additional service, they wouldn't just jump into it blindly. "We wouldn't try to over-leverage ourselves, or outdo our debt," Daniel says. "We would try to determine the demand in a particular market, then the cost of the equipment we would have to buy. Then, we would develop the service and bring it to market."

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Circle 117



Labor woes

The brothers acknowledge that the employee issue has been the toughest to deal with in keeping pace with their growth expectations. "The upper part of our company is intact, and the labor is too," Jason says. "It's the middle management that's the biggest strain." Ron Conforth, the lead operations manager, continues to set the stage for most jobs after 29 years. Jason Bruno develops creative design work.

To make sure the company is getting the best employees for its growth goals, everyone is given a trial period of two to three weeks. If a person fits in, he or she gets a uniform and becomes a member of a team. Every employee is evaluated three to four times per year.

Both Daniel and Jason envision the company growing its gross revenues to \$8 to \$12 million within five to seven years. But Daniel emphasizes that he or the other

leaders in the company aren't focusing on that every day. "Our main focus is the profit amount," he says. "I'd rather gross \$5 million and profit \$1.5 million."

"My father stressed to never let your price jeopardize or limit you," Daniel adds. "Give your customers the highest quality product and focus on the market." **LM**

5-step growth process

- ▶ Step back and take snapshot of business
- ▶ Analyze the "numbers," or the budget
- ▶ Get everyone on board with your strategy
- ▶ Formulate a plan of attack
- ▶ Have fun



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Circle No. 119

Todd Graus remembers the trip like it was yesterday. A person called and pleaded with him to come out and offer treatment advice for his lawn. "No one else will," the man

said. Graus hopped in his pickup truck, and, over the long journey, was reminded why he loves Wyoming so much. Not once did he see a single vehicle pass by. About 145 miles later he had himself a new client.

Message from God?

Let those who don't believe that the odometer on Graus's sixth-month-old truck now reads 33,000 miles be smacked upside the head. It's easier to believe that Graus would never sleep a wink if he knew what his gas expenses were. He doesn't. And that's just fine with him.

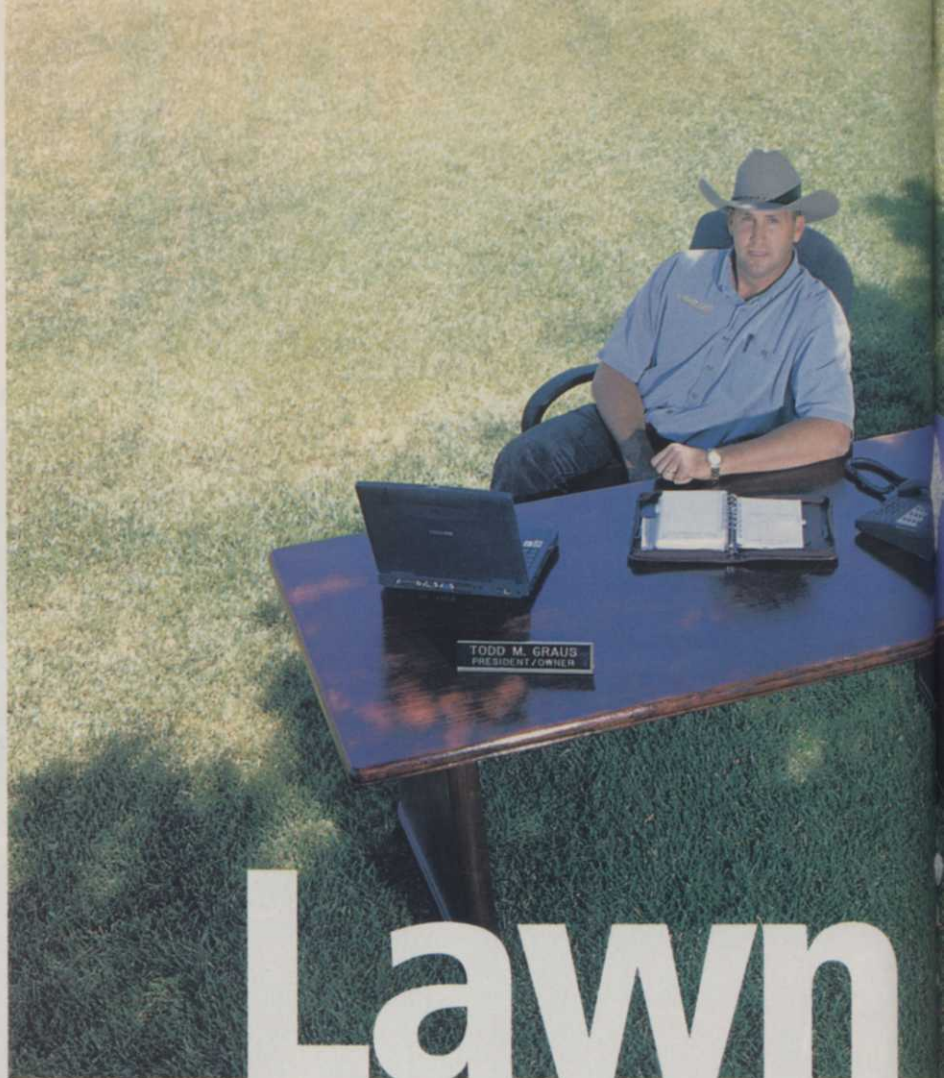
Graus doesn't take offense when someone asks, "Why in the @\$# would you start a lawn care business in Worland, Wyoming?" He can't blame someone for asking that question: his territory is 9,000 square miles, and there are only 35,000 living souls inhabiting that territory. Judging by Graus's reply, it's true that God only knows.

"The Lord put us here," Graus says. "I know without the Lord's help I wouldn't be here today. Jesus is my CEO. If he decides tomorrow that that's the end of it, we'll accept that and move on."

So this is a blessing? To be put in the middle of nowhere and forced to eke out a 35% to 40% profit margin like big city lawn care companies, while being haunted by images of numbers on odometers and gasoline pumps spinning so fast they're all a blur? Yes.

In the beginning

But Graus may not have believed that five years ago, when he started Green Turf Landscapes and worked from sunup to sundown every day. He'd sold a previous



Lawn

lawn care business in Grand Island, NE in 1993 and gone back to school at the University of Colorado to finish work on a forest management degree. That's where he met his wife, Holly, who is now his office manager. Once they had kids and moved to Worland (because of "the fishing," he finally admitted, not some divine guidance from Heaven), he was going to do whatever it took to survive, even if it meant opening a lawn care business in an area that was truly a logistical nightmare.

It's all the more amazing that Graus has managed to build his business to \$800,000 in gross revenues. In fact, he's had to guard against expanding his business too much. That's right. Cue the laugh track.

"We've tried to keep a handle on growth so we don't grow too fast," Graus says. "Our biggest challenge is finding qualified help. Once I have someone good and get a commitment from them to stick around, we go the next step and grow."

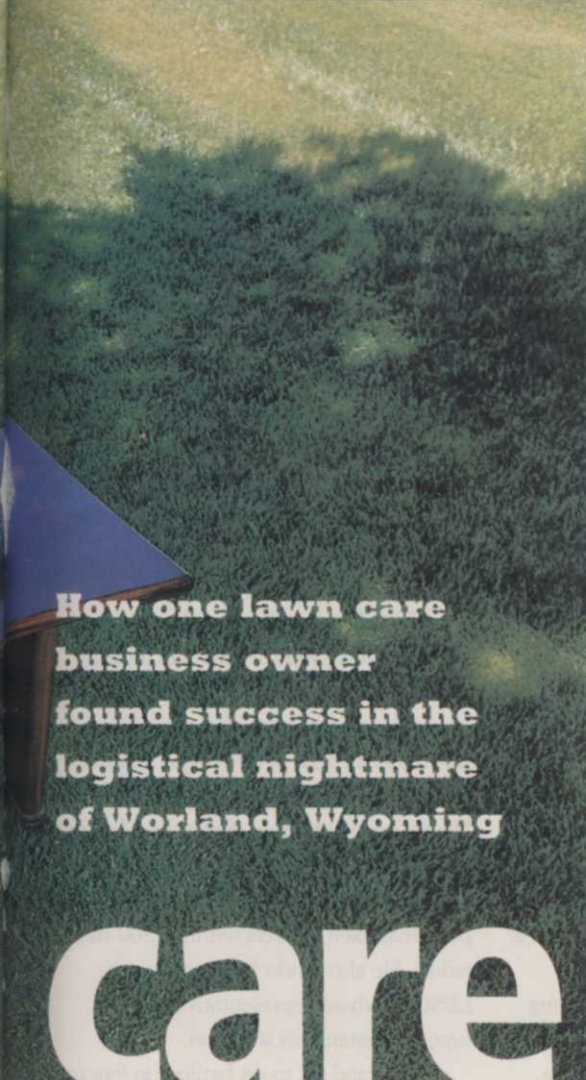
Growing in nowhere

Laugh all you want. Growth truly is a reality for Graus's business, even in Worland. The reason, he says, is not because there's no competition (there is), but that his business beats everyone hands down.

"There are lots of other companies in the area, but they haven't had the professionalism I've had," he says. "One big competitor tried to establish themselves here by offering free lawn care, and guess what? I didn't lose one customer."

The main reason Graus claims his business didn't go down was that the "big competitor" used telemarketing to recruit business, and he says people in his area hate telemarketing.

"We don't try to rip people off here," Graus says. "In a big market, you might not know your customers. Here, everyone knows each other. The last thing you'd want to do is pull something over on somebody, because then everybody would know it."



**How one lawn care
business owner
found success in the
logistical nightmare
of Worland, Wyoming**

care

in nowhere

Now that's treating employees right

Graus said he moved to Wyoming for the fishing, and he wasn't kidding. Apparently, the best time to fish there is just after the snow melts and the spring runoff comes down the mountains. The rivers rise up and become muddy and cool. Then, the snow stops melting, and the rivers drop and clear up. It becomes so clear, in fact, that you can see the fish swimming to and fro. It's at that time that, well, work becomes second priority.

"I take my employees out fishing at this time, and yes, they get paid for it," Graus says. "I tell them, 'Well, we got a lot of work done this morning, so let's go fishing. There are some things that are more important than work.'"

"People live in Wyoming for these types of things," Graus adds. "They know they'll make less money here, but there's more recreation here than anywhere else. I couldn't imagine being in any place better than where I'm at right now, and my employees will tell you the same."

BY JASON STAHL /
MANAGING EDITOR

So, while the big competitor was roused out of town, Graus opened a branch office in Cody. That move has lessened some of the logistical problems, as the Worland and Cody offices each cover a 50-mile radius. Over 120 miles from Worland, a new community is being built, and Graus is eyeing it as a potential new client base.

"Once we have enough customers to support an area, we'll put an office there," he says. "That's my goal for the next three to four years."

Before establishing the branch office in Cody, Graus and his employees would drive 90 miles every other day before they

could put down one ounce of fertilizer.

"Overtime was huge," he says. "Guys were working 12-hour days, three or four hours of that being drive time."

Holding the fort

With those type of expenses to manage, and the communication problems inherent in a place where employees can be hundreds of miles from the home office, it takes an excellent office staff to ensure each day goes by smoothly. Graus credits his wife, Holly, and Jennifer Herrmann, the administrative assistant, for making sure all employees know where they

should be and what they should be doing. And the two women have become experts in what is a crucial step in the company's customer service process: customer qualifying. The last thing Graus wants to do is travel 60 miles to someone's house, only to find they want a water garden installed.

"Holly and Jennifer know how to lead a conversation to know what we're looking for," Graus says. "If a caller asks for a service we don't provide, we don't send someone."

Green Turf's finances are in good hands with Holly, who has an accounting degree. "She can normally anticipate cash flow problems about six weeks before they hap-



Office staffers Holly Graus (left) and Jennifer Herrmann hold the fort well.

pen," Graus says. Whether they decide to close certain expense accounts or tell employees to take special care of equipment, the employees accept the decision well because they have a vested interest in the profitability of the company.

"You want employees like that who look out for your interest," Graus says. "I have some guys who will work for free on some afternoons because they don't want to incur any additional expenses."

Employee matters

There are two types of employees based on compensation: those who are paid hourly, and those, mostly crew leaders and managers, who are paid a salary plus a commission. Entry level lawn technicians make \$8 an hour. Managers make \$30,000 to \$35,000 plus commission. For example, if a crew leader sells a five-point application program, he'll earn a percentage of each application.

"We used to pay a percentage up front on the whole thing, but if the customer cancelled at the mid-way point of the program, the company would lose out," Graus explains.

Bonuses, Graus says, are based on customer retention. If a customer renews the program at the end of the year, the employee will receive a percentage of that sale. "That gives employees an incentive to

work well, and the customer is happy," he says. "It's pretty easy to get a customer, but it's harder to keep them unless you fulfill all of your promises."

Employees are sent off as two-man teams. Cue the laugh track again. It might seem to make more sense to spread your guys out individually to cover more ground, but Graus says his strategy pays off for more than one reason:

► **Less callbacks.** "I've had two-man crews since 1984 because I realized that if we worked with crew members, we didn't have callbacks." Why? Because if there's a callback, it reflects poorly on both persons.

► **Conversation.** In Graus's case, employees have to drive long distances. A person is much less likely to fall asleep at the wheel if he or she is engaged in conversation.

► **Accountability.** Two people working together reduces the chance of someone merely fertilizing part of a yard or, worse, simply hanging an invoice on the doorknob after having done nothing at all.

The teams cover 18 to 20 communities, with every community being its own zone. All lawn applications are on a six-week rotation as part of an elaborate scheduling program. All applicators are cross-trained on various responsibilities, again for the purpose of making the logistical nightmare a little less scary.

"Guys who work on lawn care know about trees," Graus says. "That way, if they're in town and someone has a tree problem, they can go over there."

Master of efficiency

You can hardly blame Graus for having so many checks and balances within his business that you'd think he was neurotic. Being in the middle of nowhere, he has had to make his business the ultimate model of efficiency. Any problems have to be

anticipated early enough to allow his staff to turn them in to non-problems.

"We have efficiency reports and production reports so that we know when we're off 1 to 2% on spraying or fertilizing," he says.

Graus's applicators check their production twice a day to make sure they're not under- or over-applying fertilizer. Graus himself will randomly check lawns to make sure the square footage that was initially measured is correct.

As far as getting supplies goes, Graus says it's as difficult as one might imagine living in an area of endless isolated towns. "There's no such thing as next day delivery here," he says. He picks up liquid material from a company 150 miles away — a company that itself delivers within a 300-mile radius. He also works frequently with LESCO, whose representatives, Graus says, understand his situation.

"I'll call and ask to get fertilizer in four to five days, and they'll often say, 'Good luck,'" Graus says. "But that just means they have to work very hard on their end to get it done."

Class is in session

Graus lives in what is known as the Bighorn Basin. The Bighorn Mountains are just to

continued on page 41



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Fertilizer (46-0-0) + Prospect Plus	0.014 lb. N/1000 sq. ft. + 48 oz./acre	77.00

Seeded on August 4, 2000 with G-2 creeping bentgrass at a rate of 2 lbs. per 1000 sq. ft. Density measurements were based on % cover taken visually on 10/4 (8 weeks after treatment)

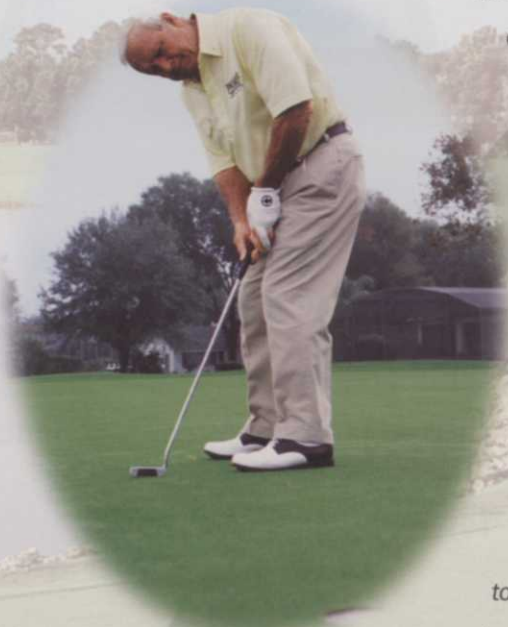
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United
Horticultural Supply

At a glance

Company: Green Turf Landscapes Inc.

Location: Worland, WY

Gross revenue: \$800,000

Employees: 14

Services: Lawn fertilization, tree spraying, tree trimming

Other business: Brite Ideas Decorating holiday light distributorship

continued from page 38

the east, and the Wind River is 40 to 50 miles south of Worland. Many years ago, a dam was built on the Wind River, and canal systems were built north of it, making the entire area fully irrigated. When that happened, Worland started producing a ton of sugar beets and barley, which attracted major companies like Coca-Cola, Budweiser and Coors to the area.

Because of prolonged drought conditions, the local reservoir fed by those old canals has only one year of water left in it. "We're in a world of hurt," Graus says. "If we don't have a lot of snowfall, there will be lots of crops that won't be grown."

It's no wonder then that Graus goes to painstaking lengths to teach his clients about

proper watering practices. "I tell them to water heavily early in the season and create a lot of subsoil moisture. Then I tell them to shut the water off when the root system develops, which forces the roots to search for water and establish a root base. You're giving grass what it wants at that point."

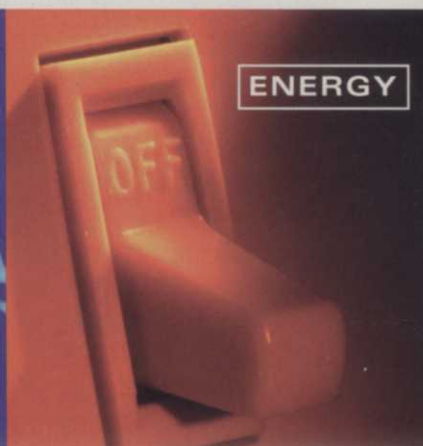
Keeping the faith

Just as Graus is likely to offer clients advice

on mowing and watering, so is he likely to speak his faith. He's a deacon for his non-denominational, evangelical church, and his father is the pastor. Both place total belief in the Bible and prayer. And with the challenges his business faces every single day, a little prayer probably helps.

"Prayer gets us through every day," Graus admits. "I was told that my competitors will make 15% more than me. That's probably true, because 10% of our profits go to the church, where we support a lot of missions."

Don't expect Graus to move his family and company to a bigger and better market anytime soon. Worland will become a thriving metropolis before that happens. Like he says, "There are some things that are just more important than work." **LJM**



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Property at a glance

- Location: Chicago, IL
- Staff: Abbott North Chicago Grounds Maintenance
- Category: Industrial or Office Park
- Total budget: \$964,000
- Year site built: 1925
- Acres of turf: 43
- Acres of woody ornamentals: 11.5
- Acres of display beds: 1.5
- Total paved area: 73.6
- Total man-hours/week: 500

Maintenance challenges

- ▶ Weather extremes: snow storms and drought
- ▶ Congestion/construction damage
- ▶ Difficult access due to fencing and roads

Project checklist

- Completed in last two years:
 - ▶ Building A1 landscape
 - ▶ Area 4 irrigation installation
 - ▶ Gate 4 landscaping

On the job

- ▶ 10 full-time staff, 6 seasonal employees, 8 licensed pesticide applicators

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How do you maintain the grounds of a Fortune 500 company? The Fortune 500 way, of course.

Larry Dolnik and his grounds crew employ the same work ethic in their day-to-day chores that it took for Abbott Laboratories, a pharmaceutical and health care product manufacturer, to rise to such meteoric financial heights. To make crews accountable, and instill pride and ownership in their work, each is assigned one of four zones that comprise the 230-acre site. Each year, one zone or area receives the "Area of the Year Award" based on the quality of weed control, pruning techniques, turf and flower maintenance and site cleanliness.

The crews' tasks vary depending on the season. From May 1 to October 31 they mow and water turf areas at least once per week; maintain the flower beds and hedges on an ongoing basis; and collect litter daily. That job takes a lot of time and seems to never end.



An Abbott grounds maintenance employee uses hand pruners to keep this ornamental out of a walkway used by 4,000 employees daily.

They're also responsible for snow and ice duty. Dolnik's management plan must be approved by three levels of management. Between December 1 and April 1, the entire grounds staff is on 24-hour call in case of a blizzard. Grounds staffers planning to winter in Hawaii during this time run into tough luck — vacation time is restricted in winter.

PGMS
Landscape
MANAGEMENT

Editors' note: *Landscape Management* is the exclusive sponsor of the Green Star Professional Grounds Management Awards for outstanding management of residential, commercial and institutional landscapes. The 2002 winners will be named at the annual meeting of the Professional Grounds Management Society in November. For more information on the 2001 Awards, contact PGMS at:

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Using spot spraying and IPM methods helps to keep the turf and display beds looking good.



Landscape lighting shines



This fixture from Progress Lighting features a solid copper roof.

BY JAMIE GOOCH

Landscape lighting is enjoying a surge in popularity as more people invest in lighting systems for aesthetics and security. "This is what upper-scale consumers are looking for," says Linda Haslage, president of Cascade Lighting, Akron, OH.

Haslage says landscape contractors can capitalize on the outdoor lighting trend by offering high-quality products and professional services that will distance their work from the do-it-yourself market. "It's a great

value-add for contractors," she says.

One contractor who agrees is Kurt Kluznik, president, Yardmaster, Inc. Landscape lighting has been in Yardmaster's business for 20 years. Kluznik says Yardmaster suggests lighting on most installations, with 10% of its customers choosing nightscaping.

Learning to install landscape lighting means more than just figuring out how to run low-voltage lines to fixtures. There is also a design element involved. That means avoiding common mistakes made by homeowners who "turn their houses into helicopter landing pads," says Kluznik. "You should see the light, not the source."

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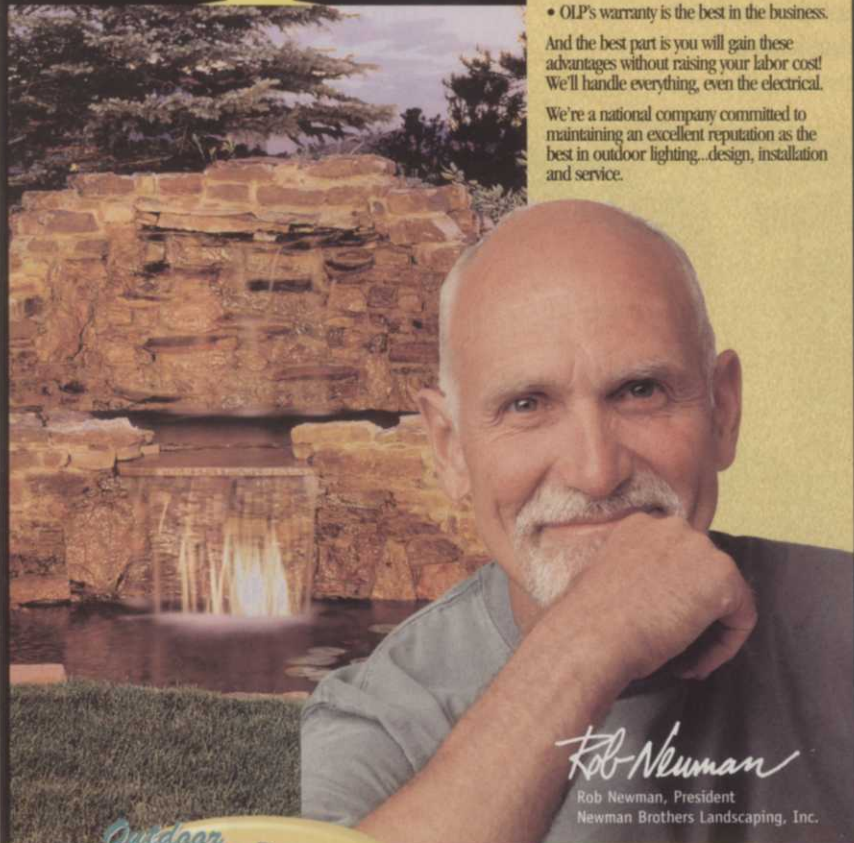
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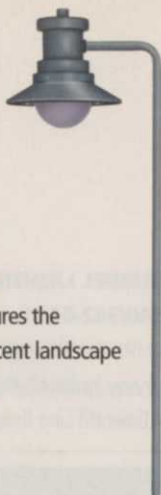
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Make disease management

Solve clients' turf and ornamental disease problems — and profit from it

BY DEBBIE CLAYTON

Each year Cliff Drezek knows what to expect in terms of disease management for his tree and shrub customers. In his area just west of Boston, apple scab on crabapple trees, anthracnose on flowering dogwoods and diploдия on hard pines are as predictable as snow in January. But disease management for turf is different.

"Disease management in lawn care is entirely weather related," says Drezek, operations manager for Green Lawns Plus, Marlborough, MA. "We treat it as an add-on service to our five regular visits. We have a fair amount of disease problems in lawns, but most can be handled on a curative basis. In the spring we get leaf spot, a little red thread and some cool-season brown patch. Once we get into summer, the humidity comes in and red thread increases dramatically, especially on ryegrass and fine fescue lawns. We also get brown patch and summer patch, particularly on sod lawns."

Get with the program

Green Lawns Plus begins disease management in turf when symptoms make an appearance. "We first try to make adjustments in fertilization and get customers to change their cultural practices in an effort to let the turfgrass grow out of it," Drezek says. "If we can solve the problem without pesticides, it's a better approach and more acceptable to our customers. If that doesn't work, we go to the next step: chemical control."

pay



If a lawn has a history of disease problems, Drezek puts the customer on a preventive program of fungicide treatments. Generally, newer Kentucky bluegrass sod lawns and older bentgrass lawns seem to attract more patch diseases during summer. "Older lawns have more common cultivars and tend to show the wear-and-tear if you get into a stressful situation like hot, dry weather," he explains.

This year, Drezek is trying Compass fungicide for residual disease control in lawns. That product controls a wide range of turf diseases, including brown patch, leaf spot, anthracnose, rust and red thread.

Consider adding tree & ornamental disease management along with your turf services.

Used at the rate of 0.25 oz. per 1,000 sq. ft., it provides control for up to 28 days. He also uses it on ornamental diseases, including apple scab, powdery mildew and Rhizoctonia root rot.

"We like to take advantage of new chemistry as it becomes available," says Drezek. He also favors products with a broader spectrum of action.

Because the weather determines how much turf disease management Drezek provides for his customers, he never knows

from year to year how much of a program he'll have. He's not alone. Many lawn care companies provide turf disease management on a year-to-year basis. But how intensive the program is depends on the area of the country in which a business is located. Certain parts of the country experience higher pressures from diseases.

No additional licensing is required for fungicide applications, though training for each type of pesticide treatment is always recommended.

Charlie King of King Green, Gainesville, GA, feels that disease management is a necessary component of lawn maintenance. "We are glad to offer it to our customers on a per-visit basis," he says. "But we have to charge extra for it because we need to make extra applications when weather conditions are conducive to disease development. We have found that the best way to not have disease is to have really good maintenance. But we don't control the maintenance, so it's hard to predict where diseases will hit."

Tree and shrub care more predictable

Like Drezek, King has found that tree and shrub disease management is more predictable than disease management in lawn care. He offers his tree and shrub customers seven treatments a year — one fertilization, two dormant oils and four insect and disease treatments. King encourages lawn care operators to branch out into trees and shrubs for two reasons. "First, you've already got the customers," he says. "Secondly, it's profitable if you can get your route density up. We've designed a truck to handle both services so the stop is twice as profitable on customers who choose tree and shrub care as well as lawn care."

Matt Mierzejewski, service center manager for Weed Man Lawn Care and Eradico Tree and Shrub Care, Farmington Hills, MI, has three trucks dedicated to tree

and shrub service. A division of Eradico Services, Weed Man serves four counties in the metro Detroit area. "We are proactive in terms of tree and shrub disease control," Mierzejewski says. "Our program encompasses five fungicide applications a year, including one dormant oil treatment, two to three fungicide applications in early to late spring and a miticide treatment during the summer. We also provide a fall fertility treatment, usually a deep-root injection for ornamental trees."

Typical disease problems in Mierzejewski's area include apple scab on crabapple trees, anthracnose on sycamores and tip blights on pine trees. He often combines insect and disease management in one treatment. "I'm always looking for good mesostemic fungicides with residual control," says Mierzejewski. "I will be looking at Compass for our tree and shrub disease problems."

As far as managing turf disease problems, Weed Man does little fungicide spraying. After each application, technicians distribute handouts promoting proper cultural practices. Mierzejewski tells customers about proper mowing and watering, the value of aeration and how to prune trees to allow sunlight to get to



Diseases of ornamentals are generally more predictable than turfgrass diseases.

the turf. "We do offer aeration, but other than that, we inform the customer about the environmental conditions that usually cause the disease problem," he says.

Include it in the contract

Environmental Care, Inc., a national company headquartered in Calabasas, CA, has another approach. Disease control is included in the contract for its largely commercial customer base. Environmental Care installs and maintains landscapes and maintains turf. Typically, customers pay a contract price on a monthly basis, which includes mechanical maintenance, fertilization and pest control.

The company tries to take an integrated pest management approach, says Barry Troutman, Ph.D., ECI's director of technical services for the eastern U.S. It aims to accomplish five things:

1. Select plants adapted to the site.
2. Create a healthy soil through fertilization and soil amendments, where necessary.
3. Mow and prune properly.
4. Water properly.
5. Control pests, including weeds, insects and diseases.

"If the first four tasks are done well, the fifth job should be easy," Troutman says. "When I see a recurring disease problem, I go back and look at the first four items to see what we're doing wrong. However, there are situations where we have an inherent problem with a plant that just can't be replaced. A good example is brown patch in St. Augustine turf in the south."

Since brown patch is caused by a rhizoctonia fungus that remains in the soil, the disease pops up every spring and fall in Florida and other southern states. "St. Augustine is a susceptible host, and when the temperature and moisture levels are right, the disease develops," Troutman explains. "When

continued on page 51



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Under ideal conditions, germination may begin within 7 days. After 14 to 21 days for full germination. Mowing may begin when grass is 1/3 taller than desired mowing height. It is recommended that no more than 1/3 of the leaf blade be removed per mowing.

Winter overseeding may be done for year round green color, but is generally not recommended on turf less than 6 to 8 months old.

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Disease guide fits into a pocket

Turfgrass pathologist Dr. Henry Wilkinson and D.K. Pedersen are the co-authors of a pocket-sized book that contains descriptive information and more than 80 photographs of common cool-season turfgrass disease problems. The book, available for \$5 and less in bulk orders, is laminated for outdoor use and fits easily into a shirt pocket. Both English and Spanish language editions can be ordered. To learn more about "Cool-Season Turfgrass Diseases," contact Gem Printing, Inc., at 630/690-9828 or e-mail at gemprints@aol.com.

continued from page 48

we get to that point, we have to respond with a fungicide. It will arrest the fungus for two to three weeks. By then, conditions will hopefully be different."

Brown patch capital of the world

Houston, TX, is the brown patch capital of the world. Brown patch starts in September and continues through the end of the year. "The only way to stop brown patch in St. Augustine in Houston is to treat monthly with a fungicide," says Troutman. "If our customers don't want to pay for that, we focus on the 'A' areas, such as the front of the property."

Troutman advises lawn care operators considering adding a disease management

program to survey their customers first. "There are customers who never ask what it costs," he says. "Generally, you can fund the program by charging everyone just a little bit extra. It's the character of the disease in your marketplace that determines whether you should offer it or not."

For most lawn care professionals, offering disease management is an extension of

the overall service they provide to their customers. "I think all lawn care operations will provide disease management when necessary," says Charlie King. "After all, we are in the service business. If my customer wants me to feed his dog, I'll do it!" **LM**

— The author is a freelance writer who lives in Horsham, PA, and is a frequent contributor to LM.

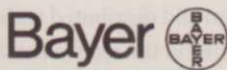


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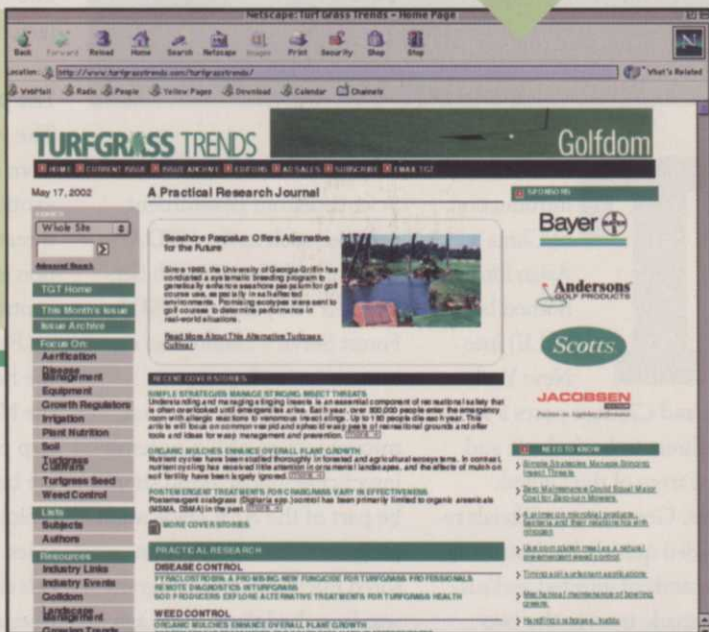
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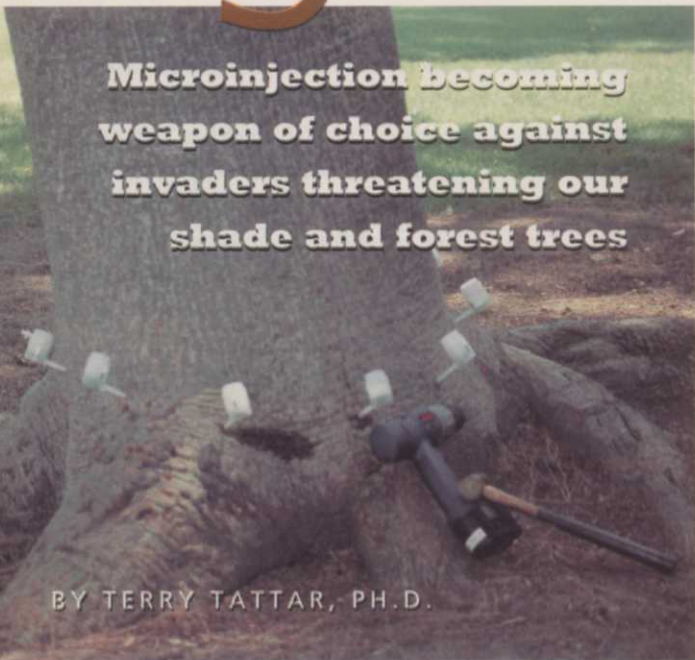
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Fight tree

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Microinjection becoming weapon of choice against invaders threatening our shade and forest trees

BY TERRY TATTAR, PH.D.

2002, over 120,000 trees were injected with the systemic insecticide Imicide in microinjection capsules. Under the USDA's direction, over 200,000 trees have been injected with Imicide to date.

The idea of tree injection isn't new. The first reports of the introduction of materials into trees date to the 12th century. In the 15th century, Leonardo DaVinci reportedly injected poisons into fruit trees to discourage theft of the fruit.

The pests keep coming

The war against ALB is far from over. Also, there are other exotic pests that pose serious threats to trees, and microinjection is being used as part of the control efforts.

For example, infestations of the hemlock woolly adelgid in the Northeast and the red gum lerp psyllid on the West Coast are being controlled by microinjection of systemic insecticides. Other systemic chemicals can be microinjected into trees as well, such as antibiotics, fungicides, insecticides, mineral nutrients and plant growth regulators.

Materials in liquids can be injected into the woody tissues, or xylem, of trees because the pressure within the xylem is below that of atmospheric pressure outside of the tree. Under this condition of negative pressure, liquids introduced into healthy xylem through a fresh injection wound will be taken into the xylem and distributed within the tree in the sap stream. It has been suggested that since the xylem of the tree accepts the liquids based on its porosity, the term infusion is more appropriate than injection

continued on page 54

The accidental introduction of China's Asian long-horned beetle (ALB) into New York

City and Chicago poses a serious threat to both shade and forest trees of the United States. Government officials responded quickly by destroying thousands of infested and suspect shade trees in the two cities, but another strategy to eradicate and contain ALB was needed.

Feds get into the action

Scientists from government agencies such as the USDA Animal and Plant Health Service (APHIS) and the USDA Forest Service initiated an extensive research program. These studies indicated that microinjection of the systemic insecticide imidacloprid should be part of the ALB eradication program. The USDA-sponsored microinjection program was launched three years ago in Chicago. In 2001, it expanded to include the New York City area, and by spring

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THE PREMIER
MICRO-INJECTION SYSTEM

continued from page 52
when describing the movement of systemic liquids into trees.

Here's how it's done

Microinjection is a type of trunk injection where small amounts (approximately 0.1 oz.) of therapeutic chemicals, contained in sealed capsules, are introduced into shallow trunk wounds around a tree's base. The injected chemicals are then distributed systemically by sap movement within the tree to the branches, leaves and even roots within a few hours after injection.

High pressures to attempt

to "force" liquids into the tree aren't needed with microinjection. High-pressure injection of any volume of liquid often damages tree tissues, especially in the bark/cambial zone, and doesn't place most of the injected materials into the outer xylem where most systemic transport occurs. Low pressures sufficient to empty the injection reservoir are most effective for transport and cause the least impact on the tree.

A breakthrough in injection technology occurred in the 1960s when the systemic insecticide Bidrin, in microinjection capsules, was injected into trees

and shown to control a variety of chewing and sucking insect pests. It was then clear that it wasn't necessary for large volumes of materials to be injected into a tree to control a tree health problem. Research on Bidrin demonstrated that a small volume of a concentrated systemic chemical in a microinjection capsule could provide effective tree health care.

Combine treatments?

Since that time, the focus of microinjection research has been on developing systemic formulations of antibiotics, insecticides, fungicides and mineral nutrients that are effective in low volumes.

Considerable research has gone into studies of the most effective injection techniques to maximize uptake and distribution and to minimize injury to the tree. Recently, combinations of an insecticide and a fungicide in a single capsule have been developed to allow microinjection treatment of both insect and disease problems with a single injection. In the past year, plant growth regulators that can eliminate or reduce nuisance fruit production have been developed for microinjection application.

Today, microinjection is both an evolving, research-based technology and a clinical tool for the tree health care practitioner. Research on microinjection is continuing both at major research universities and at government research facilities. A key goal for microin-



jection's future is to determine the potential systemic uses for new tree health care chemicals which are being produced and registered each year.

Microinjection allows the introduction of systemic chemicals directly into a tree without any contact with the environment. Microinjections, together with macroinjections and implants, are one of the most commonly used methods to introduce systemic chemicals directly into the vascular system of trees.

Forget spraying here

Trunk injections and implants have become an increasingly popular clinical alternative to spray applications in the control of urban tree health problems, in part because they're efficient delivery systems that can be performed under most weather conditions. Systemic materials placed into the tree are rapidly available, and there is no environmental contact with pesticides.

Spraying large shade trees in urban areas requires specialized, expensive equipment and has a negative public image. It also may not be a tree health care option if a hospital, nursing home, school, pond, stream or river is near your clients. In

6 benefits of microinjection

1. It's a quick and easy service to offer clients. A landscape professional, while performing routine maintenance duties on a job site, could microinject a single tree in less than five minutes. The tools needed for microinjection include a battery-powered drill and a hammer, already owned by most landscape professionals.
2. A wide range of tree care products is available. Microinjection capsules can be used on a case-by-case basis, to inject one tree or a hundred trees, with either the same or a variety of different materials.
3. Capsules have a long shelf life.
4. It's environmentally safe. Microinjection capsules contain systemic chemicals in a sealed container that are used only once; there is no tank of unused chemicals to empty or clean.
5. Disposal of empty capsules is simple; they're placed into plastic bags after removal from the tree and taken to a landfill with household garbage.
6. The cost of treatments per tree can be competitively priced with spraying and soil injection.



Trunk injections and implants have become a popular alternative to spray applications.

roots susceptible to the invasion of root pathogens. Systemic chemicals injected into the soil may also impact beneficial soil microorganisms. In addition, increasing concerns about groundwater contamination have limited the use of soil injections in many areas. In Long Island, NY, for example, soil injection of pesticides is banned in many communities.

Microinjection is most effective if applied by trained applicators who have correctly diagnosed a tree health problem. An incorrect diagnosis will likely result in the use of an in-

effective material, and improper application can be harmful to the tree.

Don't forget training

Companies that sell injection and implant products usually provide training prior to the use of their products, in part because microinjection has to be applied in strict adherence to the guidelines of the manufacturers. Attendance at a microinjection training workshop should be the first step for any potential user of microinjection technology. The J.J. Mauget Company, for example, regu-

larly conducts one-day training workshops about the correct use of their microinjection products.

The landscape professional who maintains trees on clients' properties must be concerned with both the efficacy of and cost-effectiveness of any treatments that are used.

— The author is a professor at the Shade Tree Laboratory, Department of Microbiology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA. He can be reached at 413/545-2402 or tattar@microbio.umass.edu.

addition, if your clients or their neighbors have concerns about their pets or local wildlife, or they have chemical sensitivities to pesticides, spraying trees would also not be recommended.

Systemic chemicals may also be applied by soil injection. However, soil injections can damage roots and make injured

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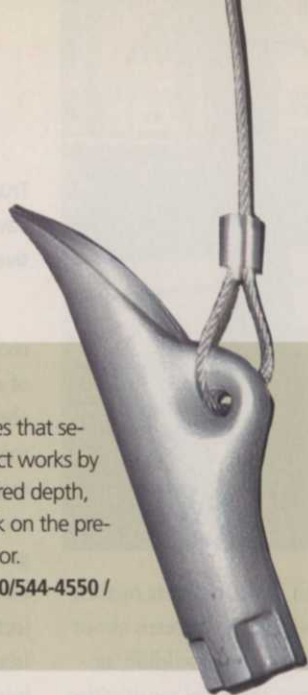
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WHAT, WHEN & WHERE

August

16 Annual Field Day /

Gloucester, VA; Sponsored by the Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association; 540/382-0943

17 Certified Landscape

Technician Exam / Joliet, IL; 630/472-2851

22 Indiana Professional

Lawn and Landscape Association Summer Field Day / Carmel, IN; 317/575-9010

25 Annual University of

Rhode Island Field Trip /

Kingston, RI; Sponsored by NYSTA; 914/948-6468

25-1 Int'l. Garden Centre

Tour / Amsterdam-Maastricht, Netherlands; 202/789-5980

September

3-6 RISE 12th Annual

Meeting / New Orleans, LA; 202/872-3860

5 Annual Summer Outing /

Clermont, KY; Sponsored by the Kentucky Nursery & Landscape Association; 502/848-0055

10 Clemson University

Turfgrass Field Day / Clemson, SC; 864/656-2545

12-13 Southwest

Horticultural Trade Show / Phoenix, AZ; 480/966-1610

12-15 ANLA Landscape

Distribution Tour / Atlanta, GA; 202/789-2900; www.anla.org

16-18 Florida Turfgrass

Association Conference and Trade Show / Tampa, FL; 800/882-6721; www.ftga.org

18 Nursery and Landscape

Field Day / Virginia Beach, VA; Sponsored by VA Tech's Hampton Rds. Ag. Research and Ext. Center; 757/363-3906

19-20 MFPA Summer

Conference / Walled Lake, MI; 480/966-1610

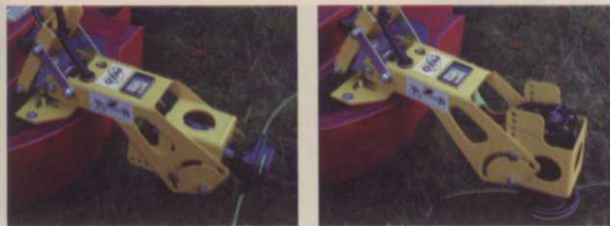
19-21 Florida Nursery &

Allied Trade Show / Orlando, FL; 800/375-3642

26-28 Community Forestry

At Its Best / Nebraska City, NB; 888/448-7337

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1. My primary business at this location is: (fill in ONE only)

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- 02 255 Landscape Contractors (Installation & Maintenance)
- 03 260 Lawn Care Service Companies & Custom Chemical Applicators (ground & air)
- 04 285 Irrigation Contractors & Consultants
 Other Contractors/Service Companies (please specify) _____

LANDSCAPING/GROUNDS CARE FACILITIES

- 05 290 Sports Complexes
- 06 295 Parks
- 07 305 Schools, Colleges & Universities
 Other Grounds Care Facilities (specify) _____

SUPPLIERS AND CONSULTANTS

- 08 355 Extension Agents/Consultants for Horticulture
- 09 360 Sod Growers, Turf Seed Growers & Nurseries
- 10 365 Dealers, Distributors, Formulators & Brokers
- 11 370 Manufacturers
 Other (please specify) _____

2. Which of the following best describes your title? (fill in ONE only)

- 12 10 **Executive/Administrator** - President, Owner, Partner, Director, General Manager, Chairman of the Board, Purchasing Agent, Director of Physical Plant
- 13 20 **Manager/Superintendent** - Arborist, Architect, Landscape/Grounds Manager, Superintendent, Foreman, Supervisor
- 14 30 **Government Official** - Government Commissioner, Agent, Other Government Official
- 15 40 **Specialist** - Forester, Consultant, Agronomist, Pilot, Instructor, Researcher, Horticulturist, Certified Specialist
- 16 50 **Other Titled and Non-Titled Personnel** (please specify) _____

3. SERVICES PERFORMED (fill in ALL that apply)

- 17 A Mowing
- 18 B Turf Insect Control
- 19 C Tree Care
- 20 D Turf Aeration
- 21 E Irrigation Services
- 22 F Turf Fertilization
- 23 G Turf Disease Control
- 24 H Ornamental Care
- 25 I Landscape Design
- 26 J Turf Weed Control
- 27 K Paving, Deck & Patio Installation
- 28 L Pond/Lake Care
- 29 M Landscape Installation
- 30 N Snow Removal
- 31 O Other (please specify) _____

4a. Do you specify, purchase or influence the selection of landscape products?

58 Yes 59 No

4b. If yes, indicate which products you buy or specify: (fill in ALL that apply)

- 32 A Aerators
- 33 B Blowers
- 34 C Chain Saws
- 35 D Chipper-Shredders
- 36 E De-icers
- 37 F Fertilizers
- 38 G Fungicides
- 39 H Herbicides
- 40 I Insecticides
- 41 J Line Trimmers
- 42 K Mowers
- 43 L Snow Removal Equipment
- 44 M Sprayers
- 45 N Spreaders
- 46 O Sweepers
- 47 P Tractors
- 48 Q Truck Trailers/Attachments
- 49 R Trucks
- 50 S Turfseed
- 51 T Utility Vehicles

5. Do you have Internet access? 52 A Yes 53 B No

5a. If so, how often do you use it?

54 A Daily 55 B Weekly 56 C Monthly 57 D Occasionally

101	113	125	137	149	161	173	185	197	209	221	233	245	257	269	281	293	305
102	114	126	138	150	162	174	186	198	210	222	234	246	258	270	282	294	306
103	115	127	139	151	163	175	187	199	211	223	235	247	259	271	283	295	307
104	116	128	140	152	164	176	188	200	212	224	236	248	260	272	284	296	308
105	117	129	141	153	165	177	189	201	213	225	237	249	261	273	285	297	309
106	118	130	142	154	166	178	190	202	214	226	238	250	262	274	286	298	310
107	119	131	143	155	167	179	191	203	215	227	239	251	263	275	287	299	311
108	120	132	144	156	168	180	192	204	216	228	240	252	264	276	288	300	312
109	121	133	145	157	169	181	193	205	217	229	241	253	265	277	289	301	313
110	122	134	146	158	170	182	194	206	218	230	242	254	266	278	290	302	314
111	123	135	147	159	171	183	195	207	219	231	243	255	267	279	291	303	315
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August 2002

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- 05 290 Sports Complexes
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- 16 50 **Other Titled and Non-Titled Personnel** (please specify) _____

3. SERVICES PERFORMED (fill in ALL that apply)

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 17 <input type="radio"/> A Mowing | 23 <input type="radio"/> G Turf Disease Control | 28 <input type="radio"/> L Pond/Lake Care |
| 18 <input type="radio"/> B Turf Insect Control | 24 <input type="radio"/> H Ornamental Care | 29 <input type="radio"/> M Landscape Installation |
| 19 <input type="radio"/> C Tree Care | 25 <input type="radio"/> I Landscape Design | 30 <input type="radio"/> N Snow Removal |
| 20 <input type="radio"/> D Turf Aeration | 26 <input type="radio"/> J Turf Weed Control | 31 <input type="radio"/> O Other (please specify) |
| 21 <input type="radio"/> E Irrigation Services | 27 <input type="radio"/> K Paving, Deck & Patio Installation | |
| 22 <input type="radio"/> F Turf Fertilization | | |

4a. Do you specify, purchase or influence the selection of landscape products?

58 Yes 59 No

4b. If yes, indicate which products you buy or specify: (fill in ALL that apply)

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 32 <input type="radio"/> A Aerators | 39 <input type="radio"/> H Herbicides | 46 <input type="radio"/> O Sweepers |
| 33 <input type="radio"/> B Blowers | 40 <input type="radio"/> I Insecticides | 47 <input type="radio"/> P Tractors |
| 34 <input type="radio"/> C Chain Saws | 41 <input type="radio"/> J Line Trimmers | 48 <input type="radio"/> Q Truck Trailers/Attachments |
| 35 <input type="radio"/> D Chipper-Shredders | 42 <input type="radio"/> K Mowers | 49 <input type="radio"/> R Trucks |
| 36 <input type="radio"/> E De-icers | 43 <input type="radio"/> L Snow Removal Equipment | 50 <input type="radio"/> S Turfseed |
| 37 <input type="radio"/> F Fertilizers | 44 <input type="radio"/> M Sprayers | 51 <input type="radio"/> T Utility Vehicles |
| 38 <input type="radio"/> G Fungicides | 45 <input type="radio"/> N Spreaders | |

5. Do you have Internet access? 52 A Yes 53 B No

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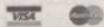
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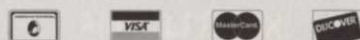
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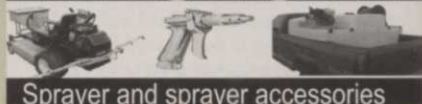
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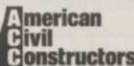
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◆ **LANDSCAPE PROJECT MANAGER**

◆ **IRRIGATION PROJECT MANAGER:** Responsible for all coordination, scheduling, training and oversight of installation field personnel. Industry experience required. Degree and bilingual ability a plus.

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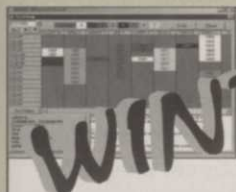
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GUIDELINES TO HELP AN INDUSTRY GROW

Response time, not price, wins jobs

BY ED LAFLAMME

Landscapers have "the need for speed." How speedy is your company in returning phone calls when potential clients call? How much time does it take you to get a proposal into the hands of a prospect after that initial call?

Does "speed" make a difference? You bet it does.

A client that does high-end residential work and I recently did a "secret shopper survey" to determine where we might gain a competitive advantage.

My client's home is in a nice residential neighborhood that's served by several of his competitors, so we decided to use it for the test. The client lives on

an acre with just more than 15,000 sq. ft. of turfgrass.

We picked 10 companies from the Yellow Pages, all of them located within 30 minutes, by car, from his property. Seven of the 10 billed themselves as full-service companies.

We waited for a slower time of year and my client made all 10 calls within a few days. The message to all was: "We want a good lawn, can you help?" We wanted to learn the following:

- Phones answered live?
- How long for a call back?
- Were they on time for the appointment?
- How much time from the phone call to the meeting?
- How long did it take to get the proposal?

■ Which were the best sales people and why?

■ How competitive was their pricing?

■ What was the quality of their lawn care proposal?

■ How did the company communicate? Phone? Email? Mail?

■ If awarded the contract, how long of a wait until work began?

Of the 10 companies called, only five showed up — even after a second call. Only one had e-mail. Only two came out within two days with proposals "on the spot"; the others took three, six and 14 days. Several talked too much about information the owner didn't care about.

Pricing? The large national company was the cheapest, but they took two weeks to arrive. The other four were competitive. The biggest difference in pricing was due to the number of applications proposed.

What did we learn and what can we apply? Price doesn't always get you the job, but speed almost always does.

— Reach LaFlamme at edlaflamme@hotmail.com.

Sound off

Ed LaFlamme ran a successful landscape company in Connecticut for many years before he sold it and began a consulting service helping others in the industry. What do you think of his take on the "need for speed?"

Agree? Disagree?

Let managing editor Jason Stahl know at jstahl@advanstar.com.

If we publish your comments, we'll send you a copy of the book, "Spanish Phrases for Landscape Professionals," by Jason Holben and Dominic Arbini. For information about the book, call 303/863-1685.



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Find out and talk about what the customer wants

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