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Landscape MANAGEMENT

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CUSTOMER SERVICES	Microfiche/film Copies 800/598-6008 Subscriber/Customer Service 218/723-9477/ 888/527-7008
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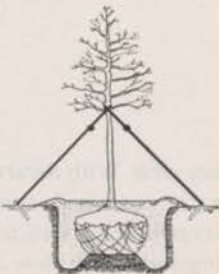


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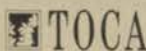
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Circle No. 108

BY RON HALL / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Canada pushes IPM plan

Canadian lawn care companies and other turf application professionals may have to embrace the concepts of Integrated Pest Management (IPM). In fact, it might be the only way they can survive. This is no ploy. An ambitious, industry-initiated "Healthy Lawns" program calls for companies to implement recognized plant health care principals and encourages all professional turf and landscape applicators to become IPM accredited. The effort is well underway in Canada's most populous province, Ontario.



The support is there

Many influential Canadian Green Industry organizations support the push toward industry-wide implementation of IPM. Some turf management companies have already begun the process to gain accreditation. Professional applicators and regulators elsewhere in the country are watching closely.

Why is this happening now? In June 2001, the Supreme Court ruled that Hudson in Quebec Province had the authority to ban professional lawn care within its borders. That decision capped a 10-year legal battle between the town and two lawn care companies. It also emboldened anti-pesticide agitators to redouble their efforts to get pesticides banned for what they consider "cosmetic" purposes. Dozens of other towns within Quebec Province have since passed similar bans, facilitated because Quebec, unlike other Canadian provinces, doesn't have provincial pesticide regulations.

In the crosshairs

Applicators across Canada have become the targets of intense anti-pesticide activism wrapped in the banners

of environmentalism and public health and loaded with half-truths and pseudo science. Caught in its crosshairs is the country's most visible and easiest professional pesticide-using group to attack — turf applicators.

This ongoing grassroots campaign to ban the use of pesticides explains the Canadian industry's strong shift toward IPM.

You probably don't need a primer on the subject, and it's enough to say that a true IPM program — one based on monitoring and establishing pest thresholds and the use of multiple controls — will require a higher level of training than most applicators now receive. It will also significantly increase the cost of delivering professional turf and ornamental care.

That's because, to gain accreditation, professional applicators will be required to pass a test, submit annual desk reviews, submit to on-site audits once every three years and stay abreast of latest techniques and laws through continuing education.

While laudable, this effort to raise the bar for the entire turf application industry of a province and, perhaps, a nation will require a huge commitment from the applicator community. And who knows if this will even satisfy their critics?

Contact Ron at 440/891-2636

or e-mail at

rhall@advanstar.com



Some turf applicators have already begun the process of gaining accreditation.

let's hear it

YOUR OPINIONS, COMMENTS, & QUOTES

Equal time for the little guys

I eagerly awaited my new copy of *Landscape Management*, but when it arrived and I read the cover story, "Don't let lowballers bite into your profits," my usual eagerness dissolved into a mixture of different feelings.

Last year, I decided to start my own lawn care business as a part-time endeavor, with the idea of eventually making it a full-time job. My current full-time profession allows me to grow slowly and to set my own hours of operation.

I'm a one-person crew, so I wear every hat in my company. I'm licensed and insured. My core business is maintenance. As a one-person operation, my only chance to get a foot in the door is to beat competitors' prices. All the service in the world doesn't matter to some potential customers.

I'll put the quality of my work against anyone's. I use high quality equipment and have always kept my customers satisfied. It's through their referrals and my willingness to often work "cheaper" than the bigger guys that I've been able to double my client base this year. In the three months I did this work last year, I netted over \$6,000.

Your magazine has been a valuable source of information and knowledge to me, and has given me an edge many times. The disheartening point of view put forth by your April issue is nothing but a demoral-

izing piece of propaganda that would surely dash the hopes of many of the people interviewed if they read it back when they first started in this business.

Everyone has to start somewhere. If I ever want a chance to compete at a major level, I must be willing to get business any way I can. Then, I need to keep that business the only way I can — by doing quality work. I understand that your magazine is sometimes geared toward high-end companies, but remember you also have quite a few future big-time players in the Green Industry who are trying to ride on the big guys' coattails. I suggest you give equal time to the "little guys."

— Mickey Smith
Household Contractual Services
Lawrenceville, GA

Big vs. small

We all read and hear about "lowballers." According to your report, the largest LCOs (over \$5 million in revenue) are the "lowballers." With the exception of the rate for companies in the \$1 million to \$5 million category, the trend is, the higher the revenues, the lower the price. Can that be true?

A local firm which is the largest in our area is offering some of the lowest mowing rates to get a big contract, then tack on additional services at a premium. Since they're the only ones who can



offer additional services on such large properties, their bids look acceptable on the additional services and terrific on the mowing service.

Some big companies are in need of the contracts just as bad as the small operators, and maybe even more so. There are a limited number of large and super-sized properties that a large LCO needs to keep its workers fully occupied.

Large LCOs will say, "We have the economy of scale to allow us to offer lower prices." I think that's an insufficient reason for their lowballing. The owners should still require the same investment return on their capital, whether they have \$50,000 or \$1 million worth of equipment. They should have profits comparable to other \$5 million+ companies. If the market can sustain \$36 per hour, then the large LCO should be maximizing his profit and charging a full market rate, too.

A large LCO and small LCO operating the same equipment incur comparable costs on the turf. Overhead expenses can be spread over a larger number of properties, but the wages, truck, trailer and equipment costs are the same.

Small operators don't have salespeople, receptionists, big Yellow Page ads, four corporate officers and a payment for a large shop. The average cost of materials may be less for large operators, but their cost of service per property is usually more than small operators'.

Your \$30.63 per hour mowing rate for companies over \$5 million may be skewed since you only surveyed 300 companies, and it can be assumed that of those 300, only a small number were over \$5 million. One or two low rates can easily misrepresent the information.

— Mark Mosher
Green in Idaho
Boise, ID

Pay yourself more

I think your estimates on what an owner should pay himself from your article, "Payday for the owner," are on the low side. I find if you price your job correctly, avoid lowballing at all costs (even if it means giving up the job), and watch your budget carefully, you should be able to give yourself more than \$20 per hour.

— Marco Goncalves
Clean Cut Lawns & Landscapes
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Circle No. 107

Twenty-five years ago, we considered every homeowner a potential customer. That's not the case today.



Don't overreact to change

There's nothing more boring than watching grass grow. I say that because, from customers' point of view, the past few decades have brought little change in the service they receive from their lawn care company.

Offering consistent and reliable service results in loyal customers. But from my standpoint, there has been considerable change in the way our services are marketed and provided.

Things are different now

Looking back over Spring-Green's first 25 years, the biggest challenge our industry has faced has been the emergence of inexpensive, do-it-yourself lawn care products. Twenty-five years ago, aside from basic fertilizer, the few products that were available to homeowners were expensive and ineffective. That's what fueled the explosion of the lawn care industry.

Today, it's a whole new ballgame. There are big-box retailers on every corner catering to the do-it-yourselfer. Their racks are filled to the ceiling with first-rate fertilizers, weed control products and inexpensive spreaders. The overall effect has been the elimination of a large segment of our target audience, homeowners who say, "It's not that hard. It's not that expensive and it doesn't take that long. I'll just do it myself."

Twenty-five years ago, we considered every homeowner a potential customer. That's not the case today. We've been forced to focus our marketing toward more affluent customers who see us as a convenience service. They're the customers who would rather pay extra money than do it themselves.

While a changing customer base shows that the

lawn care industry is in transition, it's critical not to overreact. Our business is surprisingly resilient to most market forces, even poor economic times. The perception is that lawn care is one of the first items trimmed from a family's checklist in bad times, but we've found that's not always the case. Customers often make other sacrifices before surrendering a well-maintained lawn.

Success takes time

The backbone of our company has always been our independently owned franchises. While the industry experienced some tough times in the late 1980s and early '90s, our franchise system continued to grow. As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, the lesson of our first 25 years is that success is a marathon, not a sprint. It doesn't happen overnight. In many of our markets, we aren't the dominant player, but our franchises build on their accomplishments year after year. Before they realize it, several years have passed and they've built substantial businesses.

We stress the importance of the customer relationship to our franchises. When price is the primary consideration, it's difficult to build customer loyalty. But with most homeowners, there's a long-term payoff once a strong relationship is established.

I don't see massive changes happening in our industry in the coming years. The four building blocks of our company are quality, service, professionalism and value. It will be more important than ever for companies to deliver on these standards or their survival will be at risk.

— Tom Hofer is president and chief executive officer of Spring-Green Corp. He can be reached at 815/436-8777.

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BY JUDITH M. GUIDO / GUEST COLUMNIST

New housing starts today will have a trickle-down effect for a landscape professional in year one and two.



Housing starts will start you up

This is the first of what will become a regular column entitled, "Market Watch." The objective of Market Watch is to take key macroeconomic indicators and market happenings and analyze how they affect the landscape professional and the Green Industry.

The intent is to educate you, the landscape professional, as to how the "big picture" affects your local business, and how to position your company to respond and react to these ever-changing market conditions.

Housing starts

Our first key economic indicator is new housing starts. Housing is always a critical economic factor and is the key to the U.S. economic recovery of 2002. Consider these statistics an answer to what makes housing so important to the U.S. economy and landscape professionals:

► Housing production and related services account for 14% of the nation's gross domestic product and drive other closely related sectors of the economy.

► Building 100 single-family homes generates \$11.6 million in new income to local businesses and workers in the first year of construction and \$2.8 million every year thereafter.

► Building 100 single-family homes generates 250 jobs in the local community during the first year and 65 jobs every year thereafter.

► Building 100 multi-family homes generates \$5.3 million in local income in the first year of construction and \$2.2 million every year thereafter.

► Building 100 multi-family homes generates 112 local jobs in the first year of construction and 46 jobs every year thereafter.

► In the first 12 months after purchasing a newly built home, owners spend an average of \$8,900 on improvements.

► A record 906,000 new homes were sold in 2001.

Housing creates millions of jobs and generates millions of dollars in revenue each year. New housing starts today will have a trickle-down effect for a landscape professional in year one and two. How the landscape professional positions the company and services the needs of the new homebuyer in year one and two will determine the lifetime economic value of that customer relationship.

Opportunity to educate

As American home buyers increase their faith in the value of real estate as a long-term investment, landscape professionals have a great opportunity to educate them on 1) the economic value of landscaping, 2) how it can increase their property values by as much as 15%, and, when ready to sell their home, 3) how it can substantially decrease their selling time. Dollars spent on a landscape investment today will not only protect their investment but will enhance their property value, yielding a strong rate of investment. Make sure you have positioned your company to reap the benefits of housing starts before your competition does.

Statistics provided by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB.)

— Judith M. Guido is a partner in KehoeGuido, a strategic management consulting firm specializing in the Green Industry, and an executive vice president of Organicare, an organic lawn care franchise operation. Contact her at 949/715-3804 or 800/801-8046 or jguido@kehoeguido or judyg@organicare.net.



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industry almanac

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Becker Underwood buys Seedbiotics

AMES, IA — Becker Underwood, a manufacturer of bioagronomic and specialty chemical products, acquired Seedbiotics, a U.S.-based specialty seed coatings company. The acquisition unites Becker Underwood's existing seed coating and polymer technologies and expertise with Seedbiotics' coating and polymer operations.

Toro wins GSA contract

BLOOMINGTON, MN — The Toro Company was recently issued a General Services Administration (GSA) corporate contract. Included in the contract are all golf, grounds and sports field products, Toro Landscape Contractor Equipment, Sitework Systems products, and Timecutter ZTM products. Also included are most walk power mowers and snowthrowers.

SpeedZone gets CA registration

KANSAS CITY — PBI/Gordon Corp. received registration acceptance from California for its three new herbicides containing the active ingredient carfentrazone-ethyl.

Lebanon presents check to Rutgers

NEW BRUNSWICK, NJ — Lebanon Seaboard Corp. gave a \$102,934 check to Dr. William Meyer of Rutgers University to further turfgrass research. Ongoing cooperative projects have led to the release of several top rated turfgrass varieties.

'03 Leadership Jams go national Paluch's popular program coming to a site near you

Leadership Jams '03 presented by the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) goes on the road soon. It's sponsored by equipment manufacturer Husqvarna and supported by *Landscape Management* magazine.

"We introduced the program two years ago to a select group of companies and saw amazing results," says Jim Paluch, who developed the program. "I was impressed by the number of individuals working month after month to reach their goals and improve their effectiveness as leaders."

John Gachina of Gachina Landscape Management, Menlo Park, CA, sent several of his foreman and supervisors to the first Leadership Jam. "The programs transformed my company," says Gachina. "The supervisors begin with two high-energy days with Jim Paluch and other great speakers, not to mention great networking opportunities with other leaders and potential leaders like themselves.

"Then, every month they were challenged by the program to complete tasks and to follow through on commitments that benefited the company and their own careers," adds Gachina.

The program's goal is to strengthen the leadership and decision-making skills of company owners and/or the employees who the owners have pegged for more responsibility within their organizations. Some of the topics covered during the "Jams" include customer service, creating a team, developing training programs, using

"Jam" dates and locations:

- **January 27-28:** Southeast Region, Jacksonville, FL
- **February 10-11:** West Coast Region, Oakland, CA
- **February 28-March 1:** Southwest Region, Dallas, TX
- **March 3-4:** Midwest Region, Indianapolis, IN
- **March 7-8:** Northeast Region, Providence, RI

effective systems, understanding profitability, and personal growth.

Bill Sheehan, ALCA vice president, says the decision to introduce the program in five regions around the country was conceived by the ALCA Education committee this past summer.

"It was clear that developing leaders is an issue that many owners are concerned about, and we were looking for an ALCA program that we could offer in partnership with state associations," says

Sheehan, adding that the program is a "perfect fit for what the landscape industry is looking for."

For more information about Leadership Jams 2003, call 877/574-5267, visit www.jphorizons.com or visit the ALCA booth at the Green Industry Expo in Nashville, TN, Nov. 13-17.

CLIPPINGS



Landscape pros like John Gachina (right) love Jim Paluch's (left) "Jams."



OPEI moves EXPO 2003 to October

ALEXANDRIA, VA — The OPEI Board of Directors has changed the dates of the International Lawn, Garden and Power Equipment Exposition to Oct. 18-20, 2003.

This unanimous vote for fall dates is a radical departure for the major Green Industry show which has, during its nearly 20-year history, traditionally convened in late summer.

"This is a major decision with many positive implica-

tions, and it was based on a tidal wave of concurring voices from all of EXPO's major stakeholders," says Bill Harley, OPEI president and CEO.

Just after EXPO 2002, Sellers Expositions conducted an attendee survey by fax of dealers and landscape professionals with these results: 90% of responding dealers and 81% of responding landscape professionals preferred October dates. According to OPEI, the

move to October will give attendees more flexibility in their schedules and make the outdoor product demos more popular since the weather will be cooler.

For more information on the show, call Sellers Expositions at 812/949-9200 or 800/558-8767, or visit www.expo.mow.org.

12

Mark your calendar!

18 19 20
International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo

25 26 27

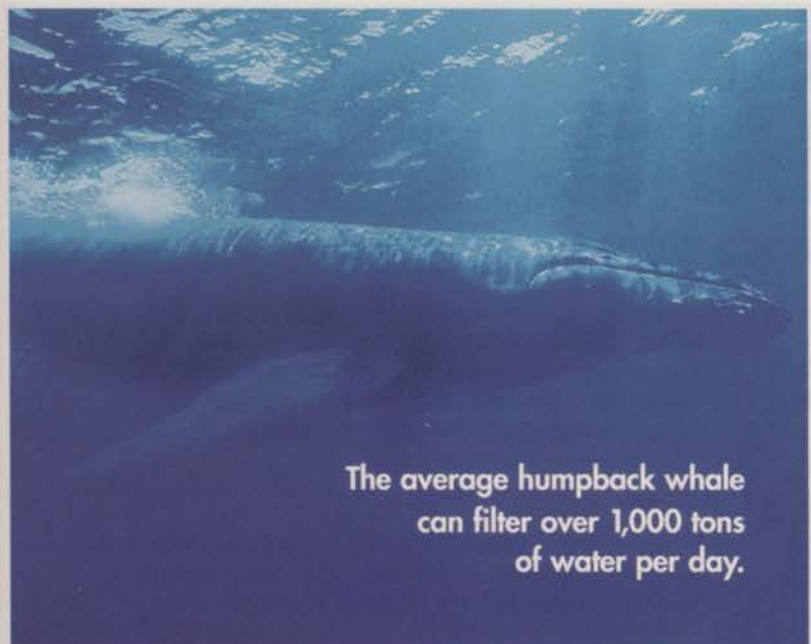
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- The latest Green Industry news
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PGMS to unite with local branches

BALTIMORE, MD — The Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) will soon be "one PGMS," reports Matt Vehr, president of the 91-year-old Green Industry organization, thanks to a three-year effort to unite PGMS with its local branches.

Beginning Jan. 2003, membership in PGMS will only be available through its national headquarters in Baltimore. Members will then be able to be a part of a local branch as part of their annual membership investment fee.

Promoting professionalism

Previously, individuals could associate with a local branch of PGMS without

having to belong to the national organization. "This often caused confusion and misunderstanding about membership," said Thomas Shaner, CAE, executive director for PGMS.

As part of the new program, PGMS will provide a variety of support and administrative services to its branches.

Fallout expected

Vehr and Shaner note there will be some fallout from local members who won't opt to take advantage of the new "united membership," but as Vehr points out, "We're really not losing members as these individuals were not our members in the first place."

To bring about the united front, PGMS modified its membership fees to only \$175, but as Shaner notes, this isn't an increase but rather a savings to those members who have been members of both a branch and the national organization. National dues were \$150 and branch dues were \$50. Under the new dues arrangement, PGMS will rebate \$50 of each branch member's dues back to the branch of his or her choice, resulting in a \$25 decrease in net revenues to the society.

For info on PGMS membership or its upcoming annual conference and Green Industry Expo, contact the Society at 720 Light St., Baltimore, MD 21230, or by fax 410/752-8295 or e-mail pgms@assn-hqtrs.com. Membership applications are also available online.

PGMS

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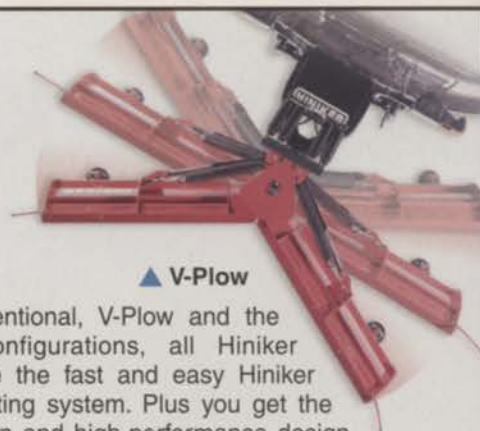
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Roundup Ready bentgrass approval delayed

WASHINGTON — The Scotts Co. and Monsanto temporarily withdrew their application for the approval of Roundup Ready bentgrass for commercial use in order to answer more questions the American Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) has about the turf variety.

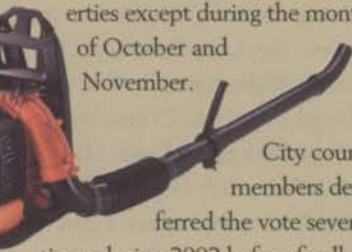
This sort of delay is common in the regulatory process, occurring in 40% of the petitions the agency has reviewed since 1998, a Scotts Co. spokesman said.

The company had expected this development for some time, even as they planted 400 acres of seed in Oregon for production. The companies expect to provide

APHIS with the additional information next spring and resubmit the petition. They still expect regulatory approval that will allow commercialization in 2004 or 2005.

Industry stops leaf blower ban

TORONTO, ONTARIO — Council members here voted down a proposed ban on leaf blowers. The issue surfaced late in 2001 when a city councilperson floated legislation to ban the use of leaf blowers at all times on residential properties except during the months of October and November.



City council members deferred the vote several times during 2002 before finally settling the matter in mid-October.

Credit Tony DiGiovanni, executive director of Landscape Ontario, concerned industry members and staff from the Toronto Parks and Recreation Department for persuading lawmakers from passing the ban. Industry members pointed out that the use of leaf blowers saves the city more than \$1 million in labor costs annually.

DiGiovanni also urged industry members to use leaf blowers responsibly, and he offered the services of Landscape Ontario in to deal with misuse complaints and to educate users.

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Circle 112

CLCA afraid paid family leave law will hurt small companies

BY LYNNE BRAKEMAN

SACRAMENTO, CA — California Gov. Gray Davis recently signed SB 1661, a

bill that amends the state's unemployment insurance code to include paid family leave for all employees starting in July 2004. Originally, the bill provided for 12

weeks of paid leave, but that was amended to six weeks in response to concerns raised by the business community.

Unlike the federal family leave law, which exempts businesses with fewer than 50 employees, this law applies to all businesses in California.

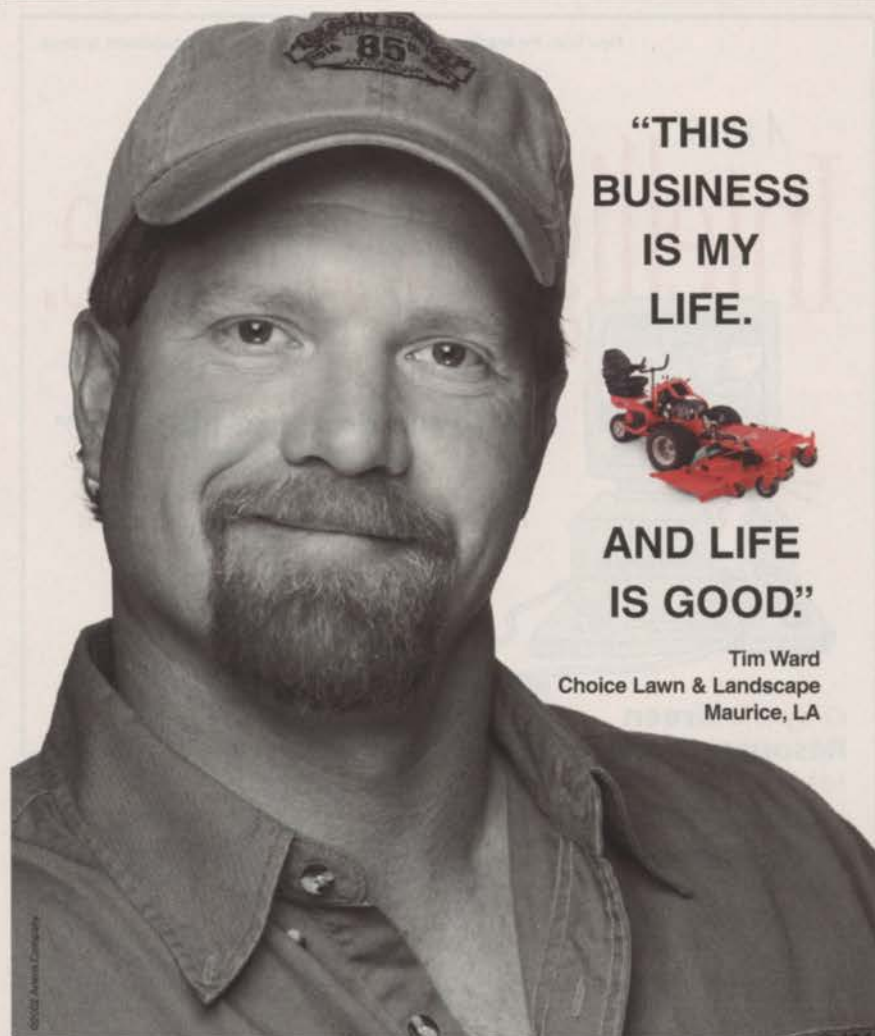
Employees who qualify for the benefit will receive 55% of their wages during their absence, up to a maximum of \$728 a week. The benefit is funded by employee payroll deductions for the State Disability Insurance (SDI) program. The deductions will average about \$27 a year, ranging up to \$70 a year for employees earning more than \$72,000 a year.

The California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA) strongly opposed the bill and issued a legislative alert about the bill back in August. At least 60 CLCA members wrote the governor urging him not to sign the bill.

"This is going to be very hard on smaller companies," says Larry Rohlfes, CLCA's government affairs manager. "Our members average from 16 to 21 employees depending on the time of year. Many of them have fewer than 10 employees. How does a small company replace a foreman or an estimator for six weeks?"

"Paid family leave is one the worst bills for employers in the 2001-02 legislative session," says Julianne Broyles, director of insurance and employee relations for the California Chamber of Commerce. "[It] fails miserably to address the real cost concerns of employers — the costs of replacement workers and additional overtime to cover for absent workers, training costs, and loss of productivity."

The Associated Press reports that twenty-seven other states, including Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey and Washington, have introduced similar legislation.



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Circle 113

People & companies

John Deere Landscapes appointed **Frank Bates** senior vice president of operations, **Jeff Lanahan** senior vice president of supply management and information technologies, and **Mark Nattinger** senior vice president of sales. **Thomas Childers** has also been named marketing director.



Hunter Industries, led by CEO Richard Hunter, was named Corporate Benefactor of the

Year for 2002 by St. Clare's Home, a non-denominational charity that provides housing for abused women and their children.

Pickseed West hired **Mandi McDowell** to its sales and marketing staff.

Burlingham Seeds hired **Zenon Lis** as its vice president of sales and marketing.

Novozymes Biological hired **Scott Inman** as technical sales manager.

Minuteman International appointed **Richard J.**

Wood as a member of its Board of Directors.

The **Snow & Ice Management Association** appointed new officers of its Board of Directors: **Jeff Tovar**, president, **Charles Glossop**, vice president, **Samuel Grados**, secretary, **Craig Geller**, treasurer, and **John Allin**, past perfect president.

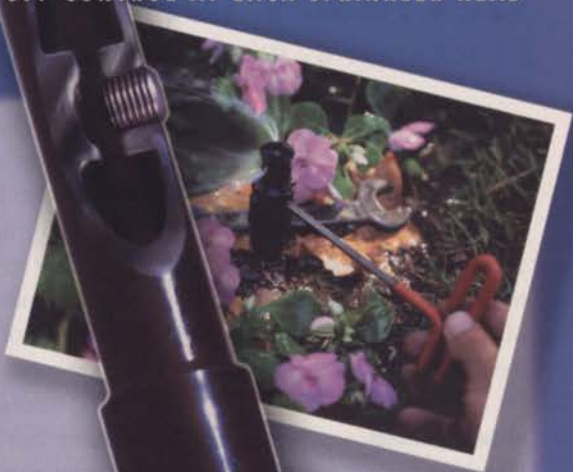
FMC Corp. appointed **Neil DeStefano** communications and e-business director, **Laurie Tieckelmann** customer service manager, **Kim Watson** global development manager for the Specialty Business Products (SPB), **Shelley Woods Whiting** U.S. marketing director for SPB, **Amy Gabrielian** marketing manager for Termite and Software, **Dan Rosenbaum** director of operations and business development for Latin America, Specialty Products and Insecticides, **Matt Robinson** operations manager, and **Maureen Thompson** turf & ornamental sales manager.

Landscape Forms has added **Tim Gish** as a direct sales representative.

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Get ready for 2003 ALCA Student Career Days

BY MARTHA G. HILL

RAYMOND, MS — The Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) Student Career Days is slated for March 13-16, 2003, and Hinds Community College of Raymond, MS is busy with plans to host the 1,200-plus attendees.

Planning ahead

Plans have been underway since 1999, when Hinds' Landscape Management staff and administration offered to host the Career Days.

Hotel reservations and the booking of various facilities for the large crowd expected were made in 1999. In June 2002, the ALCA Student Career Days Committee and ALCA staff visited the campus to ensure the college and Landscape Management Department could handle this large undertaking.

Planning activities currently underway include: budgeting for the entire event, scheduling catering services, securing shut-

tle buses and lining out the shuttle routes, acquiring competition event materials, coordinating with event sponsors, hiring entertainment for various events, studying the scoring system and setting up printing services, hiring security for various events, planning of signage for all events, securing audio-visual equipment, renting port-a-potties, lining up tour stops, coordinating workshop presenters and locations for workshops, and vast amounts of communication with the ALCA staff, industry sponsors, college departments, volunteers and assistants.

Hooray for sponsors

There are numerous committees and groups busy with the details of each activity. Sponsors have been secured for various events, as well as major sponsors who supply the financial backing to make the programs possible. Platinum Sponsor is Stihl, Silver Sponsor is Husqvarna, and Bronze Sponsors are Caterpil-



lar, Pavestone, Toro and ValleyCrest.

There are plenty of sponsorships still available as each event must have sponsors to coordinate each competitive event, secure event judges, and obtain the materials and supplies. A complete list of events, registration forms and schedules can be found at the ALCA Student Career Days Web site at www.studentcareer-days.org.

The ALCA Student Career Days provides a great forum for students from across the United States to meet their peers, go head-to-head in

Friendly competitions await students at the Career Days.

friendly games of competition, compare college experiences, and meet their future employers. These students are busy preparing resumes for the Career Fair, where there will be 100-plus companies from throughout the country and from all areas of the Green Industry — and 700-plus potential employees ready to take the industry to new heights.

— *The author is chair of the Landscape Management Department of Hinds Community College.*



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Circle 142

statistics

INDUSTRY TRENDS BY THE NUMBERS

TOP CITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT (Q2, 2002)

City	# of starts	% of U.S. starts
LA	3,329	5.8%
Ft. Lauderdale	3,032	5.3%
NYC	2,935	5.1%
Atlanta	2,838	5.0%
Denver	2,828	4.9%
Houston	2,561	4.5%
Chicago	2,451	4.3%
Washington, DC	2,355	4.1%
Dallas/Ft. Worth	2,292	4.0%
Sacramento	2,003	3.5%

MULTIFAMILY

N. NJ	2,028	5.3%
Dallas, Ft. Worth	1,844	4.8%
LA	1,762	3.6%
Pittsburgh	1,689	4.4%
Chicago	1,599	4.2%
Atlanta	1,453	3.8%
Houston	1,374	3.6%
Philly	1,355	3.5%
Phoenix	1,278	3.3%
KC	1,243	3.3%

RETAIL

DC	2,725	9.7%
NYC	1,640	5.9%
Atlanta	1,235	4.4%
Tampa	1,108	4.0%
Dallas/Ft. Worth	1,103	3.9%
Phoenix	1,060	3.8%
Philly	1,031	3.7%
LA	972	3.5%
Orlando	966	3.5%
MPLS	901	3.2%

OFFICE

SOURCE: NATL. ASSN. OF REALTORS COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE QUARTERLY

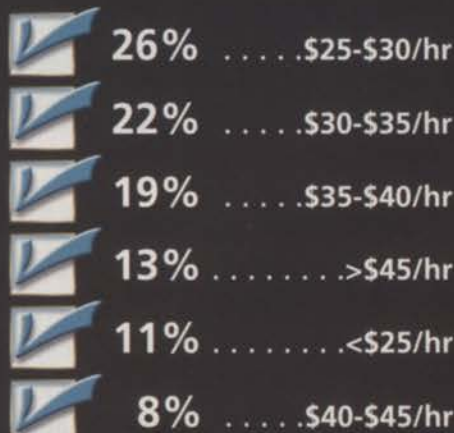
WHAT A DIFFERENCE A YEAR MAKES

Reader response	2001	2002
Revenues rising	72%	59%
Revenues holding	18%	33%
Had more work	77%	40%
Harder to compete	63%	67%
Had more backlog	65%	51%

SOURCE: LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT READER SURVEYS

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'03 Fast

Blast your business out of the starting blocks ahead of the competition next season

BY RON HALL / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Psst. Come a little closer. Here's a secret about getting your landscape or lawn care operation off to a terrific start this coming season — start planning yesterday. If you're like most landscape or lawn care company owners, you're hustling through this season's final production push and haven't had time to complete your "head start" plan for 2003. But don't despair — there's still time if you start now. We'll help.

Read how the following owners get off the starting blocks ahead of the pack once all hell breaks loose each spring.

Break out the training manuals

David Pursell enjoys teaching young people. Although he's just as busy as the owner of any other small landscape company, he's still making time this fall to instruct vocational students on equipment maintenance and operation at nearby Hinds Community College in Jackson, MS.

ILLUSTRATION: BOB LYNCH

start

strategies



David Pursell

Pursell, owner of a U.S. Lawns franchise, says that he can leave his business for several hours Monday and Wednesday mornings because he runs his company with a plan

that's always looking forward. In fact, instructing at a local school even when his company is still churning out production is part of the plan, too.

Says Pursell with a wry grin, "Teaching helps my company attract great graduates and students that make my life much easier."

Are his falls busy? You bet. Sometimes Mississippi's growing season extends well into the fall and, even when it doesn't, his crews are planting pansies, cleaning properties and removing leaves until mid-December. Then it's time to break out the Gardener Training Manuals from parent company ValleyCrest Maintenance. Pursell says that this formal instruction gives his key employees an opportunity to increase

their value to his company and its customers. It also allows them to earn more for themselves the following season.

"The winter is when our foremen really grow," says Pursell. "It would be too hard to give them this kind of training in the summer when they're so busy."

And, oh, by the way, adds Pursell, "I sell aggressively during the early winter."

continued on page 30

Getting off on the right foot the grounds way

BY JASON STAHL / MANAGING EDITOR

"A stitch in time saves nine." "Prepare ahead of time for all possible scenarios." "Pre-plan and carry through with the plan." No matter what grounds manager we talked to, all repeated the same general theme about how to get off to a fast start in 2003: prepare ahead of time. And the tasks they mention to get ahead of the game are amazingly obvious; the real challenge is organizing and managing your time

well enough to accomplish those tasks.

"Right now we're prioritizing our projects and deciding what should be at the top of the list," says Todd Cochran, grounds manager of the Bergen County Department of Parks, Hackensack, NJ. "We want to do everything, but realistically you have to pick what you do well."

He focuses on what will keep him ahead of the game. Staying on top of one task



Todd Cochran

leaves room for your crew to focus on the next one. You don't want to be playing catch-up when the busy season hits.

Remove all leaves prior to the first snowfall. "If you get behind, it's that much harder to pick up wet leaves," says Ellen Newell, landscaper manager at Utah State University. You can't afford to have your crew, which likely is short staffed due to budget cuts earlier in the year, get pushed even more to the limit.

Another important thing to do before it snows is get your snow removal equipment ready. "We're already looking at the snow removal season even though we're jumping into leaf removal," Cochran says. "We're dusting off the spreaders, lubing

continued on page 32

continued from page 29

That's when I can grow the business and pick up additional properties." His goal this fall is ambitious for an operation his size — an additional \$12,000 in revenues a month for 2003. "That would allow us to basically add another crew next spring," he says.

Know where you are

Pursell has set this goal because he knows exactly where his company is this season, both financially and in terms of production. That's the first, and perhaps most important, step in planning for next spring — know where you are.



Fred Haskett

U.S. Lawns facilitator Fred Haskett, a former business owner himself and a 25-year industry veteran, goes into more detail about systems that help owners start each new season effi-

ciently and aggressively. He lives in St. Louis and travels extensively in the Midwest and West, offering support to franchise owners. Planning for the next year, he says, actually begins just weeks after the spring rush of the present season. Start when summer has settled. "That's when we make revenue projections," he says, describing them as financial snapshots that alert owners to adjustments they may have to make to meet the current season's goals.

That exercise also signals the approach of the fall renewal and selling season. Customer contacts made in August and September lead to renewals and sales in October and November, says Haskett. Developing a realistic "sales action plan," he says, is essential in building next season's book of business.

The owners he works with know their sales closing rates, so it's a simple exercise for them to determine how many contacts

10 late-season "must do" items

1 Prepare a staffing plan. Labor your biggest expense in delivering landscape and lawn care services. If you plan to use H2B seasonal foreign workers in March, and you haven't begun the process to recruit them or get them certified, get cracking now. Generally, the process takes 120 days.

2 Analyze and audit your customers. Do they fit the profile you want to serve? Are they profitable? Drop those that don't fit or aren't profitable.

3 Get contracts signed. Many property managers and owners build next season's budgets in the fall, just like you. While you should have been booking '03 business by late summer or early fall, some clients and potential clients are still signing contracts. Make that final effort to sign the jobs that you want.

4 Get involved in clients' budgeting. Sometimes they will welcome your input. It can be a relationship builder.

5 Train key managers and foremen. Allow them to attend turf and landscape conferences, or perhaps take business or communications classes at a local college or trade school. Insist that

they come back with ideas for improving efficiencies, allowing them to advance their careers as they become more valuable to your operation.

6 Prepare for winter sales. If you use telemarketing, check your state regulations. They may have changed. Have your sales literature and program ready to go when you are.

7 Review your marketing strategy. Many small companies rely upon quality service and word of mouth to build business. That works fine. But if you rely upon direct mail, billboards or any other marketing strategies to build business, now is the time to review their effectiveness.

8 Plan for equipment and chemical needs. Visit trade shows. Strengthen relationships with vendors. Can you take advantage of pre-season discounts?

9 Clean, paint and repair equipment. Start the season with reliable tools. You can't afford breakdowns, particularly in the spring.

10 Start planning now. What are you waiting for — Christmas?

they must make and how many proposals they must write to attract the volume of business they desire next spring. "It's best if they break it into daily and weekly goals. It's not as forbidding that way," says Haskett. "It allows them to get their arms around it."

As the end of the year approaches, his franchise owners also receive an annual scored evaluation that provides a detailed look at their operations, pointing out strengths and offering solutions for areas needing improvement. Owners rely upon this information as they budget and develop their annual business plans.

Details, details

"If you're a halfway decent businessman, you're always thinking for more than just

the moment," adds Terry Kurth, Madison, WI, who several years ago joined with a small group of other lawn care entrepreneurs to own and promote the Weed Man network in the United States. Indeed, it was the organization's detailed approach to planning, forecasting and budgeting that most impressed him, he says.

Like Haskett, he stops to do a "picture in time" of his company in early summer to make sure it's in line with his business plan. "Then we adjust from June through the rest of the year," says Kurth. That lays the foundation for next season's planning.

"We break down just about everything in the business, almost to our paperclips," adds Kurth. "This includes source of sales, all

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Gary Mason, Director of Housekeeping, ProPlayer Stadium

"I hate peanut shells."

Leaves and grass clippings are nothing. You want tough? Clean up the 10 tons of trash and peanut shells that 75,000 screaming fans leave behind—and do it in just 13 hours. That's what Gary Mason and his crew do every three days, more than 100 times a year.



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Circle No. 117

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costs, the product that we use. We do this round by round and we do it in detail."

Don't go it alone

Owners often try to do too much on their own as they prepare their companies for the coming season.

"When we begin the process, we sit down with our administration and with our production and we ask what do we need? What's working? What's not working? We determine exactly what we want to do next season," says Jon Cundiff, Turf's Up/Weedman, Kansas City. Supervisors prepare "wish lists" that may or may not find their way into next season's budget. Cundiff makes the hard decisions when he completes the budget in November.

"One of the big jobs is to match personnel with production and to determine if we have the right people in the right places," he adds. "We determine who our top performers are, what we're going to do to manage next season's production, and if we will need additional people."



Jim Oyler

Jim Oyler, Dora Landscape, Orlando, FL, also seeks input from managers within his firm. "We will sit down on the weekend prior to Halloween and have a round robin session with everybody in the office and talk about next year," he explains. "Then, all of the managers will go back and put together their plans and report back to me by the end of November."

Because there is no slow season in Florida — just a slightly less busy season — he wants Dora Landscape off and running with the start of a new year. "Even with the maintenance, although we have a fall cutback, everyone here is pretty much on a 12-month schedule," he says.

Analyze your customers

The fall is an excellent time — perhaps the best time — to separate your profitable customers from those that don't fit your company profile, adds Bob Kinnucan, president of the Kinnucan Company, Lake Bluff, IL.

"We analyze our existing clients and audit each account," says Kinnucan, relying

upon his 32 years of landscape experience. "We want to determine the value of each account. We're looking for clients that fit our client profile. We tally up all the ser-



Bob Kinnucan

vices that we provide for each customer, and that's what that account is worth."

Do you have to build a perfect "head start" plan? No way. What's important is to have a plan.

"Our budgeting process is not perfect but at least it's a plan; it's a path," adds Mike Russo, Russo Landscape, Windsor Locks, CT. "We work on it in November, which is a good time because we have the numbers for the first three quarters and it's time to begin making our sales projections for next year.

"The trick is to set up a system to keep all the information that you need reported to you in a streamlined manner. You don't want to have to reinvent the wheel every fall," he says.

Not everyone's plan will be exactly alike, but owners that consistently get off to a good start each spring have one thing in common — they plan early. **LMI**

Fast start checklist

- ▶ Fix equipment, spec new equipment
- ▶ Prep snow removal equipment
- ▶ Get jump on leave removal before snow hits
- ▶ Plant flowers now for spring events
- ▶ Fix irrigation systems
- ▶ Save certain plants from frost
- ▶ Complete composting if necessary so you can add it to beds
- ▶ Review job descriptions with focus on efficiency

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up the chains and checking out some new snow plows."

In general, winter's the ideal time to focus on all of your equipment to make sure it's ready for another year's worth of abuse.

"We look at what we're going to tear down and rebuild, and what we might auction off," Cochran says. "We also look at our equipment needs — what new machine we need to buy and what repair parts we need to order."



Ellen Newell

Newell of Utah State has a more specific goal with equipment. "We try to stay one season ahead," she says. "We order it in December so we have it ready in spring." This year,

she's bringing a co-worker with her to the Green Industry Conference to help her purchase new spraying equipment — and it's only November.

Nip it in the bud

Preparing for the coming season can also mean taking care of a problem before it gets too big. A classic example of that is Newell's battle with budget cuts last year. Figuring it could happen again, she and her crew took on additional landscape installation work to save her maintenance budget.

Diane Weiner, superintendent of horticulture and landscape at Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, NY, also has an eye on the future. She's reviewing all of her co-workers' job descriptions to find ways to do things more efficiently. How? By knowing who's willing to transition from part-time to full-time or vice versa, Weiner says. "That way, if we do have budget cuts, we can handle it. We can transition people from full-time to part-time or, if we have a windfall, we can hit the ground running."

Count on a drought

You can count on a drought rearing its ugly head almost every year now, so this offers a perfect opportunity for grounds managers to stay ahead of the game. "Water management has become crucial," Cochran says. "If you anticipate restrictions, sometimes you're better off postponing putting in expensive plants. It's about postponing projects or rethinking future ones."

Newell says she and her crew conduct repairs on their irrigation system even after the water has been drained out prior to winter. She was also recently named to Utah State's environmental task force, which will be targeting water management. "We're going to come out with guidelines for the environment, and a big part of that is plantscapes," she says. A new state-of-the-art irrigation system should help their endeavor.

Diane Weiner and her crew are busy replacing their irrigation system this fall.



Diane Weiner

"Before we blew out the lines and winterized them, we thought we'd take a

look at them first," she says. "We're looking at the entire drainage system to better utilize water coming off the mountain and out of dug wells." **LM**



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2012 People of

Wayne Richards

Landscape contracting



BY JASON STAHL /
MANAGING EDITOR

It's no surprise that Wayne Richards still holds clear memories of he and his grandfather, Paul, running their part-time gardening service in the early 1960s. That experience left an indelible mark on him that hasn't faded with age.

"He was hard on me, but fair," Richards says of his grandfather. "He knew how to praise me when I did something right."

Richards inherited his entrepreneurial spirit from both his father, who owned a service station, and his grandfather. These were men who "controlled their own destinies," Richards says, "and taught me that all I had to do was work hard to do the same."

After a brief attempt at college, Richards got his draft notice and joined the Navy to "see the world." After the Navy, he went back to school, taking night classes while working part-time. Eventually, he earned a degree in ornamental horticulture

with an emphasis in agricultural education from California State Polytechnic University.

After graduation, Richards was hired as an agricultural education teacher at Indio High School, Indio, CA. At the time, he had a young family, so he did landscaping jobs on weekends. When he was told there would be no summer employment at the school, he started his own landscape company.

He ran the company successfully for two years, but realized he and his wife didn't want to spend the rest of their lives in the Southern California desert. Through Cal Poly University, Richards heard about a job position with Cagwin & Dorward Landscape Contractors, Novato, CA.

At the time, Cagwin & Dorward, founded in 1955, was a landscape construction company with an emerging maintenance department headed by Dennis Dougherty. Richards and Dougherty hit it off, and Wayne was hired as an operations manager to help

Dennis grow the maintenance department. When Richards joined the division, annual sales were \$500,000 from three branch offices. Today, the maintenance department brings in \$18 million from 13 branches.

From his start at Cagwin & Dorward, Richards attended California Landscape Contractor Association conferences. In 1981, he went to his first Associated Landscape Contractors Association (ALCA) meeting.

That began 20 years of involvement with ALCA, including stints on its Board of Directors, Exterior Landscape Division (Chairman), Safety and Awards Committee (Chairman), and as a member of ALCA's Crystal Ball Committee. He currently participates in the association's mentor program.

Today, Richards is vice president/chief operating officer/part-owner of Cagwin & Dorward, which will earn \$23 million this year. He became a shareholder in 1981, and,

CAREER TIMELINE

1976 – Graduates from Cal Poly Pomona University

1976 – Hired as agricultural education teacher at Indio High School

1977 – Starts own landscape contracting company

1979 – Hired at Cagwin & Dorward Landscape Contractors as operations manager

1981 – Attends first ALCA conference

1982 – Becomes shareholder at Cagwin & Dorward

1988-89 – Gets involved in leadership of ALCA's exterior landscape board

along with partners Dennis Dougherty and Steve Glennon, eventually succeeded Tom Cagwin and Dave Dorward as owners.

Richards credits the special culture of the company that has been there since the beginning for its success. "You have to have a really trusting environment that lets people take chances, make mistakes, and treat those mistakes as learning experiences," he says.

the Year

Ellen Newell

Grounds management



BY JASON STAHL /
MANAGING EDITOR

When you listen to Ellen Newell's life story, you realize she was born to be a grounds manager.

Shortly after she learned to walk, she held one end of her father's saw as he cut down an apple tree. By nine years old, she was mowing neighbors' lawns. In her spare time, she'd work in her parents' vegetable garden or pick wild berries in the woods and make jam.

At six years old, she took a trip with her family to Williamsburg, VA, which only strengthened her love of nature. "That was a big influence on me," Newell says. "I loved the flowers, the maze of yew trees at the governor's place and the old boxwood gardens."

Originally, she wanted to be a farmer, and in high school she remembers "reading every agriculture book I could get a hold of." She chose to pursue her education at Utah State

University simply because she could take many agriculture and plant courses "without taking a bunch of other stuff."

During her summer breaks, she worked at a 634-acre vegetable farm in her native New Jersey. "It was hard work, but I enjoyed it," Newell says. "It strengthened my desire to do it as a living later."

Newell graduated from Utah State in 1976 with a B.S. in plant science. That same year, she was hired as an hourly employee of the Facilities Maintenance division. "I did everything — mowing, spraying, pruning," Newell recalls.

She still laughs about some of the memories from those days. One morning, the crew got called in to remove snow, but Newell's truck wouldn't start and she got there late. Once she arrived, the work was almost done, but still she grabbed a shovel and heaved a couple of mounds of snow out of the way. A newspaper photographer took her picture for the daily news.

"So I ended up making the newspaper, while all of the other guys who did all the work didn't," Newell says.

Good-natured teasing ensued, and the seeds of a strong relationship with her co-workers were planted. Today, 26 years later, that relationship is one of the keys to Newell's success as head of the crew, and it's kept her from feeling uncomfortable as a woman on a male-dominated crew.

At the urging of her former boss, Newell joined the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) in 1993. A year later, she and her crew earned a Grand award from the association for outstanding grounds management. Newell became a certified grounds manager (she was exempt from getting certified but thought she should set a good example for her crew), and eventually was appointed to PGMS's Executive Board to represent the far west coast.

"I enjoy going to the conferences and meeting people from

CAREER TIMELINE

1976 – Graduates cum laude from Utah State University with a B.S. in plant science

1976 – Hired as hourly employee of Utah State University's Facilities Maintenance division

1993 – Promoted to position of landscape manager at Utah State University

1993 – Attends first PGMS meeting

1999 – Elected to PGMS's Executive Board

2002 – Plans to run for treasurer of PGMS

all over the country," Newell says of her experience with PGMS. "It gives you a lot of inspiration and motivation."

Newell has ambitions of becoming president of PGMS one day. In the meantime, she's focusing on issues like water management, which, after four straight years of drought in the West, has become a big issue.

"We're taking our responsibility for water management very seriously," Newell says. "We need to make sure we are an example in how we use water and other resources."

02 People of the Year

Bill Hoopes

Lawn care



BY RON HALL /
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

But for the Beatles, the lawn care business and one of its most recognizable companies, Scotts LawnService, would look a lot different than they do today.

How? That's impossible to say, but certainly they wouldn't have the same energy or vitality. These qualities best describe a skilled and respected trainer whose efforts have touched thousands of industry professionals and who, in recent years, has emerged as one of its most dynamic leaders.

His name is William "Bill" Hoopes, and as a young man fresh out of Ohio Wesleyan University he was playing in a folk trio and making the circuit around Columbus, OH.

Then, the so-called British Invasion arrived.

"The Beatles killed us," he recalls. "All of a sudden, folk wasn't cool."

Folk trios aside, Hoopes' journey to professional lawn

care was a roundabout one despite growing up in the shadow of The Scotts Company in Marysville, OH.

After a brief stint selling aluminum, Hoopes joined Scotts' consumer lawn care business.

"The first thing they did at Scotts was put me in a training program called Scotts Training Institute," he explains. "I walked into the STI class and this guy gets up and goes through with his thing, and within five minutes I remember going, 'That's the job for me,' and I jumped up out of my chair and went straight to the main office, met with the vp of sales and said, 'Right company, wrong job.'"

Bill became manager of STI in 1981. The department trained major Scotts retailers at the headquarters and through one-day seminars around the U.S.

That job led to Hoopes being promoted to manager of Scotts Pro Turf Training Institute (PTI), handling the creation and technical training programs for golf course superintendents.

It wasn't until Hoopes joined Barefoot Grass, Worthington, OH, in 1985 that he became a full-fledged participant in the professional lawn service industry as director of training. He also had operational responsibility for the company's Texas region.

Barefoot became the nation's second largest lawn service company with annual sales of \$125 million before being purchased by TruGreen-ChemLawn in 1997. After spending a year with that organization, he returned to Scotts as Director of Training, Development and Regulatory Affairs for Scotts LawnService, which was just getting started.

Bill has been one of the most visible members of the Scotts LawnService management team, which has grown the operation to locations in 55 markets and 2002 sales of \$90 million.

Hoopes says many people with the organization are contributing to its success, but he says the successes within his own career are largely due to

CAREER TIMELINE

1973 – Hired as Scotts Northeast Ohio sales rep

1980 – Becomes manager of Scotts Professional Turf Institute

1985 – Hired as Director of Training for Barefoot Grass, Worthington, OH

1993-99 – Serves two three-year terms on the PLCAA Board of Directors

1997 – After the sale of Barefoot in 1996, becomes manager of regulatory affairs for the Consumer Services Division of Service-Master Corporation

1997 – Joins Scotts new Lawn Service as director of training, Development and Regulatory Affairs

1997-2000 – Chairman of the PLCAA Education and Conference committees

2000 – PLCAA vice president

2001 – PLCAA president elect

2002 – PLCAA president

one person — Debby, his wife of 24 years. "Debby deserves lots and lots of credit for keeping me propped up," says Bill.



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1-2-3 pond installation

Low-voltage pond kits can save you time and money by turning pond projects into one-day operations

BY JEFF MCGRADY

Water gardens add the perfect touch to any landscaping project. Creating that perfect touch can be tough to achieve for landscape professionals, but it doesn't have to be if you have the right tools.

Creating a water garden can be an easy one-day project if you use an integrated low-voltage pond kit that contains everything needed to create the pond. The time and money you save can be

used for other pond installation and landscaping projects.

With a low-voltage pond kit, you don't have to hire an electrician or obtain an electrical permit. You can install a low-voltage pond kit up to 50 ft. away from an existing GFCI outlet. Kits are available that run on a 12-volt power supply, using the same technology as low-voltage outdoor or pond lighting.

Five basic steps

There are five basic steps to installing a water garden:

1 Determine the pump size for the pond. Use the following formulas to determine the water capacity of your pond: for a circular pond, multiply the top diameter (in ft.) by the bottom diameter (in ft.) by the depth (in ft.) by 5.9. For a rectangular pond, multiply the length (in ft.) by the width (in ft.) by the depth (in ft.) by 7.5.

Example: You've dug a pond with a maximum length of 8 ft. and a maximum width of 5.5 ft. The maximum depth of the pond is 2 ft. You would use the rectangular pond formula to calculate water capacity in gallons: 8 ft. x 5.5 ft. x 2 ft. x 7.5 = 660 gallons.

Here's a minimum rule of thumb: The pump flow should be large enough to recirculate the pond water at least once every two hours. 660 gallons per hour divided by 2 equals 330 gallons per hour pump mini-

continued on page 42

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POND INSTALLATION

The low-voltage wire can be buried in mulch so the customer can focus on the beauty of the newly-installed pond.



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mum (use a 400 gph pond kit). Note: There are several other factors to consider when sizing a pond pump, including pond location and the amount of plants and fish in the water garden.

2 **Install the liner and fill the pond.** Once you've selected the pond kit and dug the hole, you can install the liner. Line the bottom of the pond with a layer of sand or underlayment to provide a protective surface for the liner. Carefully drape the liner across the pond, making sure it overlaps equally on all sides. Contour and smooth the liner to the inside edges and the bottom of the pond. Secure the edges, if necessary, with a weighted object to hold it in place.

As you fill the pond with water, pull the edges of the liner up and smooth out any creases around the inside walls of the pond. Try to minimize the amount of folds in the liner. Some folds are inevitable, but the less you have, the better off you'll be.

3 **Install the power pack and low-voltage controller.** If you're using a low-voltage pond kit, mount the 12 VAC power pack near a GFCI outdoor electric outlet. Place the controller next to the pond site. Route the low-voltage cable from the power pack to the controller. The low-voltage wire can be buried in mulch, rock or sod. The maximum distance between the power pack and the controller is 50 ft. Insert the two wires of the power pack cable into the terminals on the bottom of the controller and tighten with a screwdriver.

4 **Install the pump and the filter.** Place the control valve from the fountain kit onto the top outlet of the pump. Tighten the telescoping extender onto the control valve and attach the spray pattern head to the top of the extender.

Attach the 5/8-in. inlet tubing to the side of the control valve that will face the above-ground filter. Set the pump in the desired location of the pond. Route the tubing to the filter site. Insert and tighten the two wires from the end of the pump cord into the controller terminals.

Position the above-ground pond filter above the edge of the pond where you placed the inlet tubing from the pump. Secure the 5/8-in. tubing lightly onto the water inlet. Trim any excess tubing. Secure the 1 1/4-in. discharge tubing to the water outlet at the bottom of the filter body and extend the other end over the edge of the pond.

5 **Install the underwater lighting.** Set the supplied low-voltage light in the bottom of the pond or on one of the plant shelves. Weigh down the light base with rocks or pebbles to prevent it from tipping or floating. Insert the two wires from the end of the light cord into the controller terminals and tighten the screws.

Final preparations

Before stocking the pond with plants and fish, I recommend that you remove the chlorine from the water and allow the biological filter to mature. A complete pond kit should include chlorine and chloramine remover, along with measurement guidelines. The biological filter must operate three to four days after the pond is filled in order to build up the healthy bacteria needed to purify the pond water.

These are the basic elements for creating a water garden for your customer. It's simple, quick and economical, particularly if you use a low-voltage pond kit. Low-voltage wiring will also give your customer an added feature of safety, especially when they or young children are near the water garden. **LW**

— *The author is the marketing manager of Wayne Water Systems, Harrison, OH. He can be reached at 800/237-0987.*

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CIRCLE NO. 121

▶ Be ready for erosion rules



Knowing the new NPDES rules will eliminate hassles and open your eyes to new business opportunities in landscape construction

BY CINDY GRAHL

Stormwater runoff from construction sites is a detriment to America's water quality. It washes sediment into our bodies of water, along with chemicals and oil. This runoff also swells streams beyond capacity, eroding their banks and destroying plant life and animal habitats.

The problem is huge. The U.S. Department of Agriculture says we lose more than two billion tons of topsoil yearly due to erosion. Stormwater runoff

accounts for 80% of all U.S. water quality violations, and it costs the world \$400 billion yearly. The *CE News* reports that 20 to 150 tons of soil per acre are lost yearly because of runoff from construction sites alone.

As a way to reduce runoff and the resulting erosion, next March will see an extension of the National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) rules, which control sediment migration from construction sites. While Phase I of NPDES affected properties with ground disturbances of over five acres, Phase II regulates construction activities on lands of only one acre. This is approximately 97.5% of all acreage under development, according to the *CE News*.

Landscapers beware

General contractors will bear the brunt of these rules, needing NPDES permits for all sites larger than one acre and stormwater management plans completed before the first shovel of earth is turned.

But landscape professionals will also be affected by the law. Landscapers, says Grant Davis, executive director of the Bay Institute of San Francisco, Nevada, CA, are the second biggest users of water in many drought-ridden states, after farmers.

Despite this, awareness of erosion control and Phase II requirements among landscapers varies from region to region. Those on the East Coast are "light years ahead of the game," says Ed Stein, president of the International Erosion Control Association (IECA), due to already stringent regulations there. While those in the West are also coming on

strong with erosion control, he notes, Midwesterners and Southerners are just beginning their learning curves.

One Midwestern landscaper just entering that curve is Barry Morton of Morton's Landscape Development, Columbia Station, OH. NPDES Phase II means that how water is managed on a site must be determined and accounted for even before construction begins, he says, so "everyone is getting on the bandwagon for Phase II."

According to Roy Nelsen, manager of technical services at North American Green, Franklin, NC, although erosion control impacts construction engineers and developers most heavily, landscape contractors and designers are the ones who bring their knowledge of water use, ground covers, turfs and project aesthetics into the process.

Phase II of NPDES offers a huge opportunity for landscape contractors, agrees the Bay Institute's Davis, ushering in new business growth. "It will mean a huge increase in jobs for people skilled in working with native and drought-tolerant plants," he says. Indeed, he adds, it can even mean things like remediating parking lots to be "green" areas that reduce runoff.

Changes ahead

According to Jason Giles, director of development and an erosion control expert at Rexius/Express Blowers, Eugene, OR, Phase II will take some adjustment in how landscapers do business. "They were formerly called in at the end of a project to finish up with soil stabilizing and seeding," Giles says. "They will now be called in at the beginning, before grading even starts. A full-service landscape contractor should be involved in this paradigm shift."

IECA's Stein agrees that landscapers can no longer be relegated to the end of a project. Requirements for frequent stabilization, depending on slope, mean multiple visits by landscapers for seeding or mulching. And that increases staff time, material costs and paperwork. Not only that, he says, but landscape designers must get used to the idea that "their ideas will no longer be rubber stamped as approved."

A new role for compost

One of the by-products of Phase II will be a new respect for compost as a way to reduce erosion, says Rod Tyler, owner of Green Horizons, Grafton, OH. He notes that compost products hold moisture, release nutrients slowly, bind or remove pollutants, shield soil from rain and allow coverage of seed if seeding is being used for vegetation.

Erosion control products using compost, such as socks, berms and blankets, Tyler says, will become popular because compost is always available locally and the products are efficient. They're all-organic and allow for filtration, and they can be reused and run over by equipment. In addition, says Tyler, there's a favorable cost differential.

Less cost

According to Jason Giles, director of development and erosion control expert at Rexius/Express Blowers, Eugene, OR, the use of compost creates a sustainable loop with erosion control as a large part of it. "You can get long-term benefits and pay for them only once, while you eliminate synthetic products that don't do as well," he says.

The U.S. Composting Council notes that compost applications cost about a third of what synthetic blankets do, and composting solutions halved the cost of one streambank restoration over the cost of hard solutions.

Using compost to help establish vegetation with seeds is known as tereseeding. Not only can this practice be used on slopes, it, unlike hydroseeding, has been shown to extend the growing season by holding the heat in the soil longer and offering a longer seeding opportunity than straw.

Blow it in

Compost that fills the filter berms and socks for pond or stream bank renovation is blown in with blower trucks. Landscapers, says Tyler, can save money in the long run with the new small blowers as they can free up from three to five workers on an average mulch installation and deliver many products efficiently.

Blower hoses offer easier access to a site and have a minimum impact on surrounding plants, compared to the heavy equipment needed for retaining walls or rip rap. Blowers can also work vertically, allowing for rooftop work for planters or even green roofs.

Barry Morton is one of many landscapers gearing up for the changes brought by Phase II by buying a new blower truck for creating compost berms and filter socks. This fall, he tested the equipment on a project for a nearby municipality.

Jim Daulton, assistant vice president of American Civil Contractors, Littleton, CO, agrees that Phase II will change things. Since general contractors can only open an acre or two at a time, he says, "surprisingly large amounts of mulch will be needed, so unit costs go up. Thus, contractors must really know what they're doing to submit realistic bids based on knowledge of erosion control costs so that all players are playing on an even field."

The new law, adds Giles, means landscapers must become proactive, refocusing on their timing — "selling at the front end and during bidding, and blending what they do at the back end of a project with what needs to be done up front."

According to Giles, erosion control is be-

coming ever more technical, with "standards getting higher, practices more sophisticated, monitoring more prevalent and thorough, and quality more of an issue. Landscapers will have to raise the bar to come in as experts," he says, knowing "not only best practices but also the cost-effective ones, so bids reflect the reality of the marketplace."

Best management practices

In erosion control, best practices are key. Because landscape contractors need to keep control of a project during the active phase of construction, according to North American Green's Nelsen, they must expand their use of erosion control techniques on-site. Fortunately, the tools and techniques for erosion control under Phase II, called



Landscape pros will have to expand their erosion control techniques on-site.

Best Management Practices (BMPs), exist, and they're many and varied.

The requirements for BMPs needed begin with the EPA setting rules that are then delegated to the states to enforce, with oversight moving down to the county and municipal level. Goals to be met by the municipalities include controlling both construction site and post-construction runoff. It's a hodgepodge of regs, says Giles, with protocols on what's

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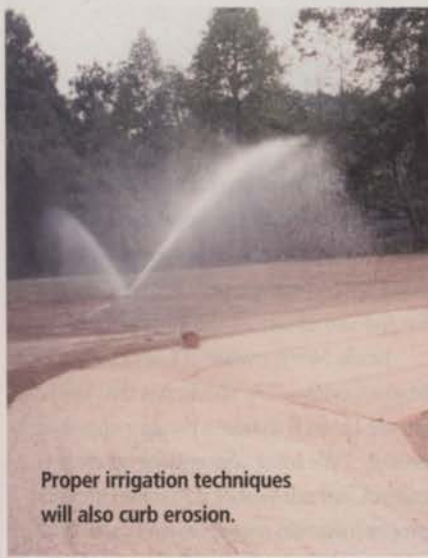
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Proper irrigation techniques will also curb erosion.

acceptable varying from watershed to watershed.

"There is beaucoup room for interpretation," adds Tom Master, president of Wolbert & Master, Edgewood, MD. He notes that states and counties will have varying requirements, with a possibility that the feds will trump them all. Plus, he adds, "you're dealing with sediment guys, stormwater guys, nutrient guys," all with different agendas.

The BMPs most important to landscapers are structural BMPs, including such things as wetlands creation and rain gardens, infiltration BMPs such as trenches, and treatment controls such as filtration devices. Regulated municipalities can develop their own lists of BMPs to be used, and databases of BMPs are meant to guide those in regulated industries. Thus, the implementation of NPDES Phase II is more flexible than was that of Phase I.

Be aware that many BMPs are products used to control sediment migration. These vary from "soft" to "hard," depending on the water force they must withstand. One end of the spectrum begins with straw bales, coconut fiber and hydraulic mulches, and then includes rolled erosion control

products, blankets, berms and socks, geotextiles, and permanent turf reinforcement mats, finishing with harder controls such as concrete embankments or rip rap.

Choosing the right BMP

Part of choosing the right BMP for the job is factoring in its overall costs, and many of the new BMP strategies can save money on

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a project. For instance, the number of plantings on a site can be reduced by balancing the spacing of plantings with the right erosion control products.

Rod Tyler, owner of Green Horizons, Grafton, OH, says that preventing erosion by keeping soil in place with such products is 90% to 95% effective, while sediment control after the earth has begun moving is about half as effective.

Davis advises landscape contractors to build the use of BMPs into a project from the start, including the use of the right plantings and minimal water use as well as actual products. He praises the flexibility in Phase II that lets contractors choose from a large range of such strategies. This flexibility, he says, makes use of the most appro-

priate responses for a particular site, "to let the industry deliver better results and keep things on a voluntary basis, avoiding increased regulation down the road that could sledgehammer in solutions that might be less efficient."

Take advantage of vegetation

One erosion control area where landscapers can shine is in the use of vegetation for erosion control. Vegetation is key, says Nelsen, because "people want green," and vegetation is what landscapers provide.

Vegetation, including turfgrasses and spreading and ornamental ground covers, reduces soil detachment and migration, as well as the amount of water leaving a site, in addition to slowing water velocity when



used as a channel liner. However, soil must be protected until the vegetation is established, which can take between two to five years with certain ground covers, calling for the use of one of the BMPs above.

Linda Novy, owner of Gardener's Guild, Marin County, CA, also hopes that landscapers use Phase II to take a broader approach to erosion. "We must concentrate on erosion control, but remember that it also includes proper irrigation management practices to prevent overwatering, which wastes both sediment and nutrients in the soil," she says.



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At left, soil is protected until the turfgrass grows in. Here, the turfgrass is an effective erosion control device.

And when using vegetation to control erosion, Novy advises, consider using indigenous plants and drought resistant plants that demand less water. Finally, she concludes, educate customers about erosion control and explain why you do what you do, realizing that your activities impact an entire ecosystem.

Hit the books

Landscapers facing Phase II requirements have a number of ways to learn more about erosion control. IECA's Stein says that the group, made up of engineers, regulators and others, has workshops around the country that have been well-received, as well as distance learning opportunities covering erosion control from the basics on up. See their Web site at www.ieca.org for more information.

The Bay Institute's Davis suggests working with local regulatory bodies and associations. He works closely with Linda Novy, who also recommends government resources such as a county wetland biologist with whom she confers about wetland plants.

Daulton notes that his company, American Civil Contractors, has 39 erosion control specialists certified with IECA who work closely with the Colorado Contractors Association and with the state department of transportation. DOTs are a good source for any contractor wanting to learn more about stormwater control, adds Giles.

Another useful Web site for learning includes the EPA's NPDES site at www.epa.gov/npdes/menuofbmps. It includes lists of BMPs for stormwater management under Phase II as well as more

general information that will answer any question relating to NPDES.

Landscapers must realize that NPDES Phase II is on its way, so those at the begin-

ning of the learning curve had best begin learning. "The talking is over," says Daulton. "This year, we will begin living with the impacts of Phase II." **LM**

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Sustainable landscaping's success

Gardeners' Guild partners with a major industrial client in an ambitious program of resource management

BY DR. FERNANDO AGUDELO-SILVA
AND LINDA NOVY

In 1996, Gardeners' Guild began its landscape management program at Agilent Technologies (formerly Hewlett-Packard) in Sonoma County, CA. The company's two major Sonoma County campuses, the Fountain Grove site in Santa Rosa and a facility in Rohnert Park consist of approximately 70 acres of ornamental landscape, sports fields and less disturbed areas like wetlands, oak woodlands and open areas of mixed exotics. Bordered by agricultural lands with suburban interface, the campuses present wide expanses of land with buildings situated to blend into the natural setting.

A third campus in Sonoma County

was brought on during late 2001; all three campuses have been part of the Gardeners' Guild and Agilent Technologies' Sustainable Landscape Program. This article, however, will focus on the challenges and accomplishments of the Rohnert Park site.

Back in the day

In 1996, this site included 15 acres of turf and sports fields, 10 acres of ornamental landscape, several large areas with invasive perennial weeds and exotic vegetation, and a five-acre wetland refuge. The landscape presented a formal appearance with its large expanses of turf and traditional presentation and selection of trees, shrubs and ground cover.

continued on page 56





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continued from page 54

The site was designed as an electronic manufacturing plant in 1984, and 15 acres of turf were selected for the landscape design with a purpose: to bio-filter the anticipated reclaimed water generated by the plant. This need was eliminated when a different application for the plant was chosen midway through construction. This required Agilent Technologies to purchase water from Rohnert Park to irrigate their landscape vs. generating much of its own landscape water from plant operations.

Rohnert Park at that time couldn't meet the water needs of Agilent Technologies, which was then forced to dig a well to supplement its water supply. As the drought of the 1980s progressed, the aquifer supplying water to Agilent Technologies' well dried up, and the company then purchased water from the city. Later, as Rohnert Park moved to recycled water, this water supply was provided to Agilent, which now uses approximately 130 acre ft. of recycled water annually on its landscape.

No stranger to efficiency

Agilent Technologies was no stranger to the concept of resource efficiency. In the early 90s, Agilent initiated a program with its landscape maintenance firm and a team from the University of California to study the effects of naturalizing red fescue in some areas. The result of the study established that red fescue berms, when not mowed, provided valuable, less disturbed habitats and were aesthetically pleasing. In addition, considerable labor and fuel resources were saved by no longer maintaining the berms as manicured areas.

In 1996, there was a clear opportunity for Gardeners' Guild and Agilent Technologies to combine landscape beauty and functionality with the appropriate use of resources. This landscape management approach incorporates ecological guidelines,

VEGETATION COMPARISON TABLE

Plant cover	1996 sq. ft.	2002 sq. ft.	% change
Turf	717,570	583,448	-19
Ivy	88,822	17,768	-80
Tall fescue	582,496	379,237	-35
Hypericum	16,192	774	-95
Pepper trees	30,000	0	-100
Eucalyptus trees	236,250	0	-100
Willow trees	10,800	0	-100
Strawberries	2,796	1,803	-36
Butterfly garden	0	8,163	100
Boston ivy	10,000	5,000	-50
Rosemary & grasses	0	250,000	100
Pyrus trees	2,000	0	-100
Honey locust	16	0	-100
Undeveloped	4,819,666	4,420,693	-8

efficient use of resources and economic considerations.

But this kind of resource-efficient approach needs to be a gradual process. It requires cooperation and partnership among all interested parties — horticulturalists knowledgeable in sustainable landscape design and management techniques, and property owners who understand the economic, environmental and social roles of the property. The landscape management program at Agilent Technologies' plant in Rohnert Park is a real life example of this process.

Traditional maintenance

A traditional maintenance plan for this landscape had been in place since the 1980s. This plan included application of pesticides at fixed intervals for weeds, disease and insect control (calendar spraying), ample use of highly synthetic fertilizers, and intense grass mowing. Green clippings were being managed with a more progressive program: They were stored on a designated portion of the property and periodically relocated and disked into fallow land areas, or chipped and used on open space areas.

By contrast, Gardeners' Guild envisioned a program that emphasized restoration of habitat and a more directed and efficient use of resources. Shortly after beginning its landscape maintenance work, the Guild asked FAS Technologies, a company dedicated to ecological design principles, to help develop a formal "sustainable landscape management" (SLM) program for consideration by Agilent Technologies. This program included a definition of this sustainable approach, an assessment of the sites, and a method of measuring inputs and outputs.

FAS Technologies explained the ecological methodology that includes energy flow analysis as a measure of sustainability. The company recommended that an appropriate method for evaluating the maintenance program, from a sustainability point of view, would be to include an estimation of the energy used in the program based on ecological methodology. This methodology would include determination of the energy demand (measured as calories or Joules) by the various plant communities in the landscape.

continued on page 58

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Agilent Technologies Facilities Management embraced this approach and quickly adopted the concept that sustainable man-

agement would protect and enhance the natural assets of the property.

FAS Technologies continued to serve as the technical sustainability advisor to Gar-

deners' Guild and to assist in defining and shaping goals for the program. The initial agreement with Agilent Technologies included guidelines that would measure the maintenance program's costs and results in terms of efficiency, resource use and environmental benefits. It was agreed that the management plan would be modified according to the following criteria: Vegetation that demanded less calorie input for maintenance would be replaced by vegetation that demanded less calorie input, including native plants. In addition, vegetation management in less disturbed natural areas would be improved. Other ecologically-based management principles would also be included, such as Integrated Pest Management (IPM), water management, resource reuse and the measurement of all resources used for landscape maintenance.

The efficiency of the maintenance program would be assessed yearly, based on the amount of resources used, as well as the amount of resources recycled and recaptured back into the landscape system. It was also agreed that FAS Technologies would eventually evaluate the ecological performance of the landscape program based on energy flow.

Let's go sustainable

The Agilent Technologies Facilities Management Department was interested in moving in this sustainable direction. The company has a deep sense of environmental stewardship, and the SLM fit their ISO 9000 model as well as their inherent green business philosophy.

Company employees also take a vital interest in the environment (in particular, many had concerns about pesticide use). They were kept apprised of the SLM through "Brown Bag Lunch" talks so that they could support their company's investment in the program. In addition, Gardeners' Guild regularly reported to the Faci-

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ties Management Department, measuring its progress against the mutually established goals.

The Gardeners' Guild operations team was aware that its management contract with Agilent Technologies was priced competitively and that implementing the new sustainable landscape management plan would require additional funds.

Therefore, to realize the long-term partnership they wanted with Agilent, a strategy was needed to implement capital projects that would move the program toward maintenance efficiencies and a reduction of labor and materials input over time.

For instance, the Guild team recognized that many of the traditional practices in place at the Rohnert Park site, like

the calendar spraying for insects and diseases, could be phased out, thus immediately reducing these costs. Further savings could be realized by monitoring operational inputs into the project, which would inform the program which resource demands could first be modified to yield the greatest savings.

Strategies prove effective

Since the plan was initiated in 1996, these strategies have proven effective. Gardeners' Guild and Agilent Technologies are realizing a stabilization of maintenance costs and capital inputs. The specific changes made in the landscape include:

► **Reducing or eliminating excessive maintenance tasks.** For example, by remov-

ing lawns under redwood trees and allowing this area to look more like areas under canopies of redwood forests in nature, the task of removing redwood duff from lawns is no longer needed.

► **Replacing high-maintenance plants** such as ivy, hypericum and large lawn areas with plants that use fewer resources, such as ceanothus, carpenteria, ornamental and native grasses, and rosemary.

► **Transforming small strips of turf with large trees and parking lot islands** into pleasing and loose arrangements of ornamental and native grasses, and mediterranean plants.

► **Reducing the amount of organic material removed from the landscape** through grasscycling. This practice has also signifi-

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cantly reduced the amount of fertilizers used on the turf.

► **Chipping removed vegetation** and using the chips for weed control in ornamental beds. This has been so successful that virtually no new mulch has been imported to the property except to the newly installed landscape area.

► **Lowering water demand by reducing the amount of turf** and improving irrigation management, and, in selected natural areas, turning off irrigation. The indigenous plants in these areas prefer little irrigation.

Herbicide reduction

The sustainable plan called for a reduction in the use of herbicides. However, the transition from densely planted ivy and hy-

RESOURCE COMPARISON TABLE

Site inputs	1997	2001	% Change
Herbicides	6,643 oz.	11,010 oz.	*65% increase
Insecticides	89 oz.	64 oz.	39% decrease
Mulched areas	275,000 sq. ft.	600,000 sq. ft.	118% increase
Fertilizer 21-7-14	1,274 lbs.	500 lbs.	61% decrease
Water (AF)	133	130	2% decrease

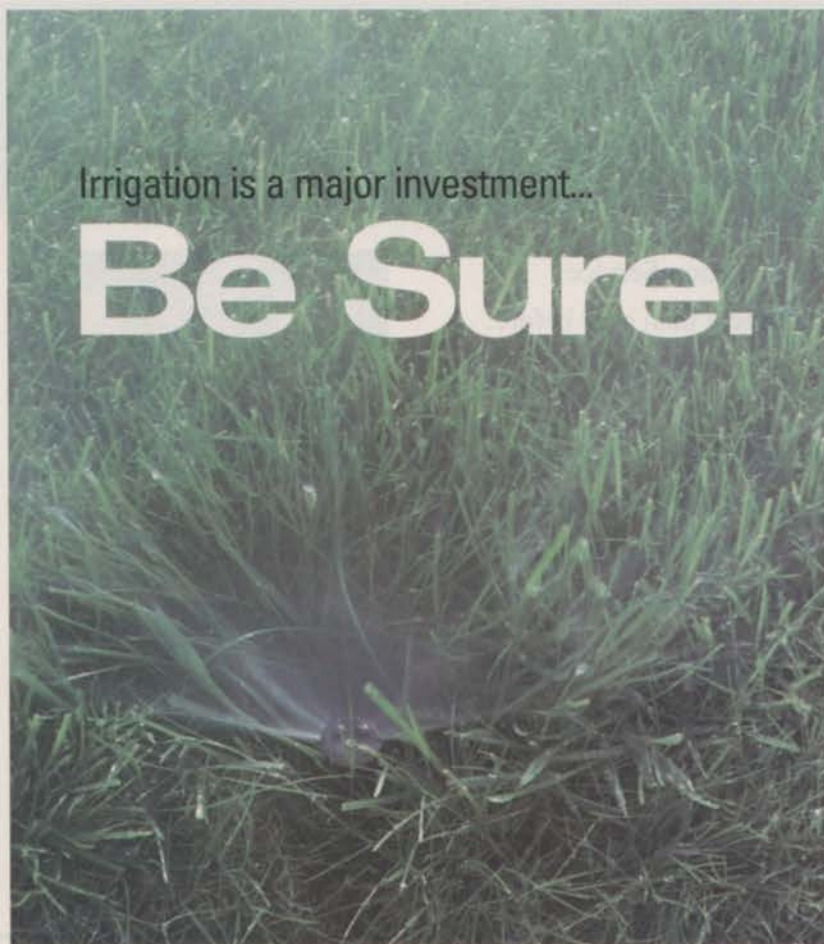
**65% increase is due to intensive scotch broom control and pre-emergent herbicide application in transitioning areas*

pericum beds to new plantings with shrubs and trees and no ground cover presented a challenge to this plan. After trial and error, a weed barrier fabric was introduced to use with the mulch, as the new plantings became established and weed seeds became less viable. Rosemary and pennisetum occupy an area that once was turf.

Pesticide use was reduced over the six-year period. Management approaches, in-

cluding beneficial insect releases (primarily green lacewings), were successful, and when these methods weren't appropriate, ecologically sensitive "soft" insecticides such as soaps and oils were employed.

Comparable success hasn't been achieved in herbicide reduction, although the use of weed barrier fabric with mulch and management of surrounding natural areas is reducing some of the weed pressure.



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The demand for synthetic fertilizers was reduced by recognizing that the nutrient load in the recycled water and the incorporation of grasscycling to turf areas were maintaining healthy plant growth and good color in the turf. Throughout the site, no additional fertilizer is used in the ornamental beds and only a small amount was used on the sports fields, resulting in significant savings in maintenance costs and reducing potential impacts on ground water.

For a new 10-acre area, which in 2000 was converted from fallow land to parking lots and landscaping, Gardeners' Guild asked Environmental Technical Services of Petaluma, CA to recommend improvements to the adobe soil. This recommendation has served as a guideline for other

planting areas. Sustane organic fertilizer, a 4-6-4 blend, is utilized in color containers.

Reducing the need to import mulch was supported by the team's efforts to remove dangerous and non-desirable tree species. These trees, mainly non-native Eucalyptus, willows and honey locust, were removed because of their potential for dangerous limb breakage, sidewalk upheaval and excessive debris. All the tree cuttings were chipped, and this mulch was used extensively throughout the grounds. This strategic step served many purposes: It suppressed weeds, improved water retention, dressed up the appearance of many beds and eliminated the need to purchase mulch or dispose of the cuttings.

Conservation of the site's wetlands area

has been emphasized. The five-acre seasonal wetland has weed pressure from the surrounding open areas. Yellow star thistle, the primary weed, was treated in 1997 with a release of hairy weevil as a biological control. Some measure of success was achieved, and the population is now considered minor. In addition, scotch and french broom are now removed by hand.

An integrated water management plan has resulted in the reduction of water use, even though the actual planted area increased by 10 acres. This was achieved primarily through hardware upgrades, increased clock programming frequency and the changes in plant palette. **LM**

— The authors are with FAS Technologies and Gardeners' Guild, respectively.

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Getting back to

nature

BY DEBBIE CLAYTON

Michigan State University (MSU) is often lauded for having the top turfgrass science program in the United States. Yet, until recently, MSU's Big Ten football team played on artificial turf. The synthetic playing surface was installed in 1968 when the university ripped out its natural grass field to make the stadium suitable for concerts, band camps, field hockey and other special events.

"They wanted a multi-use stadium, and natural grass just doesn't allow for as much traffic," says Mark Collins, MSU turf farm manager. "We have the best turfgrass program in the world, but our football played on artificial turf. It always seemed odd to me."

Real grass...again

When the MSU Spartan football team hit the gridiron this fall, they played on real grass

for the first time in 34 years. As Collins is quick to point out, this is no ordinary grass. The MSU field is constructed of 46-in. square trays designed to snap together for quick installation and quick removal.

"The university has been talking about real grass for a long time, but they weren't quite ready to give up the flexibility that artificial turf allows," Collins says. "When we told them we had a method that would allow them to remove the field if necessary, it raised a few eyebrows."

Dr. Trey Rogers, an MSU researcher specializing in turf establishment and management, perfected the moveable

► Workers used forklifts and flatbed wagons to move the turf from the nursery two miles south of the campus to the stadium. While the first installation took nearly a week, the field can be removed and replaced in 48 hours if necessary.

Strong roots and innovative thinking bring natural grass back to Spartan Stadium

natural grass method. He helped create a similar removable surface for the 1994 World Cup Soccer games played in the Pontiac Silverdome — an indoor venue that did not allow for a permanent grass field. "World Cup officials

demand that all games be played on natural grass," Rogers explains. "We told them we could do it in a domed stadium for one-time use. And we did."

MSU officials thought that a removable field sounded like a good idea. "The trick is getting





▲ Each tray was meticulously placed and tamped down for a seamless installation. "You can't tell where one tray ends and another begins," Rogers says.

◀ Dr. Trey Rogers, right, admires the natural grass with MSU head football coach Bobby Williams. "This isn't just any old grass," Williams says. "This is the best they make."



the grass off to a good start so it can be moved and still take the wear and tear of weekly football games," Rogers says.

A good start

Turf for the field was grown at the MSU nursery, two miles from its final destination in Spartan Stadium. According to Collins, a lot of thought went into making sure a mature field could be put in place in time for the 2002 season. "Other fields are sod, but we started from seed," Collins explains. "We had to make sure the grass got off to a good start."

Collins' crew of 30 students and 20 staff members started by layering 6,000 trays with gravel, followed by a sand-based soil medium to ensure

the field would drain quickly once in place. Then, the team added nine varieties of bluegrass seed in a fertilizer mixture designed to establish a strong root system.

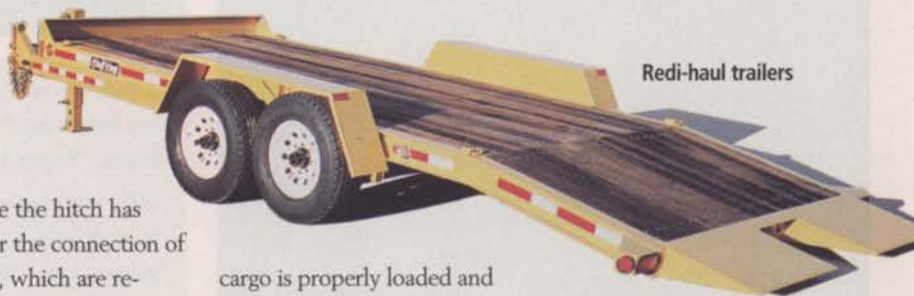
To ensure a strong base, Collins gave the grass a substantial dose of nitrogen every three weeks during the initial growing phase. "We used Nitroform, a slow-release product that ensured the roots got nitrogen when they needed it," he says. Nitroform has a 1:1 ratio of nitrogen to carbon. Microorganisms break down the nitrogen in Nitroform, leaving carbon behind as a food source for microbes. The result is a healthier microorganism population, which promotes root growth and prevents nitrogen tie-up.

Collins' attention to detail paid off. The roots quickly grew all the way down to the gravel layer at the bottom four inches of the 12-inch deep boxes. "Good root establishment will keep the field from tearing up when it's played on," Collins says. "A poor root system not only looks bad, it's unsafe for players."

MSU head football coach Bobby Williams is so enamored with the new field that he's used it as a recruiting tool for two years. "We've been telling players that they will end their college career on real grass," he says. "And it makes a difference. This seems to be a win-win situation: The university gets to keep their multi-use ideas, and we get to play on natural grass." **LJM**

Get hitched to a new trailer

BY CURT HARLER /
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR



Redi-haul trailers

The trailer towing industry has a classification system that differentiates hitches according to the amount of weight they can tow. This system addresses tongue weight and total weight. Within each classification are numerous hitches. The three most common types of hitches are:

- ▶ the weight-carrying hitch,
- ▶ the weight-distributing (or load equalizer) hitch, and
- ▶ the fifth-wheel hitch, or gooseneck.

Weight-carrying hitches are designed to carry the trailer's total tongue weight. Weight-distributing hitches are used with a receiver hitch and special parts that distribute the tongue weight among all tow vehicle and trailer axles. Fifth-wheel hitches are designed for mounting the trailer connection point in the middle of the truck bed.

Make sure the hitch has provisions for the connection of safety chains, which are required by most states. When connected, safety chains should have some slack to permit sharp turns but shouldn't drag on the road. In addition, they should cross under the trailer tongue to prevent it from dropping to the road if the trailer separates from the tow vehicle.

Level and steady

The trailers made today are good products. But they have their limits — weight limits, that is. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), two of the best ways to ensure your trailer is safe is to keep the load within the manufacturer's guidelines and to distribute the load properly on the trailer.

The driver's ability to handle and control a landscape trailer and the tow vehicle is greatly improved when the

cargo is properly loaded and distributed. Be sure to:

- ▶ Balance weight from side to side
- ▶ Distribute cargo weight evenly along the length of the trailer
- ▶ Secure and brace all items to prevent moving during travel
- ▶ Adjust the height of the tow vehicle/trailer interface
- ▶ Apply load leveling (weight distributing hitch bars)

Most trailers and tow vehicles should be level during travel, NHTSA engineers state. Check the instructions from the trailer manufacturer to make sure your workers have the correct setup for the combination of vehicles that you own.

continued on page 66

Keep those tires rollin'

The tires on any landscape trailer should all be the same type, size and construction.

Whatever you do, don't mix bias-belted and radial tires. In selecting tires for your trailer, buy the size, type and load range found on the trailer's certification label or in the owner's manual. Keep in mind that tires have a load rating that indicates the amount of weight they can carry safely.

As with the pickup you use as a tow vehicle, always maintain proper tire pressure and replace worn tires. In this case, the truck's tires may need more attention than the trailer's. Frequently, a tow vehicle's tires require a higher tire pressure for towing any load, especially heavy ones.

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Circle No. 130

LM-01

continued from page 64

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 - Fits 1971-2002 Ford F-250 and F-350 Super Duty trucks
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GREEN TOUCH INDUSTRIES

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www.green-touch.com

- TB052 enclosed trailer hand tool rack
 - Secures up to five hand tools, one line trimmer
 - Locks tools in place with flat pin
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LAND PRIDE

785/820-8692

SALINA, KS

www.landpride.com

- Skid-steer hitch allows operation of Cat 1 or 2 non-pto implements with skid-steer loader
 - SH35 fits variety of Land Pride products
 - Adjustable top hook, auto-lock on lower three-pt.
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TUALATIN, OR

www.shindaiwa.com

- M230 multi-purpose tool carrier and power source saves space
 - Features quick-change attachments, easy disassembly
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POWER HOUSE

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402/371-2294

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mrktg@biljax.com

- Escalate equipment trailer features drop deck design
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 - Handles payloads up to 7,000 lbs.
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- C-2500 dump trailer
 - Hauls, dumps, spreads loads
 - 12-ft. bed, 6-ft. 6-in. width, GVW 10,000 lbs.
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www.csturfequip.com

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 - Open top containers available in 10- or 15-cu. yd. sizes
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BURNSVILLE, MN

www.northerntool.com

- BYO (build your own) trailer with plans from Northern Tool
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- Model DT-6000E is 6000-lb. aluminum tilt-bed trailer
 - 2-in. ball coupler, two 36-in. zinc safety chains
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PISCATAWAY, NJ

www.rackemmfgr.com

■ All sorts of racks available for landscape trailers

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Circle #287

TRITON TRAILERS

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www.tritontrailers.com

■ Front rail kit standard on

AUT8, AUT10 aluminum trailers

■ Optional side kit bolts onto trailer

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events

WHAT, WHEN & WHERE

November

12-14 Turf and Grounds Exposition / Syracuse, NY; 800/873-8873

13-14 Turf & Ornamental Seminar / West Lafayette, IN; Sponsored by the Midwest Regional Turf Foundation; 765/494-8039

13-17 Green Industry Expo / Nashville, TN; 800/395-2522

20-23 CLCA Convention / Waikiki, HI; Sponsored by the

California Landscape Contractors Association; 916/830-2780; www.clca.org

December

3-5 OLA Short Course - Advanced Landscape Drawing / Hudson, OH; Sponsored by the Ohio Landscapers Association; 440/717-0004

6-7 The Great Southern Tree Conference / Gainesville, FL; 800/375-3642

9-12 Ohio Turfgrass Foundation Conference & Show / Columbus, OH; 888/683-3445

10-12 New Jersey Turfgrass & Landscape Expo / Atlantic City, NJ; 856/853-5973

10-13 Georgia Turfgrass Conference & Show / Duluth, GA; 800/687-6949; www.turfgrass.org

11 Turfgrass and Landscape Institute & Trade Show / Buena Park, CA; Co-sponsored by

the Southern California Turfgrass Council and the University of California Cooperative Extension Program; 800/500-7282

11-13 Grow & Mow Expo / Duluth, GA; Sponsored by the Georgia Turfgrass Association; 706/335-6817

January 2003

6-10 Cornell Turfgrass Management Short Course / Ithaca, NY; 607/255-1792; www.nysta.org

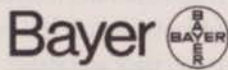
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The screenshot shows the website interface for TurfGrass Trends. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like Home, Search, and Register. Below that, the main content area features a featured article titled "Bioscience Paves the Way for Alternative to the Future" by the University of Georgia. The article discusses the use of bioscience in turfgrass management. To the right of the article, there are logos for sponsors like Bayer, Andersons, Scotts, and Jacobson. At the bottom of the screenshot, there are more navigation options and a search bar.

www.TurfGrassTrends.com

To lime or not to lime

Knowing the ins and outs of liming can lead to greater vigor and health of your customers' lawns

BY SCOTT ANDERSON

There's a common misconception that more nutrients and lime are necessary to maintain a high quality lawn. That, of course, isn't always true. The decision of whether to apply lime ultimately comes down to understanding why lime is applied, determining if it's needed and, finally, how to apply it. Applying too much lime will waste your time and your client's money, not to mention create an excessively high soil pH.

Why you apply lime

You apply lime to increase a soil's pH as well as supply calcium and magnesium. Soil pH, a measure of the soil's acidity or alkalinity, governs the availability of many



Apply lime to increase a soil's pH.

soil nutrients and can directly influence the vigor and quality of turf. When the pH is below 7.0, the soil is said to be acidic; when above 7.0, it's alkaline. For cool-season turfgrasses, a soil pH of between 6.0 and 6.5 (slightly acidic) is ideal.

Several factors are responsible for the formation of acidic soil conditions:

- ▶ **The leaching of base nutrients** such as calcium, magnesium and potassium from the soil. This occurs more frequently in areas of heavy rainfall or on heavily irrigated turfs.

- ▶ **The use of acidifying nitrogen fertilizers.** Most lawn fertilizers can cause acidic conditions. However, the extent to which fertilizer application will affect soil pH is dependent on a number of factors, including: nitrogen type applied, amount used, other nutrient types present in the fertilizer, soil type and irrigation frequency.

- ▶ **Decomposition of soil organic matter.**

- ▶ **Irrigation with acidic water.** When the soil pH drops below 6.0, a number of nutrients necessary for proper growth become less available to the turfgrass.

These include the following: nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, sulfur, calcium, magnesium and molybdenum. As these nutrients become less available, the lawn's color, vigor and ability to resist (or recover from) heat, drought or traffic stress will be reduced. Applications of lime to neutralize the acidic condition and raise the soil pH above 6.0 can increase the availability of these nutrients,

making it easier to maintain the quality and vigor of the lawn.

Be aware that an excessively high (alkaline) soil pH (greater than 8.0) is just as undesirable as a low pH. When the pH exceeds 8.0, nutrients such as nitrogen, phosphorus, iron, manganese, boron, copper and zinc become less available for use by the turfgrass. The result may be a less vigorous, unhealthy lawn. Over-application of liming products may cause the development of alkaline soil conditions.

Test that soil

The only way to determine whether or not liming is needed, and how much lime to apply, is through the results of a soil test. A soil test kit or pH probe to test soil pH may indicate the need for liming. However, these simple tests don't indicate how much lime is needed to correct the acidic condition. Individual soils can differ greatly in the amount of lime required to raise the pH to some specified level between 6.0 and 7.0.

The soil test reports will indicate the lime requirement in pounds of pure calcium carbonate per 1,000 sq. ft. Since the liming product you use isn't likely to be pure calcium carbonate, you'll have to calculate how much product to apply to your lawn. To do this, first find the number on the bag label which is called the calcium carbonate equivalent — it will be stated as a percentage. Next, find the liming requirement stated in the soil test report. Using these two numbers, perform the following calculation: $100 \times \text{lbs. CaCO}_3$ (from soil test) / $\% \text{ CaCO}_3$ of the liming product = amount of product per 1,000 sq. ft.

If this amount exceeds the values in the table above, the amount recommended for your lawn should be divided in half and applied at two different times during the year.

Apply lime only when soil testing indicates that it's needed. Don't make yearly

LIMING MATERIALS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Material	CaCO ₃ equivalent ¹	Rate of pH change	Maximum recommended application rates ²	Other comments
Burned lime	180	Fast	10	Hazardous, difficult to apply
Dolomitic limestone	70-95	Slow	50	Also a source of magnesium
Ground limestone	70-95	Slow	50	none
Hydrated lime	140	Fast	20	Hazardous, difficult to apply
Pelletized	70-95	Fast	50	Easy to apply; more expensive than other sources

¹ These are approximate values and will vary with the purity of the individual product.
² Maximum rate in pounds of product/1,000 square feet. Multiply by 44 for rate in pounds/acre.

lime applications without conducting a soil test because alkaline (high pH) conditions may develop.

You can apply lime any time during the year except when the turf is wilted or frost-covered. Irrigate the turf after the application to wash any lime off of the turfgrass leaves.

All liming materials aren't the same (see table). They can differ in price, safety, ease of application, calcium carbonate equivalent and rate at which they work. Note that gypsum (calcium sulfate) isn't included in this table. Gypsum will change soil pH very little, if at all, and should never be considered as a liming material. **LM**

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Circle 131

Switching colors

It was a re-occurring problem at For Shore Weed Control, a Waretown, NJ business with 10 full-time employees and 7,000 clients, the majority of them in affluent neighborhoods with waterfront properties.

The problem: scary white coveralls

When applicators had jobs that required the use of protective coveralls, residents would call business owner Mike Matthews to ask what his employees were doing and what chemicals they were spraying. According to Matthews, who has been in business for 18 years, the site of someone wearing a white suit similar to the one worn by a hazardous materials worker was scaring people.

"About 50% of the time, if we have to suit up in white, we might get a call from a neighbor or concerned citizen asking, 'What's going on there?'" he says. "There's this perception that whatever we're doing is dangerous because it requires protective gear."

"Some of the chemicals we use have color in them that comes out when you're wearing white," says Matthews. "So, not only do you have the visual effect of a guy wearing what's perceived as a hazmat suit, but as he's working, it's obvious that he's spraying something that's getting on him."

Matthews says some motorists who have viewed his workers out in the field have called to complain, even if they didn't live in that particular neighborhood.

Lawn care operator found that switching to blue coveralls made for better customer perception

BY MIKE KLAWITTER

Vitals

Company: For Shore Weed Control

2001 gross revenue: N/A

Employees: 10

Services: Chemical weed control

Customer mix: 90% residential, 5% commercial, 5% municipal

"Most people we deal with are delighted we're there, controlling the poison ivy or noxious weeds," he adds. "But that one person who grabs the guy on the side of the road or stops his car and acts hostile can absolutely ruin your day and make it difficult to effectively do your job."

The solution: change to blue

Luckily, Matthews was able to find a way to calm the public's fears by replacing the white coveralls with denim blue coveralls produced by Tyvek. Gempler's, a catalog retailer in Belleville, WI specializing in safety equipment used in grounds maintenance, horticulture and agriculture, had Tyvek produce blue-colored coveralls to help businesses that have had negative experiences similar to Matthews'.



Since using them, Matthews says the complaints from the public have fallen significantly.

"There has definitely been a reduction in those kind of calls," he says. "If I was a guy wearing a white suit, pushing a measuring wheel through vacant property, that would stir all kinds of interest, whereas a guy wearing blue is just looked upon as some guy wearing blue."

Matthews says his applicators are also relieved they no longer have to wear white for jobs that require the use of protective coveralls. "I think there's more of a willingness to wear it because it's blue," he says. "I don't have absolute control over what they're doing and what personal protective equipment they're wearing out in the field."

— *The author is with Gempler's, Inc. For more information about the Tyvek blue coveralls, visit Gempler's Web site at www.gemplers.com or call 800/382-8473.*

products

TECH CENTER

Water right

Irrrometer Co.'s new Watermark Multiple Hydrozone System provides soil moisture automation for 24 VAC controllers. Up to eight independent zones of moisture control can be accommodated with easily selected moisture levels allowing the user to irrigate based on plant water requirements.

For more information contact Irrrometer Company at 909/689-1701 or www.irrometer.com / circle no. 250



Stream away

The WaterWick gravel injection system improves drainage without disturbing the soil surface. It uses multiple vibratory plow blades that gently slice into the turf. As the turf is drawn apart, a gravel vein is injected into the opening to create a permanent underground aqueduct that carries away excess water.

For more information contact WaterWick at 888/287-1644 or www.waterwick.com / circle no. 251

Rain's coming



Hunter Industries' new Rain-Clik is an electronic weather sensor that can be installed on a residential or commercial site without running electrical lines to the irrigation controller. It can be

mounted anywhere, and it's compatible with all standard 24-volt controllers. Transmitter has range of 300 ft.; receiver attaches near



Feel the wind

Little Wonder's high-output blowers feature 10-in. diameter steel-hubbed pneumatic wheels and a cushion-gripped height-adjustable ergonomic handle. Three models feature Briggs Intek engines from 6 to 10 hp. Two models feature either a 9-hp or 13-hp Honda engine.

For more information contact Little Wonder at 877/596-6337 or www.littlewonder.com / circle no. 252

controller and has a built-in bypass switch.

For more information contact Hunter Industries at www.hunterindustries.com / circle no. 253

Snow be gone

Polaris's 2x4, 4x4 and 6x6 utility task vehicles can be purchased with an optional snow removal package that includes a 72-in. plow blade, plow markers, hard cab, windshield wiper kit, strobe light, diamond plate side-mounted cargo box and tire chains.

For more information contact Polaris at 800/330-9407 or www.polarisindustries.com / circle no. 254

Light the way

Architectural Landscape Lighting's Focca, a focused collection of outdoor and landscape lighting luminaires, has streamlined, low-scale conical shaped lampheads with large-format, recessed lenses. The lampheads move smoothly through 180 degrees of vertical adjustment. A curved-edge, tapered Y-shaped yoke is affixed to the ballast



box at a 45-degree angle for stability with added visual interest.

For more information contact Architectural Landscape Lighting at 800/854-8277 or www.allighting.com / circle no. 255

Don't blow it

FINN Corp. has enhanced its B-40 straw blower with a newly developed solid discharge head configuration that increases pro-



duction and reduces maintenance. The new metal discharge tube is designed to limit air loss and improve airflow. The discharge assembly can be completely removed so that an optional hose can be attached. The B-40 is a portable, self-powered blower with a 20-hp Kohler gas engine, capable of blowing 2 to 3 bales of straw in less than a minute.

For more information contact FINN Corp. at 800/543-7166 or www.finncorp.com / circle no. 256

New mount

SnowEx has introduced a new receiver mount for its 1075 Pivot Pro tailgate spreader. Designed to mount in a Class III receiver hitch, the new mount option bolts onto the bumper, requiring no holes to be drilled into the truck bed or tailgate. To ensure stability, two pins are included on each side of the receiving mount.

For more information contact TrynEx at 800/725-8377 / circle no. 257



products

Talk, talk, talk

Midland Radio Corp.'s new portable two-way radio eliminates costly air-time fees for job-site communications, allowing users to talk 24/7 at no additional cost. The 80-150/400 packs 16 channel capacity and 5 watts (VHF, 4 watts UHF) of talking power into a 5.75-in. high by 2.8-in. wide by 1.5-in. deep (less antenna) durable polycarbonate housing. The radio, along with the standard 1200 mAh NiMH rechargeable battery, weighs just 14 oz.

For more information contact Midland Radio Corp. at 816/241-8500 or www.midland-radio.com / circle no. 258

Hooray for spray

Rittenhouse's new stainless steel Boominator boomless spray nozzle is ideal for applying liquid de-icer in parking lots, roadside and commercial property spraying and dust control. One-sided model gives 18-ft. swath width (one direction only) and uses 3.6 gpm at 30 psi. With roadside kit, you mount the nozzle to front or rear bumper of truck and Rittenhouse provides the solenoid valve, switch, 20-ft. hose and 12-ft. wire to control the spray from inside your truck.

For more information contact Rittenhouse at 800/461-1041 or www.rittenhouse.com / circle no. 259



Lift high

Caterpillar's 232 and 242 vertical lift skid-steer loaders feature a lift height of 119.9 in. and a reach of 30.2 in. at a bucket angle of 45 degrees. With rated capacities of 1,750 lbs. for



the 232 and 2,000 lbs. for the 242, the machines can also lift high and reach farther over sideboards on trucks to load materials.

For more information contact Caterpillar at www.cat.com / circle no. 260

Tractor factor

Allmand Bros.' TLB-535 compact tractor loader backhoe has a 6,000-lb. digging force and 11-ft. digging depth. Dual cylinder, 180-degree hydraulic cushioned swing allows for precise work in tight conditions. Powered by a 33.3-hp liquid-cooled Isuzu 3LD1 engine and 65-hp hydrostatic transmission, the machine can lift up to 2,100 lbs. of material and load material at a height of 90 in.

For more information contact Allmand at 800/562-1373 or www.allmand.com / circle no. 261

Aerate great

Rock Solid's Plugr PL800 Pro aerator has the same 30-in. aeration width as the company's commercial Plugr PL600 beefed up with two additional cams — eight total — that move the tines closer together to increase the number of cores per sq. ft. by 20%. Aeration pattern is 2 1/4 in. by 8 in. Engine options include 6.5-hp Briggs & Stratton Intek or 5.5 Honda OHV.

For more information contact Rock Solid at 888/418-9065 or www.rock-solidx.com / circle no. 262

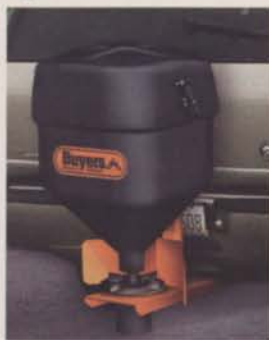
Remote possibilities

The DIG, LEIT XRC is an ambient "light powered" water management irrigation controller with radio remote control capability. It can be used from remote locations to a distance of up to 5,000 ft., and can operate 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 20, 24 and 28 stations. Radio remote control can be used to turn system on manually, operate one or any number of controllers simultane-



ously, change water budget, time and more. For more information contact DIG at 800/322-9146 / circle no. 263

Spread out



Buyers Products' new tail-gate spreader designed for pickup trucks features a thermoplastic hopper and powder-coated steel frame.

The 12-volt spreader motor is housed in a sealed motor chamber with direct to battery wire harness. It's designed to provide an even flow of 9 cu. ft./300 lbs. #1 rock salt or calcium chloride without the need for expensive auger add-ons or vibration kits.

For more information contact Buyers Products Co. at 440/974-8888 or www.buyersproducts.com / circle no. 264

Feeding frenzy

The new Vermeer HG365 horizontal grinder uses the Smart-Feed system that monitors RPM rates to optimize machine production — and to momentarily reverse feeding in case of a jam. It also has a thrown object deflector system that reduces the quantity and distance of thrown objects. A new duplex drum rotor offers a 35% increase in inertia and a 10% weight reduction.

For more information contact Vermeer at 888/837-6337 or www.vermeer.com / circle no. 265

Get blown away

Express Blower's new RB-20 blower truck is specifically designed to blow aggregate all day, every day with distances up to 200 ft. and/or at least three stories high. Designed around a 20-yd. box, the blower is a fully self-contained unit and can be mounted



on a single or tandem axle truck or a flatbed trailer. It can be built using a 10-yd. box or a 30-yd. box.

For more information contact Express Blower at 800/285-7227 or www.expressblower.com / circle no. 266

Light up

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting's new 120-volt HID ballast boxes now feature waterproof compartments for all above-ground fixture installations. Injection-molded covers have a textured finish and a 1/2-in. NPSM hub for direct fixture mounts, or blank for remote mount applications.

For more information contact Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting at 800/766-8478 or www.vistapro.com /

circle no. 267



blades has been replaced on this plow with a solid steel link and an industrial compression spring, which will prevent the plow from raising over center and contacting the operator's cab when adding snow onto a pile. The plows are for 20-hp compact tractors and smaller skid-steers in four widths: 5, 6, 7 and 8 ft.

For more information contact Snow Wolf at 800/905-2265 / circle no. 268



Zip it down

Zip Pots has developed what it says is the world's first five-gallon plastic nursery container that can be "unzipped" via two tear strips down either side of the container. Using garden snips, end users cut the rim in four places along perforated markings on each side of the container. Once both lanes are snipped, the strips can be fully "unzipped" by grabbing the rim and pulling the tear strips down and away from the container.

For more information contact Zip Pots at www.zippots.com / circle no. 269

Spread it easily

Meyer Products' Mate spreader is designed for standard pickups and can be used to apply salt to driveways, parking lots, walkways, access ramps and intersections. It has 9 cu. ft. of capacity, and can be easily attached and removed from the tailgate with a nylon strap and ratchet. Material is broadcast with a 1/6-hp, 12-volt motor protected by a

thermoplastic cover.

For more information contact Meyer at 216/486-1313 or www.meyerproducts.com / circle no. 270

Get in control

Valvette Systems' new sprinkler head bodies, pop-up shafts and fittings offer savings in time, money and water. Each part contains the Little Valve, which provides for individual on/off control for each sprinkler head for stress-free cleaning, flushing, adjusting, and change-outs of sprinkler nozzles and/or heads.

For more information contact Valvette Systems at 866/200-8590 / circle no. 271

Power mowing

The Gravely 260Z zero-turn mower comes available with a 31-hp liquid-cooled turbo diesel engine and a 14-gal. fuel tank. Other en-



gine selections include a 25-hp Kawasaki or 25-hp Kohler twin cylinder air cooled, a Kohler EFI OHV gas 26-hp twin cylinder air cooled, or a 27-hp Kawasaki twin cylinder.

For more information contact Gravely at 800/472-8359 or www.gravely.com / circle no. 272

Oh so reliable

RedMax introduces the GZ24N, a new generation of strato-charged engine for its leaf blowers that is more reliable than the original. The stratified charge is now controlled by a piston port rather than a reed valve, which means that piston movement controls the fresh air charge. Emissions are 73% less than its previous conventional engines, and fuel consumption is 34% less.

For more information contact RedMax at 800/291-8251 or www.redmax.com / circle no. 273

Snow no mo³

The Snow Wolf Pro Series has a floating blade that allows putting the vehicle weight onto the blade to increase scraping ability to clean compacted snow and ice. The chain typically used to lift floating



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 20 D Turf Aeration
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 23 G Turf Disease Control
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 26 J Turf Weed Control
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 29 M Landscape Installation
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- 4a. Do you specify, purchase or influence the selection of landscape products?**
 58 Yes 59 No

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 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 Sprayers
 46 O Sweepers
 47 P Tractors
 48 Q Truck Trailers/Attachments
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 50 S Turfseed
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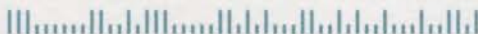
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Help Wanted (Cont'd)

Director of Operations

The Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, a not-for-profit parks organization, is searching for dynamic landscape professional to lead a ground-breaking public-private partnership among the Conservancy, the City of Buffalo and Erie County in implementing a 20-year Management and Restoration Plan for Buffalo, New York's Frederick Law Olmsted-designed Park and Parkway system, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and comprises 75 percent of the City's parkland.

Position requires expertise in landscape design/build, multiple project management and budgeting (Expedition, Suretrak or Microsoft Project), horticulture, and parks maintenance, with an understanding of the Olmsted landscape, union contracts and the environmental review process. The successful candidate will have strong communication skills and an ability to build consensus. Bachelor's degree, master's preferred. Competitive compensation.

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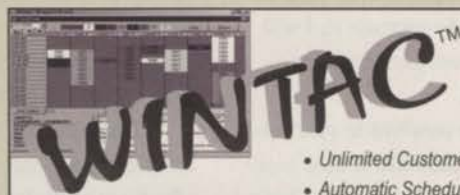
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GUIDELINES TO HELP AN INDUSTRY GROW

Aim for 90% along with price increases

BY BRUCE WILSON

A book of business that renews from year to year is essential for growing a landscape maintenance business. The higher percentage of jobs retained each year, the less new sales required to grow. The better companies in the industry retain at least 90% of their contracts from year to year.

Another major benefit to client retention is that efficiency improves each year for the first couple of years, making the job more profitable. If you're able to increase the price as well as improve efficiency, that's even better.

Price increases are always necessary to recapture increasing costs of doing business. Has there ever been a year where employees took a pay decrease because their costs went down? However, raising prices has become increasingly difficult. Many companies have high retention rates and eroding margins. Go the extra yard and position yourself for the price increase.

The following are some of the best practices associated with renewing from year to year and, better still, getting the price increase needed to cover your cost increases.

► **Stay close to customers.**

You, the business owner, have the most leverage in securing the renewal and getting the increase. If you delegate this to employees, remember that they don't and won't have the same vested interest as you in getting the increase and will back down just to get the renewal.

► **Be sensitive to your customers' business.** If their business is hurting, you may have to forgo the increase. You can reduce services to retain the same margin, or perhaps delay the increase until better times.

► **Be in a strong position at renewal time.** You can't afford to have a customer service glitch at renewal time. Make sure your crews take extra care in the months leading up to renewal.

► **Do some reconnaissance.** Have the customers' other ser-



Bruce Wilson

vice providers been able to renew and get increases, and how much? Changes in other service providers should warn you that it may not be business as usual.

► **Get involved in the customer's budget process.**

If you're close to your customer, you should be able to find out when they budget for the coming year. Give them a budget number for your increase, as well as a budget for enhancements. In tough times, they may be asked to cut costs. You need to know this.

► **Don't just ask for an inflationary increase.** That usually doesn't sell. Be specific in citing which of your costs have increased. This year, most companies have suffered increases in liability, health and workers' compensation insurance. The customer has also suffered these and will be able to identify with you. Build your case around specific cost data.

Placing emphasis and efforts on getting renewals pays off in a big way on the bottom line.

Sound off

What a great business, eh? Month after month, season after season, we nurture our customers' properties and they provide us with an ongoing stream of revenue. The more customers we keep from one year to the next, the better. That's the way it works best if you want to grow your company.

What can you add to Bruce Wilson's take on customer retention? Let managing editor Jason Stahl know at jstahl@advanstar.com.

Bruce spent 30 years with Environmental Care, Inc. (now known as Valley-Crest Maintenance). He and partner Thomas L. Oyler of Wilson-Oyler Group now offer consulting services to landscape and grounds care providers. (Visit www.wilson-oyler.com or contact Wilson at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.)

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by Advanstar Communications, Inc., 131 W. First St., Duluth, MN 55802-2065. **Subscription rates:** one year, \$46, two years \$67 in the United States & Possessions; \$76 for one year, \$113 for two years in Canada and Mexico; all other countries \$148 for one year, \$220 for two years. For airmail delivery, include an additional \$70 per order annually. Single copies (pre-paid only): \$8 in the United States; \$10 in Canada and Mexico; \$15 all other countries. Back issues, if available: \$16 in the U.S.; \$20 in Canada and Mexico; \$30 all other countries. Add \$6 per order for shipping and handling. **Periodicals postage paid** at Duluth, MN 55806 and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Please send address changes to Landscape Management, P.O. Box 6198, Duluth, MN 55806. Canadian G.S.T. number: R-124213133. Publications Mail Agreement Number 841919. Printed in the U.S.A.



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