

inside the owner's head

BY RON HALL / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Imagination builds a team

Remember working like the dickens to write a great term paper or to finish a big project? I bet you haven't forgotten the guilty pleasure of playing hooky a few days later, either.

Gone fishin'

One day each July, the "team" at Russo Lawn & Landscape plays hooky. Employees at the 13-year-old landscape company grab their fishing poles, stock the coolers and head out together for a day on the ocean. Sometimes they land stripers and sometimes blue fish...and sometimes not much at all. But they always come back with great stories, and they always have a great time.

"Hey, thanks Mike!" That's what they say when they get back to the dock. That's because owner Mike Russo picks up the tab. It's one of the unique "perks" that make his operation a different place to work. In many respects, Russo is a different kind of an owner as is evidenced by community projects he and his crews do absolutely gratis. But let's focus on the imaginative team-building activities and exercises that make his company such a great place to work.

Cash, food and parties

For example, the owner gives his "team" an \$800 cash certificate each month. The money is to be used towards any controllable repairs. If any incidents occur that result in controllable damage, the dollar amount of the replacement/repair is de-

ducted from the \$800; the rest is divided among team members.

Pizza, anyone? If all of the company's crews meet or come in below their budgeted man-hours for the week, everyone gets pizza. Career Enhancement Director Samantha Wood wrote it for all to see.

Need a little bit extra in your paycheck this coming month? If you work on Russo's team, you can earn it if you accrue enough points to be selected as "Team Member of the Month." The rules are simple and they're in English and in Spanish. Heck, you might even earn "Team Member of the Year." Francisco Mari won it last year



The whole team at Russo Lawn & Landscape gathers for its July 2002 ocean fishing trip.

Where else do you get a day's pay for putting a fishing pole in your hands?

and earned himself and his family extra cash and a 27-in. television.

We all know what "sick pay" is, but what about paying somebody for "well days?" Mike does. A team member earns

Russo Lawn and Landscape

▶ AT A GLANCE

Russo Lawn and Landscape
Windsor Locks, CT

Owner: Mike Russo

Year founded: 1990

Employees: 20

2002 gross revenue: \$1,350,000

Services: Landscape maintenance & installation — 90% commercial and 10% residential

1/2 hour for each week they're on time every day and don't have any early dismissals. You're allowed two paid "well days" each year.

Russo Lawn & Landscape embraced the JP Horizons Pro Training Challenge, and won first place in the program in 2000 and shared first place in 2001. Team members have

continued to meet each week in "Career Enhancement Meetings." That's where the serious stuff takes place.

But there's plenty of fun stuff, too, like an annual holiday party and an annual Success Banquet to start each new season. Besides, where else do you get a day's pay for putting a fishing pole in your hands?

— Information provided by The Owners' Network, a program created by JP Horizons, Inc. and sponsored by Weed Man. Visit the Web site www.owners1.com or call 877/574-5267.