



THE HALLMARK

RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

Contact Ron via e-mail at rhall@questex.com.

Be more productive — or take less

There are just three ways to weather a severe economic crisis: expect and take less, work more or become more productive. Most of us prefer the third option, although likely we're all being forced by present circumstances to accept all three in various degrees.

One thing is clear: The age of extravagant waste is over. Gone. That era is as far removed from our realities as the reign of the dinosaurs. The housing and financial meltdowns of this past year have sobered us to the realities of our new economy, just as surely as the brutal slap in the face of 9/11 awoke us to our vulnerability in an unstable world.

Simply put, uncertainty over the prospects for a short or long economic recovery is not uncertain anymore. We're in for a long, hard, painful slog. Economists are divided over when our economy will bottom and begin improving again. Some say we're already there, and predict small, but positive growth by year's end. Most aren't so optimistic. Regardless, nobody is predicting that our economy will soon return to the level of activity it displayed just two short years ago.

Better than most

Acknowledging that, *Landscape Management's* recent industry-wide survey revealed that the landscape/lawn service industry is faring better than many

The **housing and financial meltdowns** of this past year have sobered us to the **realities of our new economy**, just as surely as the brutal slap in the face of 9/11 awoke us to our vulnerability in an unstable world.

other industries through these tough times.

Consumers want their properties maintained and established lawn care, and many landscape businesses are plugging along at a steady, if hardly stellar, pace. Some are actually doing better than expected — perhaps because, spooked by events of this past fall and winter, they projected too-low sales and revenues. Other firms serve markets that have not suffered so severely from job losses and home foreclosures. Weather is a factor, too. Lots of rain in the U.S. Southeast caused the lifting of business-killing watering bans.

Other positive factors in our favor include:

› **We're now an expected expense.** Many clients that have experienced the beauty and benefits of green, healthy lawns and maintained properties no longer view them as luxuries or extras but as essentials — probably not as essential as, say, cell phones or wireless Internet, but you see what I mean.

› **Our services are affordable.** The cost for lawn care and property maintenance for most homeowners is about the same as their cable or utility bills, and we've made it increasingly easy to pay for these services by promoting pre-payments, online payments and credit card payments.

› **We help protect property values.** Property owners, whether residential or commercial, realize they need to protect their properties' value in the face of decreased property prices. Commercial and rental properties in particular must be maintained to attract traffic — and tenants.

› **We improve the "staycation" experience.** Many homeowners are forgoing expensive vacations and now view their properties as sanctuaries to relax and entertain family and friends.

Of course, if unemployment keeps rising, the construction industry remains in shambles and the credit crisis doesn't improve (or worsens), even these advantages may evaporate and we will have to rejuggle the options of accepting less, working harder or boosting our productivity.