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LM MARKET MATCH We've made your life a little easier by supplying icons that direct you to stories targeting your core business.

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LMdirect!

Following safe work practices during trenching and excavation activities can mean the difference between leaving the worksite safely to enjoy another day above ground ... or not.

Athletic Turf News

Attending conferences are a great way to network with other professionals within the industry and meet with students studying to become turfgrass managers.

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Many companies have turned to add-on services to keep the cash flowing year long.

Get Growing

Using a less-common blooming tree with a unique flower breaks the monotony.

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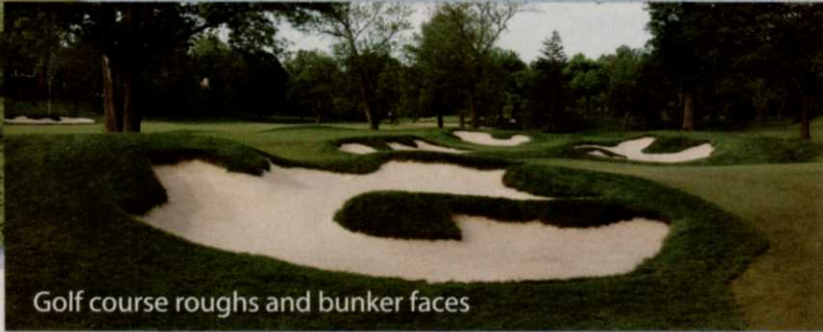
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THE HALLMARK

RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

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

10 tips to beat the '09 recession

Here are 10 suggestions to help get you through this season and prepare for better times. In the spirit of full disclosure, most came from friends in the business. I jotted some in notebooks, a few on loose scraps of paper I had in my pocket or handy by the phone in my office — and a couple on restaurant or cocktail napkins. Sometimes you get your best ideas after a drink or two. Here goes:

- 1. Reduce overhead.** Give a reward to any employee who comes up with an idea to cut overhead 5% or more. Employees often know where the waste is when owners and managers don't.
- 2. Trim equipment costs.** If a piece of equipment isn't making you money, sell it. Why pay insurance and worry about the risk of theft or damage on equipment you rarely use? Rent what you need for those occasional jobs.
- 3. Keep cash flowing.** Set up a system to monitor and manage cash. Stay on top of your receivables. Look at each customer's credit history before extending credit, especially for large projects. If you're having trouble meeting payment deadlines, talk to your vendors before the money is due. This goes double if the payment is to your bank.
- 4. Keep training your best employees and fire the troublemakers.** There are a lot of good people

Don't whine about the economy or other things you can't control. **Do what you can with your business, and stay positive.**

looking for careers in this tight job market. Cherry-pick bright young talent by building relationships with local high schools, vocational schools, community colleges and with local universities. Tip: Get to know the local FFA advisor. He or she can point out the most ambitious and talented students seeking careers.

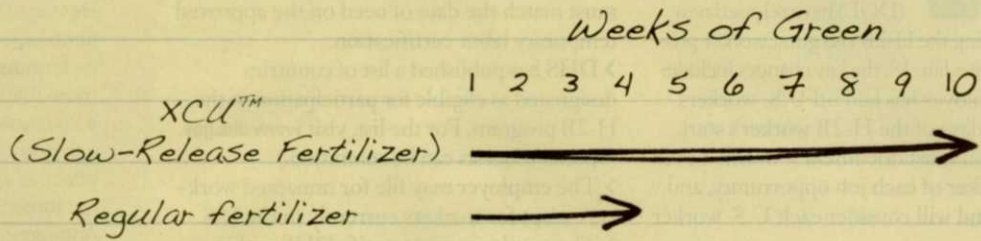
- 5. Seek better deals from subcontractors and suppliers.** Everybody's keen to keep cash flowing. In these conditions, it's not unreasonable to expect better service and lower prices for your loyalty.
- 6. Keep your best crews busy.** Make a deal with contractors in related but non-competing industries to share your crews to keep labor costs in line. Consider similar working arrangements to share costly equipment.
- 7. Ever hear of the Pareto principle?** This is the oft-quoted 80-20 rule of thumb — 20% of a company's customers generate 80% of its revenues or profits. This isn't necessarily true, especially for small independent service businesses. Even so, all companies have customers (or classes of customers) that are more profitable than others. Stay in touch with them. Make them feel special.
- 8. Be a bulldog when it comes to controlling costs.** Every dollar you save represents more than \$10 you don't have to sell to maintain the same profit level, assuming your net profit margin, for example's sake, is 10%.
- 9. Add more services.** What else can your employees do for customers while they're on their properties? Power washing? Gutter cleaning? Minor home repairs?
- 10. Reacquaint yourself with family, friends and fun.** Don't whine about the economy or other things you can't control. Do what you can with your business, and stay positive. Don't neglect your personal life, including your health. You're fortunate — more fortunate than most — if you're healthy, have family and friends and you're a part of this great industry. Enjoy it all.

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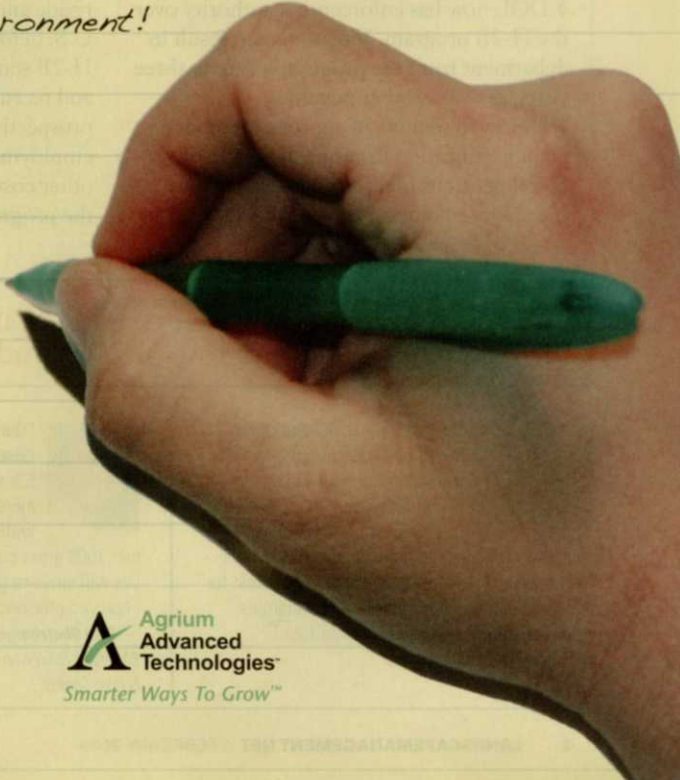


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Note to Self
Ask my distributor for a blend with at least 75% slow-release fertilizer. Insist on XCU!



NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

CLIPPINGS

Heritage G fungicide receives EPA registration

GREENSBORO, NC — The EPA has registered Syngenta Professional Products' Heritage G fungicide for use on a variety of turf, including golf courses, sod farms, athletic fields, and residential and commercial lawns. Heritage G is a systemic strobilurin fungicide in a granular formulation that controls more than 21 diseases during a 28-day window. The products has been tested and proven effective against brown patch, red thread, Pythium, Anthracnose, gray leaf spot, snow mold, take-all patch, leaf spot, summer patch and necrotic ring spot, to name just a few turf diseases. The fungicide has the same efficacy as the sprayable versions, Heritage WG and Heritage TL.

STIHL sponsors Tour des Trees

VIRGINIA BEACH, VA — Outdoor power equipment manufacturer STIHL is the title sponsor of this year's cross-country cycling and education event to benefit the Tree Research and Education Endowment Fund.

H-2B regulation changes

Washington, D.C. — The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) have released new rules governing the H-2B visa guest worker program. Effective Jan. 18, the key changes include:

- ▶ If the employer has laid off U.S. workers within 120 days of the H-2B worker's start date, the firm must document it notified each laid-off worker of each job opportunity, and that it has and will consider each U.S. worker interested.
- ▶ The employer must offer, and pay throughout the H-2B guest worker's period of employment, a wage equal to or higher than the prevailing wage. Competitive terms and conditions must not be worse for U.S. workers than for H-2B workers.
- ▶ The employer must keep documents related to advertising, recruiting, prevailing wage determination, supporting documentation, and additional attestations for three years.
- ▶ DOL now has enforcement authority over the H-2B program. Violations can result in debarment from the program for up to three years, as well as other penalties.
- ▶ DHS will require an approved temporary labor certification in connection with all H-2B petitions filed; employers will have the ability to request review with DOL if an

H-2B visa application is denied.

- ▶ Beginning Oct. 1, 2009 (FY 2010), the employment start date indicated on Form I-129, Petition for a Nonimmigrant Worker, must match the date of need on the approved temporary labor certification.

- ▶ DHS has published a list of countries designated as eligible for participation in the H-2B program. For the list, visit www.dhs.gov. (Special requests can be submitted.)

- ▶ The employer may file for unnamed workers except for workers currently in the U.S.

- ▶ The employer must notify DHS within two work days when the worker either: has not come to work within five days of his/her start date designated by the employer; completes his/her contract 30 days before the petitioned end date; or is fired/laid off. The employer must retain evidence of DHS notification in such situations for one year.

- ▶ New rules also: reduce from six months to three months the time an H-2B worker who has spent three years in the U.S. must reside and be physically present outside the U.S. before he or she is eligible to re-obtain H-2B status; and prohibit H-2B employers and recruiters from imposing certain fees on prospective H-2B workers as a condition of employment or passing along application and other costs to H-2B workers participating in the program.

WORD ON THE STREET

Overall, are you raising your prices, lowering them or keeping them the same in 2009 and why?



"BIO Landscape, a member of the Yellowstone Landscape Group, will be holding existing pricing during 2009 for landscape maintenance work. Given the current economy, and the financial state of our existing customers, a raise in pricing would be suicidal. New work, for the most part, will be bid with tighter margins."

— **Robert Taylor**, president of Houston-based BIO Landscape & Maintenance



"Our philosophy and practice is to raise prices and hourly rates 3% to 5% every year. In 2009 we are being more conservative and selective with increases. Departments that met 2008 gross profit goals will have no increase. We will strive to gain additional margin through improved efficiency."

— **Tom Shotzberger**, general manager, of Lancaster, PA-based Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care, Landscape & Pest Control



"For 2009, we have decided to put a freeze on price increases. However, we do hold multi-year contracts that will increase in the second and third years at around 2% to 3%. We are working harder than ever to become a lean company to maintain profitability."

— **Tony Sposato**, president of Milton, DE-based Sposato Landscape Co.

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PROVEN SOLUTIONS

Irrigation Association participates in Congressional Water Caucus briefing

Irrigation Association (IA) staff recently attended the January briefing of the Congressional Water Caucus. The event was the first meeting of the Water Caucus for the 111th Congress.

The educational event was moderated by IA External Affairs Director Andy Smith. Fifty people attended the briefing, with the audience comprised of senior Congressional staff and water industry professionals. Attendees discussed the history and current issues facing the nation's water infrastructure, and viewed the PBS documentary "Liquid Assets: The Story of Our Water Infrastructure."

"Educating members of Congress on national water policy is imperative to our

Irrigation Association (IA) External Affairs Director Andy Smith moderated the recent Congressional Water Caucus briefing.



mission of promoting efficient irrigation," said IA's Federal Affairs Director John Farmer. "It's an honor for the Irrigation Association to moderate the inaugural briefing of the Water Caucus and Andy did an excellent job advancing the IA's message and credibility amongst key leaders of the U.S. House of Representatives."

The Congressional Water Caucus was founded in 2007 in response to the growing need for Congress to address the nation's water woes. The group established "Twelve Principles of Water Policy," a set of goals for the caucus that includes achieving a sufficient water supply for urban and rural areas; considering all available technologies for increasing water supply efficiently while safeguarding the environment; and implementing strategies to improve efficiencies.

The Irrigation Association is the leading membership organization for irrigation equipment and system manufacturers, dealers, distributors, designers, consultants, contractors and end users. Originally founded in 1949, IA includes more than 2,000 corporate and technical members and is dedicated to promoting efficient irrigation. For more information, visit www.irrigation.org.

BELIEVE IT

OR NOT ...

X-Ray spectacles for Super Landscaper Man



Underhill International recently unveiled its TurfSpy detection glasses designed to help landscape managers see the future by revealing potential problems before they are visible to the naked eye. TurfSpy lenses work by blocking out the green spectrum reflected from chlorophyll



in healthy vegetation. Stress conditions, such as disease, drought, pests or

poor nutrition, are revealed with glowing colors (red, coral, pink) and reportedly can be detected two to 10 days before they are visible to the unaided eye. For more information, visit www.underhill.us.

PHOTOS BY COURTESY: MARTY WHITFORD (FAR LEFT); UNDERHILL INTERNATIONAL (TURFSPIY)



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THE WRIGHT WAY TO MOW

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A letter to all commercial mowing professionals, dealers, distributors and manufacturers.

Dear Commercial Mowing Industry Professionals,

Over the last few years, there has been an undeniable trend in the commercial mowing industry toward stand-on products. I'd like to take this opportunity to share my insight regarding the recent growth of the stand-on market and encourage our continued mutual success.

As our industry grows, all of our businesses grow and vice versa. Our individual efforts to improve our businesses through our respective areas of expertise result in greater success for all of us. The stand-on trend is a perfect example of this phenomenon.

First off, I congratulate and commend each of you who have embraced the stand-on as the most productive mower category today. There are currently about six brands of stand-on mowers. If you've researched stand-on mowers, you certainly understand their productivity and profitability. For those of you who have not looked into them, I encourage you to do so this winter.

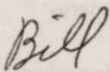
In my career, I've witnessed similar trends three consecutive times in the following three categories of mowers:

1. The rise, plateau and decline of commercial intermediate **walk-behind** from the early '80s to the early '00s.
2. The rise, plateau and decline of commercial zero-radius-turning, **mid-mount riders** beginning in the late '90s and losing momentum over the past two or three years.
3. The growth of the **stand-on** market, which began around 2000 and has dramatically accelerated over the last few years in spite of industry-wide commercial mower declines.

Incremental advances in technology and the resulting productivity gains have driven this evolution of the commercial mower market. As a leader in the stand-on category, we at Wright are naturally grateful that the industry has begun to embrace standing as superior way to mow. Just as our company, partners and users have profited from this trend, I believe the entire industry will profit as more of you make the shift to stand-on mowers.

Again, I congratulate and give a hearty welcome to the newer participants in the stand-on category. I hope all is well with your businesses and families these days and that you have the finest season ever in 2009!

Sincerely,



William R. Wright, CEO
Wright Manufacturing, Inc.

In 1981, Bill Wright started with a lawn maintenance business, Lawn-Wright, which grew to mow about 500 lawns per week. In 1983, he also founded a separate manufacturing division, which led to the development of stand-on mowers. In 1993, he formed Wright Manufacturing, Inc. for the purpose of manufacturing stand-on mowers and Wright shipped their first Stander® in October 1997.



THE WRIGHT WAY TO MOW

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SECURING YOUR FUT

Business owners must prepare for the time when they are no longer responsible for the day-to-day operations of their companies

RON KUJAWA STOPPED taking a paycheck in 1997. Nearly 45 years ago, the 76-year-old father of four founded Kujawa Enterprises Inc. (KEI), just three years after he married Sally, who still serves dual roles as CEO and CFO. While he still goes into the office often, Kujawa, who long ago relinquished day-to-day responsibilities, and his wife enjoy an active semi-retirement that this year includes trips to China, Canada and a pair of visits to Africa. While wise investments have secured their financial future, the Kujawas' main concern is ensuring KEI continues and is able to provide for their children's futures.

In fact, it was money problems that led Kujawa to start working on his long-term finances.

"I never thought of it as retirement planning," he recalls. "In 1972, I had to borrow money to pay taxes."

Kujawa started talking to an advisor who served as both his accountant and attorney. It was then Kujawa began working to create the financial stability that would sustain his day-to-day operations — and also provide him with a comfortable life when he finally decided to hand over the reins.

When an owner starts a business, retirement might be decades away. Working with your advisors to develop a plan early on and periodically revisiting that plan help ensure comfort in your golden years and the successful transfer of your operation — whether it's to a family member, your employees or someone outside the operation.

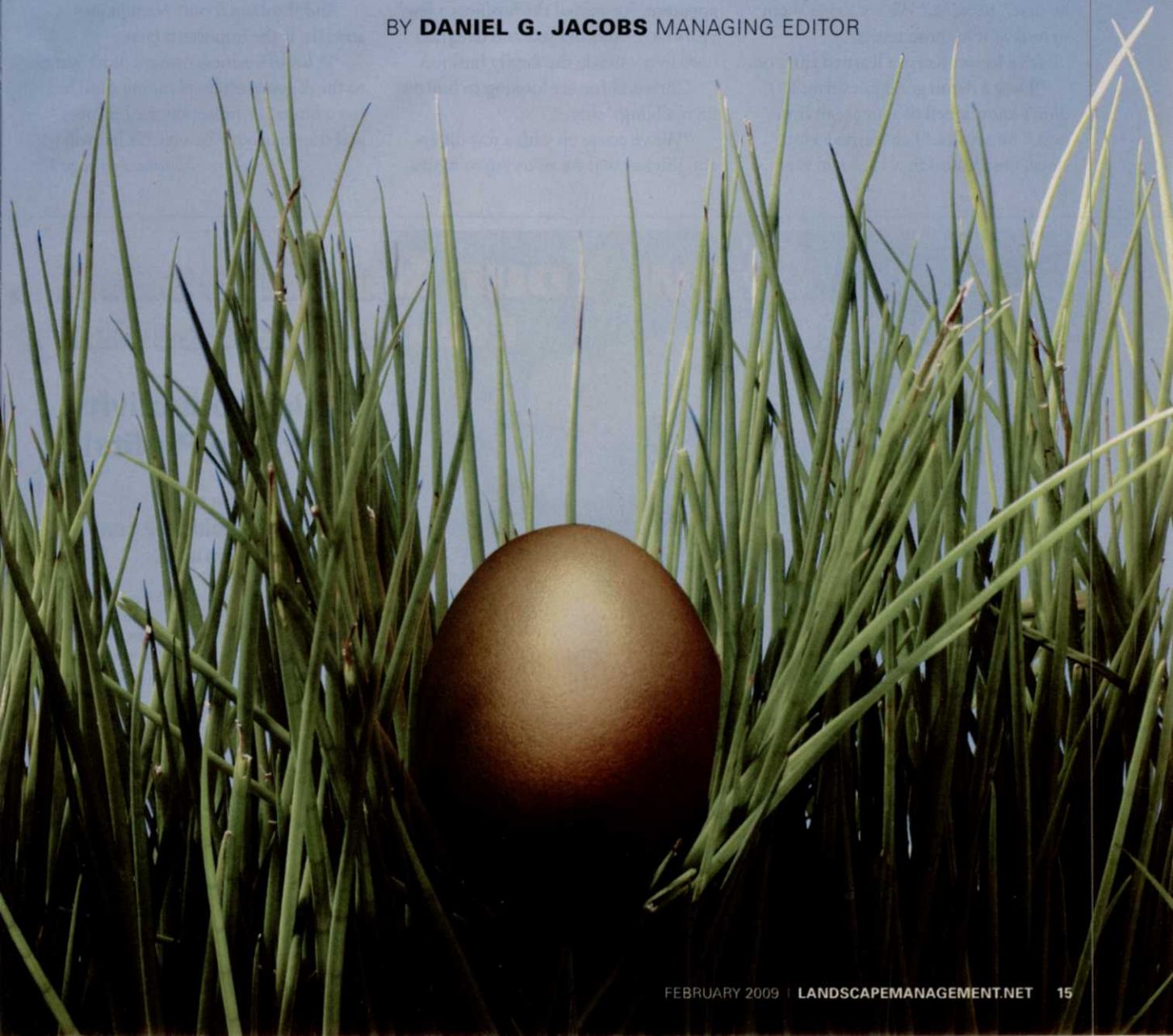
Volumes have been written about the difficulty of knowing when to make the change. Many owners, like Yardmaster's Kurt Kluznik, know it's an issue, but they have yet to embark down that path.

"I don't have a successor or a partner," says Kluznik, who founded the Painesville, OH-based company in 1971. "I don't have a timeline. I need to be doing that."

continued on page 16

URE

BY **DANIEL G. JACOBS** MANAGING EDITOR



THE GOLDEN YEARS

continued from page 14

Solutions

Even for those who have offspring waiting in the wings, transitions can be a challenge. While the way that scenario plays out is unique to each entity, the question of when to begin the process is much simpler.

"With estate planning, (owners) should be doing it when they have accumulated wealth, when it's going to present a tax situation," says Michael Napolitano, a partner with Citrin, Cooperman & Co., which provides tax and accounting services to middle market companies. "You may not make everyone happy, but the business has to be first," he adds. "We try to get them to look at it in those terms."

It's a lesson Kujawa learned early on.

"I was a damn good salesman; I didn't know a hell of a lot about business," he admits. "I've learned a lot since. One lesson that I learned was



Richard Heller, Greener by Design

'know what I didn't know.'

Kujawa is now working through the second phase of business transition. While each of the Kujawa children owns 12% of the company (Sally has the other 52%), Chris was the heir apparent. Joe joined the business a few years later. Another son and daughter have lives outside the family business.

Chris and Joe are looking to buy out their siblings' shares.

"We've come up with a few different glitches that we're trying to figure

out," Kujawa says. "We haven't come to a complete agreement on it on all four sides. Whether the company should buy the stock, whether the individuals should buy (the stock); or if they want to retain any stock on their own as a minority stockholder with a look-back provision if the company is sold."

As for Sally's shares, those are part of the estate.

"We have to be cognizant of the children and their tax problems," Kujawa says. "For them to get a chunk of money at a certain time might not be the best thing. Maybe it's going to be an installment purchase. Each of these things has to be thought out."

And thinking it out, Napolitano stresses, is the important factor.

"A lot of business owners don't want to think about estate planning until it has a financial impact on the business and the children," he says. "That will

continued on page 18

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THE GOLDEN YEARS

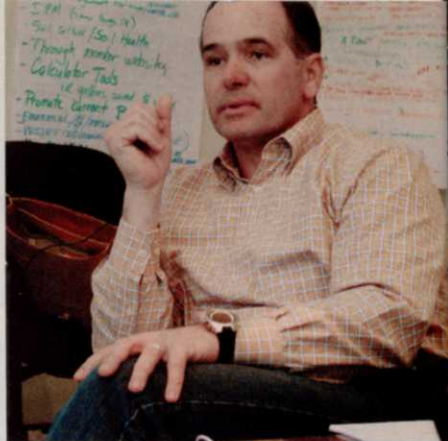
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then bring in the succession planning, because that is a very strong issue a lot of business owners know is out there, but they don't want to address."

Richard Heller, owner of Greener by Design, Pelham, NY, fits into that category. The self-described "49-year-old adolescent" was reminded of his

own mortality recently when a friend was diagnosed with cancer. He's yet to seriously begin his retirement planning, but knows it must be done: "I'd better think about this stuff."

Jim McCutcheon, CEO and partner of HighGrove Partners, Austell, GA, is only in the exploratory stage. His kids are too young to take over the busi-



Jim McCutcheon, HighGrove Partners

ness, and his partner's children are off doing their own things. McCutcheon is reviewing options, including identifying someone internally who might one day take over operations.

But, he admits, while it's one thing to have a strong manager, "it's another thing to hand that guy the keys."

ESOP

By the time he was 12 years old, Kevin Johnson probably had a pretty good idea where his future lay. He began working part time in the family business in 1976, the same year his father, Daryle, started operations. Ten years later, it was a full-time gig. And four years ago, he became president of All American Turf Beauty, Van Meter, IA.

While Kevin may run daily operations (Daryle remains CEO), 51% of the company is employee owned. In 1995, Daryle changed the 401(k) profit sharing plan to an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP). Naturally, there are tax advantages to that approach, but one key factor was what Daryle saw happening to operations gobbled up by national chains.

"My father looked at what happened to the employees and the people who helped build up those companies after a national company bought them," Kevin Johnson says. "He wasn't comfortable seeing what he worked on for a number of years wrecked or destroyed. He felt some obligation to the employees who helped make it what it has become."

In 14 years, the company has sold just over half the stock to employees.

"The ESOP is a pretty complicated creature — the whole mechanics of it,"

continued on page 20



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Wed.		4:00			8
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Crestview Job	Placing Sod	-	-	7:58	7:49	15:47	
		7:38	7:35	7:53	7:58	7:49	38:53

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continued from page 18

Johnson says. "We've had two purchases of stock from the original owners. Once we get that completed, we're probably looking at purchasing more shares from the owners."

The company borrows money to buy the stock and then transfers it to qualified employees.



(L to R) All American Turf Beauty's Jim O'Loughlin, VP sales & marketing; Daryle Johnson, CEO; Kevin Johnson, president; Clarice Baiotto, administrative assistant

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"It does take a lot of planning and forethought as to how you want things to go. The ESOP has worked out very well for our employees. They receive shares of stock at no cost to them as part of their retirement plan," Johnson says.

He points out the arrangement has kept the company somewhat insulated from some of the market downturns.

When employees leave, the company buys back their shares and recycles them back through the system.

Most years, All American's employees receive 8% to 11% of their yearly compensation in stock. Valuation is a part of any business transfer.

"You have to have an independent appraiser come in and give you an appraisal of what that stock is worth, based on your company performance, the marketability of your company and a whole range of things," Johnson says. "The value in the shares has gone up for the most part since 1995."

Emotion

Napolitano says family discussions about the future of the business can be tricky. "There are so many moving parts," he says. *continued on page 22*

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parts with family members; they tend to ignore it, and it can be devastating.

Family dynamics have a way of complicating the process.

"We run into the emotional aspect of it," Napolitano says. "It's easy for us as professionals to put it on paper and say, 'this makes the most sense.'"

Once the plan is in place, it needs to be revisited every couple of years (for ESOPs, a formal valuation is required every year and a renewal plan must be submitted to the IRS every five years).

"If there are any life changes within the family, you should revisit it," Napolitano says. "Every couple of years, the estate should be revisited."

Ensuring your future and that of your children is key, but there is another aspect to planning. Greener by Design's Heller sums it up best: "It isn't just about money. It's about seeing what you've created continue long-term." LM



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WORKINGSMARTER

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The author is president of JP Horizons Inc. Visit www.jp horizons.com.

You are what you communicate

Companies that are working smarter know the importance of sharing information in positive and productive ways. As soon as you finish this article, I suggest you take a walk around your company. Go ahead — it's just an investment of a couple of minutes, but it might give you some insights that could save you hours.

As you walk, ask yourself "What are we communicating to the rest of the team?" Your answer might fall into one of these categories:

1. "Nothing, unless old dusty workers' compensation certificates and a 2005 vendor calendar count." Actually, you are communicating *something*; you are telling your team that they are not important enough to share information with, and that you are not organized enough to have anything to share.

2. "We tell them just what we think they should know." You might be putting up a schedule board that tells them where they are going today and for whom they are working. You might also be putting up some signs that have phrases that begin "Anyone caught . . ."; "Stop doing . . ."; "Don't park on the . . ." and "You can no longer . . ." The negative messages and marching orders for the day seem to say "Welcome to San Quentin."

3. "We are having some success." If you are in this category, you are beginning to share some of the obvious and fundamental things. These include time without accidents, customer compliments and possibly even sales goals. You also might be posting budgeted hours, and letting the crews post their actual hours next to them. There also might be some reminders of equipment maintenance schedules or uniform deliveries taped up in the production area, and everyone knows when the next company outing is taking place.

4. "There is a commitment to clarity." There is a common area that everyone knows to go to get the information they need to make decisions and do

their jobs effectively. Charts and measurements are capturing the attention of people like a scoreboard at an NBA game. The pictures of this month's projects are securely placed, with some sense of order, on the team bulletin board. There are process maps and written instructions that allow people to clearly understand things that need explanation. Just by glancing around, you might see a commitment to continuous improvement by the learning opportunities listed somewhere, or explanations of new ideas that are being implemented. Another thing to look for is explanations of processes and the opportunity to improve them. Process maps and big white boards with plenty of markers generally are great indicators of innovative companies looking for new ideas.

Talking back

Now that the categories are presented, consider what the attitude of the employees might be like for each one:

1. "This is just a job until something better comes along."
2. "I'll do just enough to keep my job, but will do a little less whenever I can."
3. "I'll do the best I know how to do." (They realize there is a connection between their performance and the results being measured and communicated.)
4. "I have the information I need to be successful and have a positive impact on the company."

This last category is where every company wants to position themselves. There is an energy that comes from innovation and creativity. And when information is shared, people feel confident in their ideas and abilities.

You might already know what you will see in your journey around the company, but I challenge you to take the stroll anyway. If you feel a little discouraged by what you see (or don't see), just take some simple steps to change it. If you are excited with what you see, take some simple steps to keep improving upon it.

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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author is the owner-manager of Kehoe & Co. Contact him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

Business lessons from the field

The 2007 Fiesta Bowl was what I (and millions of other fans) consider to be the best college football game played in recent years. That night, Boise State beat the University of Oklahoma 43-42 in overtime. The experts and oddsmakers expected Boise State to lose. Oklahoma was too big and too good.

How did Boise State pull off the win? And what does it mean for you?

1. They were prepared with a well-thought-out game plan. Are you prepared? Does your budget minimize non-essential costs? Have you reviewed your pricing to ensure you can compete? Are you proactive with your customers, managing budgets and delivery? Boise State was aware that they did not have the guns the Sooners had, but they knew how to expose the Sooners' weaknesses.

Everyone has the challenge of delivering consistent quality. Make this Job No. 1 this year. This one tactic exposes the weakness of any competitor — the challenge of keeping customers happy 98% of the time. Make certain everyone on your team understands what the customer considers "quality," and delivers it. You won't lose customers, and you will pick up some defectors along the way.

2. They played to their strengths. Boise State, while smaller, was solid in their skill positions. They were able to make plays outside of the tackles with their talented players.

Your sources of strength in a tight economy are relationships and cash. A strong cash position gives you the ability to leverage relationships with both customers and vendors. Have you talked with your bank about increasing your line of credit? Are you conserving cash by extending the life of your equipment? Have you gone to your vendors to press for better prices and services in exchange for faster payment or increased purchase volume? Have you negotiated higher prices with some of your customers, and lower prices with others to keep the relationships working for you?

Make certain every vendor and customer hears from you. Make cash and relationship management Job No. 2 this year.

3. They took chances. Boise State used trick plays to surprise the Sooners. They did not play the traditional post-season football game. This had the effect of neutralizing some of the Sooners' speed, as well as confusing the defense.

What kinds of trick plays do you have in your playbook? Are you willing to use aggressive pricing in select situations to win the big jobs? Are you willing to spend more money on marketing with a message that is both edgier and delivered more frequently? Customers have a lot of choices in a tight economy, and they *will* shop. You have to get your message through the noise, and be willing to "go low" on a few jobs at the right time. Make marketing Job No. 3 this year.

4. They believed they could win. Boise State had faith in their coach and in themselves as a team. This, in the end, might have been the difference. They knew the extent of the challenge, and they were not discouraged by it.

What are you doing to communicate the challenge and your plan to your team? Have you made certain that you have all of the right people on the bus? All it takes is one pessimist to sink the ship sometimes. Make certain it is not you, and that anyone else who takes that role gets coached back in — or coached out the door. People need to have faith in their leaders and trust their teammates. People respond to optimistic realism. Make team morale Job No. 4 this year.

What a game at the end! Are you kidding me? The Statue of Liberty* trick play to win it. Boise State left it all on the field that night.

They did not worry so much about the opponent (*I like the Sooners just fine!*) as much as they focused on their own effort.

Did they get lucky? Maybe so. But luck, as they say, still favors the prepared — especially in today's tight economy.

* **Lady Liberty on the field:** The Statue of Liberty trick play consists of the quarterback faking a pass, then just standing there with the ball in his raised hand. The halfback, running a crossing route, nabs the ball and runs. It is usually seen at the high school level by a desperate team in a blowout game, and often, it doesn't work. But the move made headlines (and a win) in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl.

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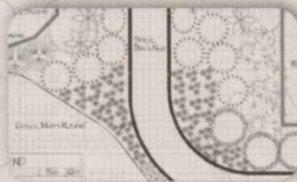
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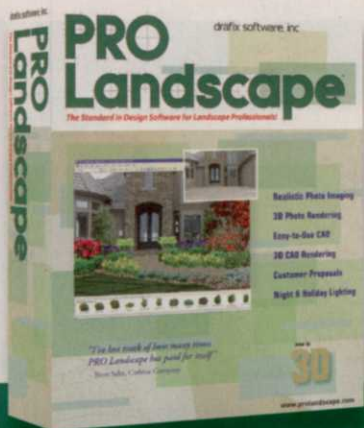
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FERTILIZER TRENDS

Getting the most from fertilizer applications goes back to Turf 101 — soil testing, keeping detailed records of what was applied in the past and not over-dosing lawns.

BY CURT HARLER

FOR LAWN CARE operators (LCOs), less might be more in fertilization this year.

“A lot of our focus is on trying to make the product as economical for the LCO as possible,” says Mike Sisti, product marketing manager for Lebanon Turf, Lebanon, PA.

With the price of phosphorous (P) going through the roof, Lebanon Turf's Zero-P initiative has come front-and-center. But the company also is looking at new nitrogen (N) technologies to meet LCOs' needs.

“About 90% of our product focuses on Zero-P,” Sisti says. “From an environmental and cost standpoint, it makes sense to apply only what you need. With the costs of P and potassium (K) skyrocketing, this has really hit home. This is an industry-wide promotion.”

Mike Bandy, marketing manager of turf products for The Andersons, Maumee, OH, advises that LCOs rethink their overall fertilizer strategy this season. “Phosphorous should only be used where they need it,” he says. “Potassium can be temporarily reduced, but this strategy will eventually affect turf quality.

“Focus on application accuracy,” Bandy says, stressing accurate calibration. Use spreaders with deflectors to

keep fertilizer from unwanted areas. LCOs also should look for more slow-release and controlled-release fertilizers on the market.

“Some manufacturers have worked hard to improve the durability of the coatings to allow for more predictable, and longer-lasting nitrogen release,” says Bryan Gooch, marketing manager with Agrium Advanced Technologies, Sylacauga, AL.

Bob Bauwens, industry sales manager for Roots Plant Care Group of Novozymes Biologicals, Salem, VA, adds: “Look for improvements in the longevity of materials.” Expect more slow-release and timed-release materials, as well as formulations with dispersible granules, he says. The latter offers minute amounts of product dispersed across the turf with NPK, herbicides and plant stimulants.

“The materials might not be new and innovative, but the way we put them together will give the user better and more effective use,” Bauwens says.

Older sulfur-coated urea technologies still suffer from what is known as catastrophic release, where N might release all at once. Don Myers, product development manager for herbicides and plant growth regulators (PGRs) with Bayer Environmental Science, says his company's new XCU brand of sulfur-coated technology has a proprietary new coating process that emphasizes durability.

However, Myers says he

expects there will continue to be restrictions on certain materials, and that costs will continue to rise. “We are seeing a downward blip in oil prices ... but if you think it will stay that way, think again,” he says.

Volatile prices

“Increased demand for food in India and China and fluctuating prices of domestic crops are just two of the factors involved — but if history repeats itself, we may see another run up in prices by the second quarter of 2009,” Gooch says.

Bandy agrees but says, “No one expects a repeat of last year's major increases.” K should remain fairly strong, he believes, as fertilizer raw material producers are idling capacity to keep the market in balance.

“The good news is we got a wake-up call from the prices of fuel and fertilizer,” Bauwens adds. “It made us rethink how we go to business. But these times will pass; American innovation will get us through them to a new day.”





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FERTILIZER TRENDS

continued from page 32

Whatever the cost, customers like green lawns. Sisti says Lebanon Turf Stabilized Nitrogen (LSN) is one product that reduces the volatility of nitrogen. Even if the lawn gets no rain for 14 days, the N-value remains. Contrast that to urea, which will volatilize into the atmosphere over two weeks' time.

Lebanon Turf also offers a product called MESA, a methylene urea fertilizer with ammonium sulfate. "MESA gives a longer N release so it slowly feeds the turf over an eight-week span," Sisti says. This means fewer truck-rolls required to fertilize a lawn.

"It also gives a brilliant green color right away," he adds.

Gooch says research shows that increasing the amount of N in a fertilizer blend coming from a slow-release source improves the efficiency of N uptake. "In many cases, you can use less total nitrogen and get equal or better greening, compared to blends with soluble sources of nitrogen," he says.

Learning opportunities

Bauwens says LCOs are being pressured to reduce the amount of nitrogen and phosphorous put on turf, and the industry needs to learn more about using "nutritional feeds" for turf rather than focusing only on NPK.

LCOs need to do their own research, and not rely solely on university recommendations when it comes to building their lawn care programs, Bauwens advises. "Things are changing so fast that university researchers might not have all of the data they need at hand."

Do trials under your own, local growing conditions, he advises.

"Most landscapers and lawn professionals don't know that there are controlled-release fertilizers that can last for six months with one application," Gooch adds. "This type of fertilizer can be a great choice for a commercial account that is under annual contract." LM

HARLER is a freelance writer who lives in Strongsville, OH. Contact him at curt@curtharler.com.



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Read to feed your brain and business

Throughout my life, few places have offered the comfort and solace of a bookstore. Many are the hours I've spent wandering the towering stacks (any good bookstore has shelves that are just out of arm's reach) perusing countless titles covering every topic conceived.

Yet like so many areas of life, the Internet has changed forever the way we buy our books. Anyone who has visited *Landscape Management's* Web site or received one of our electronic newsletters in the past couple of months has noticed a link to our new *LM* Bookstore. There you can find titles only available through our electronic store, including Jeffrey Scott's "The Referral Advantage: How to Increase Sales and Grow Your Landscape Business By Referral" and Harvey Goldglantz's "Marketing Matters: The Ultimate Reference Guide to Making the Most of Your Marketing Money."

We offer titles covering a range of Green Industry topics, including fertilization, insect and disease control, irrigation, tree and ornamental care. And in keeping with *LM's* mission, you'll also find topics on business management, finance and leadership. Through our site, you also have access to *Amazon.com's* millions of offerings.

Many other titles will be hitting *LM* Bookstore's virtual shelves soon.

Online bookstores don't match the ambiance of their **brick-and-mortar counterparts**, but they do deliver "anywhere, anytime access" to volumes of riveting information at reduced prices.

If you're anything like me, you have a stack of titles sitting on your nightstand you're trying desperately to get to. But a backlog of books doesn't stop you from going back to a favorite bookstore and (despite the protestations of your wife) picking up another title or two. Actually, my wife enjoys bookstores as much as I do, and she probably outreads me. She has this annoying habit, though, of not picking up another book until she's nearly done with the current title. I just don't get that. But I digress.

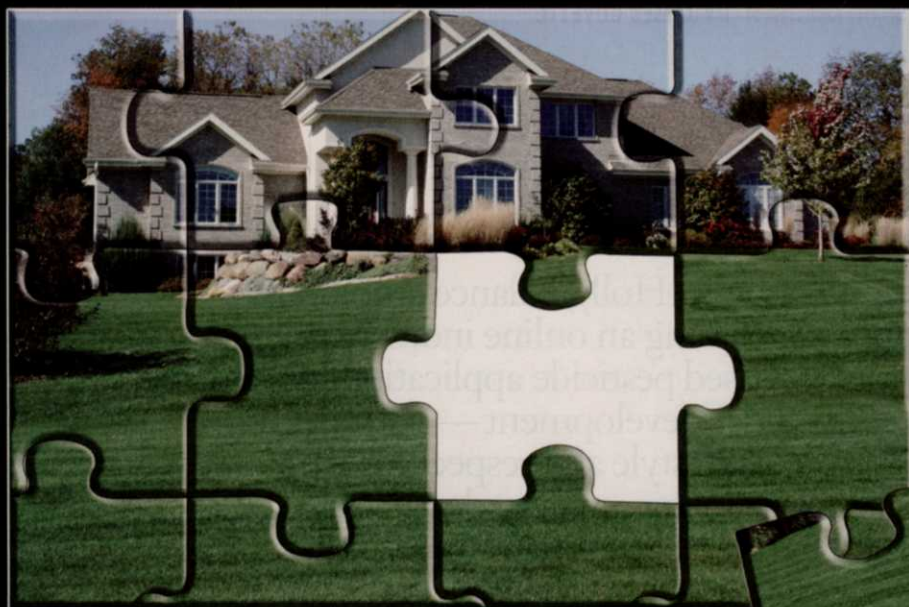
Books do more than entertain. They educate. The really good ones do both. Any writing talent I have (and there are those of you who might argue otherwise) comes primarily from reading other authors, how they turn a phrase, a nuanced word choice that deepens understanding and meaning. Our electronic bookstore, for good or ill, allows me more easily to peruse the old and the new. Brick-and-mortar operations are limited by space. They simply can't house all the titles available. Our electronic bookstore has no such limitations. There's a real thrill in coming across an unexpected title that catches your imagination.

And while I still enjoy the faint musty smell that permeates a good bookstore (used bookstores are better for that), the realities of modern life have reduced the amount of trips I take to my favorite haunts. Work and chasing after kids have limited my ability to walk among the stacks. Occasionally, after a rare dinner out, we'll stop by the bookstore and scan the latest new releases. Sometimes we get lost among the titles and never make it to the movie.

But usually my free time comes after the kids have gone to bed and the brick-and-mortar operations have closed for the evening. How much of your business do you manage after the sun goes down? I like the ability to shop late at night.

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- ◆ LebanonPro 16-0-5 50% LSN® .38 Barricade
- ◆ ProScape 19-0-6 33% MESA with LockUp™

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LebanonTurf

Improving the Way Professionals Care for Turf



Todd Graus and his wife, Holly, balance ambitious business plans — including an online industry training service and a GPS-based pesticide application monitoring system currently under development — with strong family ties, a spiritual lifestyle and respect for employees. It all takes place at the company's headquarters, a converted ranch house in Jackson, WY.

What are some of the challenges of running two operations 250 miles apart?

Even though it's not a franchise, I have my Worland, WY, office running as one. We offer the same services.

Having the two locations (Jackson and Worland, WY) prompted me to develop GreenApplicator.com — a Web site devoted to weekly pesticide training — due to the fact that I was unable to be in two places at the same time. We decided to beef it up and make it available to every company in the U.S. and Canada. At \$10 per user per year, 52 weeks per year, it has become a very inexpensive training tool.

Detail your Green Applicator training program.

We assume that when we have a new hire, and that person passes the pesticide applicator exam that he or she will retain the information and continue to learn. That's not always the case. Green Applicator prompts our pesticide applicators — and consumers — to log into a secure Web site, watch a pesticide safety

training video that I teach, and take a 10-question exam. Users are required to log in every week to view the new material, setting up the conditions for continuing education.

What are some of the practices you have in place to promote a seamless flow of business information?

During vacations, we transfer calls from one office to the other. We use a browser-based software package that allows both offices access to both customer databases, and because the programs are similar, whoever answers the phone has got things covered. We also have exceptional communication with our clients.

You're gaining professional property management accounts. How does this segment differ from your typical residential and commercial

customers? Larger accounts mean I work for one client versus 30 customers in the residential market. It also means doing more work with fewer man hours.

What are the plans for your business for 2009? God willing, Green Turf Lawnscape will continue to gain market share throughout Wyoming and Idaho. Green Applicator's educational and auction sites will begin to catch fire, and SNIPER Technology (a GPS-based pesticide application monitoring system) will totally revolutionize the worldwide workplace. I partnered with a few friends to develop and bring to the marketplace technology that could eliminate paperwork and save even small companies tens of thousands of dollars per season, while increasing productivity 6% to 10% each day.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Green Turf Lawnscape, Jackson, WY

FOUNDED: 1984

NUMBER OF OUTLETS: 2 (Jackson, WY; Worland, WY)

EMPLOYEES: Six full-time; 16 seasonal

EDUCATION/CERTIFICATIONS: Todd Graus holds a bachelor's of science degree in forest management from Colorado State University; he also is an International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)-certified arborist

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: ISA; Professional Landcare Network (PLANET); and Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) board of directors

BUSINESS OUTLOOK: "We're looking at double-digit growth for 2009."

PERSONAL INTERESTS/HOBBIES: Coaches youth basketball, plays in over-45 basketball league, and enjoys downhill skiing and boating.

FAMILY: Co-owners Todd and Holly; daughters Sydney, 13, Rebekah, 11, and son Gage, 7

WEB SITE: GreenTurf.org, GreenApplicator.com, GreenApplicatorAuction.com and SniperTechnology.com

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Out-front mowers feature EFI, electronic deck lifts and ergonomic gains.

BY CURT HARLER

MANUFACTURERS KEEP COMING up with cool new concepts. But one constant question in the mower industry is how much “cool” the landscaper can afford. The good news is there is technology out there that has a good payback. Like almost every other industry segment, the higher costs of fuel and steel have put pressure on prices, even for basic units. However, manufacturers are doing their best to keep costs even more under control.

“There is a careful balance all manufacturers have to tread,” says Tim Cromley, sales and marketing manager for

Walker Mowers, Fort Collins, CO. “The technology we put in has to be allowable for what the market will bear. We can do gyroscopes and all sorts of science fiction technology on our mowers — but it has to make sense for the guy writing the check.”

Fuel-injected

One thing growing in popularity is electronic fuel injection (EFI). Kohler, a major provider of mower power, has made great strides in EFI. Starting with its Command PRO 30 gasoline, twin-cylinder model in March, Kohler

continued on page 42

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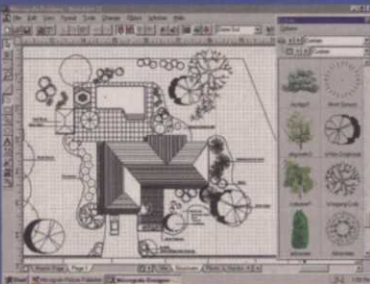
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MOWER TECH



← Dixie Chopper plans to bring back EFI technology.

continued from page 40 will introduce the first flex-fuel, EFI engine. Over the next two years, Kohler plans to convert its entire Command PRO air-cooled and Aegis liquid-cooled engines to EFI.

This past year, Walker shipped 26% of its mowers with EFI, up from 22% in 2005 — and that share is growing. “About 80% of our machines are Kohler,” Cromley says.

The additional cost of EFI on a 26-hp unit is about \$700 to \$800, including matching up the other electronics on the mower. However, the annual fuel savings of a 26-hp EFI versus a 23-hp carbureted engine is about \$1,000, so the payback period on initial investment is one season of mowing.

Dixie Chopper used to offer a Kohler-EFI engine, but stopped selling it. “We will go back to it,” says Rick Judy, marketing manager for Dixie. “Down the road, it will become more popular.”

The firm’s current model offers an

ergonomic boost thanks to dial on the seat that allows operators to adjust for their weights. “More spring gives a better ride,” Judy says.

ZTRs and ergonomics

Out-front zero-turn radius (ZTR) mowers are making waves, too.

“Zero-turn maneuverability makes mowing far more effective because the mowing deck never has to leave uncut grass,” says Patsy Penner, marketing coordinator with Moundridge, KS-based Grasshopper. Penner says the combination of ZTR maneuverability with the reach of the front-mounted deck lets landscapers trim while mowing, reach into and under spaces quickly and efficiently, and mow areas that could otherwise only be reached with a walk-behind mower. While this is not new, it’s gaining wider attention as mowing operations try to increase efficiencies.

Grasshopper has developed and will soon introduce a new 72-in. DuraMax featuring

its PowerFold deck-lifting and electric cutting-height adjustment technology.

The new Snapper PRO S800x is another ZTR that offers new, ergonomic features landscapers appreciate. The S800x is an out-front ZTR with an electric deck lift that takes the effort out of adjusting cutting height. The electronics take care of height adjustments from 1.5 in. to 5 in. When it’s time to do routine blade maintenance, the electric lift angles the deck up to make the job easier. The twin 6-gal. fuel tanks are equipped with an extra-large filler neck.

Landscapers want to protect their investment, too. One place to look is at the unit’s warranty. Dixie Chopper has extended its warranty to three-year, bumper-to-bumper coverage on all units. The only exclusions are for Dixie’s Kohler and Yanmar engines. **LM**

HARLER is a freelance writer who lives in Strongsville, OH. Contact him at curt@curtharler.com.

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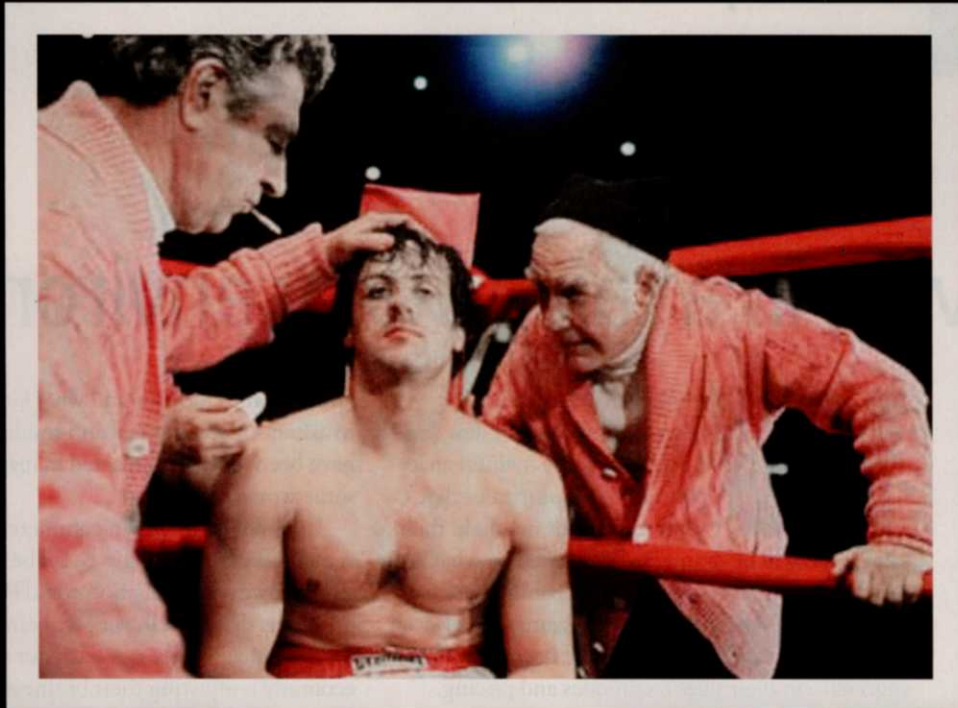
Jeffrey Scott grew his maintenance/landscape design-build/lawn and tree care business from \$5 million to \$10 million in annual revenues in part by raising retention to 98%, growing professional referral sales from \$50,000 to \$2 million, and boosting division margins 15%. Founder and president of Trumbull, CT-based Landscape Success Systems, Jeffrey Scott is author of the recent hit book “The Referral Advantage: How to Increase Sales & Grow Your Business By Referral”. Jeffrey is an expert in helping build brands, captivate clients and grow businesses profitably. He has developed systems and processes to boost your top and bottom line.

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Thriving in a take-away environment

With the decline in new construction comes a new reality for landscape maintenance contractors. Companies that want to grow or maintain their sales levels will be dramatically affected by what is rapidly becoming a take-away environment.

Companies will have more pressure than ever on their accounts as other contractors become more aggressive in their sales techniques and pricing. With few new projects to bid on, most contractors will resort to going after other contractors' work.

In this increasingly competitive environment, companies need comprehensive strategies to maintain profitable growth. The most important part of these strategies is to identify signs that your properties might be at risk.

Staying close to your customers and always doing a great job is the best strategy, but during tough times it's also important to pay more attention to your clients' businesses.

This will involve some training of your account managers and customer relationship managers to

know what to look for and what kinds of questions to ask. Both commercial and residential real estate have been severely impacted in many markets, some worse than others.

Look for vacancies in commercial and retail centers. Bankruptcy sales could be an indicator that a homeowners' association could have budgetary problems thanks to lower fees being collected. As for individual businesses, ask your clients how the economy is affecting their business.

It warrants making a matrix of your client types and what sensitivities they might have to the recession so you can systematically evaluate their vulnerability. They will have sales people from other companies calling on them. Will they listen? You should be looking in advance of just what work might be vulnerable to accepting low bids, and who might ask you to cut your bids.

A proactive approach might help you build more trust and loyalty with clients — if you feel their pain and go to them first with a value-engineered temporary reduction of scope to help them get through the tough times.


Opportunity knocks

When prospecting for new clients, you often will be calling on your competitors' properties. Here you should be looking for sites being maintained by competitors that price similarly to you and deliver the same quality of work. No sense chasing properties being maintained by "low ballers" — unless you want to go low yourself.

You need to minimize costs because you will have to bid tighter than you want to get work. In this economy, you might have to cut some prices just to keep work. Unless you cut your costs, the price cuts you make will come off your top and bottom lines.

Remember, with each challenge there are new opportunities. Smart, proactive contractors always come out of tough times stronger than their competitors. Be one of them.

Staying close to your customers and always doing a great job is the best strategy, but during tough times it's also important to pay more attention to your clients' businesses.

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

PROFITABILITY & SUSTAINABILITY

WHAT A DIFFERENCE a few decades makes in the technology world.

Remember the original Sony Walkman? When launched in 1979, the portable audio cassette player, equipped with headphones, was small and light enough to clip on to your belt. The Walkman defined state-of-the-art audio. Fast forward to 2009. Compare the original Sony Walkman to the tremendous audio and video storage and playing capacity, portability and pricing of today's MP3 players such as the iPod.

The same "decades apart, worlds apart" comparison can be drawn between light-emitting diode (LED) landscape lighting technologies in the early 1990s and their far-more-evolved offspring now marketed by major lighting manufacturers.

Energy-efficient LED technologies help contractors sell landscape lighting and save customers money. BY **MARTY WHITFORD**

"LEDs have been around since the '60s, but it took three decades for the technology to enter the landscape market in a measurable way, and then another almost two decades for LEDs to evolve into the viable alternative they've become for many landscape applications," says Cruz Perez, vice president of marketing for Simi Valley, CA-based Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting.

"Landscape LEDs had a laundry list of issues needing correction in the early '90s — including light color/

temperature and pricing to name just a few — but that was then," Perez adds. "Now, LEDs are the technology of choice for many landscape lighting applications because they make sense from both a profitability and a sustainability standpoint."

Nick Trostle, owner of Columbus, OH-based Scenic Outdoor Lighting & Design, concurs.

"Landscape LEDs reduce related energy costs 75%, and the lights can out-



live their conventional incandescent and halogen counterparts by a factor of 10 or more — say 10 to 15 seasons versus one or two, Trostle adds.

Just as important, Trostle says landscape LEDs, on average, cost half what they did just three years ago. LED pricing has benefitted from economies of scale on both the purchasing side and the technology side.

Rising utility costs also have given quite a lift to landscape LEDs. “It’s not uncommon to receive a complete pay-back on LEDs in energy savings alone in the first year,” Trostle adds.

Equally enticing, LEDs’ temperatures usually range 4,000 to 4,200 Kelvins — 2,000 Kelvins or so fewer than a few years ago — meaning LEDs more closely match conventional lights in temperature and color.

“The days of designers, contractors and customers feeling blue about LEDs throwing blue light no longer need to be an issue with the right LED lights,” Perez says.

LEDs are quick start, solid state and vibration resistant.

Perez says 80% to 90% of a typical LED light’s energy is used to give off light versus many other lights which expend 80% to 90% of their energy through heat, not light — which not only is wasteful but can be a safety issue.

Perez says LEDs’ low maintenance/high safety features make them ideal for a number landscape lighting applications including, to name just a few: down lights from a tree; water features; anywhere children are drawn to and can access lights; step lights; and hotel interiorscapes.

Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting has a portfolio of more than 350 light lines, two-thirds of which are available with LED sources, Perez said.

Additional benefits of LEDs include, according to Perez and Trostle, simplified installation (more fixtures per cable reduces the complexity of installations and related wire and labor costs 50% or more) and the ability to meet



today’s increasingly popular green building requirements.

“Further driving the move to LEDs, there are efficient energy mandates in the Energy Independence & Security Act of 2007, and state legislation such as California’s Title 24,” Perez says.

“Suffice it to say, LED’s time has come — and it’s here to stay.”

Trostle seconds the notion.

“The world is going LED,” Trostle adds. “There are still too many contractors who say, ‘LEDs cost too much and are too blue,’ but my reply to them is, ‘Have you checked out LEDs recently? This isn’t 1990.’” LM

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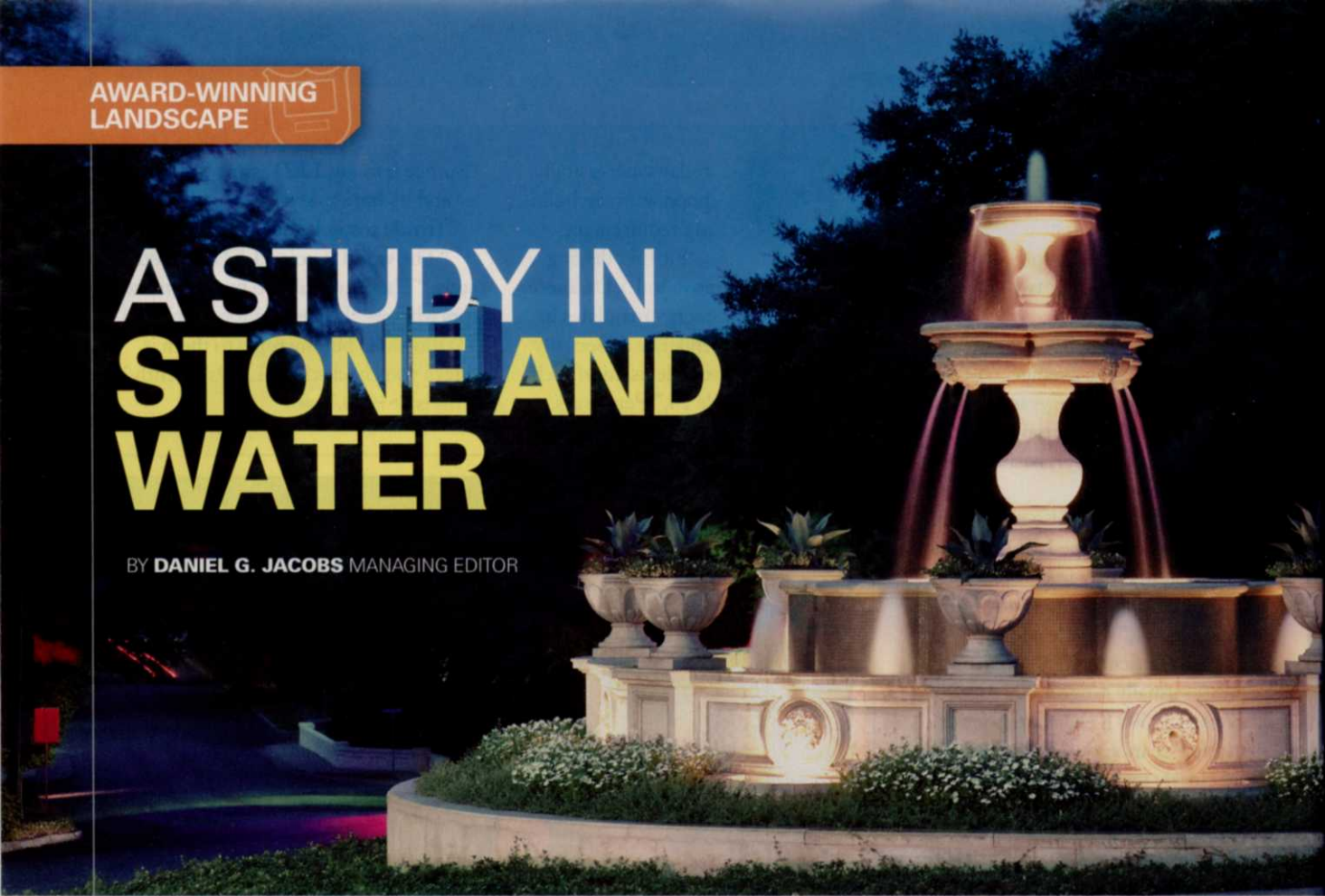
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A STUDY IN STONE AND WATER

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR



Reconstruction of the Ashley Priddy Memorial Fountain earns the ultimate compliment from an Italian visitor

“Bellissima.”

With a single word, the Italian visitor validated the seven months of time, effort and energy Lambert Landscape designers and crew poured into the planning and rebuilding the Ashley Priddy Memorial Fountain in Holland Park, TX.

The fountain is located in small plaza surrounded by roads on all sides. The visitor was driving by, leaned out his window and exclaimed “bellissima” to the crew. The word translates as “lovely” or “beautiful.”

“A lot of the architecture is very classical in that town,” says architect Paul Fields,

president and director of Lambert Landscape. “We wanted something that was not only classical and related to the town, but also really created a gateway — something that makes an image and a statement as a gateway to the city.”

The fountain was originally built in 1987 with a porous stone. A series of freeze and thaw cycles had severely damaged the fountain, and it was in need of constant repair. Fields chose Istrian stone to construct the fountain. The non-porous limestone makes up much of the building façades along Venice’s Grand Canal.

“It was used quite extensively back in the 16th and 17th centuries,” Fields explains. “It accepts carving really well and is durable.”

And it blends well with the nearby architecture.

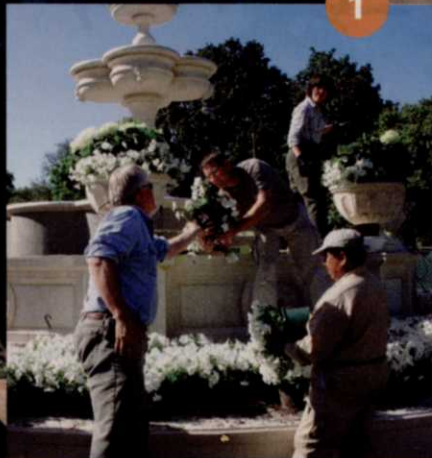
“There’s a lot of classical architecture that surrounds this site,” Fields says. “There’s an old Romanesque church that’s a landmark in the city that’s adjacent to the site. We wanted something that felt congruent to the city and the surrounding space.”

The beauty of the fountain was enhanced with plantings of white hydrangeas and petunias. An evergreen groundcover base provides year round color to the structure. Lambert Landscape also added architectural agaves to the large urns around the base of the fountain.

The fountain melds nicely with nearby buildings, but to accomplish that Lambert Landscape had to reach out to the Old Country and surmount language and time constraints. Fields sent drawings to Italy, where artisans carved the material and shipped it back to the states. The company had only three months to plan and four months to complete the project so it would be ready for an Easter dedication.

And unlike most private projects, the fountain was city-owned. Two families carried the brunt of the cost of the reconstruction. Fields had to please a committee of people.

Not only was the company able to complete the project on time, it earned a Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) last year. **LMB**



Main images. At night, the fountain beckons residents from city. Lighting was incorporated into the fountain's basin.

1. Workers install white hydrangeas and petunias enhance the Istrian stone work.
2. The lion's mask is a symbol of stateliness and power.
3. Classical urns broaden the base, offsetting the 40-ft. diameter of the structure and the 18-ft height of the central fountain.

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SMART CONTROLLERS, SMART CHOICE

New systems automate how much water is used where and when.

BY **RON HALL** EDITOR-AT-LARGE

IRRIGATION CONTROLLERS, OFTEN referred to as timers, are essentially clocks. Although the technology designed into the latest generation of controllers — so-called “smart controllers” — is sophisticated, their task remains humble: They tell valves on irrigation systems when to open to allow water to flow through pipes and to exit sprayheads, rotors or emitters.

Controllers, including smart controllers, are available in a range of prices and different levels of sophistication. Homeowners typically opt for relatively inexpensive, standard controllers they buy at retail garden centers and big box stores. In spite of their modest price, it's inaccurate to

describe these units as “dumb.” They dispense water efficiently, assuming that the remainder of the system is well designed, installed, is intelligently maintained and the clocks are adjusted to meet climatic conditions.

These are big assumptions. The biggest is the belief (hope?) that property owners regularly adjust timers to account for changes or seasonal differences in the weather. This is seldom the case.

Chris Spain, chairman of the board and chief strategy officer of Petaluma, CA-based HydroPoint Data Systems, offers this analogy to this “set-it-and-forget-it” syndrome: Envision that instead of a thermostat to control the heat in your home, you install a timer that turns on your furnace at the same time for the same period of time every day, every season. Wouldn't make much sense, would it?

Get smart

Introduced into the golf and sports field markets 20 years ago, smart controllers are now turning up on commercial and residential properties.

For the most part, they take humans out of the day-to-day landscape irrigation picture by using weather information and/or sensors to manage watering times and frequencies — how much water is dispersed where and when. As environmental conditions vary, they increase or decrease irrigation, by measuring factors such as precipitation, humidity, wind, solar radiation and soil moisture.

Smart controllers have come to the attention of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and water

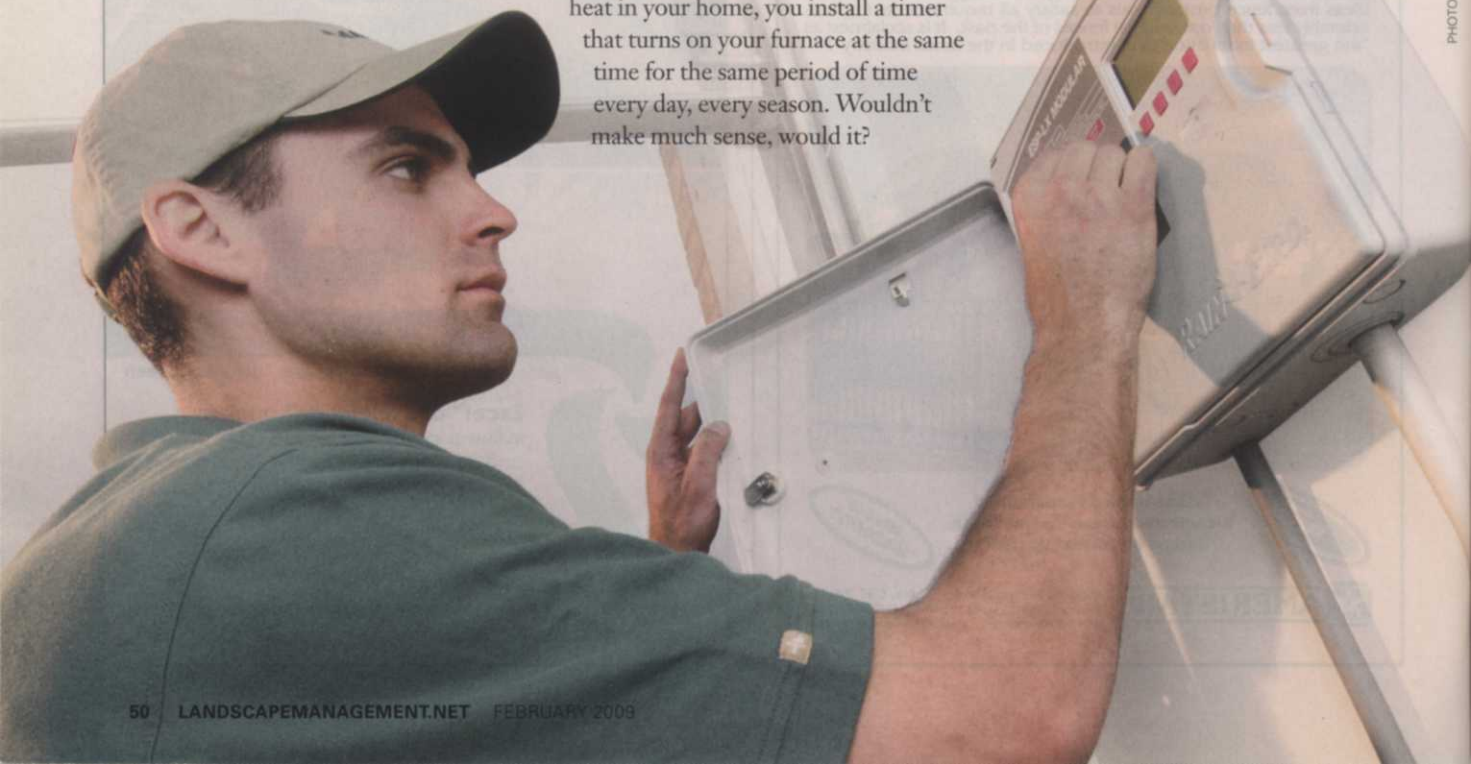


PHOTO COURTESY: RAIN BIRD CORP.

agencies eager to reduce water waste and runoff from irrigated landscapes.

Some communities offer cash incentives to encourage homeowners to replace their older controllers with smart units. The San Diego County Water Authority (SDCWA), for example, gives homeowners \$350 rebates for replacing their standard timers with smart controllers. Other water purveyors, most of them located in the arid Southwest U.S., have similar programs.

All major irrigation suppliers offer smart controllers. Years of testing have shown that when properly installed and tuned, the units cut related water consumption and costs 15% to 30%.

Interaction still important

While replacing an older clock with a smart controller generally reduces water use, occasionally property managers are surprised when irrigation water use goes up. In some instances, older clock actually might have been providing too little irrigation, or the coverage was so uneven that large portions of the landscape were under-watered.

"It took some time for us learn how to use it, But we're getting really good in setting up these systems and managing these controllers now," said John Gachina of his company's experiences. "I think there is a misconception by some people that you buy these smart controllers and they take care of themselves. They need care and feeding as you're gaining experience with them."

Gachina, owner of Gachina Landscape Management, Menlo Park, CA, says that his irrigation technicians recommend smart controllers to customers — but only where they're appropriate.

"When we look at a system, we want to know whether it's a good candidate for a smart controller. If it's not because of a poorly designed system, then we'll talk to the customer about how to upgrade the system," he says. "The controller won't adjust for bad system design."

Landscape irrigation efficiency is increasingly important because of environmental and financial considerations. The U.S. EPA estimates that as much as

50% of water used for landscape irrigation is wasted. Overwatering results in runoff and non-point source pollution; wasted water and energy (including the cost of infrastructure to meet peak demands); damage to hardscapes and foundations; added liability; higher water bills; and damage to turfgrass and ornamentals.

Will Johnson, owner of Seco Land-

scape in San Diego, says his passion for installing water-efficient landscapes is reflected in the name of his company — seco is the Spanish word for dry.

"A smart controller is a tool, and like any other tool, you have to use it correctly," Johnson says. "The beauty of this tool is that after I've programmed the timer and I leave the homeowner's

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GET SMART CHOICE

property, I know that, at least this season, the landscape will be watered appropriately and that water is not going to run into the street."

But even with smart technology, you can't "set it and forget it" — at least not in the \$300 to \$500 price range most customers are willing to pay for a timer.

Compare features

In pursuit of water savings and to reduce non-point-source pollution, the U.S. EPA has partnered with the Irrigation Association (IA) to test water-efficient products that can be promoted through its voluntary, three-year-old WaterSense program.

AT A GLANCE

Smart controllers

- › The technology is established on golf courses and sports fields.
- › All major irrigation manufacturers offer them.
- › There are two basic types: climate-based and sensor-based.
- › Climate-based controllers receive regular signals of prevailing weather conditions from local weather stations that update the current evapotranspiration rate to the units.
- › Sensor-based systems typically have historic weather data programmed into their memories for baselines and adjust irrigation as they receive real-time data on rainfall, temperature, sunlight, humidity, slope and soil moisture.
- › When properly set up on well-designed systems, they can save up to 30% of water usage.
- › The U.S. EPA will consider them for the first irrigation product for its WaterSense labeling program.

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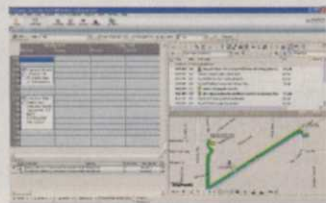
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That process is under way for smart climate-based controllers, the first irrigation product category being considered for WaterSense labeling. You can compare the capabilities of tested smart controllers — climate-based and sensor-based — online at www.irrigation.org.

Do your research. Manufacturers offer valuable information online, but you'll get a better idea of how these units work by visiting sites where they're being used and talking with end users. LM

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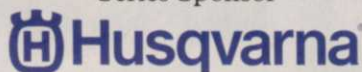
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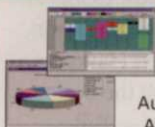
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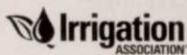
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- ▶ A trio of Kehoe & Co.'s Green Industry reports: Benchmarking to Improve Profits, The Down-Market Budget Worksheet, and Pay & Benefits Survey.

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Systems, coaches business owners on building their brands, captivating their clients, and implementing new systems to grow business profitably.

2. *LM's* Marketing Matters Consulting Club —

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