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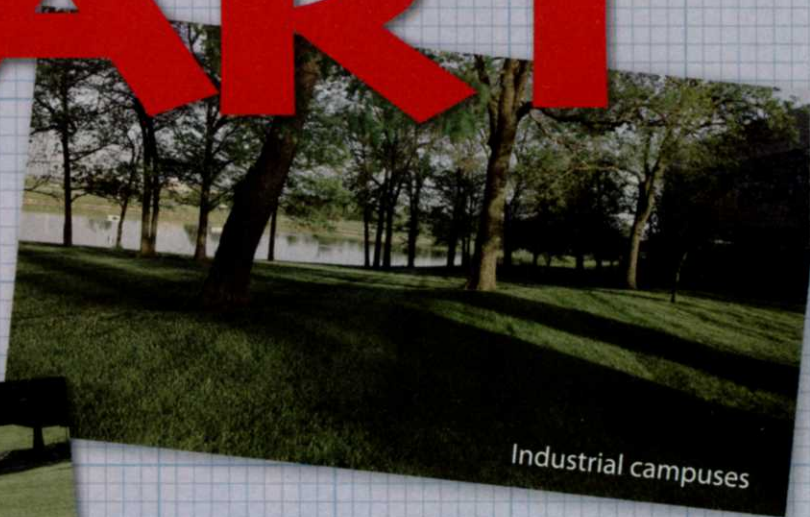
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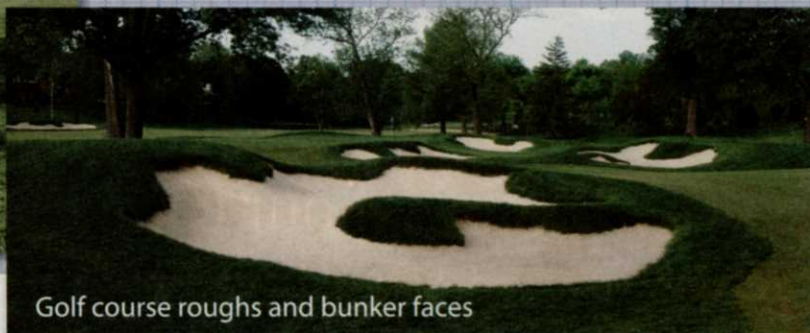
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CONTENTS»

MAY 2009
VOL 48, ISSUE 5

LM
WEBINAR



Scott
McCredie

FEATURES

10 Our greener future (B LC M)

You can't put off getting in step with America's growing environmental movement if you want to ensure your place in the approaching era of Green Industry growth and prosperity. BY RON HALL

24 Immigration's widening fault line (B D/B I LC)

Congress' failure to fix immigration policies and extend H-2B's returning worker exemption triggers labor tremors across the Green Industry. BY MARTY WHITFORD

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

B—Business, D/B—Design/Build, I—Irrigation, LC—Lawn Care, M—Maintenance

DEPARTMENTS

34 Lawn Care Pro Chris Senske,
Senske Lawn & Tree Care,
Kennewick, WA
BY RON HALL

57 LM Reports Aerators
& dethachers

COLUMNS

8 The Hall Mark
BY RON HALL

20 Working Smarter
BY JIM PALUCH

33 The Benchmark
BY KEVIN KEHOE

36 Best Practices
BY BRUCE WILSON

64 Whit's World
BY MARTY WHITFORD

IN EVERY ISSUE

22 Products **59 Resources**
62 Classifieds

ON THE COVER

Beautiful landscapes of the future will be designed with sustainability in mind. Photo courtesy: The Hendrikus Group

DISEASE CONTROL FOR COOL SEASON LAWNS

DATE: Thursday, May 28, 2009
TIME: Noon EDT

Matt Giese, technical manager at Syngenta, will discuss cool season turf diseases and how diagnosing them can increase revenue. To register visit www.landscapemanagement.net/webinar



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LMdirect!

Channel your inner Spielberg. Learn about Rain Bird's Intelligent Use of Water film competition.

Athletic Turf News

Turfgrass, it seems, is becoming the whipping boy of American landscapes by a small but growing group of critics.

LD/B Solutions

USDA Secretary Vilsack and First Lady Michelle Obama support community gardens.

Get Growing

The Missouri Botanical Garden identifies 13 new "Plants of Merit" for the Midwest in 2009.

Correction: A comment on Agrium's new XCU slow-release fertilizer in the "Fertilizer Trends" article in the February edition of *Landscape Management* should have been attributed to Bryan Gooch, marketing manager with Agrium Advanced Technologies. The quote was incorrectly attributed to Don Myers, product development manager for herbicides and plant growth regulators (PGRs) with Bayer Environmental Science.

SPECIAL SECTIONS

39

LIVESCAPES

Improve your bottom line with environmentally friendly landscapes.

45

SNOW + ICE GUIDE

The snow is flying fast and furious. Do you know who to service first?



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Without healthy soils, we're history

Only water approaches soil's importance in sustaining life on our beautiful blue globe. As obvious as that might seem, seldom do we give soil the attention it warrants in light of its crucial role in our livelihoods — not to mention our existence.

Perhaps like you, I've unthinkingly looked at soil and dirt as being one and the same. There's a vast and vital difference, of course.

Living soil — replete with minerals, organic matter, invertebrates, macro-flora and micro-flora — is the foundation we build upon to populate our urban environments with beautiful, life-enhancing green material. Healthy soil is a marvelously complex and synergistic mixture of living and non-living material that engenders plant health.

Dirt, which is often lifeless, cannot do this.

Do we focus too narrowly on treating the symptoms of plant woes, rather than determining and fixing the root cause, which is usually damaged or poor-quality soil? Perhaps. Sometimes, of course, we have no choice, inheriting pre-existing conditions in the form of lifeless dirt. Then we must choose

between improving the soil's capacity to sustain healthy plant life or launching a maintenance regimen that, in the long run, might turn out to be wasteful, expensive and potentially harmful to the environment. Economics and revenue considerations often loom large in determining which course is selected.

Why is soil top of mind for me now? An enlightening Earth Day presentation by Dr. Rattan Lal, a world-famous soil scientist, at

the Wooster, OH, campus of The Ohio State University re-opened my eyes to its vital importance — not just to our industry, but to our future well-being and survival.

I hope that you find Lal's 10 laws of soil, which he shared with an audience of several hundred Earth Day celebrants, as enlightening as I did:

- ▶ **Law #1:** The biophysical process of soil degradation is driven by economic, social and political forces.
- ▶ **Law #2:** When people are poverty-stricken, desperate and starving, they pass on their sufferings to the land.
- ▶ **Law #3:** It is not possible to take more out of a soil than what is put in it without degrading its quality.
- ▶ **Law #4:** Marginal soils cultivated with marginal inputs produce marginal yields and support marginal living.
- ▶ **Law #5:** Plants cannot differentiate among the nutrients supplied through inorganic fertilizers or organic amendments.
- ▶ **Law #6:** Mining carbon has the same effect on global warming, whether it is through mineralization of soil organic matter and extractive farming, burning fossil fuels or draining peat soils.
- ▶ **Law #7:** Even the elite varieties of plants cannot extract water and nutrients from any soil where they do not exist.
- ▶ **Law #8:** Soils are integral to any strategy of mitigating global warming and improving the environment.
- ▶ **Law #9:** Sustainable management of soils is the engine of economic development, political stability and transformation of rural communities in developing countries.
- ▶ **Law #10:** Sustainable management of soil implies the use of modern innovations built upon traditional knowledge. Those who refuse to use modern science to address urgent global issues must be prepared to endure more suffering.

If you would like to view Lal's complete PowerPoint presentation, which he kindly shared with me, email me at rhall@questex.com.



Dr. Rattan Lal

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COVER STORY

Our greener future

BY **RON HALL**
EDITOR AT LARGE

You can't put off getting in step with America's growing environmental movement if you want to ensure your place in tomorrow's Green Industry.

YOU MIGHT ALREADY have figured this out, but here's the scoop: Most of your customers aren't interested in green services, particularly if it means they will be writing bigger checks to you. The hype and posturing regarding sustainability, regardless of products or services, far exceed the public's acceptance and adoption.

At least that's the case right now.

"Very few people today are making buying decisions based on what is green," says Dr. Honey Rand, APR, president and CEO of Environmental PR Group, Lutz, FL. Rand describes selling propositions based solely on environmental claims as "meaningless."

"Green is the new branding. There is so much green now that (the term) has no meaning anymore," she adds.

continued on page 13

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RAIN  BIRD®

continued from page 10

Rand has solid, hands-on expertise in that arena. She started her marketing and public relations company that specializes in environmental issues after serving as director of communications at the Southwest Florida Water Management District.

But if the majority of the public has yet to embrace green with its wallets, why would anyone suggest, as we now are, that the Green Industry must become greener, and that ultimately

following that path will provide landscape and lawn service providers with its best opportunities for long-term revenue growth and prosperity.

The short answer is the Green Industry might have no choice in the matter.

Government agencies, activist organizations, the state of the economy (the age of extravagant waste is over) and other industries that provide allied services, such as the building industry, will see to that.

ULTIMATE SUSTAINABILITY?

BALLARD, WA — The only aspect of Eco Mow lawn service in danger of not being sustainable might be the legs of its owner/operator. Scott McCredie, 55, bicycles to his job sites, pulling a small trailer loaded with a battery-powered (or corded) mower, a broom, grass shears and, on bigger properties, an electric trimmer.

"The weight starts to add up pretty quickly when you put a mower and few tools on a trailer like that," says McCredie, whose service vehicle is his Jamis Dakota city bicycle.

"The bicycle has 27 speeds so it can handle the hills here — and we have some pretty steep hills, which means I have to go into granny gear and go one mile per hour or less when I'm going up a hill with the loaded trailer," says McCredie, acknowledging it's unlikely he will challenge the likes of TruGreen anytime soon.

"Most of the lawns here are fairly small," he explains. "It usually takes me a half-hour to an hour to mow them."

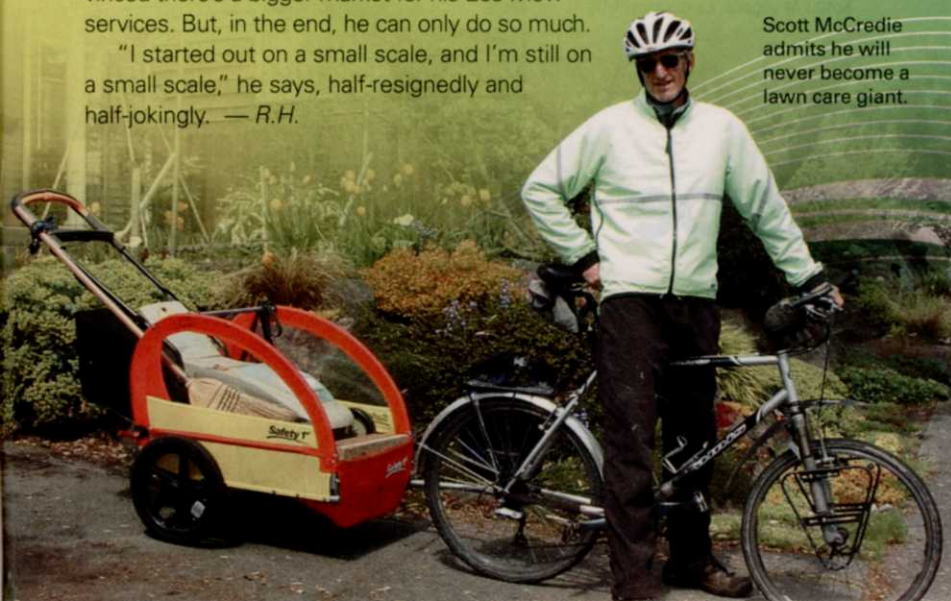
What prompted McCredie, an avid bicyclist and confirmed outdoorsman, to start such a unique (and physically taxing) service two years ago?

"I watched the mow-blow-go guys pull up in their pickup trucks pulling trailers with big gas-guzzling mowers on them, and listened to lawn mower after lawn mower, noisy things in my neighborhood. When I looked into it, I learned that it's polluting on a number of levels, and felt that property owners needed another option," he says.

McCredie says the Seattle area embraces environmental issues, and he's convinced there's a bigger market for his Eco Mow services. But, in the end, he can only do so much.

"I started out on a small scale, and I'm still on a small scale," he says, half-resignedly and half-jokingly. — R.H.

Scott McCredie admits he will never become a lawn care giant.



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Changing standards

Will the public accept this new reality? Evidence suggests yes. Witness how Canadian citizens have accepted the ban on the use of synthetic pest control products on public and private landscapes in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Or how property owners throughout the United States are

changing their landscape irrigation practices because of water agency restrictions or water costs.

Hendrikus Schraven, owner of a successful design/build company in Issaquah, WA, and a decades-long advocate of sustainable practices, says the industry must shift its mindset. Professionals must begin designing and

delivering landscapes that provide clients with ecological benefits in addition to being functional and beautiful.

A conversation Schraven had with a client several decades ago — in this case, Bill Gates, founder of Microsoft — suggests to him that it can be done.

"I'm going to put a computer in every home in America," Gates told Schraven, who found the statement to be more than a bit bold at the time.

"How are you going to do that," queried Schraven?

"I'm going to change the standard," he recalls Gates responding in a matter-of-fact voice.

continued on page 17

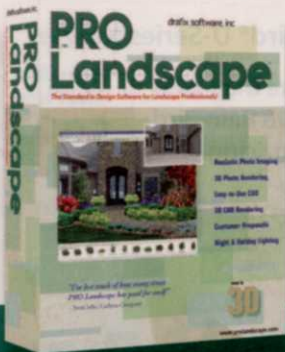


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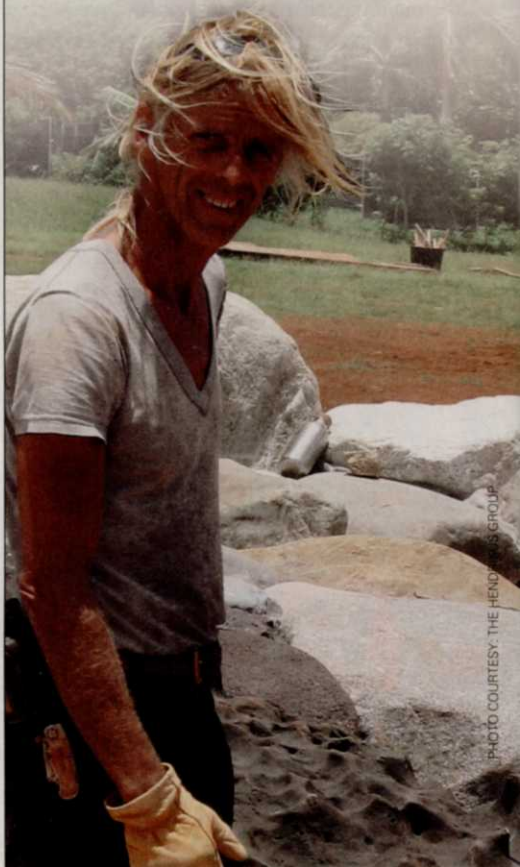
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A man wearing a dark cap and a brown vest over a light blue shirt stands in a grassy field. He is holding a large cardboard box with the Rain Bird logo. A stack of US dollar bills is tucked into his vest pocket. In the background, a large sprinkler is spraying water across the field.

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Hunter List Price

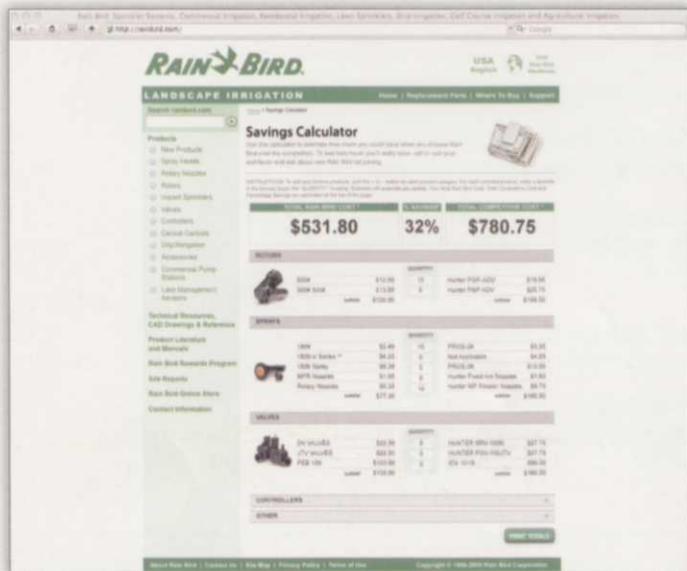
\$10⁵⁰

* 45% savings based on U.S. Rain Bird® Rotary Nozzle list price and Hunter® MP2000 Rotators list price effective January 1, 2009.

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Rain Bird Model	Qty	Rain Bird List	Total	Hunter Model	Qty	Hunter List	Total	Est. Savings
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Module Upgrade	1	\$50.00	\$50.00	Module Upgrade	2	\$47.00	\$94.00	\$44.00
5004 Rotor	10	\$12.00	\$120.00	PGP-ADJ	10	\$19.95	\$199.50	\$79.50
1804 Spray	10	\$2.48	\$24.80	PROS-04	10	\$3.35	\$33.50	\$8.70
DV Valve	7	\$22.50	\$157.50	SRV-100G	7	\$27.75	\$194.25	\$36.75
Rotary Nozzle	10	\$5.25	\$52.50	MP Rotator	10	\$9.75	\$97.50	\$45.00
TOTAL \$531.80				TOTAL \$780.75				\$248.95

YOU SAVE \$248.95*

Typical Commercial Installation

Rain Bird Model	Qty	Rain Bird List	Total	Hunter Model	Qty	Hunter List	Total	Est. Savings
ESPBLX 120V	1	\$356.00	\$356.00	1CM800PL	1	\$379.00	\$379.00	\$23.00
Module Upgrade	1	\$129.00	\$129.00	Module Upgrade	1	\$140.00	\$140.00	\$11.00
5004 SAM Rotor	120	\$13.50	\$1,620.00	PGP-ADV	120	\$25.75	\$3,090.00	\$1,470.00
1806 Spray	40	\$9.39	\$375.60	PROS-06	40	\$10.50	\$420.00	\$44.40
PEB 100 Valve	16	\$103.00	\$1,648.00	ICV 101G	16	\$99.00	\$1,584.00	\$64.00
TOTAL \$4,128.60				TOTAL \$5,613.00				\$1,304.40

YOU SAVE \$1,484.40*

*Based on 2009 U.S. Rain Bird, Hunter and Netafim List Pricing effective January 1, 2009.

RAIN BIRD®

SSI'S BENCHMARKS A TURNING POINT?



Heather Venhaus

AUSTIN, TX — Heather Venhaus, program director for the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SSI), says the nation's growing green consciousness offers landscape, lawn service and irrigation contractors a "huge opportunity" to increase

the value of their services to customers. In fact, it provides a path for the Green Industry, as a whole, to follow to prosper indefinitely into the future.

"This (the green movement) is about building upon the eco-system services that landscapes provide. It brings a whole new value to the people who design, develop and maintain those landscapes," says Venhaus, headquartered at the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin. "We're moving the discussion beyond aesthetics, and toward landscapes that provide cleaner air, cleaner water, more diverse habitats and all of those other special needs."

Get up to speed with SSI, because it promises to affect the landscape industry, perhaps profoundly — and soon because some landscape architects and municipalities already are starting to adopt them.

Briefly, SSI is a collaboration among three organizations — the wildflower center, the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) and the U.S. Botanic Garden — to develop voluntary national guidelines and performance benchmarks for sustainable land design, construction and maintenance practices. These, of course, are services that landscape, lawn service and irrigation contractors perform.

Last fall, SSI published a draft of guidelines and performance benchmarks, seeking comments from stakeholders and the public. The draft represented several years of work by SSI committees and covered topics such as soils, materials, hydrology, vegetation, and human health and well-being. That draft document generated more than 350 responses to SSI, which later this year will publish a full report. SSI is also plan-

ning to launch its pilot project process in 2010. This is where SSI will test its performance benchmarks and make adjustments prior to its eventual incorporation with LEED, perhaps in 2012.

LEED is short for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design, an international certification system developed and administered by the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC).

In the 11 years since its inception, LEED has become a powerful force in the building industry. During 2008, and counting Jan. 2009, LEED-registered and -certified "green" construction projects doubled from about 10,000 to 20,000, reports the USGBC. As of March 2009, worldwide there were an estimated 101,000 LEED-certified professionals.

While the intent of LEED guidelines is to drive energy efficiency and the adoption of sustainable and human-health practices in building construction and maintenance, some of its provisions focus on the grounds and landscapes that surround buildings, as well.

This attention on the outside environment will grow once SSI folds its guidelines and performance benchmarks into future versions of LEED, creating in essence an expanded scorecard for contractors to track the sustainability of their operations and services on LEED projects.

In light of the number of cities, governmental organizations, corporations and others requiring LEED certification for construction projects, SSI will have a huge impact on any Green Industry contractors working on those projects.

"Until we have guidelines to judge against, everyone can call themselves green, everyone can say they're making a difference," says Venhaus. "Until we can grade, until we have criteria to grade against, we can't make improvement. Once we have benchmarks, we can begin to work toward them, and then push beyond them and raise the bar again."

"Projects like this initiative are providing the will for the landscape industry to demonstrate why its work is important, and to set itself apart from those industries that aren't operating in such a sustainable manner," she says. — R.H.

continued from page 14

The new normal

Schraven, founder of The Hendrikus Group and a 30-year-plus devotee of sustainable landscaping, says he was considered "a weirdo" when he first began promoting his sustainable landscape services, but no longer.

"This isn't the 'in' thing to do any longer," says Schraven. "It's the life thing to do. There shouldn't even be a question on doing it."

Schraven says that healthy, "alive"

soil is the basis for all landscapes. He says the industry must increase its knowledge of soils and must work with builders and developers to insist upon better quality soils. The other option is to remediate soils so that they can nurture healthy plants.

What's the answer? Schraven advises accepting only projects that allow for the remediation of poor-quality soils. Because of The Hendrikus Group's reputation, this strategy works for him. Obviously, most contractors, operat-

ing in the competitive and price-driven landscape services business environment, feel they can't do this.

But they can, says Schraven, particularly if they approach the market with an ecology-based value proposition.

"You do a project right the first time and you pay less later — less plant replacement, water, maintenance. Clients will listen to this," says Schraven.

In 1997, Brad Wolfe started Organo-Lawn, shortly after graduating from the University of Colorado.

COVER STORY

He says he couldn't find a lawn service in Boulder responsive to his concerns about the environment. Sensing a business opportunity, he put together a lawn care company built *mostly* on the use of natural products.

As the company grew — something that happened rapidly, thanks to his university entrepreneurship train-

ing — Wolfe incorporated even more ecologically friendly initiatives into his company. Today, he points to the proprietary natural products that his technicians use to improve customers' lawns, along with the firm's fleet of biodiesel-fueled service vehicles, company-wide recycling efforts, wind-generated energy powering its shop and



Organo-Lawn treats lawns with proprietary, natural, soil-enriching products.

office, and the organically grown cotton shirts its employees wear.

"Organo-Lawn understands these steps are small in comparison to what can be done," Wolfe says. "But, we're continuing to grow and we're always looking at ways to become more sustainable."

In the decade since its founding, Organo-Lawn has grown to be a dominant lawn care firm in Boulder and surrounding communities. Wolfe now eyes the Denver market as he contemplates franchising the Organo-Lawn model.

Schraven and Wolfe are among the growing numbers of Green Industry business owners recognizing the industry is on the threshold of a new era and must make one of two choices. The first is to embrace products and services that enhance the ecology, conserve resources and build diversity within urban landscapes — this in addition to delivering landscapes with lifestyle and aesthetic benefits customers desire.

The other choice is to continue to offer the same services in the same ways, face increasing regulations and realize the possibility of stagnating growth.

Actually, there might be no choice. The possibility exists that the Green Industry will get dragged kicking and screaming into the new era if it doesn't embrace more ecologically sound business decisions on its own. **LM**

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Monday, October 12, 2009 - Friday, October 16, 2009

Jobsite Name	Cost Code	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Total
Brentwood Job	Irrigation	7:38	7:35	7:53	—	—	23:06
Crestview Job	Planting	—	—	—	7:58	7:49	15:47
		7:38	7:35	7:53	7:58	7:49	38:53

Bill Kemp
Bill Kemp

Regular Hours **38:53**
Overtime Hours - 0 -
Double Time Hours - 0 -



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WORKINGSMARTER

JIM PALUCH

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

Rally your team to a daily win

Imagine you and a friend have just sat down at Game 7 of the NBA Finals, the arena buzzing with electricity. Your team grabs the opening tip and scores the first basket — followed by exuberant cheers. Baskets are traded furiously, yet with each score the crowd grows quieter.

You look up at the scoreboard over center court and there is nothing being reported. No scores, no statistics — just blanks where the numbers should be.

You wonder what is going on as you slump back in your seat. You soon lose interest in watching grown men run up and down a floor for what appears to be no purpose at all.

After about two hours, both groups of men walk off the floor. You and the few remaining people in the arena trudge to the parking lot. On the drive home, you turn on the radio and learn your team won the game by one point with a last-second three-pointer.

How do you feel?

The oversimplified scenario above might border on the absurd, but try to apply the concept to your business. How many of your employees trudge to their cars not knowing whether they won or lost at the end of the day? How many are told the final outcome long after the “game” is over? For companies that Work Smarter, putting up easy-to-understand scoreboards for their teams makes sense — and, ultimately, makes money.

Stroll around your company and see how many scoreboards you can identify. You might be rationalizing that all of your scorekeeping is in the computer and in reports shared with “need-to-knows” at

company meetings. That’s fine, but how does that help employees heading home every evening know whether they won or not?

“Did we win today?” should be a question you and your teammates ask every day. The most important thing, regardless of the answer, is that everyone is able to answer the question. If your employees know the score is being kept, they will strive to win — it is our human nature to want to win and achieve.

Game on

Here are some simple guidelines that will help your players enjoy the game and focus on winning:

- 1. Get visual.** Think about where the scoreboards are at sporting events. They are not hidden; they are a major focal point and constantly being looked at by fans and players. Get your scoreboards up where everyone in the company can see them.
- 2. Keep it simple.** One of the biggest mistakes companies make when it comes to keeping score is trying to track too many things. Determine one or two key indicators, and make sure everyone understands what they mean.
- 3. Train the team.** Spend time coaching the team and help them determine what they need to do to improve scores and earn a victory for the day. Time spent discussing this will pay dividends quickly.
- 4. Celebrate every win.** I’m sure you’ve watched a team win an NBA or NCAA championship: There is an enormous rush onto the court and the celebration begins. Now you might not need to cut down the nets, but you can and should use such victory celebrations to build up your team. Acknowledge the success achieved on the scoreboard, and draw attention to it. The more you make a practice out of doing this, the more opportunities you will have to do it.

Did you win today?

MONTHLY CHALLENGE

Get a very visual scoreboard up somewhere with just one simple measurement on it. Allow your team to decide what they want to measure — and how they will celebrate a victory.

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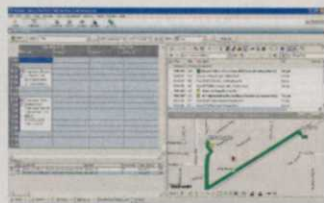


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IMMIGRATION'S WIDENING FAULT LINE

Congress' failure to fix immigration policies and extend H-2B's returning worker exemption triggers labor tremors across the Green Industry

BY **MARTY WHITFORD**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

NO ONE can say with absolute certainty where or when the term "Band-Aid fix" originated. However, most would agree the U.S. Government embodies the concept.

Temporary stop-gaps — creating them, constantly tweaking them, jettisoning them and often later trying to resuscitate them — is the circle of life for Congress.

We asked business owners who have participated in our nation's H-2B guest worker program if that stop-gap has "fixed" the fissure triggered by years of delaying comprehensive immigration reform. Most laughed — and quite a few almost cried.

Dual-edged sword

Mariani Landscape in Lake Bluff, IL, was one of the first landscape companies to use the H-2B guest worker program, and has done so for years with mixed results.

"The good news is H-2B enables us to meet our goal of hiring legal employees," says CEO Frank Mariani. "It guarantees them safe travel, which is much more humane than the

continued on page 26

CONTINUING SERIES:
IMMIGRATION & LABOR

Last month, we focused on the trend toward more worksite raids being conducted by federal immigration agents. This month, we cover the continued fall-out from the increasingly strained H-2B guest worker program. **Stay tuned:** LM will report on immigration-related labor issues as they evolve.

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We're No. 1

Landscape laborers by far are the top certified H-2B occupation — typically accounting for 1.5 to two times the number of visas that the second-ranked certified occupation, forest worker, does.

Source: U.S. Employment and Training Administration, Office of National Programs, Division of Foreign Labor Certification

**H-2R blues**

In the fiscal year ended Sept. 30, 2007, there were 129,547 nonagricultural visas issued — 60,227 new H-2B visas and 69,320 H-2R returning worker visas.

In fiscal 2008 and 2009, 0 returning worker (H-2R) visas were issued.

Source: U.S. Department of State

continued from page 24

alternative of sneaking across a raging river or walking for days in a desert. And the H-2B candidates come alone, pay taxes and, at a company like Mariani, have insurance."

Now for what Mariani calls "the dark side of the story."

"We never know from year to year whether the H-2B program will be available," Mariani notes. "If it is available, we don't know how many — if any — permits we will receive. We also don't have anything to say regarding the H-2B workers' pay scale. That's decided in Washington."

"Any program that creates a partnership with the federal government is one to stay away from," Mariani warns. "We're looking at ways to attract legal workers without using the H-2B program. We're spreading the good news locally that good careers are available for able-bodied, hard-working individuals who like working outdoors. The current economic downturn is making that easier, but our hiring issues will resurface when the economy improves."

Friendly competitors

The H-2B program is capped at 66,000 visas per year, but in the mid-2000s a special exemption allowed H-2Bs from the past three years to return without counting

against the cap. Congress failed to reinstate H-2B's returning worker exemption (H-2R visas) for fiscal 2008 and 2009. As a result, last year, Painesville, OH-based Yardmaster received zero H-2B or H-2R visas. Fortunately, a nearby friendly competitor lent a helping hand.

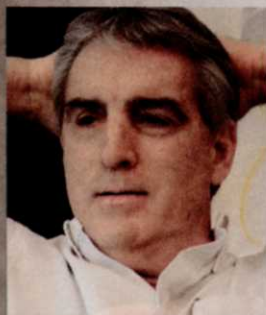
"In 2007, the last year H-2B exempted returning guest workers from its visa cap, we received 92 guest workers," reminisces Kurt Kluznik, president of Yardmaster. "In 2008, we had about 20 H-2Bs — and all of them came compliments of Steve Pattie, president of The Pattie Group, which itself could have used the H-2Bs."

Kluznik says he's truly grateful for both the H-2B guest workers Pattie transferred to Yardmaster as well as the underlying lesson he learned.

"Losing the returning worker visas really hurt us. We had to put a lot more manhours into jobs because we lost experience, and we had reduced capacity to pursue new business," Kluznik concludes. "But we came out of it all less dependent on the federal government and its increasingly convoluted H-2B program."

Pattie warns that H-2B is only a temporary fix and that's masking the root of the problem — the need for improved recruitment and retention industrywide.

continued on page 29



LOSING THE RETURNING WORKER EXEMPTION REALLY HURT US ... BUT WE CAME OUT OF IT ALL LESS DEPENDENT ON THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

KURT KLUZNIK, PRESIDENT, YARDMASTER

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H-2B hotbeds

Following are 20 traditional hotbeds for H-2B guest worker visa awards:



Source: The Employment and Training Administration, Office of National Programs, Division of Foreign Labor Certification

continued from page 26

"Having the federal government as a business partner is insane," Pattie says. "We lost 5,500 H-2Bs in Ohio alone last year."

In 2006, The Pattie Group began working in earnest to develop its "farm system."

"We regularly participate in career days at eight Northeast Ohio horticultural trade schools," Pattie says. "It's taken three years for us to cultivate it, but our farm system has helped us overcome our former dependence on getting 30 to 40 H-2Bs."

Help wanted

The majority of the laborers at The Laurel-Rock Co. in Wilton, CT, were guest workers — at least until 2008, when H-2B pitched a shutout against the business.

"With unemployment at a 25-year high, we've been able to hire locally," says Laurel-Rock President Burt



**WE ENDED UP
HIRING ABOUT 60
PEOPLE TOTAL TO
FILL 24 POSITIONS.
NOT EVERYONE IS
CUT OUT FOR THIS
KIND OF WORK.**

BURT DEMARCHE, PRESIDENT,
THE LAURELROCK CO.

DeMarche. "But we ended up hiring about 60 people total to fill 24 positions. Not everyone is cut out for this kind of work."

It's a good thing Josh Denison, HR manager for Denison Landscaping in Fort Washington, MD, speaks Spanish. The company employs about 400, including 300 in the field — typically half H-2Bs and the other half mostly Spanish-speaking citizens, resident aliens and other work-permitted laborers.

"We only got 37 H-2Bs this year," Denison says. "We're down about 110. I could hire 50 if they walked through the door today — but that ain't happening."

Denison scrambled to attend more than a dozen career fairs from Maine to Florida this spring, but that netted him just one field worker and five office interns.

"Most of these college kids look at a shovel like it's a poisonous snake," he adds.

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WEB EXTRA!

Sandy Munley, Ohio Landscape Association's executive director, tells a tale of a recent H-2B hearing in Washington that shut out the vocal majority — Green Industry employers and associations. Please visit www.landscapemanagement.net for the online scoop.

Thankfully, out-of-work construction laborers have hung a silver lining on Denison's H-2B cloud.

"Construction workers are used to making two to three times as much — \$18 to \$28 an hour — but they realize \$8 to \$9 an hour is better than nothing," Denison says. "The problem is they only have a four-month shelf life."

Top 10 senders — H-2B/H-2R visa entrances (fiscal year ended Sept. 30, 2007)



Mexico
105,244

2	Jamaica	14,964
3	Guatemala	4,557
4	Romania	2,803
5	Canada	2,494
6	Philippines	2,492
7	South Africa	1,913
8	United Kingdom	1,687
9	Dominican Republic	1,420
10	Australia	1,305

Source: The Department of Homeland Security. Note: Data represents H-2B/H-2R visa entrances — not issuances; one visa can be counted multiple times as a result of more than one entry.

Just as they begin to learn our trade, they find something they think is better and are out the door."

Bob Wingfield, president of Dallas-based Amigos Labor Solutions, which assists companies in completing H-2B paperwork and obtaining guest workers, says in 2007 he had more than 325 clients — 85% landscape and lawn care companies — and received 100% of the about 4,500 H-2B visas he applied for (75% were returning workers). However, after losing the returning worker exemption, the firm's H-2B batting average dropped to under .750, earning Amigos' clients 2,000 fewer visas in 2008. Wingfield predicts he'll bat .100 on H-2B visa applications this year.

"By law, my clients are required to advertise these jobs locally," he adds. "In 2008, they spent more than \$400,000 combined on these help wanted ads and filled just 20 of the more than 3,000 advertised jobs locally. Yet somehow people keep crying that H-2Bs are stealing jobs from out-of-work Americans. It's nothing more than a broken train of thought on our broken immigration system." **LJM**



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- RAM-VB-108-SW1 fits Ford Excursion (2000-2005), Ford Excursion Eddie Bauer Edition (2000-2005), Ford F-250, F-350, F-450, F-550, F-650, F-750 Super Duty Trucks (1999-Current), Ford F-350 Super Duty Trucks (1997)
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- Made of reinforced, UV treated 10 mil polyethylene
- Fits around tree trunk
- Holds approx. 20 gal. of water and drips 6-10 hours with 2 holes open
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3052

Lincoln Soil Moisture Meters

- Reads in a scale of "1" to "10," with "1" being completely dry and "10" indicating full saturation
- Sensing element is located in the tip of probe
- A chart on the back of each unit indicates relative moisture readings
- Operates on one AA battery (included)

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9" Probe

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\$82.95

77105-386
24" Probe

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- Light Duty Kit: 3 straight stakes (15") and 3 ten-foot lengths of ArborTie
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3787

Jameson Telescoping Pole Saw Package

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- JA-14 Pruner with adapter and rope
- 13" Tri-Edge saw blade with casting and adapter

80159-386
Pole Saw
Package

SALE!
\$135⁹⁵

JAMESON



NEW!

3787

Jameson Pro Pruner/Saw Package

- Includes 6' extension pole and 6' base pole
- JA-14 pruner with adapter and rope
- 13" Tri-Cut saw blade with casting and adapter

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Pruner/Saw
Package

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CORONA



3755

Corona® 12' Compound Action Tree Pruner

- Die-cast zinc alloy head
- 15" Fully heat-treated, Teflon™-coated steel saw 1" dia. cutting capacity
- Lightweight fiberglass pole telescopes to 12'

81155-386
12' Tree
Pruner

SALE!
\$42⁹⁵

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6695

Hayauchi Pole Saws By Silky

- 6.5 Teeth per 1.2"
- 15.4" cutting length
- Upper and lower sickle
- Aluminum alloy extension pole is race track-shaped for precise control

81082-386
16'
Pole Saw

SALE!
\$139⁹⁵

81083-386
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Pole Saw

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FELCO



1786

Felco® Model 2 Hand Pruner

81130-386
Model 2

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\$39²⁵

CORONA



NEW!

1795

Corona® Ergo-Action Hand Pruner

81125-386
Model
BP3640

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CORONA



1739

Corona® 13' Pruning Saws

81262-386
Plastic
Handle

SALE!
\$23⁵⁰

81272-386
Wooden
Handle

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CORONA



1742

Corona® 7' Folding Saw

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7' Folding
Saw

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7014

Corona® StrataShear™ Bypass Loppers

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2-1/2" cut,
26" long

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8499

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Genus Hand
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8528

Hori-Hori Soil Knife

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2726

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Folding Saw
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57385-386
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BACKPACK SPRAYERS & SIDESWIPE



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Solo® Backpack Sprayers

- 4-gallon capacity
- Piston or diaphragm pump models
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- Adjustable brass nozzle
- Rugged polyethylene tank with folding handles for easy storage

13195-386 Piston	13174-386 Diaphragm
SALE! \$89 ⁹⁵	SALE! \$89 ⁹⁵



1839

SP0® Triple Function Backpack Sprayer

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- Triple Function Pump™ safely provides higher pressures to 150 psi
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- Ergonomic pump handle
- Brass spray wand with 42" hose
- Adjustable nozzle stream to a mist

13699-386
SALE! \$159 ⁹⁵



1846

D.B. Smith Field King™ Sprayers

- 4- or 5-gallon capacity models
- Dual paddle agitators
- Internal Pump prevents leaks
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- 24" spray wand with 50" hose
- Adjustable brass & fan spray nozzle
- Molded lumbar support for comfort

13398-386 4-Gallon	13399-386 5-Gallon
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1854

Solo® 456 and 457V Hand-held Sprayers

- Spraying pressure up to 45 psi
- Viton® seals and O-rings
- High-density polyethylene tank
- Multifunction safety valve to relieve excess pressure

13384-386 Model 456, 2.25 Gallon	13397-386 Model 457V, 3 Gallon
SALE! \$37 ²⁵	SALE! \$42 ⁷⁵



1855

D.B. Smith – MAX™ The Ultimate Sprayer

- Spraying pressure up to 60 psi
- Includes straight stream/fine mist adjustable nozzle and flat fan nozzle
- 19" Aluminum spray wand with reinforced 48" hose

13298-386 MAX 7 2-Gallon	13299-386 MAX 11 3-Gallon
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8273

Sideswipe® Pro Herbicide Applicator

- Selective application of herbicides
- Wets evenly without drift or overspray
- Top shield protects desirable plants and shrubs during application
- 32 oz. (1 liter) reservoir handle
- 1,800 sq. ft. coverage area

18025-386
SALE! \$35 ⁵⁰



4425

40- & 60-Gallon Boomless Nozzle Utility Skid Sprayers

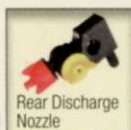
- Full 30' coverage
- Corrosion-resistant polyethylene tank
- 12V diaphragm pump
- Adjustable pressure gauge (0 to 45 psi)
- Output: 3.8 gpm
- Maximum vertical throw: 18'
- Maximum horizontal throw: 30'

14061-386
40-Gallon
Sprayer

SALE!
\$564⁰⁰

14060-386
60-Gallon
Sprayer

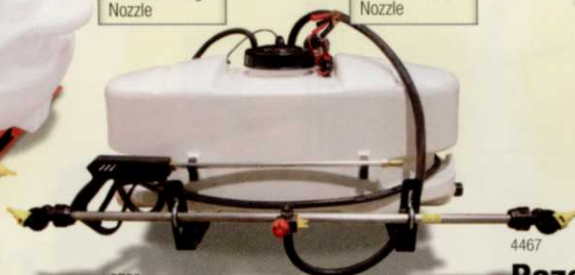
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Rear Discharge
Nozzle



Side Discharge
Nozzle



3760

25-Gallon ATV Sprayer

- With stainless steel wetboom boomless nozzle!
- Spray tips are color coded for on/off positions and metered to adjust at 15° increments
- 3.8 GPM, 12V Diaphragm demand style pump
- Adjustable pressure up to 45 PSI
- Handgun Max Vertical Throw: 26'
- Handgun Max Horizontal Throw: 43'

14035-386
25-Gallon
ATV Sprayer

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\$369⁰⁰



4467

Razor® Pro Herbicide

- 41% Glyphosate Isopropylamine Salt (Compare to Roundup® Pro)
- Ideal for use in post-emergent weed control in industrial sites as well as forestry, turf, and ornamental areas
- Controls most annual and perennial weeds and is effective on woody brush and plants
- Rainfast within two hours of application and eliminates the need for additional surfactant

17121-386
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- Lays 8'-12' swath

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3601, 1918

Chemical Spray Chapp's™ and Vest

- 11 oz. butyl rubber
- Adjustable belt secures with Velcro®

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Chapp's

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23397-386
Rubber Front
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SALE!
\$54²⁵

23396-386
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Vest

SALE!
\$54²⁵



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- Quart chamber is graduated in 2 oz. increments to 32 oz.
- Measures 1/2 oz. and 1 oz. amounts.

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Landscape Trailer Accessories

- Secure a variety of tools and equipment to your trailer!
- Constructed of heavy duty black powder-coated steel and include mounting hardware
- Made in the USA.



4503

Polymer Trailer Tongue Box

- High-density polyethylene
- Integrated hinge and a zinc-plated hasp latch
- 18" x 20" x 36"

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Polymer
Tongue Box

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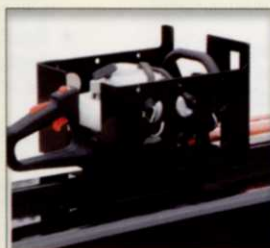
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Lockable Trimmer Rack

- Holds three trimmers
- For open trailers

94700-386

SALE!
\$159⁰⁰



3744

Multi-Rack

- Secure your trimmers, chain saws, or blowers
- Rubber straps included
- For open or enclosed trailers

94701-386

SALE!
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3744

Backpack Blower Rack

- Rubber strap included
- For open or enclosed trailers
- Not for STIHL® BR400

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SALE!
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3744

Water Cooler Rack

- Accommodates most standard size coolers
- Straps included
- For open or enclosed trailers

94703-386

SALE!
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3744

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- Holds one 5-gal. or two 2.5-gal. polymer cans
- Strap included
- For open or enclosed trailers

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3744

Trimmer Line Spool Bracket

- Holds one 3 lb. spool
- For open or enclosed trailers

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3744

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- Holds up to six straight handle tools
- Rubber grommets
- For open trailers

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SALE!
\$77⁹⁵





1563
**Gatorade®
Thirst Quencher**

33965-386 Lemon-Lime, makes 1 gal.	33633-386 Orange, makes 1 gal.
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SALE! \$160	SALE! \$160
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1567
**Rubbermaid®
Water Coolers**

31137-386 5-Gallon	31138-386 10-Gallon
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SALE! \$3375	SALE! \$6195
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6053
**Personal
Cooler Packs**

31179-386 5-quart	31178-386 10-quart
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SALE! \$1135	SALE! \$1750
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8284
**CARB Compliant
No-Spill® Fuel Cans**

93329-386 2.5 Gallon	93330-386 5 Gallon
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6024
**Oak-n-Ivy® Tecnu®
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SALE! \$875	SALE! \$1360
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6002
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Sunscreen**

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New!
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Waterless Hand
Cleaner with Grit**

33314-386
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Hand Cleaner

SALE!
\$355



New!
8559
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Surface Cleaner**

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2055
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23287-386 Clear Lens	23288-386 Gray Lens
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SALE! \$205	SALE! \$240
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New!
4204
**QuieTunes™ 666R
Radio Earmuffs**

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Rechargeable
AM/FM

SALE!
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3492
**Wells Lamont® Top
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90909-386 Medium	90910-386 Large
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SALE! \$670	SALE! \$670
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8347
**Barnel®
Spring Bucket**

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22" x 26"

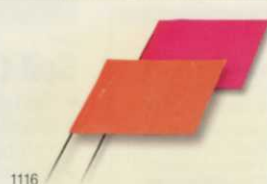
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8049
**Professional
Tool Sets**

67202-386 148-Piece	67220-386 170-Piece
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SALE! \$9495	SALE! \$10995
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1116
**Fluorescent Plain
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Flags**

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8242
**Rust-Oleum®
17 oz. Inverted Tip
Marking Paint**

• Additional colors available

57149-386 Safety Red	57151-386 Fl. Orange
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SALE! \$3.45	SALE! \$3.45
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3651
**Superknife
Folding Utility Knife**

35650-386
Superknife

SALE!
\$995



4440

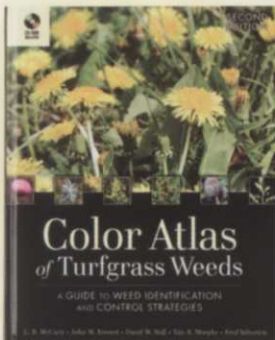
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- Technology developed by NASA
- Lenses block the green color reflected from chlorophyll found in vegetation
- Healthy plants look black or gray
- Stressed plants and turf appear as yellowish-brown or pink
- Work best on sunny days

23380-386

Detection Glasses

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Color Atlas Of Turfgrass Weeds

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- Includes effective control strategies
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- Hardcover, 432 Pages

59994-386

Color Atlas of Turfgrass Weeds

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- Displays the magnified image directly on your computer monitor
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- Add labels, make measurements, or draw on the image
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61045-386

Spectrum IPM Scope

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\$342⁰⁰



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3671

Solo® Spritzer Sprayer

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- Adjustable brass nozzle

13340-386

\$11.50
Everyday

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3042

Soil Compaction Tester

- Test compaction to subsoiling depths
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- Depth markings at 3" intervals to 18"
- Indicates compaction levels in psi
- 3/4" and 1/2" stainless steel tips
- Molded plastic housing and handle

77143-386

Compaction Tester

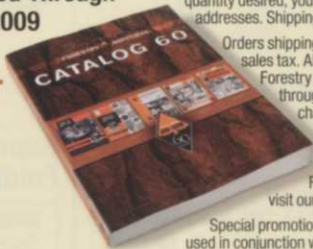
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KEY 386

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A 'survival budget' helps win bids

Part three of a multi-part series.

In my April column ("Get high profits with design/build," page 60), I went to a bid opening where 38 landscape companies bid a school construction job. My client finished 10th despite tightening his pricing factors and production standards.

Sure there's a part of you that says, "Let 'em have it at that price." But there's also a thought that gnaws at you: "I will get nothing at my current price if this keeps up." Welcome to the new world. It's hard to define what distinguishes high-profit from low-profit companies in this environment when survival becomes the driving force.

There's only so much past relationships do for you in this environment, so fashion a "survival budget" that reduces costs and prices — and gives you a better chance of generating revenues. A survival budget must provide enough profit to recapitalize the company for next year. Using the chart below, let's review the budget's basic elements.

The starting point is expected revenues. In

this example, we anticipate a 50% year-to-year reduction in revenues. We then establish a survival net profit margin. I use 3% as the low-end recap target, which reflects the working capital needed to fund longer Accounts Receivable collection periods and some level of hard asset replacement.

Overhead reduction

We keep overhead in line with revenues at 22% and conclude that overhead costs need to be halved. This is a painful, but necessary step. We add the 3% net margin to the 22% overhead expense to equal a gross margin of 25%.

Labor cost reduction/hour

Given the reduced gross margin expectation, materials costs are now likely 50% of revenues — up from 35%. We can calculate labor expenditures and hours from this assumption.

Revenues of \$2.5 million, less \$1.25 million in materials, leaves \$625,000 for labor. Dividing this by a \$13 hourly wage rate yields 48,077 labor hours.

To lower labor cost, we must lower the average wage 15%, from \$15 to \$13 per hour. Some of this comes from less overtime and some from tighter management of non-billable hours.

Pricing reduction

Lastly, we can calculate the hourly labor billing rate. Revenues minus the materials cost at its 10% markup, divided by the labor hours, provides the rate of \$23.40 per hour, 27% less than the prior year. In effect, prices are lowered 27% to achieve the desired margin.

With this survival budget, we can manage through a downturn and still have reinvestment income for the future. Those companies with solid balance sheets (debt-to-equity ratios lower than 40% and current ratios of 2.5 or better) will survive.

It is truly a stomach-churning case of survival of the fittest out there in the bid build world. Be prepared, and next year might look a little better.

	Good times		Survival mode	
Revenues	\$5,000,000		\$2,500,000	
Gross margin	\$1,700,000	34%	\$625,000	25%
Overhead	\$1,100,000	22%	\$550,000	22%
Net profit	\$600,000	12%	\$75,000	3%

Assume (no subs)

Average hourly wage	\$15	\$13
Job materials	35%	50%
Materials	\$1,750,000	\$1,250,000
Materials markup	10%	10%
Labor	\$1,550,000	\$625,000
Hours	\$103,333	\$48,077
Effective rate	\$29.76	\$23.40
Labor cost reduction/hour		15%
Pricing reduction		27%
Overhead reduction		100%



Chris Senske's first planning management task was to create a five-year sales and growth forecast for Senske Lawn & Tree Care, the company his parents founded more than 50 years ago. "I regularly go back to that graph paper I created more than 30 years ago, to refresh my vision of where the company is headed," says Senske, now president. It was just the first lesson of many he learned.

Your company is an industry pioneer, founded by your parents in 1947. What are the three most important business things they taught you?

Hard work, sacrifice and planning. From the very beginning, I was tasked with doing any job no one else would or had time to do.

How did you prepare yourself to be the company leader?

Had I known I was going to be put in the situation where I would run the business, I might have chosen a different educational track. I studied chemistry, mathematics and biochemistry. I might have benefited from a business and marketing education.

I ended up in the business quite by accident. I was preparing to go to graduate school when Dad needed to have someone watch over the business while he recovered from a serious surgery.

Is there another generation of the family being prepared to run the company? My son, Ben, is being trained as a supervisor. Like me, he worked summers in the business and

has done every job in the company operations — from customer service representative to tree climber. He loves the pest control side of the business the most and is learning both technical and management skills there.

What is your primary role within your company today?

My primary role now is to keep the management team energized, motivated and moving in the same direction. I spend half of my time interacting with the management team. The rest is spent looking for market growth opportunities, including organic growth, acquisitions and new service offerings.

What's your company's biggest business challenge?

Our biggest challenge is to keep everyone focused on profitable growth. The outcomes from continued

controlled growth benefit everyone in the organization. New opportunities, personal development, as well as the energy that come out of a company moving forward, all make continued growth a worthy goal.

How are you preparing the company for the next five to 10 years? We set a plan of growth for the next five years and a plan of action how to get there. We are in the first phase of that plan.

We are developing operating standards and removing fuzzy lines of responsibility so there are clear-cut goals for every team member. Daily, weekly and monthly goals, as well as progress made toward meeting those goals, are posted on the walls of each branch office for almost every position in the organization.

Our battle cry is "Every 1 Counts." We are training

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Senske Lawn & Tree Care, Kennewick, WA

FOUNDED: 1947

PRINCIPAL: Chris Senske, President

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 7

EMPLOYEES: 260

SERVICES OFFERED: Lawn care, tree and shrub care, weed control, pest control, holiday lighting

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: NPMA, past director of PLCAA, president of WSPMA

BUSINESS OUTLOOK: "Guarded optimism. With many companies giving away commercial services, our focus is on residential programs and finding commercial clients who want long-term relationships."

FAMILY: Married to Catie; two children, Sara and Ben; two grandchildren, Alyssa and Kaelyn

HOBBIES: Skiing, golf, officiating hockey, motorsports

WEB SITE: www.senske.com

every employee every week to look for ways to examine his job and the work environment around him.

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The author is a partner with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.

Irrigation techs should shower profits

More and more companies have been hiring irrigation technicians to maintain and repair irrigation on their maintenance jobs. I think this is a great opportunity to capture additional revenue from existing clients. However, there is also tremendous potential for this practice to add to your costs if not managed intensely.

Where do companies go wrong? For some, the issue is their maintenance foremen or supervisors, who in the past performed minor repairs or troubleshooting, now call on their irrigation technician co-workers to handle all of that. So they're increasing costs with your irrigation techs making separate trips to sites, and these more-expensive staffers often are spending time on non-billable services.

Non-billable time is its own beast. If there are no billable repairs to do, a technician might be sent to do system checks. Sure, he (or she) is "busy," — but not generating revenue and instead is charging time to jobs. If there are job requirements for system checks on a large site, it's probably effective to have a technician do the work. However, on small sites I would question the effectiveness of this versus having a foreman do the checks.

Smart strategies

Here are five simple solutions to avoid these potential pitfalls:

- 1. Assign someone to manage — not just schedule — your irrigation technician(s).** Create a tracking system to capture billable time versus non-billable

time. Let the techs know there are expectations for a certain amount of billable hours each week.

- 2. Spread the repair-work wealth.** Train and equip your foremen and supervisors to do the basics and have them do minor repairs.

- 3. Create forms that make billing from the field easy.** Some companies use parts sheets with photographs, where the technicians can place quantities next to the photos instead of having to write product descriptions. Most field personnel dread cumbersome paperwork, sometimes causing you to miss billing opportunities.

- 4. Keep technicians busy with profitable tasks.** If there is no profitable irrigation work to be done that day, re-assign your irrigation techs so they're doing something else that's productive and revenue-generating, such as supplementing enhancement crews.

- 5. Implement checks and balances.** Whoever manages the technicians must know the contract requirements relative to what is billable and non-billable, and make sure client authorization for repairs are received before work is done.

Billing and tracking

There are a host of other things I have seen companies do to help streamline irrigation billing and tracking parts use.

Some companies simply bill for parts without specific descriptions. For example, they bill for 7.5-in. fittings at \$1 apiece rather than listing each individual 0.5-in. coupling, tee and 90° ell. They might bill for an assembly for a valve, including associated fittings rather than itemizing them.

Some companies charge for labor and parts with no itemization. For some customers that's OK, especially for small billing amounts.

Making paperwork easier to do usually contributes to getting it done in a more timely and complete manner. Developing systems to better manage and utilize your irrigation technicians can contribute significantly to your bottom line.

Making paperwork easier to do
usually contributes to getting it done in a
more timely and complete manner.

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IN THIS AGE of increasing environmental awareness, all segments of the business community are being carefully evaluated for their shade of green. More scrutiny is also being applied to costs due to the challenging economic times. It has always been important to be aware of, and emphasize, the benefits you offer your customer, but now it is more important than ever. The customer is spending more carefully, considering both environmental and economic impact.

For landscapers, the good news is that good design has always offered environmental and economic benefits. Now is the time to clearly market those benefits. If you don't know the positive side effects of what you do, your prospective customer probably won't either.

Lower maintenance costs, fewer inputs

A well-designed landscape will work with nature, rather than against it, resulting in fewer inputs and lower maintenance costs. When in balance with nature, landscapes have a wide range of plants in their optimum growing conditions, making them more resilient to weather

extremes and pest attacks. A diverse landscape discourages pests, not only by limiting their food source, but by providing habitat for natural controls. These "beneficials" range from insects and spiders, to fungi, bacteria, birds, and small mammals. The result is a balanced and diverse system that is at least partially self-sufficient.

Simply making the appropriate plant selection and placement is a huge first step. Care-



Trees can be used to shade homes, reducing summer cooling costs.



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ful plant selection for the light, moisture, soil, and wind conditions of the site will do two things:

- 1) It will increase the likelihood of growing healthy and attractive plants, with fewer replacements.
- 2) It will reduce the necessary levels of inputs, such as water, fertilizer, soil amendments, and pesticides.

Both of these benefits lower costs and make the landscape more sustainable. Of course it's possible to force plants to grow out of their range of optimum conditions, but to successfully do so usually requires more inputs.

A well-designed landscape uses water wisely and efficiently. This is accomplished by using efficient, properly designed irrigation systems, grouping plants of similar moisture needs together, and using at least some plants that need little or no added moisture. Native plants tend to be very deep-rooted, and as the old roots die off, they create channels for moisture penetration. The result is improved drainage and less runoff and erosion—both good for the environment.

Lower energy use

An especially important, but often overlooked, benefit of good design is reduced energy use. All measures that reduce energy use are good for the environment, in addition to reducing costs. One landscape example is placing trees to limit summer solar gain in buildings, thus reducing cooling demands. If the designer carefully considers seasonal sun angles, those same trees can also be sited to allow passive solar heating in the winter, reducing heating demand. In addition to shade, trees and other plants contribute a cooling effect with transpiration from their leaves.

Shading air conditioners is also beneficial. The AC will operate more efficiently, saving fuel and money. Again, proper placement comes into play because of the importance of leaving ample space



Plants contribute a cooling effect with transpiration from their leaves and can be used to shade air conditioners, which lowers cooling costs.

between the plants and the AC to allow for adequate air flow.

Windbreaks are another landscaping technique that lowers energy use. By diverting winds and/or reducing their speeds, a more comfortable microclimate is created and winter heat loss is reduced.

Wise plant selection and bed layout also affect energy savings. Choosing lower maintenance turf grasses, making larger planting beds, and allowing more "native" areas all contribute. In situations where turf gets virtually no traffic or use, consider a native grass or prairie plant mix for lower maintenance, water, and fuel costs, higher biodiversity, and better water retention.

Education is key

Some clients would have a hard time going for the native look, or tolerating a few insects or leaf spot. But attitudes are shifting, and when educated about the environmental and economic differences of various landscaping approaches, customers are more likely to make cost-saving choices.

Education of the customer may not always directly increase your bottom line, but it is one of the critical services you offer. An efficiently designed and installed sprinkler system is still wasteful when the user is watering the lawn every day or right after a 2-in. rain, for example.

Customers will certainly vary on their level of concern for environmental and


THE WAY OF THE FUTURE?

Husqvarna has released details of a global gardening trend report produced, in which more than 6,000 people from eight countries were asked a series of questions relating to gardening and how the development of technology may impact their future behavior. Insights were gained into current trends and how social, cultural, economic and technological forces shape how homeowners with all sizes of yards spend their time and money.

> When asked about their vision of the yard of the future, 38% of the 1,000 U.S. homeowners surveyed suggested one that is entirely self-maintaining. Twenty-six percent want a yard that is a "self-sufficient ecosystem."

> Twenty percent of Americans surveyed feel the economic downturn affects their future gardening plans. Twenty-three percent want to grow their own food.

For a copy of the full report, and information on Husqvarna's line of EcoSmart solutions, visit www.husqvarna.com/us/homeowner/press/.

economic issues. To increase your business's odds of winning, offer and market services that benefit both the environment and your customers' wallets. That way everyone wins.  Kendall Weyers freelance writer and landscape designer based in Nebraska.



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For more information, visit garden-splendor.com.



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Serena Angelonia White (*Angelonia angustifolia*) is a summer snapdragon from **PanAmerican Seed** that produces full, yet compact plants. It loves sun and grows 10 to 12 in. high and 12 to 14 in. wide. The low-maintenance, continuous bloomer thrives in landscapes, gardens and mixed containers, growing up to 50% larger in Florida-like conditions. **For more information, visit** www.panamseed.com.

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SNOW+ICE

GUIDE

When the snow comes, *who's first served?*

Having a priority account system in place is vital to an effective snow and ice removal business.

BY MARK HALL CONTRIBUTOR



A good contractor simply needs a bit of organization to establish an effective priority plan.

ANYONE WORKING in a service industry knows what a struggle it can be to find a good balance serving multiple clients. That struggle can become chaos if every client demands full attention at the same time. In many industries these busy periods can be anticipated and planned for. Not so for contractors in the snow and ice management business, who don't get advance notice of the week's snowfall.

So when a snow event does occur, how do you decide which customer will receive service first?

Many contractors don't have a structured system in place — and find themselves asking "Who's first?" once the season is already under way. When the snow falls, these contractors could very likely wind up on the phone with angry customers who have a question of their own: "Why aren't you here?"

To be successful, you must establish realistic expectations — both for your customers and yourself — well before winter hits.

Who's on first?

When prospecting new snow and ice management accounts, contractors often talk to potential customers who

continued on page 47



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continued from page 45

specify they want their snow cleared by a specific time. But it's nearly impossible for you to give such a guarantee, simply because no one knows exactly when it's going to snow. Furthermore, there's no possible way to be everywhere at once. The reality is that some customers will get service more quickly than others.

There are undoubtedly several methodologies and systems subscribed to by industry professionals to determine which customers get service first. One approach that has proved extremely successful is the Retainer and Deposit system, a method that basically allows customers to choose their desired response time.

Priority 1: Retainer customers

Under this system, customers are given the option to pay a monthly retainer to gain priority status during a snow event. The retainer is based on the price of one performed service, along with the average number of plowing events that can be expected in a given market.

As an example, say a city usually experiences about 12 snow events that require plowing per winter, and it's generally recognized that there are four months — December through March — when snowfall is most likely. To calculate the monthly retainer, multiply the price for one service by the expected number of plowing events for the entire season, and then divide that number into each of the likely months for snowfall:

So if the fee for one service is \$100, the total retainer (assuming 12 snow events) for the winter would be \$1,200. Because that covers a four-month period, each month's retainer would be \$300.

As the winter rolls along, the advance retainer money can be applied to cover any services provided for the month in which the service was performed. This includes instances where no plowing is neces-

sary, but de-icing materials are applied. The only way a customer loses retainer money is if it doesn't snow, or if it snows so little the total service fees in a given month don't add up to the retainer amount.

Yes, some of the financial investment may be lost. But what's gained is a guaranteed response time during a snow event.

Of course, the retainer system only truly works if you can deliver on the promise for a timely response. The guarantee is nearly impossible to fulfill if you oversell the work and can't service priority customers in the specified time.

In the process of selling their services, many contractors find retainer customers are usually agreeable to a response time of six hours or less,

If you simply explain your successful service methodology — and compare it to an often-unsuccessful low price/high volume approach — it may be enough to gain a new customer's trust.

and therefore will set up a schedule that offers a total of six hours per truck as priority-one service. Obviously, the intensity and timing of a snow event will have a significant impact on your ability to stick to a six-hour schedule, which is why the six hours should be based on a worst-case scenario.

In most cities, the worst case would be a heavy snowfall that begins during the early-morning commute right before most businesses open for the day. Just about everything is working against you in such a case: Street traffic is heavy. You must also navigate around vehicles arriving in parking lots. Meanwhile, almost any snow — and certainly a heavy snowfall — will dictate at least a second visit to each account for additional service. If you were to encounter a worst-case scenario having oversold the work, response time can quickly become an issue for some soon-to-be-unhappy customers.

Priority 2: Deposit customers

Some customers are leery about paying a retainer and possibly losing out on any money if actual snow events fall below expectations. Additionally, many may not have as urgent a need for plowing and de-icing service. However, these people still prefer to have a contractor in

continued on page 50



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continued from page 47

place. For these customers, a seasonal deposit system might be right.

Like a retainer system, a deposit system uses the service price and expected number of plowing events as starting points. However, while a retainer customer pays a fee to cover specified months, a deposit customer pays a lump sum that applies to snow and ice control services performed any time during the winter. This flexibility to have the payment applied whenever necessary is the one advantage a deposit system holds over a retainer system from a customer's point of view. The drawback, of course, is that these customers receive service second, occasionally more than six hours after the snow begins.

If you are selling six hours of priority-one service, limit the priority-two service you sell to about two or three

timing, you can grow your customer base to a reasonable level — without promising too much to too many.

Furthermore, implementing a retainer and deposit system provides you with the benefit of guaranteed income during the winter season. Most retainer and deposit money will later be applied to portions of monthly service invoices. But for the contractor-friendly, snow-free months, any unused funds are certainly welcome to help cover equipment costs, operating expenses and other overhead.

Timing and value

Keep in mind that first service is not always best service. If a light snow begins to fall at midnight, it might make more sense to begin a route by servicing priority-two accounts so that priority-one accounts can be serviced closer to the time they open in the morning. In

an employee from a truck to shovel sidewalks isn't an efficient use of his time — and actually creates downtime for the plow and material spreader. From the retainer and deposit system perspective, it also limits the number of priority accounts the truck can get to within a given timeframe.

In addition, you should always be on the lookout to discover areas where efficiency can be improved. Knowing a customer's holiday hours is just one example. If it's been pre-determined that some accounts will have their businesses closed for the holidays, their service can be pushed back and another client can get faster service.

Of course, efficiency isn't the only thing that affects profits. The reason the winter maintenance industry even exists is because of the financial liability customers could incur by not dealing with snow and ice in a timely fashion. It's critical you protect yourself from being unnecessarily exposed to liability. No matter what system you employ for your business — and no matter what agreements you have in place — be sure to get contracts in writing.

It's better to deliver great service timing to a small group of satisfied customers than show up late for a large group of angry ones who might just decide to dump you the next day.

hours. Because priority-two customers aren't receiving the benefit of a fast response time, consider offering a seasonal deposit price that is slightly lower than the total amount paid for monthly retainers throughout the winter.

Using the previous example of a city with 12 expected plowing events and a service fee of \$100, perhaps charge 10 times the price of one service, or \$1,000, for a seasonal deposit. Customize the structure of your retainer and deposit system to find what works best for your business and your customers.

The combined approach of a retainer and a deposit system is an ideal way to realistically control and spread out workload during a snow event. By pre-defining customer expectations and establishing priority-one and priority-two

essence, priority-one customers get the best timing, not the first service.

While first service isn't necessarily best service, the cheaper service will almost never be the best. This is especially true considering contractors who undersell on price usually make up the difference by overselling on volume, making it extremely difficult to offer a guaranteed response time.

Maximize profits

Getting customers is one thing. Knowing how to efficiently service them is another. The more efficient you can be, the better chance you have of making money in snow and ice management.

Take the example of contractors whose customers would like them to handle sidewalk work. Removing

Get organized

The weather naturally won't allow anyone to account for every single possibility, but you can make logical assumptions about the number of accounts you can service in a given amount of time. You can also use additional knowledge specific to each account, such as days and times each is open for business.

Most importantly, know your limitations. It's better to deliver great service timing to a small group of satisfied customers than show up late for a large group of angry ones. Establishing a priority plan makes sense for you and your customers — and executing it — should ultimately lead to an arrangement that is more convenient for your customers, and more profitable for you. **LMI**

HALL is director of marketing and sales for SnowEx, Warren, MI. Contact him at mbhall4@comcast.net.

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Available in 8.5- and 9.5-ft. lengths, the all-new **Meyer Super-V2** Snowplow features a pistol grip controller with one-button functionality, as well as interchangeable components with the standard Meyer Super-V plow. The manufacturer claims that the blade throws snow up to 62% better than a standard V-plow, and its snow rolling action reduces vehicle stress. The blade's wings taper from 30.5 in. up to 38 in. www.meyerproducts.com or 216/486-1313



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The **Turf Teq** Power Broom has an 18- x 46-in. brush, with a two-speed drive that's suitable for both debris and snow removal. Brush pressure, brush speed and left/right pivot angle can all be adjusted easily from the operator position. It can even be used to dethatch lawns. The Power Broom features an on-the-go differential lock for traction and productivity, and the hydrostatic wheel drive allows users to adjust ground speed to meet heavy or light sweeping needs. www.turfteq.com or 866/503-8873



Pump control

Designed specially for landscapers and contractors, the **GVM ABS-800** will convert dry rock salt to liquid form for prewetting or anti-icing of roadways. The pump, controlled by a float switch or manually, transfers liquid from the wet end of the make tank to the storage tank, from the storage tank to truck mounted tanks, or recirculates liquid through the make tank. Brine concentration is established by batch process (x gal water per x pounds of dry material) or by final adjustment in storage tank. www.gvm-inc.com or 800/345-3546

Poly power

Available in two models (the 8 ft., 2 in. XT and the 9 ft., 2 in. XT), **Boss'** new Poly Power-V XT Plow features a slick poly surface that lets snow easily slide off the blade — saving on fuel costs and minimizing wear and tear on the vehicle drivetrain. The multi-position snowplow also features a 37-in. flared blade wing, which improves snow discharge for maximum performance. Other standard features on both models include 0.5 x 6-in. high-performance cutting edges, synchronized blade movement with full blade trip design and an enclosed high-performance hydraulic package. The easy SmartHitch system and the SmartLight 2 visibility system are also standard. www.bossplow.com or 800-286-4155



continued on page 54



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continued from page 52

Must: Hand tools

Yeoman & Co. offers a variety of professional-grade snow tools, shovels, pushers and scrapers. The tools are available in steel, aluminum or composite, and the company will work with operators to recommend the best models for removing deep snow vs. powdery snow, etc. www.yo-ho.com or 800/367-9646



Clean sweep

Among **Grasshopper's** full line of snow removal equipment is a power take-off driven rotary broom, which can handle dirt, debris, slush and up to 8 in. of snow effortlessly. The unit is available in 48- and 60-in. models (set at a fixed 25° right angle), as well as a 60-in. bidirectional model with a variable sweeping angle up to 25° degrees right or left, controlled hydraulically. Grasshopper's exclusive QuikConverter implement system lets users remove the mowing deck and add rotary brooms in minutes without tools. An optional winter enclosure (for 700 and 900 Series) and 16,000 BTU/hr heater (for liquid-cooled models) protect operators from the elements for enhanced comfort and efficiency. www.grasshoppermower.com or 620/345-8621

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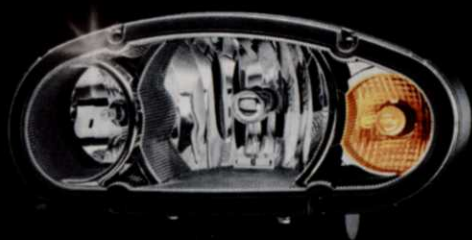
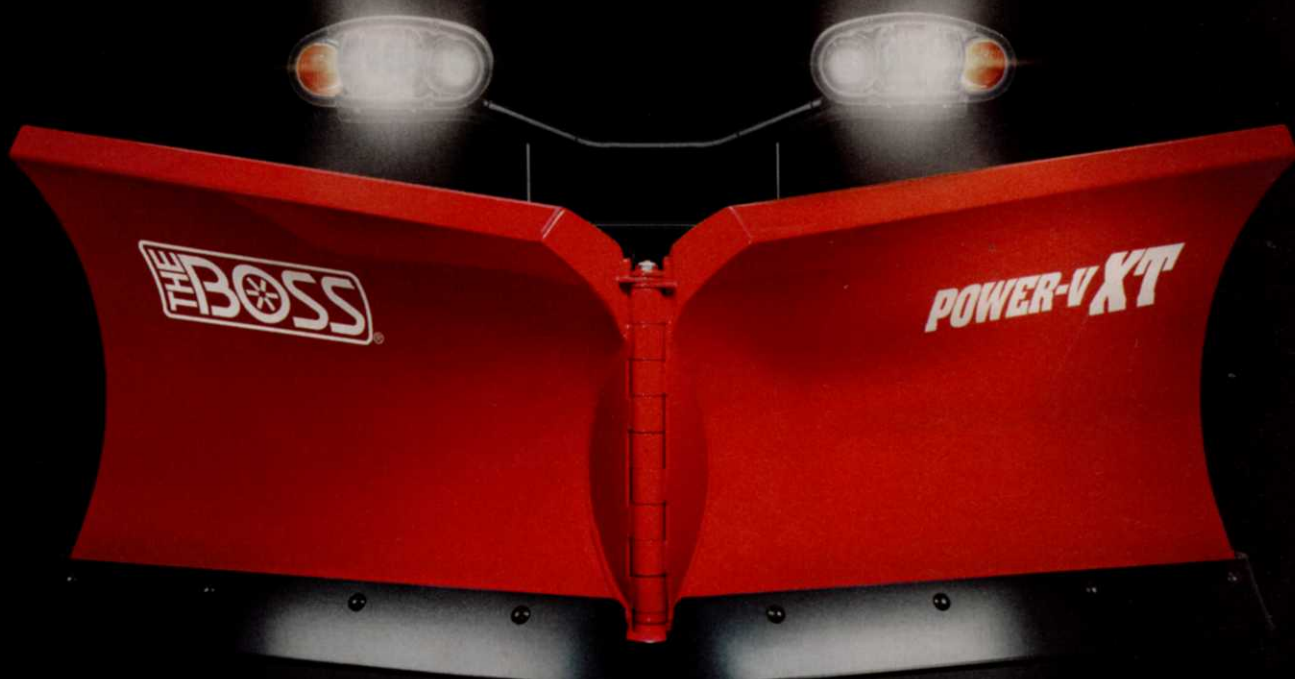
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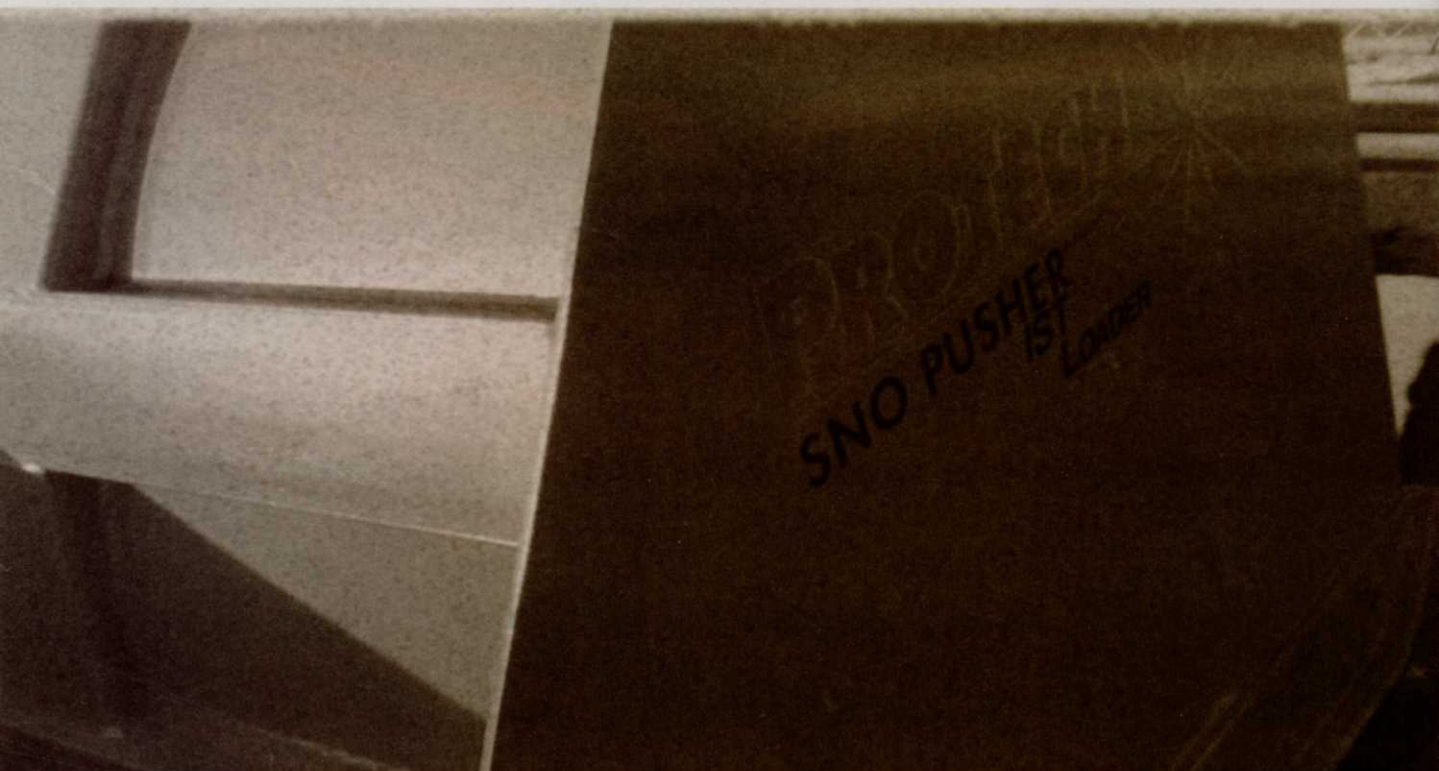
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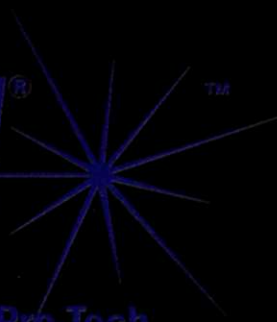


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AD INDEX

Agrium Advanced Tech.....	p23
Agrotain.....	p31
Alocet.....	p22
Andersons.....	p28
Anthony Tesselaar.....	p41
Ariens.....	p21
Arysta.....	p19, 25
BASF Corp.....	p15, 35
Ball Horticulture.....	p42
Blizzard.....	p49

Bobcat.....	p27, 29
Boss Snow Plows.....	p55
Dig Corp.....	p6
Dow AgroSciences.....	p3
Drafix.....	p14
DuPont.....	p38
Exakttime.....	p18
Fisher Plows.....	p48
Forestry Suppliers.....	Insert
Goldsmith Seeds.....	p43
Hiniker.....	p51
Horitca Insurance.....	p7

Hunter Industries.....	p6
Hustler.....	p2
J P Horizons.....	p61
John Deere Commercial.....	p5
John Deere Construction.....	cv4
L T Rich.....	p61
Lebanon Turf.....	p37
Meyer Products.....	p53
Oregon Tall Fescue.....	p1
P B I Gordon.....	p9, 58, cv3
PLANET.....	p60
Pro-Tech.....	p56
Rainbird.....	cv2, 12, 13, Insert
Sepro.....	p11
Syngenta.....	p16
Target Spec Products.....	p30

Toro.....	p57, 59
Trynex.....	p54
Turf Products.....	p58
U S Lawns.....	p58
Vista Professional.....	p61
Walker Mfg.....	p61
Western Products.....	p46
Wilson Oyler.....	p32

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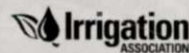


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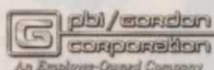
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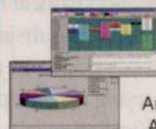
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Wanna win your people over? Be a coach — not a barking boss.

Bill Hoopes has made a career of coaching leaders on how to become good coaches so they can build championship teams. Coach Hoopes says success begins with effective leadership, which requires a coach — not a barking boss.

Hoopes managed the prestigious Scotts Training Institute and Professional Turf Institute, and helped launch Scotts Lawn Service. Now Head Coach of Grassroots Training in Delaware, OH, Hoopes also leads LM's People Power Consulting Club (www.lmconsultingclubs.net).

I recently attended one of Hoopes' Green Industry coaching sessions and had my eyes, ears and heart opened to a world of opportunities for leadership growth — both professionally and personally as my wife and I work at home with our three children.

Following are just a few of the many lessons Coach Hoopes taught me and dozens of Green Industry leaders trying to game plan ways to win our people over:

▶ Winning coaches hire, retain and fully develop those individuals who are both star players and star teammates. Star players have the basic ability and desire to learn how to succeed. Star teammates consistently show by their words and actions they are on your team and are committed to "putting the 'we' before 'me.'" (Bosses hire bodies — usually as cheaply as possible — and it shows.)

Leadership is getting someone to do what he doesn't want to do to achieve what he wants to achieve."

— TOM LANDRY, who led the Dallas Cowboys to two Superbowl championships in the 1970s

- ▶ Winning coaches effectively communicate their expectations. (Bosses think employees are psychic.)
- ▶ Winning coaches understand the benefits of teaching versus telling, and take the time to explain why they want things done certain ways. (Bosses bark orders.)
- ▶ Winning coaches involve their teams early on in the decision-making process. This promotes buy-in and helps ensure all options and likely outcomes have been explored. (Bosses involve their employees *after* making their unilateral decisions.)
- ▶ Winning coaches promptly and publicly recognize and reward successes, and ask teammates to share their winning ways. (Bosses focus more on failures.)
- ▶ Winning coaches build and capitalize on team synergies. (Bosses rely solely on stars.)
- ▶ Winning coaches have faith in their people. (Bosses believe their people are overpaid, lazy incompetents.)
- ▶ Winning coaches provide regular training that teammates look forward to and benefit from. (Bosses think training is a waste of time — and, thus, the little training they do becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.)
- ▶ Winning coaches treat their people as individuals. (Bosses treat them as resources.)
- ▶ Winning coaches ask their players for input on ways to improve training, tactics, strategies and performance. (Bosses are more about dictating than respecting and listening to co-workers.)
- ▶ Winning coaches are open and honest with themselves and others. (Bosses don't even realize that essentially they're just barking out loud to themselves — that few positives will come until they change *their* words and actions.)
- ▶ And, last but not least, winning coaches recognize all of us have tendencies to revert back to bossing. They work hard to admit and correct this behavior in themselves and their fellow coaches. (Bosses avoid an honest look in the mirror — often because they've become "the emperor with new (aka 'no') clothes."

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