



# PROGRESS

## Battling Old Man Winter

**A**t the time that *Landscape Management* launched, so did the automobile age and with that, suburban growth. In the '60s, the proliferation of new shopping centers, office parks and industrial centers created the need for private snow removal equipment and services to clear parking lots and walkways for customers and employees.

Many landscapers, like Ontario-based Clintar Landscape Management and Milwaukee-based Kujawa Enterprises, seized the opportunity by providing snow and ice removal services as early as the late '60s, proliferating into the new century.

"We got into the snow and ice removal business because we wanted to make sure our summer guys would stick around all year and have a reliable source of income to eat year-round," says Bob Wilton, president of Clintar.

The explosion of companies moving snow and ice has created a huge market for versatile and customized equipment and spurred technology to develop more specialized functions.

"When we first started snow and ice removal, all we really had was straight blade plows attached to our trucks," says Chris Kujawa, owner of Kujawa Enterprises. Wilton remembers the early days when to get the correct angle on his plows, he would hop out of his truck, navigate through the 'clunky' levers and put the pin in different positions manually.

Over the last several decades, snow and ice removal equipment has become quite diverse with stronger, more reliable and user-friendly plows. "Making up the current contractor's arsenal are blades auto-adjustable and versatile

**Changes in technology have made snow and ice removal easier, but weather unpredictability still requires contractors to remain flexible.**

enough to fit on just about any vehicle, including ATVs, quad 4-wheelers, compact tractors, farm tractors, front end loaders and backhoes," says Patrick Dietz, manager of product development for Western Snowplows. In recent years, he adds, the growth in "winged technology" is one of the key innovations in snow and ice removal for his contractor customers, increasing the width of snow plow blades as well as minimizing snow spill off.

As snow removal efforts progressed with the addition of sanding and salting, protests by environmentalists, highway engineers and rust-clad motorists grew.

Sand and salt are far from the magic bullet in ice removal, according to Kujawa. "We have to lay off the salt, especially with new pavement," he says. "Pre-treating with chemical de-icers might help in cost-cutting, but it's still all about how well you physically remove that ice and snow."

Weather reporting is the biggest advancement in technology in the industry, according to Wilton. Space technology entered the snow and ice removal effort as early as 1959, when the first satellite launched. "The reporting, forecasting, and accuracy of weather has made planning and executing more efficient," says Wilton. "Computers, Internet, websites and weather stations made it easy for us to be ahead of the storm."



Suburban sprawl created a need for private snow and ice services.

But, Kujawa points out, weather remains unpredictable, especially when your customers'

properties sit on or near a large body of water or mountain range.

Smart phones and GPS systems have been valuable replacements for the old two-way radios and "roll of the dimes" played by the drivers when locating pay-phones to contact their offices at the end of every job. "These communication technologies have not only made our lives' easier, but our customers are more accessible in case of emergencies and dealing with other issues," says Wilton.

When the Snow and Ice Management Association (SIMA) formed in 1996, many in the industry observed that effort as the most important in establishing legitimacy for the industry.

The constant Kujawa says is the importance of having quality contractors available to customers. "By quality, I mean experienced employees, proper employment of high-tech equipment, understanding weather predictions and consistent, quality performance," he says. "Everything else is secondary."