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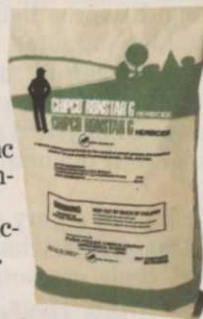
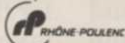
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There's also the constant preoccupation with fitness. There has to be a regard for the total integration of how people live, work and play. Communities want and need an identity of their own. We have to deal with the increasing number of choices people have."

With these considerations in mind, The Continuum continues to attract interest as well as clients.

Fitzgerald is currently working with synergy on a 3600-acre ranch in northern Douglas County (Colorado), totally revising the master plan.

"This project has tremendous potential," she enthuses, the interest in her voice noticeably rising. "We want to make it the gateway to Denver from the South. We also want to give it an urban focus—the Town Center contrasting to the suburban quality of Greater Denver. We are trying to create a focus or identity for the southeast corner of the Denver area."

The Continuum has been working on the project since last April. The number of projects Fitzgerald works on at once varies, and she says she isn't working on as many as she'd like. However, the challenges and the potential are still there.

Fitzgerald graduated from the University of Michigan in 1970 and practiced in England for two years. In 1972 after returning from England, she settled in Denver and has been there ever since. While in England, she worked for the Greater London Council on a project that still remains one of her most satisfying. It was called New Town at Bletchley. Situated on the River Thames, Fitzgerald says the greatest challenge of the project was the balance of physical design with the social and economic circumstances.

"The English have a very different set of ideas about what they want, such as their gardens, and definitely no high rises," she explained, "but it's achieving this balance between the confines of the job and what the client wants that is the fun part of this profession for me."



Bell Ranch is a camp and conference center where Fitzgerald had to incorporate the natural diversity of the land with educational and recreational uses.

After returning to the U.S. from England, Fitzgerald worked for four months with the Olympic Committee in Denver which tried to organize a massive statewide recreational event. It never really got off the ground, but she said the experience of working with them and all of the contingencies such as transportation and housing a project like this would entail, made it worthwhile.

A smaller project Fitzgerald is particularly pleased with is the Bell Ranch Camp and Conference Center in Evergreen, CO.

"Its elevation is at 8000 feet and we had to deal with the ecosystems of both the Montane and Upper Montane forests and balance the recreation and educational components of the site. The resource was the diversity of the land itself. We were involved from the comprehensive planning stages to site design.

Prior to co-funding the Continuum, Fitzgerald worked for the THK Associates of Denver.

In the diversity of projects she's worked on, Fitzgerald has found one constant and that is the need for the landscape architect to be as involved in the initial planning stages of any project as early on as possible.

"It's not that we want control over the project, it's just easier to offer opinions and options at an



early stage instead of being handed a *fait accompli*."

Fitzgerald says she enjoys most a client who is interested in creating a positive development that will have quality environmentally as well as being economically feasible.

"Some clients don't understand economic benefits of quality, and it can be a tough road to bridge," she says.

One of the things Fitzgerald enjoys most about her work is the diversity.

"There will always be traditionally organized landscape architect firms," she said, "and that's fine, but we all must get more involved in effecting decision-making as early on in a project as possible. We must learn to balance the high

continued on page 84

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Circle No. 104 on Reader Inquiry Card

Establishing a sensible seasonal labor pay policy for turf employers and employees

LAYOFFS MAY NOT PAY OFF

By RICHARD I. LEHR

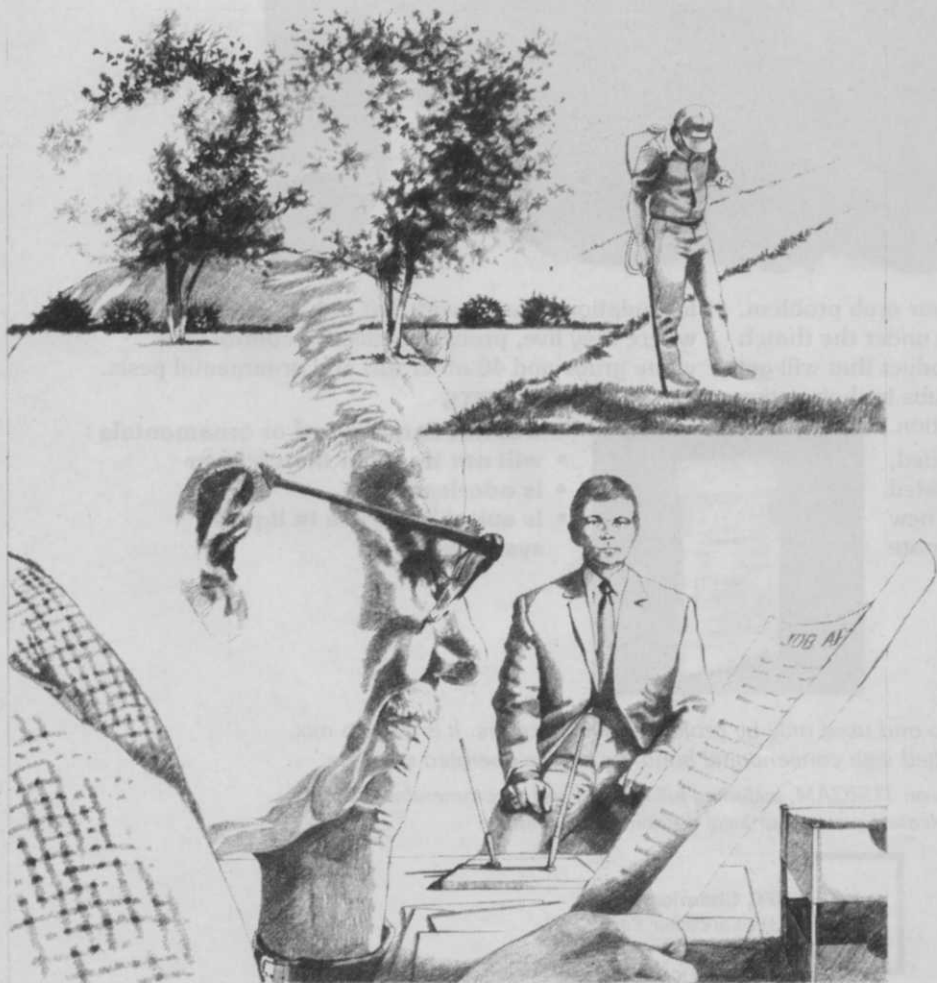
The seasonal nature of the turf industry has traditionally meant that turf employers would only hire on a seasonal basis. However, the sophistication of the turf industry in methods, materials and research, has reached the point where many turfgrass employers are finding a seasonal labor policy may have become unaffordable. This article summarizes the problem of developing a labor relations policy for a business that is still seasonal for most employers, and then developing alternatives where the turf employers could have the option of employing individuals on a year-round basis.

During the winter months, when cash flow problems develop, many turf employers prefer to lay off technicians, making them eligible for unemployment, and hope that they will still be in the labor market when the turf employer gears up for the new year. Though the turf employer saves an immediate payroll cost by laying off a technician, he will have lost approximately \$2,000 if that employee needs to be replaced next year. That \$2,000 figure is the estimate of what it costs to train a replacement. In addition to the costs of training, the turf employer loses business opportunities with turnover because a replacement is now going into the neighborhood who must begin over again in developing rapport with the customers and an identity such that other neighbors could be attracted to using the turf service.

Finally, though laying off employees saves an immediate payroll cost, it does increase the turf employer's unemployment tax. Therefore, this rate, which is an

continued on page 60

Richard I. Lehr is a partner in the Birmingham, AL, law firm of Sirote, Permutt, Friend, Friedman, Held & Apolinsky, P.A. and chairman of the Management Labor Law department. His firm represents a large contingent of turf-oriented employers across the country and internationally. Lehr is a frequent speaker on labor-related topics at turf conferences across the country. Periodically during the year, this column will address key issues facing the Green Industry in the labor area.



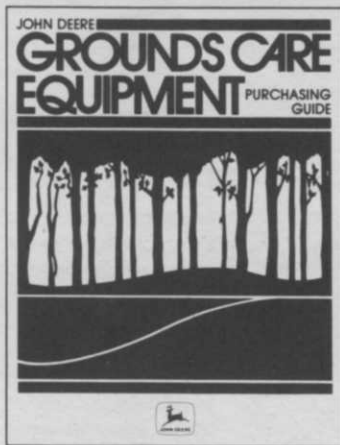
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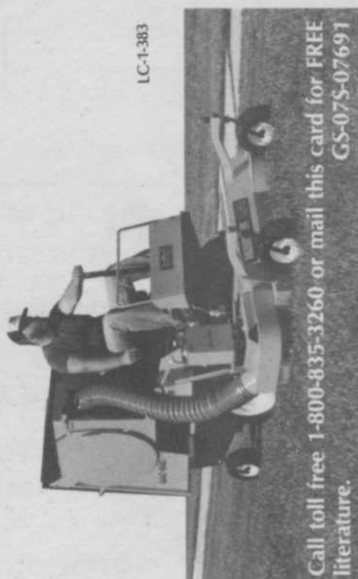
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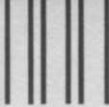
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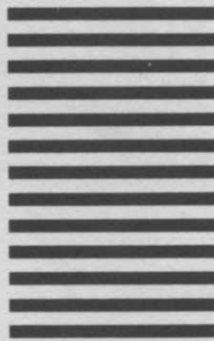
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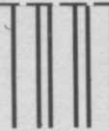
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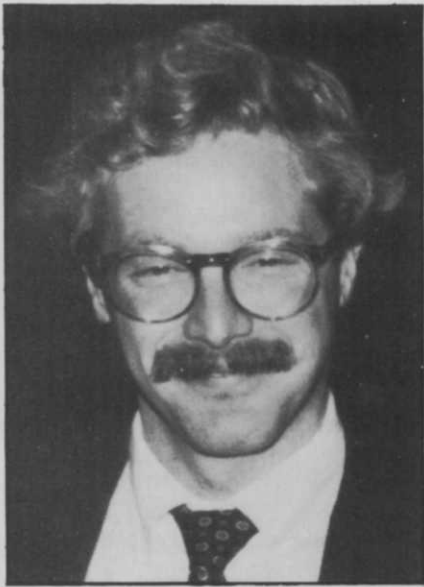
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Richard I. Lehr, attorney

analysis based on the number of weeks former employees received unemployment compensation during the year, is an additional expense which the turf employer assumes during layoff periods.

On the other hand, employing a technician on a year-round basis poses problems during the off-season due to a cash flow shortage. Additionally, there is only so much vehicle and equipment maintenance which can be done during the off-season. Basically, what can a technician do, even though he is on the payroll? Finally, if the technician is used to making a considerable amount of money during the busy season, whether on a bonus and/or commission basis, isn't it possible that he may quit during the off-season, when even though he is receiving a steady paycheck, it is for less than what he was receiving during the season?

We have seen the seasonal lay-off or year-round approach work successfully for turfgrass employers. Some employers will hire individuals for the season at a minimum wage, plus overtime, and then lay them off immediately at the conclusion of the season. Others perhaps pay their technicians more, keep them employed year-round, have less turnover, and are equally as profitable. Therefore, success and failure exists with either policy. Hopefully, some of the following ideas will assist turf em-

ployers in structuring their employment policies to afford them the opportunity of avoiding seasonal layoffs.

An initial approach that could be used is to structure a pay system such that the employee is paid a relatively steady salary throughout the year, regardless of the variations in the amount of hours worked. For example, a seasonally-adjusted wage program is a situation where an employee during the busier time of the year receives a lower hourly rate than during the slow period. Because the employee works overtime hours during the busier season, the overtime rate, when added to his hourly rate, should be roughly equivalent to what he will earn during the slower periods. The advantages to this system are that it facilitates the opportunity for an employee to plan financially on a steady income throughout the year, and it also enables the employer to avoid the wide fluctuations in labor costs between excessive overtime premiums during the busy season and layoffs during the slow season. The overtime expense within this program will not be as substantial, because the turf employer is paying the employee a lower hourly rate. The premise for implementing seasonally-adjusted wage plans is that rather than paying an employee a substantial amount of money during the busier season, the turf employer is, in essence, saving some of the money to compensate the employee during the slower time of the year.

Alternatively, a turf employer may compensate the employee during the summer season on some type of a production bonus pay system, and then shift to an hourly rate or fixed salary program during the off season. Again, the weekly salaries could be substantially equivalent, because of the turf employer's ability to take a little bit of the excess payment during the summer and use that to spread out compensation for over a 12-month period.

Either of these pay systems will avoid the situation where a technician is earning up to \$400 a week during the turf season and collecting either \$90 or \$120 a week

unemployment during the off-season. The technician would earn less during the summer, but earning less during the summer could afford the turf employer the opportunity to keep the technician employed year-round.

Other pay systems could accomplish the same objective of affording the turf employer the opportunity to employ technicians year-round, but they would be slightly more expensive than the ones discussed above. For example, a fixed salary for fluctuating work week program guarantees an employee his salary regardless of whether he works fifteen minutes or forty hours in a given work week. For each hour worked over forty, he is paid "half-time", not time and a half, as overtime. Therefore, during the slow season there will be no half-time hours worked and thus no half-time compensation. During the summer season, the half-time compensation would not be extensive. For example, the technician earning \$200 a week and working 50 hours

Although laying off employees saves an immediate payroll cost, it increases the employer's unemployment tax.

during the season will have to be paid an additional \$20 as half-time. During the off-season, he is simply paid a flat \$200 a week salary. Alternatively, a turf employer may pay an employee on fixed salary for fluctuating work week a lower weekly salary during the business season and a higher weekly salary during the off-season, which when half-time is averaged in, will approach the seasonally-adjusted wage plan discussed above.

Assume that the compensation aspect can be structured such that when the turf employer figures the savings by not laying off people and develops a pay system so that the payroll costs are rather constant for the year, he then has the

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