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EVENTS

JULY

12-16: American Association of Nurserymen, Annual Convention, Walt Disney World, Orlando, Fla. Contact: A.A.N., 1250 I St. NW, Suite 500, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 789-2900.

14-16: Mid-Atlantic Nurserymen's Summer Trade Show, Baltimore Convention Center. Contact: Mid-Atlantic Nurserymen's Trade Show, Inc., P.O. Box 314, Perry Hall, MD 21128.

15-21: Arbor Day Institute Workshop, "The Technical Arborist," Washington, D.C. Contact: The Institute, P.O. Box 81415, Lincoln, NE 68501-1415; (402) 474-5655.

18: Summer Field Day & Trade Show, Stadler Nursery, Laytonsville, Md. Contact: Landscape Contractors Association, 9053 Shady Grove Court, Gaithersburg, MD 20877; (301) 948-0810.

22-24: Residential Landscape Design Work-

shops, Virginia Polytechnic Institute. Contact: Robert McDuffie, (703) 231-7432.

24-26: National Fertilizer Solutions Association Round-Up '91, Indiana Convention Center, Indianapolis, Ind. Contact: NFSA, 339 Consort Dr. Manchester, MO 63011.

25: PGMS Facilities Management Seminars, Ohio State University. Contact: PGMS, 10402 Ridgland Rd., Suite 4, Cockeysville, MD 21030; (301) 667-1833.

27-30: Outdoor Power Equipment Institute Expo '91, Louisville, Ky. Contact: OPEI, 6100 Dutchman's Lane, Louisville, KY 40205; (800) 558-8767.

30: Midwest Regional Turf Foundation Field Day and Show, Purdue University Agronomy Research Center, West Lafayette, Ind. Contact: Dept. of Agronomy, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN 47907;

(317) 494-8039.

31: University of Georgia Turfgrass Field Day, Georgia Experiment Station, Griffin, Ga. Contact: University Extension Service, Landrum Box 8112, Georgia Southern University, Statesboro, GA 30460.

31: Connecticut Tree Protective Assoc. Summer Meeting, Aqua-Turf Club, Plantsville, Conn. Contact: CTPA, 18 Washington St., Rocky Hill, CT 06067; (203) 257-8971.

31-Aug. 2: American Sod Producers Association Summer Convention and Field Days, Red Lion Hotel/Lloyd Center, Portland, Ore. Contact: ASPA, 1855 Hicks Rd., Rolling Meadows, IL 60008; (708) 705-9898.

AUGUST

2-4: Southern Nurserymen's Association Horticultural Trade Show, Georgia World Congress Center, Atlanta. Contact: Southern Nurserymen's Association, 1511 Johnson

Ferry Road, Suite 115, Marietta, GA 30062; (404) 973-9026.

4: Perennial Plant Symposium, Farmington, CT and Long Island, N.Y. Contact: Dr. Steve Still, Perennial Plant Association, 3383 Schirtzinger Rd., Hilliard, OH 43026; (614) 771-8431.

6-8: Field Diagnostic Course for Turfgrass Managers, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. Contact: Joann Gruttadaurio, (607) 255-1792.

12-13: Int. Soc. of Arboriculture Conference and Trade Show, Adam's Mark Hotel, Philadelphia, PA. Contact: ISA Trade Show, P.O. Box 908, Urbana, IL 61801.

14-15: "Insect and Disease: Diagnosing, Managing and Complying with Regulations," sponsored by the Ball Institute. Contact: The Ball Institute, (708) 231-3600. □

MANAGEMENT

Listen, observe to sell

LAS VEGAS, Nev.—Common sense, plain speaking, listening and observing are keys Mark H. McCormack has found helpful during his career.

In remarks made at the International Golf Course Conference and Show, McCormack said it's the little things that mean a lot and often make the deal.

McCormack, a Cleveland attorney and head of International Management Group, said that to be a successful businessman you must listen aggressively: to content, tone, choice of words and any indicators which sharpen connections.

Observe aggressively, have a good sense of humor, and include the tool of silence in negotiations, the sports management specialist said. The long pause never goes long unfulfilled, McCormack concluded. □

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SELL... INSTALL... MAINTAIN

It's not the easiest job in the world selling irrigation systems to commercial establishments in the East and Midwest. But it can be done, as this dealer's representative has found out.

by Jack Simonds, contributing editor

The assignment: Market irrigation systems in an area which usually enjoys a robust mixture of sunshine and rainfall. The added challenge: A good moisture-retaining clay soil also is common throughout northeast Ohio.

It isn't the easiest way to go for George Reese, director of irrigation sales at North Coast Distributors. But he hasn't done badly on his 22-county beat. Not for an area where commercial and residential irrigation systems are sometimes considered a "prestige" item in new constructions.

"When I started 15 years ago, irrigation was not exactly a household word," remembers Reese. "This is a tough market to sell. Irrigation is not considered a 100 percent necessity item here when compared with other states in the South and West.



George Reese: irrigation systems not just for prestige clients.

"It has been a very difficult road. What you sell is a concept, and the timing has to be right," says Reese on a warm, moist spring day where every planting in sight is lush and green. "You're not handed anything in this market. You have to hard work at it," he says.

Many projects are already under his belt and others on the way. But none is likely to compare with Reese's largest ongoing design job: equipping Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co.'s world headquarters in Akron, Ohio with as much irrigation as needed on 400 of the firm's 600 city acres.

Underground obstacles

Reese works closely with Goodyear's grounds maintenance manager Tom Riccardi, a veteran green industry



Green space along the Ohio Canal is fully maintained by Goodyear maintenance crews. The canal is one of three sources of water for irrigation and plant operations.

professional who oversees all outside areas around the complex. The two have teamed since the early 1980s; to date, installing 25 miles of piping, 4,400 sprinkler heads, 50 miles of wiring and 40 automatic control centers on 100 acres.

"Tom first had to sell the idea of irrigation to Goodyear's corporate side. I sat down with Tom and we laid out a presentation package; a five-year plan," says Reese of the \$2.5 million ongoing project.

"I sold Goodyear with the image of the outside corporate grounds; the psychological image Goodyear projects as people pass by. The key was the beautification of Akron and it is nice to see a company like Goodyear take this kind of responsibility toward the community," says Reese.

Goodyear green spaces, situated directly in the center of Akron's east side with other rubber company giants as neighbors, stretch over a mixed terrain with both sandy and clay conditions, high winds, rail tracks and a manmade canal, older unused buildings and old submerged building foundations—all to be landscaped and kept green by Riccardi and his 16 full-time and 10 seasonal crewmembers. He credits the success to his crew, many of whom were former production workers now retrained in landscape maintenance techniques.

"Our main philosophy is to have a well-manicured lawn throughout the complex. We always go for total quality control. In order to do that, we need as much of the area irrigated as possible. We try to keep everything green under very harsh urban conditions. Goodyear is committed to this," says Riccardi.

Sandy soil gets less attention

Although their initial goal was to keep things as standardized as possible, Reese and Riccardi found they must be flexible in design specifications. In some shallow sandy soil conditions, for instance, the two found a limited number of sprinkler heads works best.

Other areas dictated different responses. Green space around an employee parking lot, for example, requires sturdier golf course style heads to combat wind, heat and soil conditions and even vandalism.

The front of corporate headquarters, which stretches along a city



Sloping green acreage alongside the Goodyear Technical Center headquarters is well-irrigated. The reclaimed area once sported coal piles and unused rail tracks.

block, is adorned by a half-acre flower bed which combines bulbs, ornamental shrubs and a Kentucky bluegrass blend found throughout the complex.

The irrigation system is supplied by five deep wells on Goodyear's property, the Ohio Canal or "Little Cuyahoga," as known locally, and city water. About two-thirds of the water comes from the wells and canal.

Reese and Riccardi continually find they must maintain an open mind while planning for each new irrigated area.

"Originally, we wanted to keep sprinkler heads standardized, for instance," says Riccardi. But differing soil levels and compositions, proximity to trespassers and vandals, closeness to employee parking lots and even turf installations over razed building foundations all played a case-by-case role in setting out systems.

In some areas, sturdier golf course heads proved more effective; others, like the high ground adjacent to Goodyear's Technical Center, needed 240 smaller heads spaced 38 feet apart to combat wind drift.

That 13-acre green space adjacent to Goodyear's Technical Center was the first area tackled by Reese and Riccardi in 1983. It has proved successful. Once not-so-attractively adorned with rail tracks and coal



Tom Riccardi: maintain quality control.

piles, the site now gently slopes to corporate headquarters and shores up to a brick promenade complete with a modernistic water fountain.

Another four-acre area has been reclaimed as a buffer zone between nearby interstate traffic and Goodyear's five-story machine shop. That site posed special problems because a massive building foundation still sits beneath

the surface and in some spots, topsoil is as shallow as two inches.

Irrigation is also in place on the company softball field, which hosts 22 day and night games a week in peak season.

"Even with Goodyear's wells and river, water conservation is important," says Reese. "The investment here is in landscaping, trees and plantings. You've got to deliver that water or you may totally lose it all."

The next challenge for Reese and Riccardi will be irrigation for Goodyear's test track, where tires are driven under different wetness conditions to gauge responsiveness. The system could play a part in varying wetness levels for the pavement.

Riccardi says the conversion to underground irrigation has "absolutely paid for itself," with lower man-hours and water use.

Why install irrigation?

Reese works closely with area landscape contractors, providing training seminars for Toro's systems. It is no accident that 30 area landscape contractors recently took intensive training to become familiar with the Toro line.

"There needs to be education to the end user (to show) irrigation is more than a prestige item. Irrigation increases the value of a home and preserves the investment in landscaping," says Reese. **LM**

BIDDING TO WIN IN A SOFT ECONOMY

Recession thinking increases the demand for holding or reducing the cost of maintaining property. To win and retain projects, look for your 'competitive advantage,' and modify your service strategy.

by Phil Christian

Competitive bidding should be a part of your overall marketing strategy. But it must be managed differently in a downturned economy to maintain profits.

The real estate industry has been going through an economic adjustment, and the current economy-wide recession has compounded its problems. So landscape service contractors serving the real estate industry need to reevaluate bidding and marketing strategies to fit the needs of the "new" real estate industry.

In a growing economy, where there is enough work for everyone, we develop bidding habits that soon become rote. These practices may not serve us well in a slow- or no-growth economy.

Buyers looking at price

Some modern economists tell us that recession begins with a change in the buyer's state of mind. This state of mind has real consequences. Sales drop, people lose their jobs, competition becomes more intensive, and the professional buyer becomes even more "price sensitive."

Fortunately, this price pressure is accompanied by other more positive symptoms of recession thinking, the most important of which is the tendency for property managers to be more open-minded or less resistant to change.

The complaint heard most in times of recession is from green industry contractors who say, "This year all our projects are being rebid, even the negotiated jobs with our oldest and best customers."

If the contractors are correct—and they usually are—most of the work in your area will be bid or rebid in this coming year. How does that new reality of recessionary times affect your company?

Make a trade-off

An average-sized full-service contractor bills \$500,000 a year from 24 projects. This contractor should

renew, without bidding, at least 33 percent of his jobs, or about eight projects. If this average contractor is in a \$5 million dollar market, he has a market share of about 10 percent. That means they must protect eight of their own jobs. But there are 80 new jobs belonging to their competitors that are available to bid. Not a bad trade-off in terms of competitive position.

Saving the project

Before getting involved in bid strategy for new work, let's review a plan to save those jobs that are now at risk because of recession thinking.

It is best to offer your customer a plan before you are notified of a

rebid situation. Keep in mind that the drive for a better price is accompanied by an open mind, or less regard for the status quo. This is your opportunity to offer a proposal to cut the cost of maintaining this property while protecting your own profit and the quality of the landscape.

This is a good time for creative change in landscape management. One effective method of approaching customers is to make an appointment, express your understanding of their situation, and offer your solution. For example, you could say to your customers: "We heard about your recession, and we have developed a plan to reduce your total cost for maintaining this project."

Cutting to win

- In the past you may have offered four and five rounds of lawn service over 100 percent of the turf area. Modify that program. Apply five rounds to the most visible portion of the landscape, four rounds in front of the units, and three rounds between the back door and the creek.

- Offer flexible mowing programs or frequencies that vary with the use and location of the turf area. That open field behind the units designed for future expansion may be reduced from 30 to six mowings per season.

- Reduce the weed control in the low-visibility and reduced-maintenance areas. Eliminate or cut down the applications of nitrogen in the early spring rounds, and match the fertility programs to meet the turf's function.

- Stop hand-watering and over-watering with irrigation systems. Cut the water bill and the labor/maintenance cost.

- Reduce or stop blanket appli-

cations of post-emergent herbicides.

- Stop shearing the shrubs. Prune them correctly, twice each year.

- Omit spring fertilization of trees and shrubs, and skip or reduce the fall fertilization to every other year.

- Get rid of those thick, sculptured, over-mulched beds. Mulch twice a year, only three inches thick, in a flat, natural contoured shape.

- Stop pulling weeds by hand. Use pre-emergents and increase the application frequency of contact herbicides.

- Reduce trimming with a nylon cord trimmer by establishing no-grow areas around the buildings. Reshape the mulch beds to eliminate small trim areas.

- Do not replace 100 percent of the plant material lost last winter.

- Cut your crews of four and five people down to two and three people, and operate more efficiently.

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Choose the right projects

No matter how much work is available, you can only bid a limited number of projects in a given time frame. You need a selection criteria or procedure, especially if you intend to get the "plum" jobs.

The "plum" jobs are those that fit your company's experience, in terms of size, quality, location, timing and competitive advantage.

A good information system is essential to a good selection process. You know your market well enough to identify the projects you should pursue in terms of size, quality location and timing.

To exercise your competitive advantage, look for projects that have been maintained by the same contractor for two or more seasons and are over-maintained.

Look for the projects that are maintained incorrectly: where a 21-inch push mower is used on the large turf area in front of the building, or where a crew of six is hacking away with nylon cord trimmers.

Look for the large properties that have been maintained as though they were small properties. Seek out the very large properties that would be

more effectively maintained with two full time people on-site, rather than a big, expensive mobile crew.

Bidding to get the work

The landscape industry's bidding process—as we know it—is generally an informal one, with few hard-and-fast rules. The buyer views the process as one of choice, where the contractors who want to do business with his company compete informally based on price.

In the present tight real estate economy, you should bid each project to get it! Casual bidders, who bid on everything and hope to get lucky, soon earn a reputation, and are not taken seriously, even when they are low.

If you do not have a good chance of being the low bidder on the base bid or the bid documents supplied by the buyer, you should then bid an alternate program, incorporating the changes you recommend for maintaining the property. In other words, if you cannot be among the low bidders, the least you can do is disrupt the process so no one knows who the low bidder is without talking with you. When you are successful in

landing a job based on an alternate bid, the ones who lost will complain about the "apples to apples" comparisons. You are free to tell them that all bidders have the same opportunity—and, perhaps, obligation—to be creative when it is in the best interest of the customer.

Cut profits last

Do not automatically reduce your profit to negotiate or bid a lower price for commercial customers. All costs should be trimmed first. If your adjusted profit is higher than 25 percent of the total cost, including overhead, then some reduction could be in order. Otherwise, hold the profit and recommend changes to reduce all other cost. Remember, this is their recession, their property and their choice to reduce the cost. You have the responsibility to respond to their needs. But you are not obliged to fill their needs at the expense of your profits. **LM**

Phil Christian of Alpharetta, Ga., is a green industry consultant with pdc consultants.

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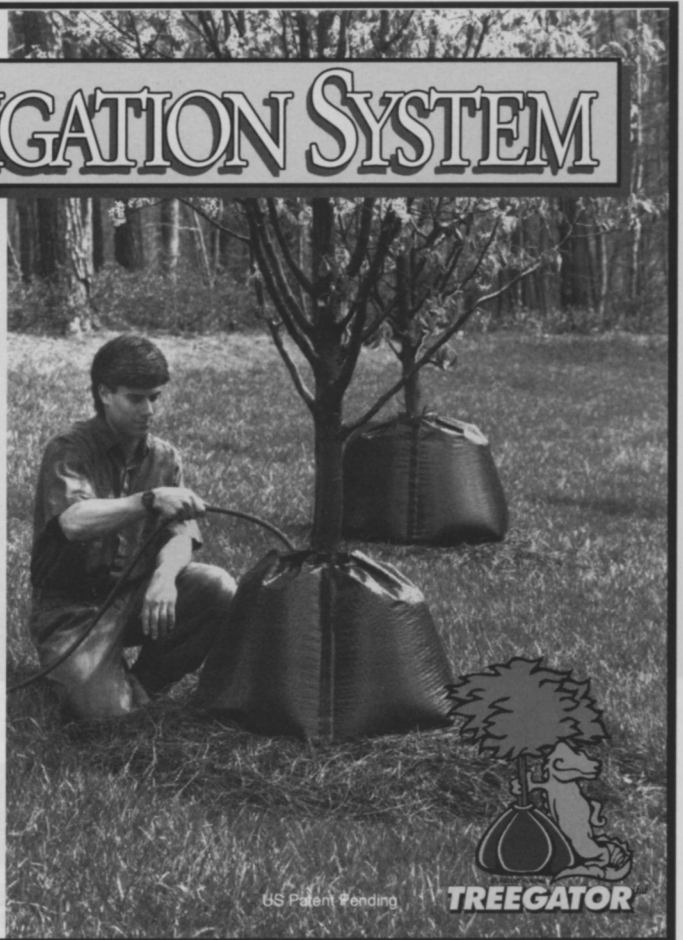
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