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Circle No. 112 on Reader Inquiry Card

Be more profitable with creative accounting

by Dan Sautner

Accounting statements, by their very nature, are based on historical information. What will happen in the future, however, is up to you. And you can use this month's information to help increase your profits next month.

First and foremost, you need to change the way you think while reading your income statement. Use it for laying out the same time period in the future. Ask yourself the following "will" questions:

- 1) Will my sales be the same for the next period?
- 2) Will my gross profit be the same next month?
- 3) Will labor costs remain the same next period?
- 4) Will my supplies/inventory balances increase or decrease?
- 5) Will my cash balance change next period?
- 6) Will my new income change next period?

Now, based on the answers, you can move to the next set of "how" questions:

- 1) How can I increase sales?
- 2) How can I reduce labor as a percentage of sales?
- 3) How can I increase my gross profit margins?
- 4) How will sales affect my supplies/inventory balances?
- 5) How can I increase my cash balances?
- 6) How can I increase net income?

After answering these questions, you have the basis for a financial plan. But be sure to test each aspect of the plan against the current financial information.

Assuming that you can increase sales, what numbers from the most recent period will change? Labor costs may or may not change. Fixed costs are unlikely to change, but part of the increased sales revenue may be coming from additional advertising or promotional expenses. Net income under

Three plans for using your monthly profit-and-loss statements to bump your bottom line.

this new model will probably change, and will this be for the better?

By using the income statement from the prior period, you can develop your future plans. Just make sure that your plans are simple, with only a few objectives each period, so as to not overwhelm yourself and diffuse your focus.

What if???—A second approach is to use the "what if" question on your financial information—a variation on the "will and how" idea. In this approach, you need to review each line of your income statement with the following question in mind: What if I increase or decrease this revenue/-expense line by 10 percent?

For example, "What if I increased my advertising expense 10 percent? Would my revenues more than compensate for the additional expense?"

Or, "What if I reduced my advertising expense 10 percent? Would my revenues decline beyond my savings in expense?"

Once you have examined each line in this manner, look beyond the next financial period. Sometimes short-term gains result in long-term losses. We often look at ways to decrease expenses instead of looking at "good" investments that may temporarily increase expenses but will result in long-term net income gains. Look in both directions.

Remember: only you, as owner, can answer the "what if" questions. Net income is on a curve, not a pillar. A small change will not cause your net income to go to zero, but rather to another position on the curve—perhaps a better position. Experiment to find the

range of possible outcomes.

Keeping score—Finally, you can use the income statement as a scorekeeper, to keep track of your progress toward defined goals.

At the beginning of the year, set up three major financial goals for your company. The goals should be exact, and mathematically expressed. Your reach should exceed your grasp. For instance: increasing sales by 19.5 percent, reducing labor to 4.5



percent of sales, increasing average cash balance to \$10,500, etc.

At the end of every financial period, review where you are. Set up a chart in your office. Pin notes on your desk. Make the representations as visual as possible. Then, each month, adjust your progress based on your financial reports.

Financial reports, on the whole, tell you where you've been. But you spend too much time, energy and money on them not to squeeze every last benefit out of them.

—Dan Sautner is chairman of Padgett Business Services, Athens, Ga. This is one of a series of articles on accounting he is writing for *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT*. For more information, call Padgett at (706) 548-1040.

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The Gateway Arch in St. Louis commemorates America's westward expansion.

Start your planning now for spring garden shows

By James E. Guyette

■ Consumer home and garden shows are great ways to market your landscape company, and now's the time to plan for shows scheduled in spring of 1995.

For more than a decade, McHenry Landscaping in Chesterland, Ohio, has participated in such shows. It reports a remarkable rate of selling success. "We probably generate 30 percent of our work from that," says landscape construction supervisor Kevin Czajka.

Patrons at these events will seek advice by running a proposed landscape design by the assembled staffers—and often they can be convinced to sign-up as a client, although sometimes the results are not immediate.

"People recognize you year after year. I've seen this happen a thousand times. They'll call and say, 'We talked about this (project) three or four years ago and we want you to do it,'" Czajka recounts. "It's a

Trade shows can accommodate just about any landscape display.

long-term process. We get a lot of leads and we have to go through them."

The type of people passing by the display can vary greatly depending on the caliber of the show itself. Attendees will range from the very wealthy to just plain folks.

"At the Cleveland Flower Festival we get more high-dollar residential," says Czajka. Other shows may attract more commercial clients or those with fewer

needs, he adds. "Sometimes you'll get someone who just wants one tree. It depends on the show."

Part of McHenry's marketing strategy is tracking which show produces more suitable results.

Smell the roses—A company considering a display at a home and garden show needs to check the quality of the other landscapers involved and the quality of the show itself, Czajka advises.

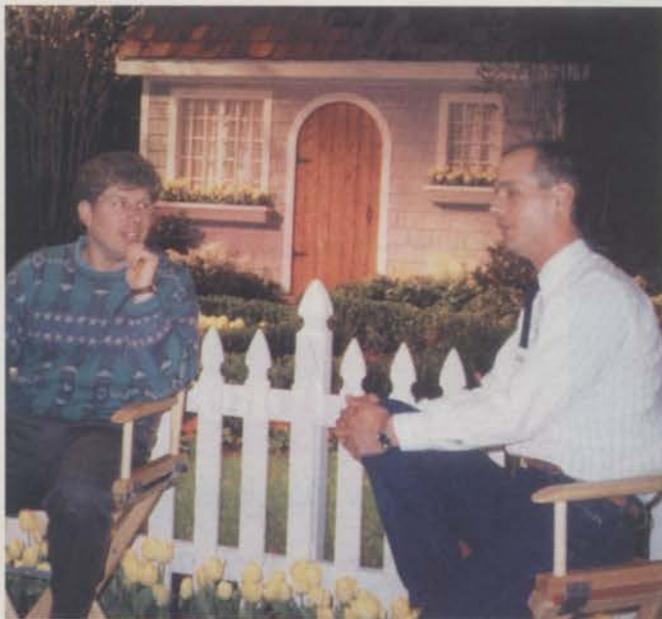
A home and garden show display can cost from \$10,000 to \$30,000. The show itself will pay a company a per-square-foot "subsidy" to erect a garden scene, but that money is inconsequential.

"They should expect to spend three to four times the subsidy," reports Paul J. Schrimpf, associate show manager at Advanstar Expositions, producer of the Cleveland Flower Festival. "But the subsidy is a good starting point."

Proper planning is the key to presenting a successful show scene, according to Czajka and Schrimpf. "It's a different world indoors, so seek advice," Schrimpf says. "Things look different under indoor lighting."

By discussing indoor displays with landscape managers in other towns you can determine such things as plant selec-

continued on page 26



Dan Schultz, left, and Kevin Czajka of McHenry Landscaping say planning is most important when presenting a display at a home and garden show.

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tion, pond placement, pump technology and worker scheduling.

Asking for advice from other landscapers in the same show that you're considering may not be the best idea because of the competition involved for the coveted ribbons. "There are a lot of bragging rights and prestige that go along with those awards," says Schrimpf.

"You're competing against the best guys (and gals) in the city," Czajka points out.

From the ground (floor) up—Putting together the display itself takes plenty of careful advance work. The planning stage alone can take 20 to 30 hours. At McHenry, Czajka meets with owner Tom McHenry and landscape maintenance supervisor Chris Dowhan to plot the general thrust. If it's a "celebrity garden" based on a local personality, the subject's favorite plants, colors and lifestyle habits are considered. Landscape designer Dan Schultz then steps in to draw the plans. All this starts in September for a February show.

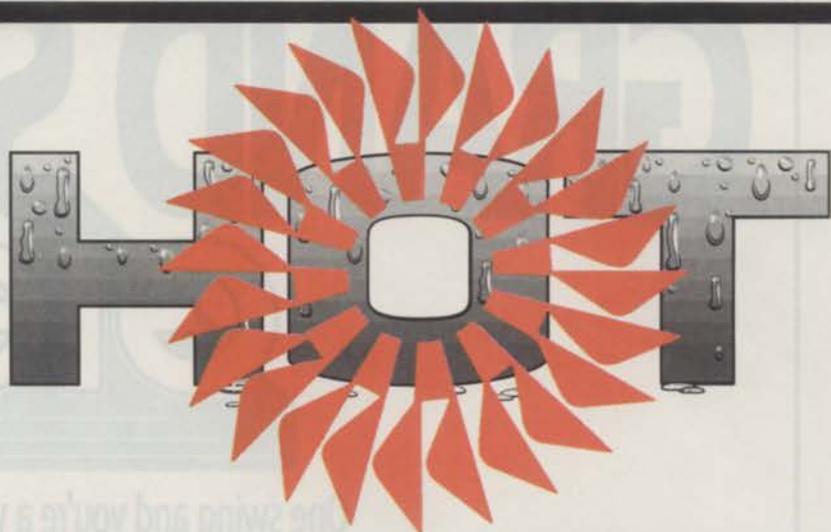
As much as possible is constructed at company headquarters. "If it can be built ahead of time we'll do it and haul it down on a trailer," Czajka says. With a walkway or patio, the stones are assembled and numbered and then taken apart to be toted to the site. Flowering plants are forced at the McHenry greenhouse.

At the convention center, a layer of sand is placed as a base atop plastic sheeting, then topsoil is brought in with the rest of the materials. "It's very similar to doing it outside," says Czajka. "It's watered every day by hand—normal maintenance."

If a landscape manager wishes to keep valued employees busy during the off-season, mounting a display project can reach that goal. "This year we brought back three people who normally would have been laid off during the winter," Czajka reports.

In addition to boosting the company's bottom line through increased visibility and sales, producing a home and garden show scene can help improve worker morale. Says Czajka: "All of us look forward to it every year. You meet and talk to a lot of people."

—The author is a freelance writer specializing in the green industry. He is based in South Euclid, Ohio.



Beware summer heat stress, fatal in 1 of 10 severe cases

■ Now that the warm season is just around the corner, and you and your co-workers will be spending long hours outdoors, you need to keep on the lookout for signs of heat stress.

Heat stress is the illness that occurs when your body is subjected to more heat than it can cope with. The personal protective equipment worn during pesticide handling activities can increase the risk of heat stress by limiting your body's ability to cool down.

Mild forms of heat stress will make you feel ill and impair your ability to do a good job. You may get tired sooner, feel weak, be less alert, and be less able to use good judgment.

Severe heat stress is fatal to more than 10 percent of its victims—even young, healthy adults. Many who survive suffer permanent damage. Sometimes, the victims remain highly sensitive to heat for months and are unable to return to the same work.

Learn the signs and symptoms of heat stress and take immediate action to cool down if you suspect you or one of your colleagues might be suffering from even mild heat stress.

Symptoms—Signs and symptoms may include:

- fatigue (exhaustion, muscle weakness)
- headache, nausea and/or chills
- dizziness and/or fainting
- severe thirst and/or dry mouth
- clammy or hot, dry skin
- heavy sweating or complete lack of sweating
- alerted behavior (confusion, slurred

speech, quarrelsome or irrational attitude).

Drink!—When you work up a sweat or need to quench a thirst, remember the cheapest, healthiest, most readily available refreshment there is: water. A body needs six to eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids every day. Water is non-caloric and non-fattening. By drinking lots of water, your body learns to retain less fluid. And always drink past the point of quenching your thirst; the extra water will guard against dehydration.

First aid—It's not always easy to tell the difference between heat stress illness and pesticide poisoning. The signs and symptoms are similar. Don't waste time trying to decide what's causing the illness. Get medical help.

First aid measures for heat stress victims are similar to those for persons who are over-exposed to pesticides:

- 1) Get the victim into a shaded or cool area.
- 2) Carefully remove all personal protective equipment and any other clothing that may be making the victim too warm.
- 3) Cool the victim as rapidly as possible by sponging or splashing the skin—especially the face, neck, hands and forearms—with cool water. If possible, immerse the victim in cool water.
- 4) Have the victim, if conscious, drink as much water as possible.
- 5) Keep the victim quiet until help arrives.

—Information courtesy of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America, through its newsletter

Soil compaction is trouble in hiding

■ It's the green industry's version of an oil leak or tooth decay.

You don't know it's there until you notice something's wrong, and by then it may be too late. But when you look for it, it's hard to miss.

It's soil compaction, and it's often responsible for weakening turf to the point of susceptibility to other problems.

The key area of concern in cool-season turf is the top three to four inches which contain the bulk of the roots, says soil expert Dr. Paul Rieke of Michigan State University.

Aerate droughty turf every year. Remove cores $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter, at a depth of up to six inches. This will improve permeability of the sod to rain and watering. This treatment also improves soil aeration and deeper rooting. Since the core holes permit much easier and deeper penetration of fertilizer and lime in situations which merit such treatment, aerification will help root development, and the yearly accumulation of dead roots will improve soil structure to the depth of rooting.

Certain soils compact more easily than others. The situation gets worse when you add heavy traffic to the picture, as on a golf green.

Compaction prevents moisture and nutrients from reaching the turf roots. Wet, waterlogged soil in heavy traffic com-



pacts quickly. Grass will begin to thin out, and eventually bare spots and weeds will result.

Solution: aerify and remove soil cores in late fall or early spring. Go in several directions for best coverage.

Do a light overseeding, then water heavily. The water will wash the seed into the newly formed core holes. Fertilize and seed bare spots before watering.

Some turf experts believe core aeration is best when done after Labor Day, so the holes can heal over before winter. In cool-season turf regions, soil is drier in fall and the temperature and moisture

conditions are more favorable and more predictable, and you have more time to fit it into your schedule.

—Sources: "Turfgrass Management" by Dr. Al Turgeon, Reston Publishing, 1980; "Ask The Lawn Expert," by Paul N. Voykin; MacMillan, 1976.

Coring cures COMPACTION

■ Coring offers a solution to compacted turf, but not without some disadvantages.

ADVANTAGES

- release of toxic gases from the soil
- improved wetting of dry or hydrophobic soils
- accelerated drying of persistently wet soils
- increased infiltration capacity, especially where surface compaction or thatch limits infiltration
- stimulated root growth within the holes
- disruption of soil layers resulting from topdressing
- control of thatch, especially where soil cores are reincorporated or where topdressing follows coring

- improved turfgrass response to fertilizers

DISADVANTAGES

- temporary disruption of the turf's surface
- increased potential for turfgrass desiccation as subsurface tissues are exposed
- increased weed development when conditions favor weed-seed germination
- increased damage from cutworms and other insects that reside in the holes.

Soil amendments can be used to alleviate soil compaction. Companies which manufacture these amendments include Aquatrols, headquartered in Cherry Hill, N.J.; Bonide Products, Inc. of Yorkville, N.Y.; Four Star Services, Inc. of Bluffton, Ind., and Innova Corp. of Westminster, Colo.

Earthworms: we need attitude adjustment

Turf managers want to get rid of them, but earthworms are a vital part of the turf ecosystem.

by Pam Elam

■ Every season, I receive calls from concerned golf course managers, landscapers and homeowners about the little piles of soil that are brought up each day by industrious earthworms.

While their concern is noted, it is important to understand the valuable role earthworms play in the overall turfgrass ecosystem:

- Earthworms help to mix surface organic layers, or thatch, with the underlying soil profile.

- In their burrowing activity, earthworms increase aeration and water movement into the soil and increase root health of the turf.

- Earthworm castings help soils develop good structure and lower soil bulk density.

All of these activities are important to maintain a healthy and long-lived turf.

The types of conditions that support or deter the development of earthworms are associated with the same management practices that correlate to thatch accumulation.

For example, acid or soil pH of 5.0 and below favors thatch development. And research shows that few earthworms reside

under turf in acid soils.

Also associated with acid soil conditions are poorer soil aggregation, higher soil bulk density and greater resistance to penetration. In 1985, Dr. Daniel Potter reported that an increase in soil acidity due to acid-type nitrogen fertilizers (like ammonium sulfate) brought with it a concurrent increase in thatch and a decrease in earthworms.

Earthworms prefer moist, medium to fine textured soils with high amounts of organic matter, adequate amounts of calcium and a moderate soil pH.

Another factor that might be associated with earthworm activity is pesticide use. Clearly, chlorinated hydrocarbon-type insecticides are toxic to earthworms. Some herbicides, specifically DCPA (Dacthal) have been associated with decreased earthworm activity. However, Cole & Turgeon (1978) suggest that thatch accumulation was not related to reductions in earthworm activity after DCPA application but rather primarily attributed to reduced microbial activity.

With other herbicides such as bensulide (Betasan), the data show no significant extra thatch development. Dr. Turgeon, in fact, found less thatch with some pre-emergence herbicidal treatments, possibly due to a reduction in grass growth and herbicide toxicity to earthworms and other soil organisms.

So it is unclear how much pesticides affect earthworms. What is also unclear is how much and how direct the link is to pesticide use, thatch development and earthworm activity.

While it is known that earthworms are important in thatch reduction, we don't know how much and to what percent might be more attributable to other micro-organisms. We also don't know enough about the effect of pesticides on earthworms, micro-organisms and to other critters in the soil.

Considering the importance of soil organisms in the breakdown of nitrogen to available forms for plant use, organic matter decomposition and other soil process, research in these areas could have a significant impact on our management practices. However, what is clear are the other benefits of earthworms to the development of good soil structure and what they tell you about the quality of your turf and soil ecosystem.

So what is needed is an attitude adjustment about earthworms bringing up little piles of soil. Look at alternatives to managing earthworms rather than trying to totally prevent them.

Some suggestions:

- 1) Sweep golf greens regularly with a broom to remove the castings and dirt piles.

- 2) On residential turf, consider mowing higher where the symptoms are not so obvious.

- 3) Drop soil pH by using acid-type fertilizers.

- 4) Increase soil aeration by core aeration and/or vertical mowing which may reduce the degree of burrowing.

However, remember the consequences of such actions: decreased soil aggregation, more thatch, greater bulk density and a possible increase in moss and algae.

—Pam Elam is a farm advisor in environment horticulture for the Fresno (Calif.)

County Extension Service. This is an excerpt from a piece in "Pro-Hort News," Spring, 1993.

Here's how to save water

■ Here are some tips on saving irrigation water from the University of California Cooperative Extension Service:

Turf:

- Early AM watering cuts evaporation.
- Water lawns separately from trees, shrubs and groundcovers, if possible.
- Remove thatch in spring if it's more than one-half inch thick. Thatch should not be removed in the heat of the summer.
- Weeds steal nutrients; control them.
- Fertilize moderately, apply at the low end of recommended rates.

- Keep lawns mowed at the right height: 1.5-3" for tall fescue, 1.5-2.5" for perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass; 0.5-1" for bermudagrass and zoysiagrass; 0.5-1.5" for St. Augustinegrass.

- Aerate to prevent soil compaction. Proper aeration requires removing plugs. Clay soils need regular aeration.

Trees:

- Water trees separately from surrounding plants. Trees prefer fewer, deeper waterings than grass.

- Water to a depth of two to three feet to help promote deep rooting.

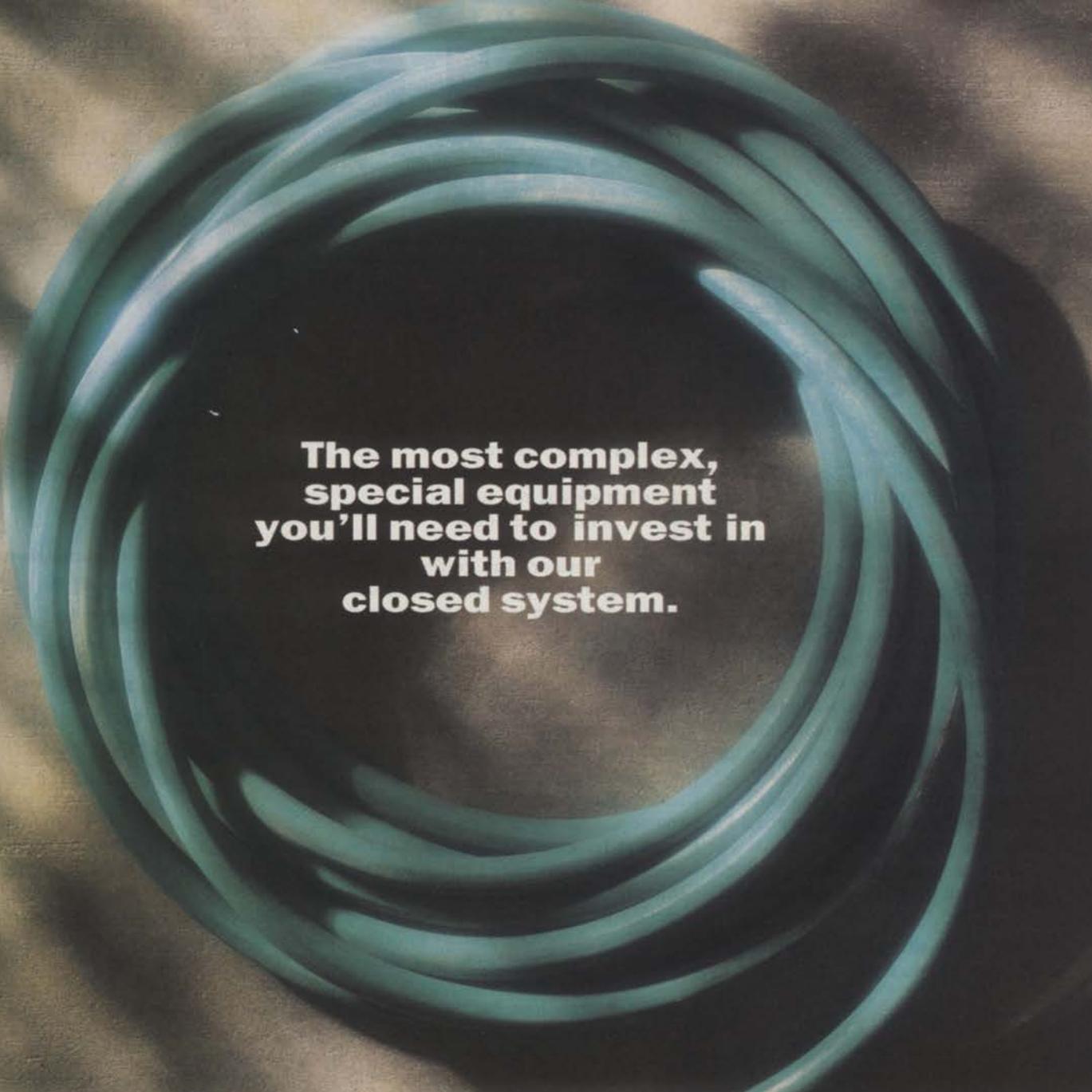
- Keep turfgrass and other plants at least one foot from tree trunks.

- Apply mulch around trees, keeping it a few inches away from tree trunks.

- Control weeds around trees.
- Avoid soil compaction around trees.

- Do not routinely fertilize landscape trees.

- Prune only when necessary: remove dead and diseased wood, dangerous branches, and suckers growing from the base of the tree.



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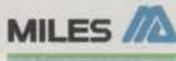
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GOLF 'SCAPING

When golfers goof off

■ BAM! POW! WHACK!

You're Batman, and abusive golfers are the Penguin, the Joker and the Riddler.

Ever feel like that's what you'd like to do to players who abuse the course? Unfortunately, when you've done all you can to preach respect, all you can do is keep your eyes open for blatant abuse, and hope for the best from the majority of your players. It's easy to spot the troublemakers: no shirts, and using language normally reserved for the likes of Madonna. They treat the golf course like a rented car.

And the popular culture doesn't help. Perhaps you've seen that commercial for a brand of casual slacks: the barely 20-somethings, with caps on backwards and pants rolled up to the knees, hit balls

Iceman: cooperative players help him stay cool, keep the course beautiful.



here and there as they recite a litany of their favorite rock and roll tunes. All the commercial doesn't show is the beer.

Then there are the golfers who—while they dress well and mind their language—insist on leaving bare divots, shuffling spiked feet on greens and driving carts in areas where they don't belong.

For that reason, we have “the sign” and the seed mix, and the verbal warning, and the pleading, and finally, the outright begging. It's all you can do, really, short of expelling people from the course.

Rod Ice-man, superintendent at the Shady Hollow Country Club, Massillon, Ohio, has very little trouble getting his golfers to cooperate—probably because he's done everything possible to deliver the message. Sure, being at a private course, the members treat it more like it's their own, but human nature always slips up, and that's where signs and other tools help.

Prudent about cart paths—“I'm not a firm believer in cart paths throughout the entire golf course,” says Iceman. “When we renovated, we paved only the areas that were beat up badly by carts.”

Two years ago, four of Shady Hollow's greens were re-designed.

That makes sense. Why put a path



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'The membership at a private club wants to take a little bit of pride in the course, so they're going to help out a little bit more.'

where you don't need one? You save money, and the course looks more “natural.”

“Scatter” signs at the end of tee areas or on approaches direct cart traffic.

Both Iceman and his golfers prefer the scatter signs to ropes.

“They don't fade, and golfers don't run into them as they do with ropes,” says Iceman.

All directional signs are moved up and down the fairway, depending on where the traffic has done the most damage.

Help it grow back—Columbia ParCar offers a wide-mouthed bottle as an accessory, which Iceman has installed on each of his 60 carts. It's a simple, yet effective tool. There's also a hinged box at each tee filled with a seed mix.

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Scatter signs make the message clear: 'Spread out!'