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The right mower for the right job

Mulching mowers save time, money, government hassles

by Rick Rodier

■ There was a time when turf managers and landscape professionals could bag grass clippings, haul or pay someone else to haul them to a local landfill and have a gratifying, finished look.

However, more state and local governments are banning yard waste disposal from landfills, but the after-cut appearance of the grass you're mowing remains as important as ever. This leaves you with few options for disposing of grass clippings: bagging and hauling to a diminishing and increasingly expensive number of disposal sites; composting or leaving clippings on the turf.

As the cost of collecting and disposing of grass clippings rises, mulching mowers seem like one of the best options. There are many benefits to mulching grass clippings. Agronomic benefits result from returning clippings to the turf. Efficiency is improved because the mowing process is not interrupted to bag and compost clippings. And transportation charges are automatically eliminated.

Agronomic benefits—Dr. James R. Watson, past president of the International Turfgrass Society and a recognized green industry expert, says mulching helps keep the plant root and crown areas cool, aids in proper clipping decomposition and conserves moisture, which enhances overall growth and photosynthesis.

"The strongest benefit," says Watson, "is pure economics. Mulching, rather than bagging, saves time, labor and money. Mulch

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Advanced mulching units mulch leaves, twigs and other material and give a quality cut.



Industrial rotary mowers: not just for tough roadsides

by Ian Burden

■ Wide, industrial rotary mowers aren't just for tough roadside grasses anymore.

Within the last five years, technical advances have allowed rotary mowers to be used in many fine turf situations, including • golf courses, • industrial parks, • public school and university grounds, • public parks and • other areas where a smooth finish is required.

The addition of multiple, small, high-speed blades has made roadside rotaries capable of fine finishing cuts. (Most roadside rotary mowers use only one large, relatively slow-cutting blade in each head.)

For a comparatively low price, you can purchase a finishing rotary mower that will cut more acres per hour than other comparable equipment. This type of rotary mower will also very likely require less maintenance: the blades are easier to sharpen and it has fewer, less expensive parts.

However, when choosing a finishing rotary mower for smooth-cut mowing, be sure to take the necessary time to educate yourself on the various features of the mower to make sure you get a machine that will function properly and leave a finish that you will be proud to have. Here are a few purchasing points:

Blades—They should be relatively thin and sharp, and have

continued on page 16



Small, high-speed blades allow rotary mowers to be used in fine turf mowing.

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 Confront

MULCH from page 12

also contributes essential nutrients to the turf and can reduce total fertilizer applications by as much as 25 to 35 percent."

According to research by the Toro Co., at least 20 states have enacted bans limiting or restricting yard waste—such as grass, leaves and tree and brush trimmings—from their landfills. Other states, cities and counties have bans scheduled to go into effect soon.

Composting an option?—Composting is another way of disposing of clippings, but it is not cost-free. Bagging clippings creates greater wear and maintenance costs on machinery. In addition, collecting clippings and bringing them to a compost site means increased time, labor and fuel costs, and is an overall inconvenience.

Customers often need to be educated about composting, which may take time and effort, as well. And compost piles must be properly watered and aerated to prevent odor and fungal growth problems.

Some operators simply leave clippings on the lawn using side- and rear-discharge mowers. However, the after-cut appearance resulting from discharge mowers often is unacceptable to turf managers, landscape professionals and their customers.

Because of the financial burden and the environmental and aesthetic concerns associated with clipping disposal, many industry experts agree that bagging will become obsolete. Allen Blakey, with the National Solid Wastes Management Association, believes mulching will become the most practical option for grass clipping disposal.

"The most inexpensive method of clipping disposal is to simply leave [the clippings] on the lawn. You can pay more and have the

clippings hauled to a separate composting facility," says Blakey, "or you can pay to dump them in a landfill if you can find one that will take yard waste."

Mulcher retrofit works—Joe Beukema, foreman for Tender Lawn Care, Grand Rapids, Mich., manages lawns for both commercial and residential customers. His company realized tremendous savings in labor and time after it retrofitted several side-discharge mowers with mulching decks two years ago.

"Before the retrofit, my crews had to cut heavy grass three or four times so that clippings were small enough to leave on the lawns," says Beukema. "With our current mulching decks, we cut a maximum of two times."

Design improvements—The first commercial mulching mowers were released in the 1980s, and were actually conventional mowers converted to mulching mowers. Using a heavy metal plate, the side or rear-discharge chute on the mowers were blocked in an attempt to create a mulching effect.

Mulching units have steadily improved since they first came on the market. Today's units can offer a much better-looking and more consistent quality of cut in most conditions. What has made the difference is a marked improvement in engineering and design. Toro's Guardian recycler deck was placed on the market in 1992, as one of the first dedicated mulching decks to use a patented chamber, deflectors and special blade design. These elements, working together, direct the clippings back into the turf, where they will decompose.

Mulching kits and dedicated mulching decks are the two types of mulching equipment available. Decks for both range from 21- to 72-inch with horsepower to match.

Mulching decks require more horsepower than conventional mowers because of the increased cutting volume. Blades may need to be sharpened more often, and more demand is placed on components. Fertilizer ratios may need to be adjusted to accommodate the soil nutrients provided by the clippings.

Mulching kits—Mulching kits can vary greatly in design. Some simply close off the discharge chute with a plate, as with the early mulching models. More sophisticated kits come with plates, cutting chamber and blades, and can offer results similar to a dedicated mulching mower.

Of the available mulching products, mulching kits are the least expensive and

Before you buy

- Select a mulching mower based on needs, expectations and budget.
- Analyze the type of grass you will be cutting; what kind of after-cut look is required? Are clumping and windrowing allowed, or is neatness essential.
- If you mow in wet or heavy turf, will you still be able to meet after-cut standards?
- Determine the deck, chamber and blade design best suited to the turf conditions and needs you face.

—R.R.

most versatile. The convertible mowers can mulch, side-discharge or bag. Performance aside, most of these attachments offer "zero discharge."

Plate-only mulching kits pulverizing clippings, but they do not direct the cut grass out of the machine in an orderly way. As a result, the mower often bogs down, especially in wet, heavy grass, and clippings are more likely to stick in the deck, causing noticeable clumping, windrowing and deposits in reverse. In short, while relatively inexpensive and versatile, mulching kits provide a lower quality of cut.

Most dedicated mulching mowers provide a good after-cut appearance under normal conditions. These units feature an enclosed, conventional cutting deck design with no discharge chute. The method of clip processing varies by unit and so will the results, particularly in wet and heavy turf. The enclosed deck is more durable than a traditional mower deck with a mulching kit attachment.

Some dedicated decks have limitations similar to most mulching kits. Many still fail to provide an orderly way for clippings to escape the deck. This creates problems with power bogging and clippings that clog the cutting chamber.

Closed systems are also subject to internal damage from debris. Unfortunately, most cutting chambers on dedicated mulching units are welded to the deck housing and cannot be replaced. Finally, the after-cut appearance can be less than satisfying.

To overcome these problems, the most advanced mulching units have a key feature: an air-flow design that provides uniform cutting and dispersion.

—The author is a product manager for The Toro Co.

The benefits of mulching mowers

- Mulching mowers can operate effectively in wet, high or heavy turf-grass.
- Mulching does not cause thatch, disease or weed problems.
- Commercial riding mowers with mulching decks operate effectively at "normal" cutting speeds.
- Converted conventional mowers do not offer the same result as dedicated mulching decks.
- The number of times and how a blade of grass is cut can determine the effectiveness of a mulching unit.

—R.R.

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Whatever mower you decide to buy, take the time to educate yourself in regards to the features.

ROTARY from page 12

adequate updraft to suck up the grass that is pushed down by the tractor wheels. However, excessive updraft will severely increase horsepower requirements and increase cost of fuel, labor and maintenance.

Make sure that the blades are at least 3/8-inch thick. If they are too thin, they will bend if an object is struck and the mower will leave a streak in the grass. The blades in the individual mower heads should overlap at least one inch.

Decks—The multiple mower sections should overlap at least six inches to prevent streaking. Check to make sure the spindle mounting plate is at least as wide as the blade, necessary to avoid lateral instability.

A constant velocity (CV) driveline maintains constant driveshaft speed while turning the tractor and mowing unit, and will eliminate a great deal of wear on the driveline and gearbox by preventing slowdown and speedup of the driveline during turns. Also, insist that your mower have a slip clutch to save the driveline from major damage is a large object is struck.

Belts—You can get yourself into a lot of trouble if you choose a mower with inadequate or unmatched drive belts. All industrial mowers with idler pulleys (and most do) should have matched, computer-designed belts.

Matched belts are provided by the belt manufacturer. They are cut from the same belt material to ensure that they have the same resistance to stretching and wear. The computer design provides the proper size and type belt and the most efficient pulley sizes to provide long economical belt life.

Single belts used by most mower manufacturers (rather than double matched

belts) will result in a seriously shortened belt lifespan and untimely and expensive parts replacement.

Make sure that the belts are easy to adjust and replace when necessary.

Other factors—A hydraulic mechanism to raise the wings for transportation to and from the worksite should be standard. Tires should be at least 26.00 x 12.00 x 12 pneumatic, flotation type. This will provide higher flotation, greater weight distribution and less turf compaction. The hydraulics and the mowing unit should be quick-disconnect types.

Make sure that the spindle and housing have seals that will keep the oil in and the trash out. It should be easy to lubricate, and the blade shaft should be at least 1-1/4-inch in diameter with a blade mounting plate as wide as the blade.

To avoid scalping on uneven terrain, your mower should be equipped with four gauge-wheels (wheels that will gauge the depth of cut) on each of the individual mowing units. An anti-scalping roller, three inches in diameter by 12 inches wide, should also be mounted on the front of each mowing unit.

Safety is a consideration. Are all the moving parts on the deck fully shielded? Is there a cover on the gearbox? When the wings are folded up, do they have safety latches to keep them in place?

The manufacturer should have knowledgeable and capable customer service and technical service personnel available.

—The author is vice president of marketing for Alamo, Seguin, Texas. Alamo manufactures and distributes McConnell, Mott, Terrain King and Triumph power equipment.

Equipment ready for spring?

Preventive maintenance is an essential part of extending the service life of commercial equipment, as well as avoiding costly repairs and down time. The following preventive maintenance is recommended for all commercial equipment as part of a yearly spring check-up.

To prepare for the spring season, start with a thorough cleaning. Give the machine a good looking over for loose nuts and bolts, loose wires, metal fatigue and more. Repair it as needed.

For large walk-behind and riding mowers:

- ✓ Change and gap spark plugs.
 - ✓ Change engine oil and filter.
 - ✓ Clean carburetor or rebuild if necessary. Adjust to manufacturer's specifications.
 - ✓ Clean air and fuel filters or replace if necessary.
 - ✓ Remove engine shrouds on all air cooled engines, clean any grass and oil build up of shrouds and engine cooling fans.
 - ✓ Inspect all cable linkages, lube and adjust.
 - ✓ Inspect all mower spindles, check bearing for wear and lube.
 - ✓ Sharpen and balance blades or replace if necessary.
 - ✓ Adjust and lube all cables.
 - ✓ Adjust governor and set RPMs to factory specifications.
 - ✓ Inspect all belts, pulleys and belt guides; adjust as needed.
 - ✓ Lube and adjust chains if applicable.
 - ✓ Check the condition of all fuel and hydraulic lines.
 - ✓ Check caster wheel bushings and bearings for wear; replace or lube as needed.
- On machines equipped with the Peerless 4 or 5 speed transmissions:**
- ✓ Inspect the output shaft busings for wear, replace if necessary and refill transmission with Bentonite grease.
 - ✓ Set tire pressure and level the deck.
 - ✓ Check and adjust tracking.
 - ✓ Check all safety switches and guards to make sure they are installed and working properly.

—Ron Weingartz, General Manager of Weingartz Supply Co., Inc., writing in *The Landsculptor*.

GOLF & ATHLETIC

TURF

Last-ditch rescue tips for ailing greens

USGA Green Section official reveals simple strategies for helping heat/humidity stressed greens stay alive.

Several weeks of unrelenting heat and humidity took their toll on greens in the northeast this past summer. The once-in-10-year conditions didn't damage all greens, nor even a majority. A declining green or two on a course was not an unusual sight, though.

Some superintendents lost jobs because of it.

"When one or two greens die, the membership wonders what did you do to these and not the others," said Robert C. Vavrek, Jr., USGA Green Section. "It was hard to explain."

A variety of conditions predispose a green for failure under unrelenting heat and humidity, Vavrek told about 300 superintendents at the North Central Turf Conference near Chicago.

The location of a green, shielded either by a hillside or surrounded by trees, may put it in jeopardy. Air movement is limited. Disease pressure increases.

Also, layering—either through improper construction or maintenance—is not such an uncommon problem. Cores taken

from a suffering green will reveal this.

"There's a layer somewhere and the water is not moving through the soil profile," Vavrek said.

Until recently he traveled the Great Lakes Region for the USGA. Because of a 1994 realignment, he now works from Michigan to Montana.

In talking to superintendents who kept their greens playable—and membership relatively satisfied—Vavrek offered these pointers for rescuing greens during periods of unusual heat and humidity stress:

- **Fans on the green**, or removing several trees can offer short-term help.

- **Put away the triplex mower** and use a walking mower.

"You see it time and time again, golf courses spending money on fungicides and hiring an extra person, but they won't buy one or two walkers to have on hand for an emergency," said Vavrek.

- **Turn off the automatic irrigation system.** Keep the green on the dry side. Hand water as much as possible. Quoting from a 50-year-old brochure from the Canadian Golf Course Association, Vavrek said: "More grass is killed by overwatering than by underwatering it."

- **Aerify, spike** or use the Hydroject. "If I had one (Hydroject) I would be using it a lot," he commented, perhaps even on a 7-to-10-day schedule on a heat/humidity-stressed green.

- **Consider applying** "a very very low rate" of nitrogen—perhaps an organic source—and phosphorus from a spray tank.

Trying to solve the problem with successive applications of fungicides and fertilizer is unwise, said Vavrek.

Better to keep your greens rescue "very, very simple."

—Ron Hall



Don't get fancy when trying to save a green, advises Robert Vavrek, Jr.



Use low rates of nitrogen on stressed golf greens to help save them.

ELSEWHERE

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Managing fields for use patterns, page 7G

Working with volunteers, page 10G

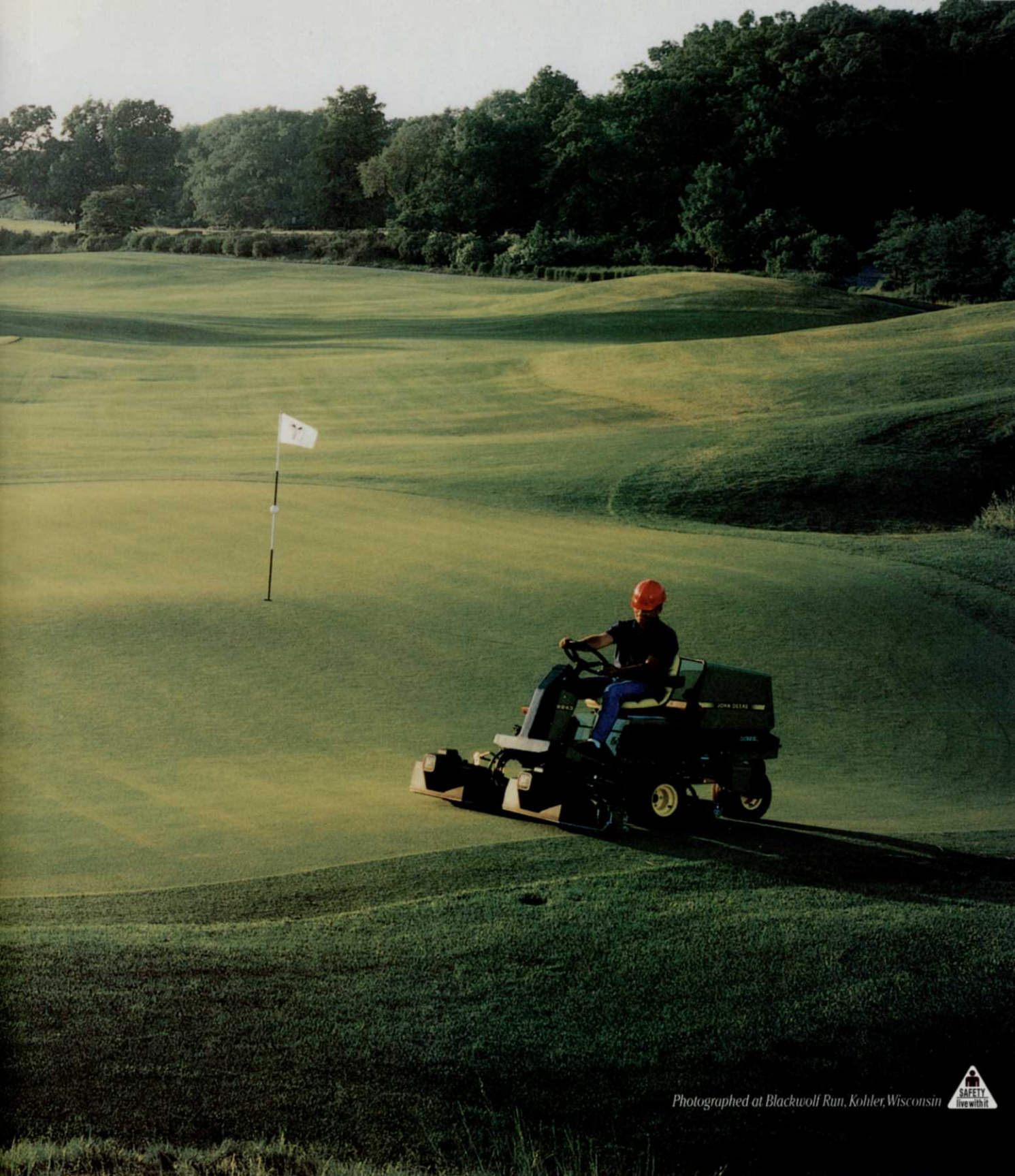
Strategies for saving your time, page 11G



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Photographed at Blackwolf Run, Kohler, Wisconsin



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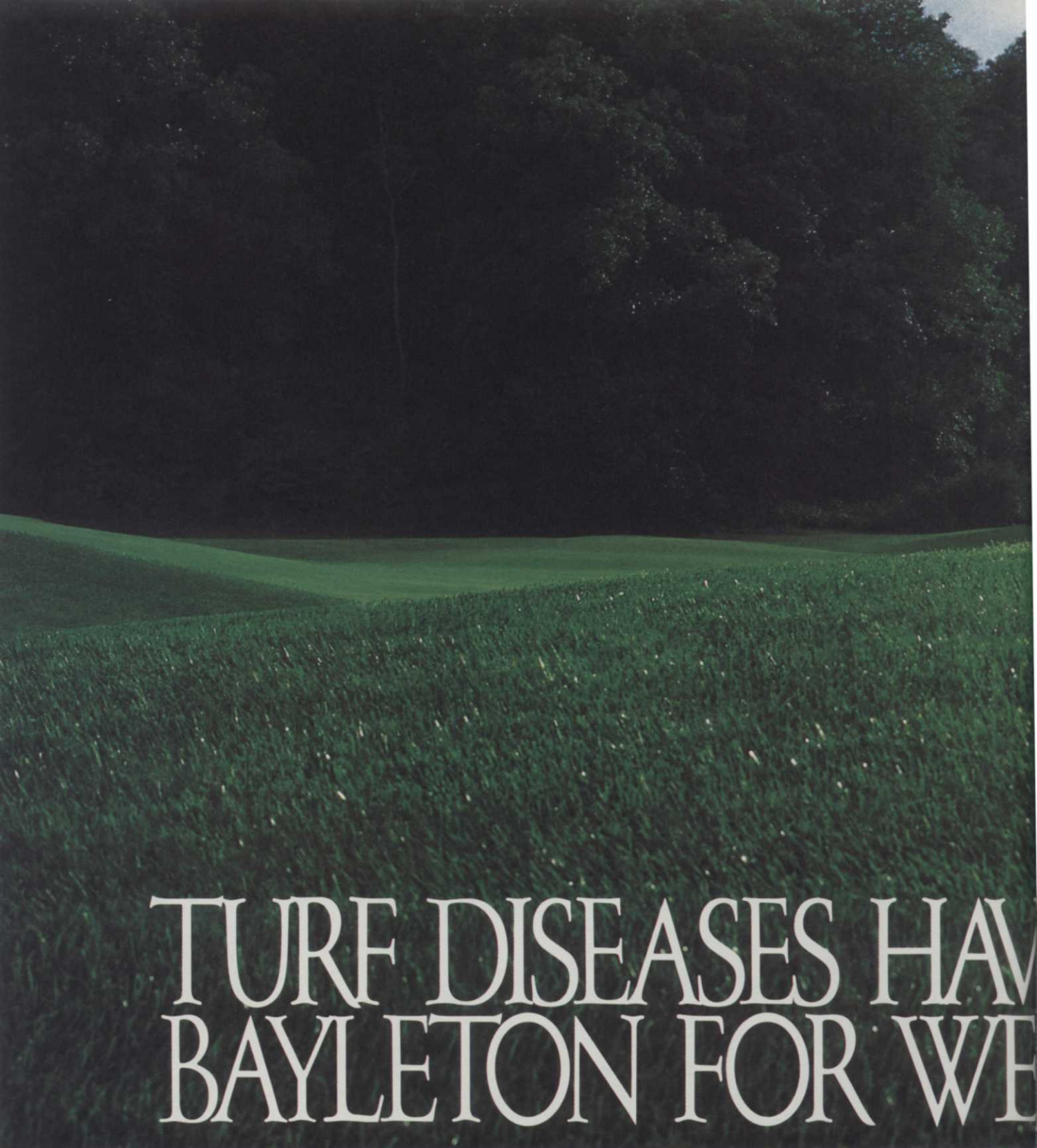
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The Metos weather station references evapotranspiration rate as inches or millimeters of water loss per 24-hour period.

What weather stations can do for your grass

by Dan Dinelli

Weather is one of the most difficult factors a turf manager faces. It is beyond human control, yet it can be the greatest influence on turf quality.

Though we cannot rely on consistent, accurate weather predictions, we can collect detailed historical weather data. With this information, degree-day accumulations and computerized models can help predict favorable conditions for pests. And spray data can be entered into the program to track the impact of spray decisions on disease activity.

Scientific support of what we do is becoming increasingly important. People who may question our management activities can relate to a computer print-out over a "judgment" based on experience. If evapotranspiration (ET) rates call for irrigation, the decision is based on scientific calculations and not a person's opinion.

A weather station, with disease model software, is a tool to do just that. Last spring, we purchased a Metos weather station, complete with 10 sensors:

- a thermometer to measure air temperature five inches above the turf;
- another thermometer for measuring soil temperature two inches below the turf in our fourth green;
- a rain gauge to measure rainfall and irrigation water;

- two leaf wetness sensors;
- a solarimeter to record solar radiation and day length;
- a soil moisture probe located two inches deep in the fourth green;
- a relative humidity sensor six inches above the turf; and
- an anemometer to measure wind speed and direction.

A solar-powered micrologger automatically scans all sensors every 12 minutes, and stores this data for up to a week. Information is downloaded from the micrologger to the personal computer in the grounds manager's office any time.

Singularly or collectively, data from these sensors improves and at times justifies many of our management practices.

Soil moisture—The computer, using a Watermark gypsum block soil moisture sensor, graphs soil wetness readings. From the information, we were able to design a rating scale that helped us determine daily watering needs.

The weather station also calculates ET as inches or millimeters of water loss per

24-hour period. Combining ET value and our rating scale gave us an even clearer picture of moisture loss and needs.

Information gathered from soil temperature has helped us to better judge the timing of our first fungicide application to control summer patch (*Magnaporthe poae*) and take-all patch (*Gaeumannomyces graminis*). Soil temperature data will also indicate the proper timing of pre-emergence herbicide treatments for crabgrass control.

Microbial activity and nutrient release (by some fertilizer carriers) are governed largely by soil temperature and moisture. With this data, we can better understand and predict fertilizer activity.

Insect control—Scientists have come up with a way to better predict insect emergence and activity by tracking accumulated heat, expressed as degree-days.

The degree total for the day is the average minus the base temperature. Each daily calculation is added to the previous days' figures to get the running total of accumulated degree-days.

Researchers have developed degree-day thresholds for many insects. Knowing the degree-day value and referencing it to a particular insect's development, in effect, creates a calendar of insect activity. Following such a calendar helps the turf

manager focus on intense scouting for a particular insect and better target insecticide applications if needed.

The weather station has refined our degree-day calculations. It averages 120 air temperature measurements each day. This average is much more accurate than simply adding the day's maximum and minimum temperature and dividing by two, the method we used in the past.

Weed control—

Other biological activity can be predicted using degree-days:

- Some plants' determination to flower or set fruit can be predicted with degree-days.
- *Poa annua* has a degree-day model for its flowering period.
- Understanding the plant's physiological state can better determine the timing



Dinelli: refining degree-day calculations with computer.

'Home grown' research based on collected data coupled with field observations is needed.

of plant growth regulator applications.

● Because plants and insects share this heat-related phenomena, field observations of plant activity can also help determine insect and weed activity. For example, pre-emergence crabgrass control can be applied when the bridal wreath spirea (*Spiraea x vanhouttei*) blooms. In this case, the bridal wreath spirea is an indicator plant for the conditions of crabgrass germination.

We have a garden of indicator plants growing on the golf course, and next season we will make comparisons of DD values versus indicator plant responses.

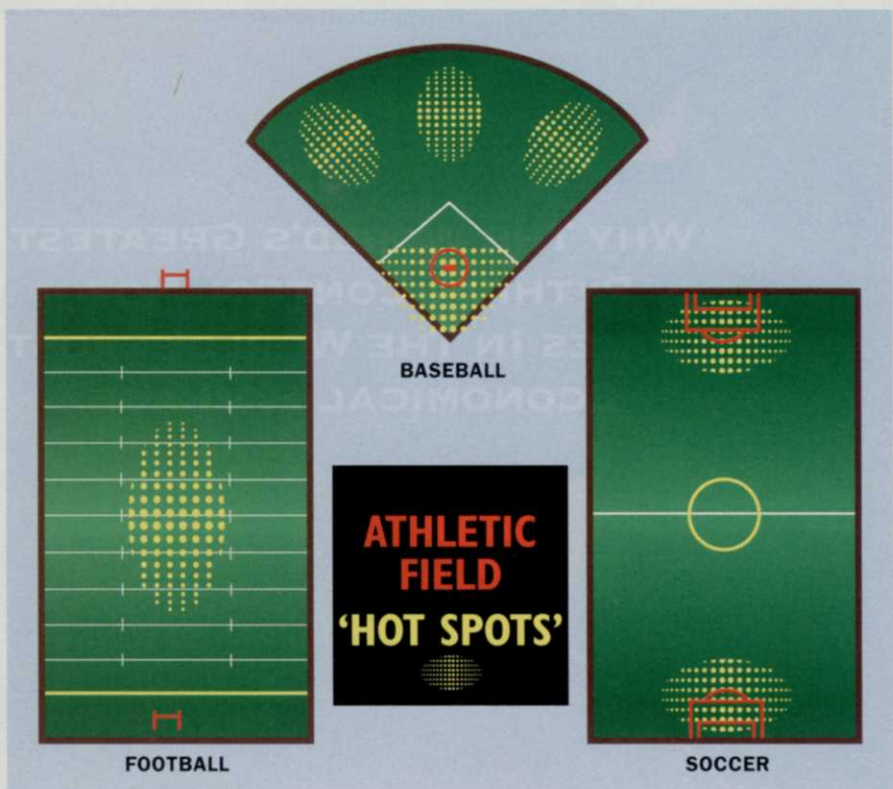
Disease control—This weather station has three prediction models for turf diseases: pythium blight (*Pythium aphanidermatum*), brown patch (*Rhizoctonia solani*) and dollar spot (*Lanzia & Moellerdiscus* spp.). The predictive models, based on complex mathematical calculations, are used as indicators of favorable environmental conditions for disease.

They do not account for inoculum pressure, species or cultivar resistance to disease, fertility or future weather (environmental) conditions. Ultimately, the turf manager makes the decision on disease pressure versus needed controls.

What's to come—Considerable work is still needed to establish historical databases for weather data and to accumulate field observations that relate to it. More disease models must be constructed. Degree-day models need to be calculated for other pests as well as for beneficial insects. "Home grown" research based on collected data coupled with field observations is needed. We are looking at soil temperature readings to help fine tune the timing of green cover applications, day length and how it may affect plant responses, solar thermal units to further refine degree units, and soil temperature versus root growth.

The uses and applications are limited to your imagination. That's what makes the weather station an exciting tool.

—The author is superintendent of grounds at North Shore Country Club in Glenview, Ill.



Managing athletic fields for specific use patterns

Save money by localizing your maintenance areas, this expert tells the STMA.

■ You can maintain an athletic field with less than \$1,500 a year in materials, if necessary, says Dr. Henry Wilkinson of the University of Illinois.

Wilkinson, speaking at the Sports Turf Managers Association's annual conference in Florida last month, said, "In general, the greater the shear force, the higher the cost of maintenance." That means that football fields—especially on the professional level—are the highest maintenance, followed by soccer, baseball and softball fields, respectively.

Maintenance factors which influence field safety, playability and appearance are, in order of importance:

- 1) selection of turfgrass species
- 2) irrigation
- 3) mowing
- 4) fertilization
- 5) use patterns
- 6) damage repair

- 7) aeration
- 8) pest management

"Sports fields do not need uniform maintenance," Wilkinson told the group. "Certain areas need more maintenance than others." For instance, the areas of highest use (and, thus, maintenance) are:

- **Football fields:** between the hash marks, from 30-yard line to 30-yard line
- **Soccer fields:** in front of the goal mouth
- **Baseball/softball fields:** around home plate, the pitcher's mound and the three areas where outfielders normally stand

Just as use areas vary, you should vary your maintenance patterns for cost-effectiveness. "If you manage a football field for the borders, the center won't last," Wilkinson said. "Likewise, if you manage for the center, you're over-managing the borders. So if you can localize your maintenance, you can afford to do more."

Wilkinson offered these tips for low-cost athletic field maintenance:

- 1) Look for wear-tolerance in the high-use seasons when you select grasses.
- 2) Water the entire rootzone, and don't



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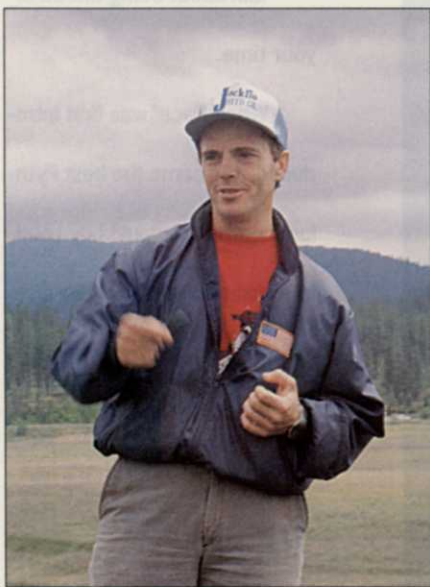
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Dr. Henry Wilkinson suggests 'don't guess' when it comes to irrigating your athletic fields.

guess. Established turf will take about one inch of water per week.

3) Mow regularly, and in non-use areas, raise the cut 1/2-inch.

4) Do not collect clippings.

5) Fertilize as needed, and lower the amount you put down each application. In general, 2 to 3 lbs. of N per year per acre should be sufficient.

6) Use creative encouragement to vary use patterns. Tell the people that are using the fields to try and spread their use, and offer to show them how.

7) Aerify high-activity areas more. Aerifying should be done at least once a season during cool, growing periods.

8) Repair damaged areas only. During the off-season, repair by seeding; in-season, you almost have to use sod.

9) Use soil conditioners when you make repairs.

10) Generally, pest management will be limited to insect control, and only when insects reach a point where they are actually damaging the turf.

Using his recommendations, and figuring the normal football/soccer field as being 1.4 acres and the normal baseball field as 1.6 acres, Wilkinson came up with these minimum costs to maintain a field for one year:

	Football	Baseball
Fertilizer	\$210	\$240
Aerification	\$550	\$600
Pest mgmt.	\$95	\$106
Damage repair	\$200	\$200

—Jerry Roche

Working with volunteers takes a special effort

Volunteers claim a facility as their own. You reap the rewards of their work and their pride in the community's facility.

by Mike Calhoun

Today's limited budgets, combined with increased use of sports and recreational facilities, force us to seek ways to do more with less. One option is to work with volunteer groups to extend the scope and efficiency of your programs with little added cost.

Opening volunteer programs to just anyone can lead to disappointment when "helpers" need too much supervision or simply are unable to do the job. So you must decide what you want to accomplish, the level of expertise needed, and standards of ability and experience that are acceptable.

Tap into the resources of the people you'd like to volunteer. First, identify the target groups and their key interests. For instance, seek out horticultural clubs for assistance with landscaping and flower beds. Look to facility user groups and those affiliated with them—such as parents and booster clubs—for site-specific tasks.

Make assignment schedules flexible enough to attract volunteers from numerous groups. For example, students at area universities can make excellent volunteers. They may not be able to make a year-long commitment, but often can devote blocks of time to specific tasks.

Such volunteer efforts can be beneficial to the students, too. Many students are "book smart" but have little hands-on experience. If we, as professionals, expect to find experienced personnel, we need to provide more opportunities for them to gain the experience. The combination of altruistic effort and hands-on experience will look

doubly good on a resumé.

Recognition—The most important element of successful programs is to recognize the efforts of volunteers. Let them know how important their service is when they agree to tackle the job, as they perform the task, and after their work is completed. Here are some other ideas:

- Write thank-you letters.
- Host picnics or luncheons.
- Distribute special badges, shirts, jackets or caps.
- Provide certificates of service.
- Write public thank-yous in the local newspaper or your newsletter.
- Give volunteers preferential treatment, such as "preview" tours of new or upgraded facilities before these sites are open to the public.

Keep a separate file on each volunteer. List:

- 1) full name, address, work and home phone numbers;
- 2) special interests and abilities; and
- 3) complete records of service, including where, when, what and how much time was spent.

Hold an annual celebration. Include everyone. Use your volunteer files to track



Volunteers help build a handicap-accessible walkway to a fishing pier at North Shields Pond in Fort Collins, Colo.

down these people and issue a personal invitation to attend, via letter or phone. To skip some people because of a poor record-keeping system will cause the volunteer program to fall apart as quickly as having no recognition system.

Volunteers who are pleased with the program will spread the word to other people with similar interests and abilities. This word-of-mouth "advertising" is the best outreach effort for any program.

Find ways to communicate with the public about the facility, its programs, and its need for (and thanks to) volunteers. Get this message out via the local newspaper, your facility's newsletter, and/or PSA (public service announcements) on local radio or television. Provide thorough information with consistent timing and placement. The public should know where and when it can find such information.

Preparation—Train volunteers properly. Tell people what they need to know, what will be expected of them, and how to accomplish it. Develop specific training programs. Monitor training and fine-tune it as necessary.

Develop a system to document each

volunteer's participation in the training programs, including a form signed by the instructor and the volunteer confirming that each training step has been completed. Add these forms to the volunteer's file.

Provide the proper supplies and tools. Volunteers may not expect the best, but don't expect them to work with anything less than what you'd supply for your own crews.

Provide adequate supervision. A thoroughly trained volunteer who is highly competent in operating a certain piece of power equipment may require only that a supervisor be in the immediate area, available to offer assistance if needed. A trainee and relatively inexperienced operator will need direct supervision.

Protection—Follow all laws and ordinances, from the federal to the local level. Here are other ways to protect your department and facility:

- Work with top management and your attorney to establish liability policies, and follow those policies precisely (for example, restricting the operation of power equipment to 18-year-olds or older).

- Check with the attorney on the

advisability of having volunteers sign a liability waiver. Though such forms may not be legally binding, they can sometimes be useful to show that the volunteer indeed had knowledge that some level of expertise was needed.

- Conduct background checks if an individual will be placed in a position of trust, such as interacting directly with children. Follow through with the background check even if the person moving into a position of trust has been a long-time volunteer in another segment of your program. All information obtained through a background check must be kept confidential—in a separate file accessible only to the specified personnel who have final approval of the volunteers selected for such positions.

- Make sure insurance coverage is adequate, not only to protect the volunteers, but to protect the facility and its personnel from possible legal action.

—Mike Calhoon is a park technician for the Fort Collins (Colo.) Park Department and an active member of the Colorado Chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

10 strategies you can use to make time more valuable, productive and rewarding

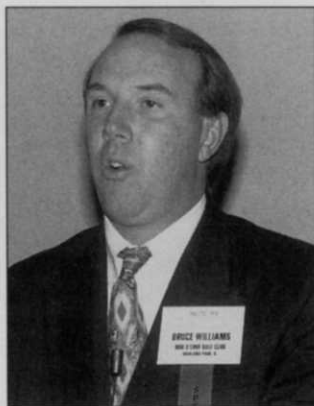
Veteran Chicagoland superintendent Bruce Williams gives pointers on getting more out of the 168 hours in a week.

■ Time must be used. It can't be put in a bank and later withdrawn. Since it must be spent, spend it productively, says certified golf course superintendent Bruce Williams.

Williams, a super since 1979, gives colleagues pointers on how to squeeze extra minutes and hours from each day.

He conducts time management seminars on behalf of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA). This past December he shared suggestions with about 300 fellow superintendents and assistants at the North Central Turfgrass Expo near Chicago.

Williams: write down goals and objectives.



Successful time management, he says, is absolutely vital to becoming a successful superintendent.

Williams, at first glance, has less time than most. He's superintendent at Bob O'Link Golf Club, Highland Park, Ill., with a staff of 18. For the past four years, he's also been a board member with the GCSAA. Before that he served on the board and was president of, first, the

Chicagoland Superintendents Association and, then, the Midwest Association of Golf Course Superintendents.

He says GCSAA business takes about two hours of his time daily.

He maintains that if he hadn't developed strategies (which he admits are still far from perfect) to manage time, he couldn't fulfill his responsibilities to his course nor to the GCSAA board, and still find sufficient time for his family and himself.

Williams says that everybody has exactly the same amount of time each week—168 hours. The difference comes in how individuals use their 168 hours.

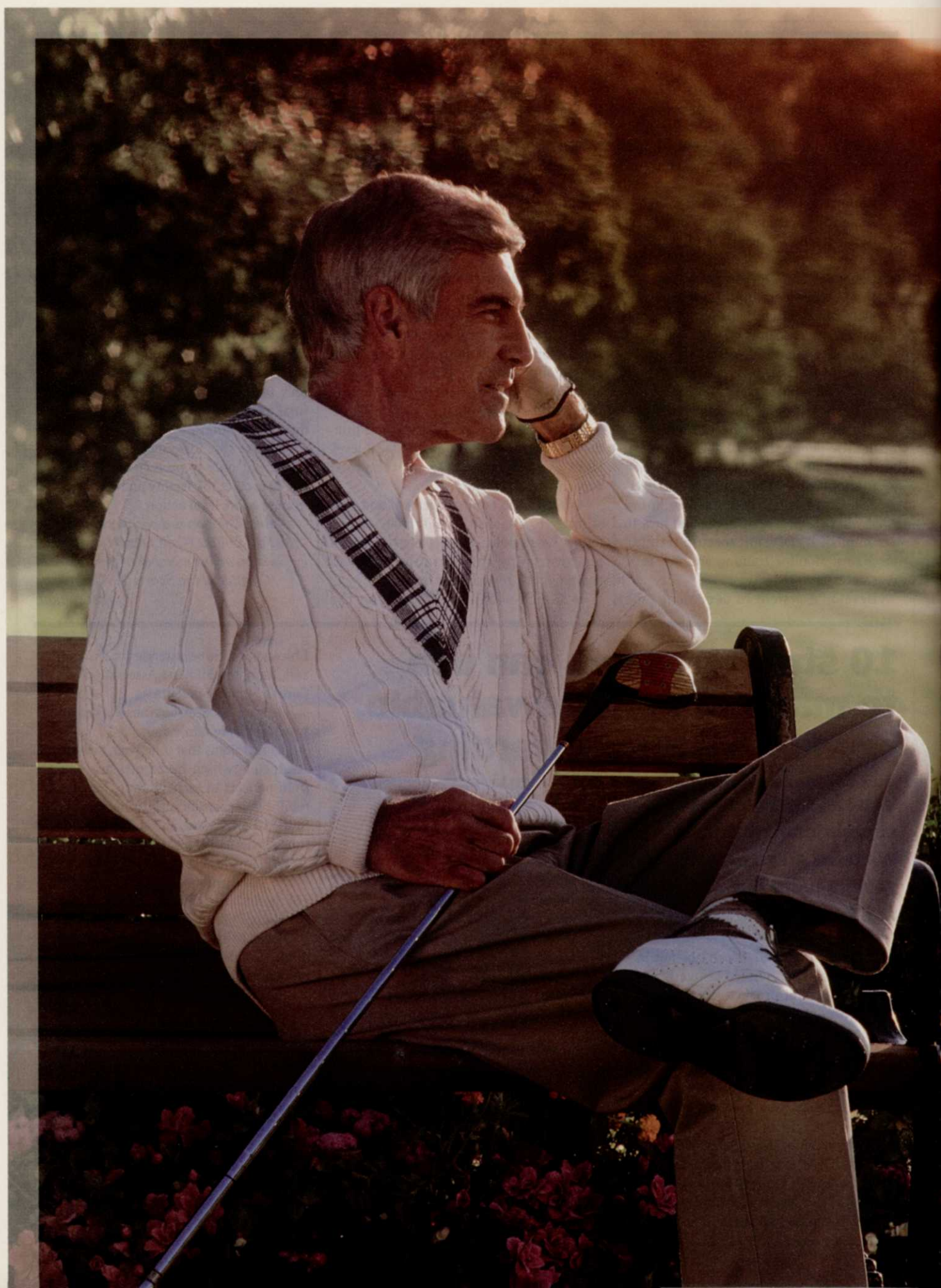
Here are 10 strategies that superintendents can use to make their time more productive and rewarding:

1) Plan, and plan regularly, maybe even a few minutes each morning.

2) Write down goals and objectives, then prioritize them. Make an "A-B-C" list. The A list contains tasks that must be done, the B list things that should be done, and the C list jobs that it would be nice to do. Do the A list first.

3) Focus on objectives rather than activities. "It's not how busy we are that determines success, it's meeting our objectives," says Williams.

4) Take items in order of importance





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relative to the people you work for or report to.

5) Complete what you start. Do it right the first time.

6) Delegate, delegate, delegate. "If you've hired good quality people, then you can delegate," he says.

7) Make people accountable. "We're all hired to do a job. If people have a right to make you accountable, then you have a right to make the people who work for you accountable," he says.

8) Conquer procrastination. If a vital task needs to be done, do it *now*.

9) Make time for yourself. Keep your job in perspective. You also need time to dream, relax, and to do some of the things you like to do.

10) Spend your time more carefully than you spend your money.

—Ron Hall

Staking, filling trees: keys to transplanting

As a general rule, most trees with a diameter greater than three inches don't require staking.

■ Current research shows that a shallow planting area should surround the transplant hole.

To make a planting area, the ground around the hole should be shovel-dug or rototilled to at least a 10- to 12-inch depth. This depth is appropriate because the tree's roots that absorb water and nutrients are located within an 18-inch depth of the soil surface.

The planting area should be three to five times the width of the root ball, or, the soil should be loosened or tilled well past the current-year drip line so roots can spread horizontally into the native soil. Roots spreading out in this manner create a stronger base for the tree, especially in times of drought.

Digging the hole—A planting hole should be dug near the center of the planting area after the area has been rototilled. The hole should be deep enough so that the tree's base is at or slightly higher than ground level. The root ball should not sit on the fill soil, but on the bottom of the

hole, to prevent the root ball from sitting too low in the ground.

"No plant should be planted deeper than it was at its original planting site," says Richard Rathjens, a technical advisor with the Davey Tree Expert Company, Kent, Ohio. "Err on the side of planting too high, as opposed to too deep."

The size of the planting hole should be at least two times the root system (for bare-root plantings) or root-ball diameter. The hole should be larger when possible and dug with sloping sides at about a 45-degree angle from the ground surface. The slanting sides direct roots to spread horizontally, not downward.

If a hole is dug deeper than necessary, some fill soil should be added to the bottom of the hole. Stone, rocks or cement chips should not be added to the bottom of a hole dug too deep.

Backfill composition—Use the soil removed to dig the hole as backfill. Organic matter can be added to the backfill for sandy or heavy soils. No more than 10 to 20 percent of the volume should be

Turning 'time wasters' into 'time savers'

■ "We don't lose time in 20-hour segments. Or in two-day segments," says Bruce Williams. "We lose it five minutes at a time, 10 minutes at a time, 15 minutes at a time."

These lost minutes can leave a superintendent, at day's end, trying to squeeze "five pounds of tasks into a three-pound bag."

Workday time wasters, and suggestions for picking up precious minutes, include:

✓ **Drop-in visitors.** What's wrong with saying upfront, "I've only got five minutes; let's get right to business?" But use discretion. For instance, there's always time for the greens chairman or the president of the club, right?

✓ **Telephone interruptions.** Instead of running to the phone, use an answering machine. Return calls when *you* have time. Again, try to limit the duration of conversations. (A telephone can be a "time gainer" too. In some cases, you can use it rather than writing a letter.)

✓ **Meetings.** If you call the meeting, you're in control. Clearly define the meeting's purpose. Start on time, stay on time, end on time. Several meetings in the same day? Schedule them back to back. If your presence isn't necessary, delegate the meeting to another capable person on your staff.

✓ **Not having a daily written plan.** Keep things simple. Don't try to "script" your day.

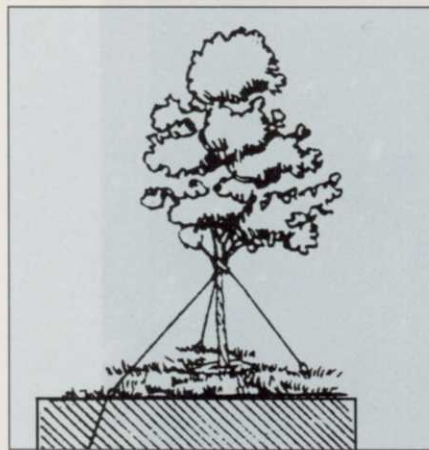
✓ **Junk mail.** Take care of it, return phone calls, and do routine reading during periods of the day when your energy levels are lower. For most people this is mid-afternoon.

✓ **Correspondence.** Don't handle it and other paper more than once. If it's important, act on it or file it. If it's not, pitch it, says Williams.

✓ **Giving directions.** Provide clear, easy-to-understand directions to co-workers and colleagues.

How important is the loss of 10 minutes here, another 10 there? Williams points out that the loss of just 30 minutes a working day adds up, by year's end, to the loss of 22 eight-hour production days.

—R.H.



Trees with a diameter of 3 inches or more don't need staking.

added because as the organic matter decomposes, the backfill settles in the hole, which causes the root ball to fall below ground level.

If the backfill is more than 20 percent organic matter, it changes the backfill's physical characteristics. Backfilling with

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soil that is lighter or better drained than the native soil can result in stunted or dead plants because roots may have difficulty growing into the soil surrounding the planting area.

The area around the soil ball should be watered to eliminate air pockets. Watering puts the soil into direct contact with the roots. Backfill and water then should be added alternately.

Mulch slows weeds—Mulch has many benefits. It is attractive and helps suppress weed growth and protect trees from moisture loss. Mulch slows soil water evaporation, and provides trees with a consistent source of water.

Mulch also protects root systems from temperature extremes by insulating roots. Mulched soil doesn't cool as quickly in the winter or warm as quickly in the summer as unmulched soil. For mulch to be effective, it should be applied before temperatures change drastically.

Mulch should be two to three inches deep, and it should never be piled against the tree's trunk. Too much mulch reduces air and water exchange, and the roots suffer.

Avoid 'mis-stakes'—One of the most common planting mistakes is improper staking. Many people don't know when to stake and when not to. As a general rule, most trees with a diameter greater than three inches don't require staking.

Proper staking helps newly-planted trees withstand strong winds. Staking anchors and supports young trees that can't stand alone after transplanting. However, staking is expensive and time-consuming. So stake trees only when it is considered necessary to the tree's health.

If staking is done correctly, the tree roots and trunk will become strong enough to stand unsupported. Improper staking can damage or even kill a tree. Trees should be staked to bend with the wind only if they are unable to stand against the wind.

A common staking error is to use only one stake. Two stakes, with a flexible tie on each will provide better trunk support and reduce the potential for injury.

A tie should have a flat, smooth surface and be somewhat elastic to allow slight movement of the tree. Rubber hosing is a good staking material. Wire covered with a hose or tubing should not be used.

Workers should be well-trained. Workers not trained in tree care basics can damage trees. In that case, a professional arborist should be consulted.

PUTTS, BUNTS & CHIP SHOTS

Environmental stewards named

■ Tim Hiers, Tim Kelly and Ted Horton/Mike Pifferini were named national winners in the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America's Environmental Steward Awards. The award recognizes superintendents and golf courses for their work to protect and/or enhance their local environment.

Hiers, super at Collier's Reserve Country Club in Naples, Fla., won in the private category. Kelly, super at The Village Links of Glen Ellyn (Ill.), won in the public category. Horton and Pifferini of The Links at Spanish Bay in Pebble Beach, Calif., won in the resort category.

Regional winners were also named: Steve Malikowski of Cape May National Golf Club, Erma, N.J.; Tom Schlick of Marriott's Golf Club at Shiloh Falls, Pickwick Dam, Tenn.; Larry Mueller of Minnesota Valley Country Club, Bloomington, Minn.; Jerry Coldiron Jr. of Lassing Pointe Golf Course, Union, Ky.; Darren Davis of Olde Florida Golf Club in Naples, Fla.; Ed Price of Coeur d'Alene (Ida.) Resort Golf Course;

Tom Janning of Rosewood Lakes Golf Course, Reno, Nev.; Mike Burris of Bay Oaks Country Club, Houston, Tex.; Frank Hutcheson of Mesquite (Tex.) Golf Course; Dale Miller of Barton Creek Resorts & Clubs, Austin, Tex.; Greg Williams of Cranberry Resort Golf Course, Collingwood, Ontario, Canada; and Paul Dermott of Oakdale Golf & Country Club, Downsview, Ontario, Canada.

The contest is jointly sponsored by the GCSAA, Ciba Turf & Ornamental Products, Rain Bird, Jacobsen Division of Textron and Lebanon Turf Products.

Athletic trainer on field safety

■ Mark Rogow, athletic trainer for the Pittsburgh Pirates, told STMA national conference attendees that there are definitely steps which field managers can take to help ensure safer playing fields. Here are some of his suggestions:

- For baseball games, use breakaway bases. He says injuries are reduced 80 percent when the new-style bases are used.
- In advance of any on-field emergencies, both the turf manager and the vehicle driver should know and use emergency vehicle paths while on the field.
- Use padding on baseball outfield fences.
- "Record-keeping is very important for injuries—not only to players, but also to fans and other personnel."
- When anchoring tarps during rainstorms, he says you should be sure to count the tarp spikes so you don't leave any in when you take them up again.
- Watch the pitcher's mound area when the field gets wet. "There's more potential for injuries then than any other time," Rogow says.
- Finally, use sunscreen for all employees—SPF15 or higher.

'Par for the Course' continues on ESPN

■ "Par for the Course," the GCSAA's national television program, with Thursday/Friday and Sunday air dates throughout the year. According to a GCSAA news release, "Every episode of 'Par for the Course' takes an innovative look at the world of golf by covering cutting edge topics...conversations with major golf figures, practical golf instruction and trends shaping golf's future."

The show will appear in the Sunday morning golf block on March 5, 12, 19, 26; April 2, 9, 23; July 9; October 22; November 5, 19, 26; December 3, 10, 17. It will appear adjacent to weekday golf coverage of the Paine Webber Invitational (May 5, 1:30 p.m.), the Cadillac/NFL Classic (May 12, 2:30 p.m.), the U.S. Open (June 15, 4 p.m.), the U.S. Senior's Open (June 30, 2 p.m.), the British Open (July 21, 2 p.m.), the Bell Canadian Open (Sept. 8, 2:30 p.m.) and the Senior Tour Championship (Nov. 10, 2:30 p.m.).



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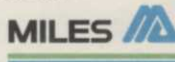
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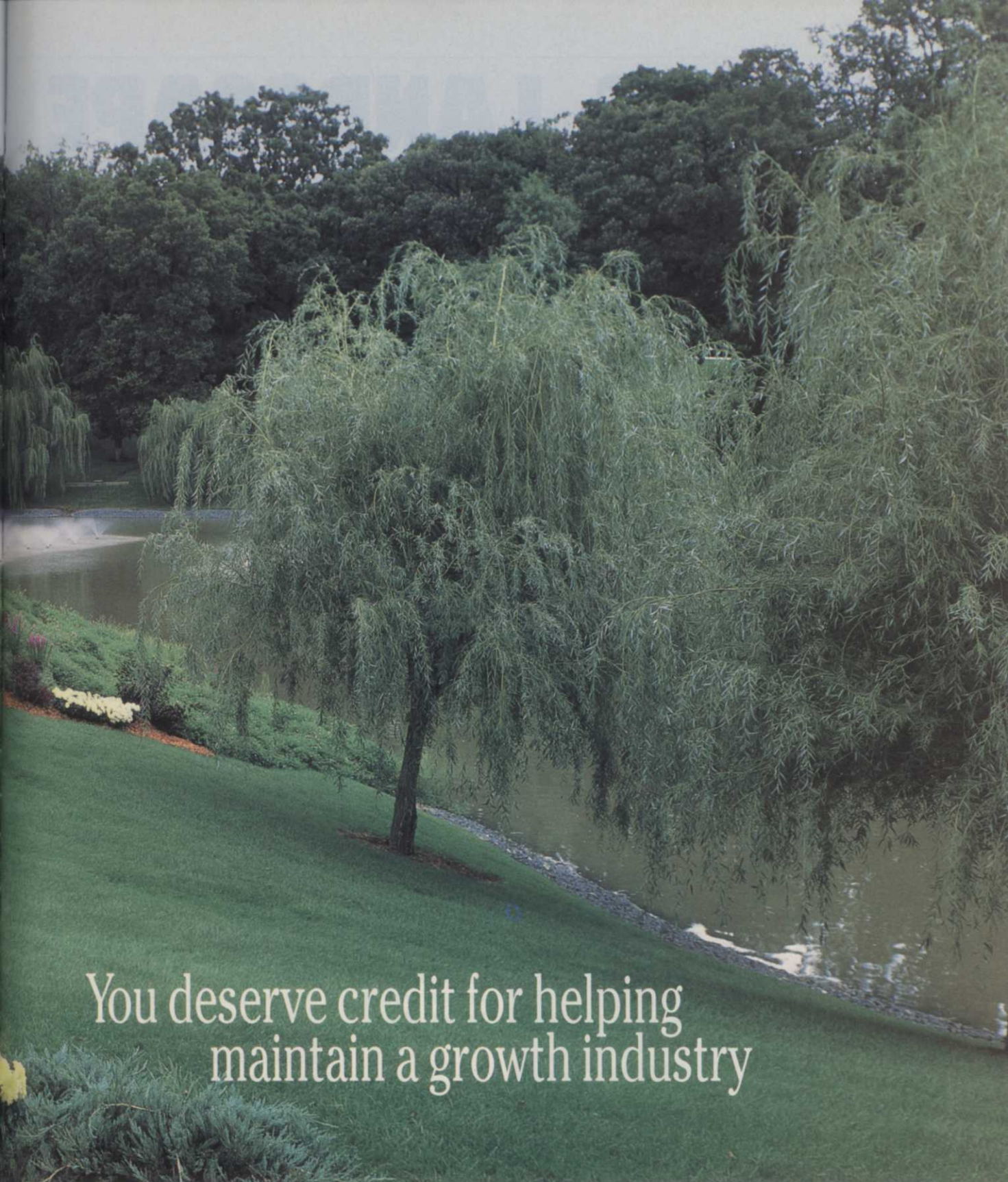
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LAWN & LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY

Focusing on 'lawn health' works for The Weed Man

Here's a program to reduce pesticide use by stressing fertility, turf cultivation, and customer cooperation.

by Darcy Olds

■ Our pest management strategy focuses on turfgrass health which helps our customers' lawns avoid pest problems.

A healthy, well-cultivated lawn, developed through proper fertility and cultural practices, eliminates much of the need for pesticides. They no longer become necessary as a cure for every lawn problem. They can be used sparingly and only when necessary.

Our main program consists of three applications per year of our own high-quality, S.C.U. slow-release granular fertilizer blend. We strongly feel that three

applications of our well-balanced fertilizer, which lasts 8 to 10 weeks, provide sufficient balanced nutrition throughout the growing season in Ontario.

Our customized fertilizer releases gradually through microbial activity in the soil. Microbes break down the material that coats the natural elements needed for plant growth. This helps ensure that grass plants aren't burned or stressed in any way.

Can't forget aeration—Along with providing balanced fertility, we believe that aeration is vital either in spring or fall or, perhaps, both. This eliminates



Technicians for the Weed Man talk with homeowners to remind them about proper mowing and watering.



Quick couplings on spray guns help eliminate pesticide drips at the press of a button.

thatch and alleviates compaction which provides resistance to many pests. It also improves soil porosity, increases deeper rooting and allows water, air and nutrients to penetrate turfgrass root systems.

Regular lawn cultivation and appropriate fertility throughout the growing season allow our technicians to monitor for pests or specific problems each time they are at a site. They map and record problems so that each lawn can be continually monitored.

When pest problems become significant enough to warrant control, we use pesticides, but the least amount necessary for adequate control. We commonly spot-spray to prevent unnecessary use of pesticides.

The products we have chosen for use in our pest management programs have very low toxicity and residual potential. Our pest management strategy does not include fungicides. We believe cultural

INSIDE

Retaining accounts when people move, page 6L

Balance the books in 35 minutes, page 10L

Don't give away any of your time, page 14L

Special Report on grass seed quality, page 17L

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"(Of 8 national brands tested) highest (weed) suppression was observed in Weed-X...Weed-X reduced Bermuda Grass significantly. Fabrics such as Weed-X, which limit root penetration, should be expected to provide superior weed control over fabrics that permit greater root penetration."

**Journal of
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"In tests over a 2 year period, Weed-X proved itself superior to other landscaping fabrics. Weed-X consistently stopped weeds from reaching the surface more effectively than any of the other national brands."

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**Virginia
Polytechnic
Institute and
State
University**

In tests to evaluate landscape fabrics, Weed-X outperformed four national brands of landscape fabric in weed and root penetration.

**University of
Georgia**



Weed Man technician monitors for any further pest problems on this lawn, such as chinch bug feeding.

methods best control lawn diseases.

Customers help—Perhaps the most important aspect of our program is our partnership with the homeowner. We do our best to educate each homeowner about watering appropriately and at the

right time of the day, as well as mowing correctly and at an appropriate height. We've found that if customers mow high (2½ to 3 inches), most disease and weed problems are less likely to occur.

Since it's not possible for us to be on a customer's lawn daily, we ask that each customer keep a sharp eye out for any developing problems, and notify us immediately so that we can adequately control the problem. The cooperation of homeowners promotes a healthy lawn and contributes greatly to our integrated approach to lawn care.

When it becomes absolutely necessary to control insects in a lawn, we use such things as day/degrees and indicator plants

to determine the best time for control.

Day/degree computations reveal the stage of a lifecycle of a particular insect. They allow us to determine the best time to apply control measures. Indicator plants, such as the horse chestnut and the vanhoutte (spirea), help us identify lifecycle stages of insects such as the European chafer.

Along with routine inspections, which take place each time one of our technicians is on a lawn, a thorough inspection is performed each year in July. It includes a complete examination of the lawn for signs of insects, weeds or disease as well as a detailed observation of the homeowner's effort to maintain the lawn through adequate cultural practices.

All information from the inspection, including maps and pest level predictions, help us build a valuable and on-going history of each lawn.

—The author is a technical representative of *The Weed Man*, a company founded in 1970 by entrepreneur Des Rice.

Retaining a lawn when the customer moves

Why it's better to develop a strategy to keep a client, or property, from season to season

■ Successful lawn care business owners strive to retain multi-season customers. These are usually their most profitable customers.

But what happens when these customers move away? This is a problem that Robert Andrews regularly faces in the growing communities surrounding Indianapolis.

Andrews is co-owner along with his wife, Jennifer, of *The Greenskeeper*, Carmel, Ind., and a past president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). Andrews also heads Andrews and Associates, a small business consulting firm. It was in this capacity that he addressed a group of LCOs in Orlando recently.

Andrews told the LCOs that relocations because of job transfers are common enough in his market area to have caused him to develop a strategy to retain these lawns. And that's the key in these special instances—keeping the property when the customer leaves.

The Greenskeeper delivers a complete history of the lawn to the real estate per-

son to give to the next owners. The professionally designed lawn history becomes another selling tool for the seller "because it demonstrates the care that's been given to this property," says Andrews.

Lawn care business owners, said Andrews, know that it's less expensive, and more profitable, to retain customers (or their lawns) than to find new ones.

Here are some reasons why:

- ✓ Retained properties are, comparatively, weed-free, and less expensive to treat than start-ups.
- ✓ They usually result in fewer service calls.
- ✓ They're already part of a route.
- ✓ Credit and collections improve.
- ✓ Long-term clients are more apt to buy add-on services.
- ✓ Often, through referrals, they result



LCO/consultant Bob Andrews: Why not reward a customer for getting you another customer?

in new business.

Andrews also said he's not hesitant to reward any customer for referring another customer to *The Greenskeeper*. This reward, for instance, may be \$20 off the next application.

"Who wouldn't pay \$20 for a new customer?" he asked.

—Ron Hall

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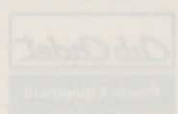
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Circle No. 117 on Reader Inquiry Card

Balancing company checkbooks

A bank reconciliation should take about 35 minutes for a small company.

by Dan Sautner

■ Unless you keep your cash in the "sock" or "mattress" vault, you have to work with a monthly bank statement. The balance on that statement and the amount of money you actually have available are only the same by sheer coincidence.

This article will give you a course of action designed to help get—and keep—your checkbook balance under control.

To prevent errors from causing you any embarrassment, always check your deposit receipts at the teller's window to ensure that the bank gave you proper credit. Double-check that you have recorded the proper amount for each check that you write and record those charges that go

through the bank automatically.

Balance your checkbook immediately after receiving your bank statement. It's not too difficult to do:

- 1) Verify all of your deposits to be sure that your figures and the bank's agree.
 - 2) Verify all of the checks that cleared to confirm that the proper amount was deducted from your account (and that you recorded the correct figure).
 - 3) List all of the checks that have not cleared as of the statement date.
 - 4) List the deposits made after the statement date.
 - 5) Deduct from your checkbook balance all bank charges, including monthly service charges, checkbook printing, overdraft charges, ATM charges and miscellaneous fees.
 - 6) Add into your balance any bank credits, such as reversals of previous charges.
 - 7) To your balance after bank charges and credits, add outstanding checks (#3) and deduct outstanding deposits (#4). This figure should equal the bank's figure at the end of the statement period.
- If your figures disagree with the bank's, don't accuse the bank of making the error.

It's usually not their fault. Ninety-five percent of all errors are made by the customer. And most of the bank's errors should be caught by the customer at an earlier time. It's your responsibility to check your receipts and to balance your checkbook each month.

If, however, the bank has made an error and returned some checks, ask the bank manager to write letters to the payees explaining that it was not your fault. Also, ask them to reverse the overdraft charge(s) as well as credit you with the charges of your payee. Also ask if they can remove this overdraft from your record.

When you approach the bank with an unbalanced checkbook, its personnel will assume that you had balanced your statement the previous month. Generally speaking, a bank reconciliation should take about 35 minutes for a company that writes about 50 checks a month. And if the bank employee cannot find an error, you should feel safe in assuming that the bank's figure is correct.

Sometimes, you have to adjust your check balance and move forward. Errors can always be found. If all else fails, start from the most recent month you reconciled your bank and recreate the balance.

—The author is chairman of Padgett Business Services, which provides accounting and tax services. For more information, call Padgett at (706) 548-1040.

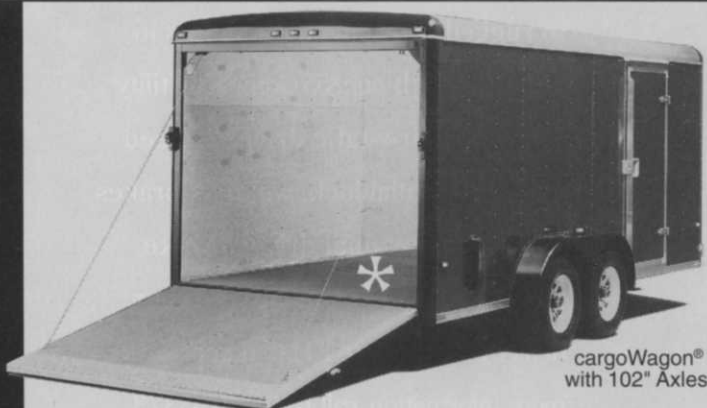
Corrective measures

■ If you and the bank don't agree, take these steps:

- 1) Use a printing calculator to double-check addition and subtraction.
- 2) Check to be sure that you carried the correct figures from page to page.
- 3) Make sure that the actual amount of each check equals what you recorded in your checkbook. If the amount you disagree with the bank is divisible by nine, you might have committed a transposition error (entering 123 as 312, etc.).
- 4) Go through steps one through seven again. (One common error is missing an outstanding check from two or more months back.)
- 5) Have someone else go over the checkbook for you.
- 6) Go to the bank and ask for their help in finding the error.

—D.S.

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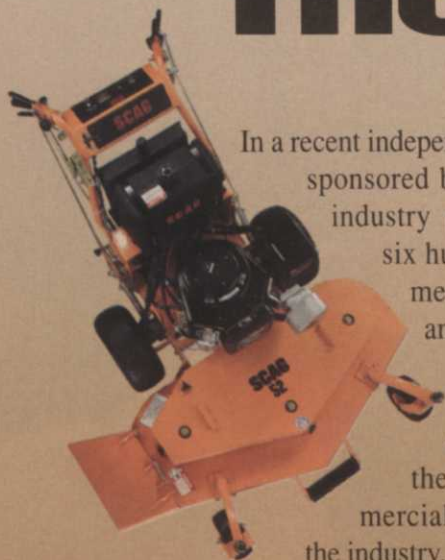
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Beware 'freeballers!'

This landscaper charges for every minute of his time, without getting prospective clients hot under the collar.

by Jay Turnbull

■ As professionals, we approach our work with great pride and diligence. We never quite know exactly what prospective customers want, unless a detailed plan has already been developed. Our job is to figure out what they need, make a proposal, and close the sale.

Sometimes, this takes more than a one-time meeting, requiring extra work to figure pricing and draw plans and designs. Many times, we need several hours to assimilate the needs and work up a new proposal. Most of us don't charge for that time. But then we make the proposal, only to find that the customer is shopping for the best price or trying to find out how to do the job so he can get a "non"-professional at a fraction of the cost.

Sound familiar? Frustrating? You bet! For lack of a better description, I call this "freeballing."

Every minute has value—Joel Lerner, marketing guru who was the keynote speaker at the Professional Grounds Management Society conference a few years ago, said we must not spend any time with our customers without charging them for our expertise. And rightly so. But how do we make the transition from giving free advice to charging for our time? Let me share with you what I am doing.

I have adopted this philosophy: no more freeballing! It has not come easily, nor has it come quickly, but over a period of time I have few cold contacts. Almost everyone I talk to has been introduced through another customer or has seen my work, or heard me talk, or read an article I wrote. So when they talk to me, it is because they want something that I have.

Warning! What happens next may be hazardous to your pocket book.

Most of us are flattered and immediately go into the sales mode and relinquish the expertise that the prospective customer is seeking. Then the inevitable question: "How much will it cost?"—the time when we discover whether the individual is shopping for information or genuinely wants you to fix his problem.

When to proceed—Let's back up. I have tried to stop at the warning and take charge of the situation differently. I remind myself what the first contact is about: to determine whether or not to go any further with the client. And the meeting should be fairly brief, so I don't charge for it.

I explain that I work for x dollars an hour for planning and consultation and



Turnbull: If you are a pro, you are paying your dues.

design, with a three-hour minimum. I also give them a ballpark figure on how much this phase will cost them and define the limits of that estimate. If, after the introduction, the prospect and I decided that we can do business, the clock starts. That means that I can now charge for the time I spend on site taking dimensions and making notes for the job.

In some cases, if I sense some resistance to this, I offer a credit toward actual work done at a future time. So I have—but not always—deducted consultation/design time from a landscape job on a pro-rated basis. But even when this is offered, I usually add my time in as miscellaneous costs in the bidding process. It all works out about the same. If they feel like they are getting a better deal that way, so be it. Perceived value is what a customer wants.

Is it worth it?—Now, if I go into a potential job knowing that I am bidding against a competitor or competitors, as was the case recently, I may not be able to charge right away. That's when I make the decision whether I want to work with the client or not, and what it's worth. In the recent instance, I decided that I wanted to

work with the customer. I wanted to go head-to-head with my competition, so the challenge superseded the couple of hours of unpaid time. I got the job, and will get new leads from this customer. And it felt good to know that I had the best plan for him.

Another difference is in commercial accounts. I have not had many commercial accounts pay me for time spent in proposing work, but I have almost always built it into the bid. I don't get all the jobs I bid, but the faster we educate everyone in this country, the sooner we will all overcome this problem.

The key is professionalism.

You deserve it—If you are truly a professional, you have paid and are paying your dues to be known as one—and that costs money. But it saves your customers money! I can do a job for a reasonable price, make a profit, and do it right. Non-professionals can do the job, do it poorly, and the customer will end up having to spend more to correct the problems they bought the first time. I can also tell a prospective customer that I cannot do the job he wants, either, because it is not my area of expertise, or because the way he wants it done is not right.

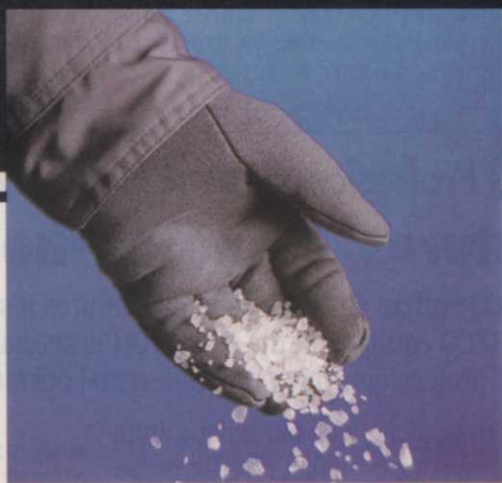
You deserve the compensation you have earned, even if it is merely proposing a job. All you have to do is sell yourself and your expertise, and the rest comes easily. But if you get into the trap of giving your time away, people will take advantage of you, and have less respect for you.

Finally, you should determine who your desired customers are. Real professionals want real professionals to do their work. Do-it-yourselfers shop price and will accept any quality job if the price is cheap enough. Don't get caught in the trap of low bidding jobs to compete with the low bidders. That philosophy puts you in their court, the only place they know where to play. I think we are better off creating our own court. Be where no one can touch you. Be the best. Be a professional.

And what is a professional? It is someone who is never satisfied that he/she knows everything. He/she is open-minded, active in industry organizations, attends educational conferences regularly, and reads trade magazines. A professional is a community leader, and is proud to show off his or her work.

—The author is a resident of North Platte, Neb., where he has his own landscape consulting business.

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ALCA/NLA cooperate on landscape cost study

■ The Associated Landscape Contractors Association (ALCA) offers its 1994 Operating Cost Study. The study was undertaken as a cooperative effort by ALCA and the National Landscape Association (NLA).

The report provides detailed financial results of landscape contractors. The results profiled in this report are based on income statement, balance sheet, and operating data provided by participating ALCA/NLA members. This management tool is designed to provide the resources which enable landscape professionals to evaluate, plan and better manage their businesses.

The study represents the most comprehensive collection of financial data ever compiled by the landscape contracting industry. It's designed to help the three primary industry groups—exterior landscape construction, landscape management and interior plantscape.

"Everyone in the landscape industry needs a copy," says David Minor, president of Minor's Landscape Services, Fort Worth, TX. "It is a prerequisite for doing business in the '90s."

The study represents the most comprehensive collection of financial data ever compiled by the landscape contracting industry.

The ALCA/NLA Operating Cost Study is available for \$25 for ALCA members and \$45 for non-members, plus 5 percent shipping and handling. To order copies, call or write ALCA, 12200 Sunrise Valley Drive, Suite 150, Reston, VA 22091; (800) 395-2522; fax: (703) 620-6365.

With our compliments

■ On the facing page you'll find a Special Report focusing on turf seed. It's meant for your clients: to better educate them, and also to urge them to consult with you when it's to install or renovate their lawns. You're the ones who keep abreast of the latest turfseed news in the pages of *LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT* Magazine.

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If you would like reprints, please contact Paul Malone at (216) 891-2630.

Paul Malone

Senior Editor

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SPECIAL REPORT:

FOCUS ON GRASS SEED

It's not just a 'bag of grass seed'

A lawn or landscape pro will know the best varieties for your lawn.

■ About as exciting as watching grass grow?

Everybody's familiar with this saying. But the truth is that watching grass grow can be exciting.

After all, who isn't excited with increasing the beauty and value of their property.

Unfortunately, most homeowners don't do a good job of installing or renovating their own lawns. They discover that it's hard work.

But there's often another factor working against homeowners—selecting the right grass seed.

Consider your options. Homeowners have several choices when buying grass seed for their lawns. They can:

1) Educate themselves about the best and newest varieties of seed for their lawn. (Then hope it's available at their store.)

2) Rely on the recommendation of a retail clerk who may or may not know more about grass seed than themselves.

3) Buy whatever's available and/or least expensive.

4) Or consult with an established lawn professional whose reputation is built on using quality seed and providing quality service.

Most do-it-yourselfers don't realize that some of the pre-packaged seed available in retail stores can *never* give them the lawns they want, no matter what.

Too often one of the prime ingredients of these mixtures is annual ryegrass seed. In fact, the least expensive retail mixes contain significant percentages of annual ryegrass.

Because it's less expensive to produce, it's sold at a bargain price. Unfortunately it's the seed anybody buying solely on price chooses.

Buy the best. Almost



without exception, the performance of annual ryegrass in a home lawn is disappointing. As its name suggests, it is temporary unlike "perennial" ryegrass which can—especially the new, improved varieties—yield a beautiful lawn in many parts of the country.

Annual ryegrass germinates rapidly, grows explosively and requires frequent mowing. Since it's so quick to germinate

Compare the dense, finer texture of the center grass plot planted improved varieties of turfgrass with the results obtained from off-the-shelf retail mixtures on either side of it. Major seed producers are constantly improving seed through testing in such plots.

Photo by International Seeds Inc., Halsey, Ore.

(a plus for its use when rapid soil stabilization is the goal) its leaf canopy hinders germination and development of more welcome and persistent types of grasses like Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass, and the new fescues.

But, most disheartening, annual ryegrass thins then, usually, disappears under summer's heat. The bare soil that it leaves behind invites weeds.

So what's the best grass seed for a home lawn?

There's no single best variety.

Actually, the new types of Kentucky bluegrass, the improved perennial ryegrasses and the constantly evolving fescues are all excellent choices.

A homeowner can check the contents of seed packages themselves for particular varieties and their percentages in the mixture or blend.

A better choice is to hire a reputable lawn or landscape professional who will know exactly the best grasses for each individual home lawn.

They'll also know how to establish and maintain the lawn so that it gives the homeowner pleasure year after year with a minimum of problems and maintenance.

With grass seed, a bargain price is rarely a bargain.

COMPLIMENTS OF

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Place business card here

The best direct mail marketing programs reach *your* target group

Marketing today is becoming more tailored to individual buyers. Direct mail marketing helps you find the best prospects.

by Julie Springer

■ In the landscaping business, direct marketing presents a world of opportunity.

✔ **It's cost effective.** It's getting trickier to keep costs down, and in the lawn and landscape industry, certain costs just keep on coming. Equipment, fertilizer, overhead, seasonal employees...the list is long. While giving up advertising altogether may seem like the easiest way to cut costs, it is more likely that advertising *less* and advertising *smarter* is as a better alternative.

✔ **It's appropriate.** Lawn care and landscape service providers don't need to advertise in the local paper only to have half of the papers delivered to apartment dwellers. Direct marketing allows you to select homeowners, an immediate advantage.

✔ **It works.** Thousands of lawn and landscape professionals with large and smaller companies have benefitted from direct marketing, and many are likely to have elaborate databases of existing customers and potential customers.

With direct marketing, you in effect purchase the names and addresses of persons whose lives and lifestyles are such that there is a need for lawn care services: some single family homes, recently moved persons, those whose incomes exceed certain minimums; senior citizens.

If you've recognized that homeowners are a highly profitable market for you, consider this: about 4 million Americans buy a home each year and need to find local merchants and services. New homeowners will spend eight to 10 times more in the first six months after moving than an established resident will spend in two years.

Established homeowners have service needs as well. In general, the homeowner is a preferred customer profile when you consider income, buying needs, credit rating and longevity as a customer.

Who might buy? The first thing you need to do is pick a geographic region you would like to target.

Select ZIP codes that represent the area of your business or your trading area.

For example, if your company is located in an industrial park surrounded by newer developments and apartment buildings, your best market may be found in one or two of the older, surrounding communities with more property per dwelling.

Consider what other household characteristics or information might help make your list more useful, such as phone numbers. Knowing both phone numbers and addresses lets you execute a combination mail/phone campaign.

You can also narrow your search to include people who are known to respond to direct mail.

The next step in this system is to call a list compiler or broker who can best meet your needs. The *Yellow Pages* contains a "Mailing Lists" category. A trip to the library can also be very useful. *The Standard Rate and Data Service* lists homeowners by ZIP code.

A list compiler, such as Metromail or Polk, is staffed by people who are experienced in dealing with customers less familiar with the ins and outs of the list business.

Direct mail is an advertising medium whose results are measurable and quantifiable. A little money up front will help you determine just how successful your efforts are and see almost instant results.

Metromail has a data base containing more than 29 million names of homeowners across the U.S. Other categories help you narrow down your list, such as amount of mortgage, home cost, etc. When arranged by ZIP code, the names can total from a few hundred up to one or two thousand.

Depending on other selections that you make to narrow down that number, you can also choose to select a random sampling to keep your mailing to the size you choose.



Each list provider has a different way of handling small business orders. Metromail provides names to small businesses without the standard industry minimums (5,000-10,000 names per order at about \$65 per thousand).

Instead, as a small business person, you can receive those names for about \$50 for 200 of them (25 cents per name, with a \$50 minimum).

You also need to consider the cost of mailing information. A post card or letter is appropriate, depending how much you want to say. If you have 300 postcards printed, you will pay a quick-printer about \$65 for printing, and \$63 for postage.

The standard benchmark for a direct mail campaign is a two percent response rate. Your response rate may be higher or lower, depending somewhat on how accurately you assess your customer profile, but two percent is a reasonable, conservative figure to use for planning purposes.

The lawn and landscape industry especially lends itself to direct marketing because it is a service which people purchase hundreds of times as property owners. The dollars that it costs you to buy and name, and send out a postcard will come back to you many times over the course of your relationships with customers.

And when they move, you may "inherit" the business of the new homeowner, and retain the loyalty of the mover.

—The author is a consultant with Metromail, a supplier of direct mail lists and other helpful information for businesses. For more information, call Julie at (800) 316-2637.



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Circle No. 129 on Reader Inquiry Card

'High' prices instill loyalty, place value on the service

Consultant Joel Lerner says landscapers shouldn't be afraid to seek a fair return for their efforts.

■ Some landscape contractors follow detailed formulas to price their work. Some use a time-and-materials approach, or, perhaps, a combination of both.

Joel Lerner, owner of Environmental Design, Chevy Chase, Md., says there's a third pricing method that can yield surprisingly good results. He calls it "get-what-the-market-will-bear." It's more intuitive than scientific, he admits, but it keeps a savvy landscape pro from leaving money on the table.

It's built on his belief that:

- ✓ low prices produce no loyalty, and
 - ✓ a professional should make money on every service he/she provides a client.
- You meet with the potential client at the

job site and you eyeball the property. Your experience tells you about what the project should cost. But you don't mention price until the prospect brings up the subject.

"You never mention price until it's brought up," advised Lerner. "You're focusing on value at this point, not price. Value is the important thing. The client has to bring up the issue of price."

When you do provide an estimate, you value your services on the high side, at least what you consider is high because you really don't know what the prospect is planning on spending.

If the prospect thinks the price is too high, you can begin listing the ways the project can be done for less money. Perhaps you can suggest using less mature plant material, or doing the project in phases. There are lots of ways to work it.

Added Lerner, "It's a lot easier to lower a high price than to raise a price that's too low."

Also, negotiation keeps a landscaper from getting that I-could-kick-myself feel-

ing by offering a price that a prospect gobbles up because the prospect had planned on spending a whole lot more.

Lerner says he's used formulas, time and materials, and get-what-the-market-will-bear but he much prefers dealing face-to-face.

"I'd rather be with the client on the job site and get a chance to test the waters," said Lerner. "If you don't at least try to see what you can charge, you'll never know what you can get."

Lerner thinks landscapers generally are on the low end of the professional pay ladder, taking a back seat to other skilled trades people like electricians, carpenters and plumbers. That's because they don't educate clients of the value of their work.

"I'm going to get a little lower price from some clients and a little higher from others and hopefully it will work out that I get a fair rate," said Lerner.

"If you're landing every job, you're not charging enough," he added.

—Joel Lerner conducted a five-city, "Leaving No Stone Unturned" series of seminars this past February. He made the above comments in Cleveland. To contact Lerner, call him at (301) 495-4747.

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Circle No. 103 on Reader Inquiry Card

The new pick-ups:

offices *on-the-go*

by Arthur Flax

■ Landscape managers shopping for new vehicles in 1995 will be pleased to find that truck manufacturers have responded to their needs with bigger, more powerful models, equipped with interior features that can turn their vehicles into mobile offices.

For example, John Kelley of Chevrolet says, "As a new feature, we have an (optional) pivoting writing desk in the center console of full-size pick-ups. Also, as standard equipment, we have a couple of 12-volt outlets for computers and cellular phones, among other things. Those were needs expressed by our commercial customers, and we addressed them."

Chrysler and Ford pick-ups offer similar interior features suited for landscape managers.

Among new trucks for 1995:

Chevrolet has a large selection of new models and improvements. GMC offers similar new models.

The all-new Chevrolet Blazer Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) is of interest to contractors who need personal transportation in addition to a work vehicle. Available in two- and four-door models with rear- or

four-wheel drive, the new Blazer has exceptional cargo capacity.

Driver's-side airbags are now standard on virtually all light truck models, with the exception of certain extra-heavy duty versions. Other safety features include standard four-wheel antilock brakes on many models. S-Series trucks also have daytime running lamps to make the trucks more visible.

The full-size K-Blazer SUV has been

renamed Tahoe and there is a new four-door version.

Ford has introduced a new diesel drivetrain that is of great interest to landscapers who typically haul heavy loads of soil or rock. You can now order F-250, F-350 and F-Super Duty pick-ups (or Econoline E-350 and Super Van models) with Ford's 7.3-liter direct injection Power Stroke turbo diesel, mated to an automatic trans-



Dodge Ram 3500 4x4



Mazda B-Series truck for 1995

mission. Previously, only a manual transmission was available for the 210 hp engine, introduced last year.

The Ford Ranger compact pick-up also gets a standard driver's airbag. A passenger airbag is optional. Four-wheel, antilock disc brakes are standard on Ranger models with the 4.0 liter V-6 engine.

All Ford light trucks have a driver's air bag as standard equipment and are covered by 24-hour roadside assistance.

Dodge has made a Club Cab available for its popular Ram pick-up, introduced in 1994. The Club Cab's interior adds 20 inches in length to the standard Ram cab, accommodating six passengers with a full rear bench seat.

The Ram Van gets a driver's airbag and optional four-wheel antilock brakes on the commercial version.

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TRUCKS from page 18

Toyota's T100 is offered with an extended cab and more powerful engine than ever. The mid-size truck gets a 3.4 liter V-6 that boasts 190 hp, up 40 hp from 1994. A 150 hp, 2.7 liter four-cylinder engine is also available with a new four-speed automatic transmission.

Nissan pick-up trucks get new graphics (XE models) and a better integrated center high-mounted stop lamp on the back of the cab. Rear antilock brakes are now standard on all two-wheel drive pick-ups, and a limited slip differential is standard on the four-wheel drive SE V-6 pick-up, which also gets bigger tires.

Mazda's 1995 B-Series pick-ups get a driver's side airbag, a redesigned instrument panel and a more responsive 2.3 liter four-cylinder base engine with 112 hp, up from 98 hp.

Popular stuff—Truck manufacturers says the most popular pick-ups for landscapers are larger ¾-ton models like the Dodge Ram 2500, the Chevrolet C/K 2500 and the Ford F-250. A ¾-ton model can typically carry payloads of 3,000 lbs.

Large Chevrolet C/K 3500, Dodge Ram 3500 and Ford Super-Duty pick-ups are best if you typically carry topsoil, stone or other heavy loads. They can carry up to 5,000 lbs.

Compact pick-ups are often used for towing equipment of up to 3,500 lbs.

Dodge Dakota and Toyota T100 intermediate-sized pick-ups and the so-called ½-ton full-sized pick-ups, including the Dodge Ram 1500, Chevrolet C/K 1500 and Ford F-150, are suited for businesses that need a larger bed (eight feet) for equipment and a vehicle to do towing or light snow plowing.

Incentives available—Among incentives currently available, Chevrolet offers a choice of \$300 cash allowance on most light truck models; pick-up truck toolboxes or van storage bins from Adrian Steel or a free three-year/36,000-mile maintenance



Chevy's new 2500 4x4

plan (including frequent oil changes). Certain vehicles are excluded.

Ford offers incentives, as needed, to control its inventory of vehicles.

Dodge offers a \$500 incentive to Farm



Mazda B-Series interior

Bureau members on select Ram and Dakota pick-ups and Ram vans.

Japanese manufacturers typically offer their dealers incentives to sell slow-moving light truck models. Also, Isuzu has traditionally provided dealers with substantial incentives to encourage the sales of vehicles

used in businesses such as landscaping.

Dealers advise you to identify yourself as a business customer and ask for special rebates available only to businesses. All dealers can offer business rebates, but dealers that specialize in business customers are more likely to be aware of them.

Chevrolet, for example, has a select group of 500 "Commercial/Specialty Vehicle" dealers specially trained and equipped to sell and service small business customers. Ford's "Mainstreet U.S.A." dealers, with 1,100 outlets, can offer similar specialized service to landscapers.

Prices up—Incentives aside, truck prices have risen two to three percent on new domestic 1995 models. Prices can be compared with the following for regular, mid-size and compact pick-ups:

- Dodge Ram Club Cab 2500 (155-inch wheelbase)..... \$19,722
- Toyota T100 (with 3.4 liter V-6).....\$14,498
- Nissan Standard (compact pickup)\$9,929

—The author is a freelance writer whose business, FlaxSun Power Fast Sunner, is located in Denver, Colo.



Nissan 4x2 XE



Ford 250 Series