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Boost your budget

Grounds managers have many of the same problems as people in business for themselves, except they must appeal to the organization itself, rather than an outside lender. This can be tough, especially if the grounds already look good.

George Van Haasteren, CGM, is grounds manager for Dwight Englewood School and director of grounds for Paramus Catholic High School, both in Bergen County, N.J.

"In my experience, the biggest problem is that there's just not enough capital or capital renewal for the equipment that you need to get the day-to-day operations completed," Van Haasteren says.

The solution? "What I've tried, and sometimes succeeded with, comes under one word — justification," he notes. "That means acquiring enough business savvy to build a business case. You compare the full-time employees it takes to do a certain task with what a new piece of equipment could do. You compare different types of machines. Or you demonstrate that your old equipment is unsafe, or doesn't meet new environmental or safety codes. Maybe, that leasing with an option to buy will save money."

He continues, "And so you justify the expenditure. Grounds management is changing in that the institutions operate it as if they were a business. You need to take some business courses — that's what I did — and learn from everyone you can. I'm lucky that I had my own business, and a family member who is a CPA. That's someone I can ask for the financial advice.

"Of course, the biggest frustration is you go through all the steps and build a huge case, and then there's a change in administration. You have to work the steps all over again with someone new!"

Sound familiar?

Continued from page 29

two-year business plan, they've been able to raise approximately \$5 million.

"Through introductions, our own networking and existing relationships, we found some private individuals — 'angel' investors," Rogan reports. "We've also approached many venture capitalists and are talking to some interested firms.

"We're on schedule," he adds, "but I am a little disappointed with the results so far in raising money. If we're not successful in raising the initial \$40 million, we will scale down our business plan or look to other more traditional methods of raising capital."

Rogan attributes his difficulties to an investing climate eager for returns typical of high-tech operations (in the 50% to 100% range), plus more caution about investing in consolidations.

A banker becomes landscaper

W. James Ormond, vice president of Barringer and Barringer in Charlotte, NC, has sat on both sides of the desk. The former officer for the nation's sixth largest bank joined the industry in 1995 to found a new landscape maintenance division for Barringer and Barringer. "It (that division) was a whole new direction for us," he says.

Company founder John Barringer also started in the banking industry. Says Ormond: "When we met, we looked at ways to grow his business and decided the most profitable and strategic path would be to expand services while growing the existing design/install business." His banking contacts helped him, and he needed them, because maintenance is more labor-intensive and equipment-intensive than installation.

"Anyone who needs capital should have a solid relationship with their banker," he adds. Rec-



W. James Ormond

ognizing that advice is easier to give than to follow, Ormond offers these tips on nurturing banker relationships:

1. Make your banker part of your professional support team, along with your attorney and accountant. "You need support people in your business who are on your side and who understand your business, so when you go to them for help, you don't have to start from scratch. They should be familiar with your business practices, seasonal trends of cash flow or whatever."

2. Invest the time and effort to maintain that relationship. "My partner used his former bank when he started the business. A lot of turnover happened there and he lost that personal relationship. He faced what many in our industry face — not being known — and the frustrations mounted rapidly.

"We ended up going with my former bank," Ormond says. "I was still tied in closely there and I also work to keep those relationships open. Even when I don't need my banker, I tell him what I'm doing.

"Recently, we knew we were going to need a temporary line of credit for a large installation job. Three months before I needed the money, I called my banker and told him: 'I may not need this money, but I want to let you know what our intentions are.' A week ago, I called and he didn't have to be brought up to speed. He asked, 'How much do you need, and when do you need it?'"

3. Know when and how to switch from start-up mode to long-term relationship.

"Equipment dealers and manufacturers set up these very attractive no-money-down, 90-day same as cash deals that make it an easy industry to get into. In our market there must be 10 pages in the Yellow Pages of one-man outfits. They do have easy access — not to bankers, but to credit.

"What they *don't* have is the knowledge of how to get to that next level. They're just looking at that monthly payment. One

"You can't go to a banker at the outset and say, 'Here I am — finance me.'"

**W. James Ormond,
Barringer & Barringer**

day, they understand that they're still paying for machines that have long since broken down — or are paying \$300 a month for 5 years for a \$6,000 mower. And what do they do? They sell and get out of the business."

"You can't go to a banker at the outset and say, 'Here I am — finance me.' But alternatives might include the Small Business Administration — they have some loan products for the small startup business."

He continues: "Or, you may want to go to a dealer and get a mower on easy terms, or use credit cards. I wrote a refinanced loan for some people who started a business with credit cards. They knew they didn't want to get too far into debt at 22%. Later, they said, 'We have a certain amount of business experience and we'd like to refinance this credit card debt with a bank loan at better rates.' That was an attractive loan for me to write."

4. Visit the bank before you need the money. "Many people wait until the 11th hour to meet their banker. When you're ready to move away from dealer or credit card financing, call your bank before you need a loan. You can tell the banker about your business and mention that you see the need for some credit coming up. When the need does arise, your banker knows your situation."

5. Get counseling on financial matters. "A large part of obtaining credit is the presentation. There are agencies, the SBA being one of them, (others include local

chambers of commerce and economic development offices) with financial counselors to help you to present your case intelligently."

6. Bank locally. "The bank I chose was my former employer — but had I not worked there, I probably would have used

a small community bank. They are eager to lend to this kind of business and the advantage is a better long-term relationship."

— *The author has written about several Green Industry topics from his base in Mendham, NJ*

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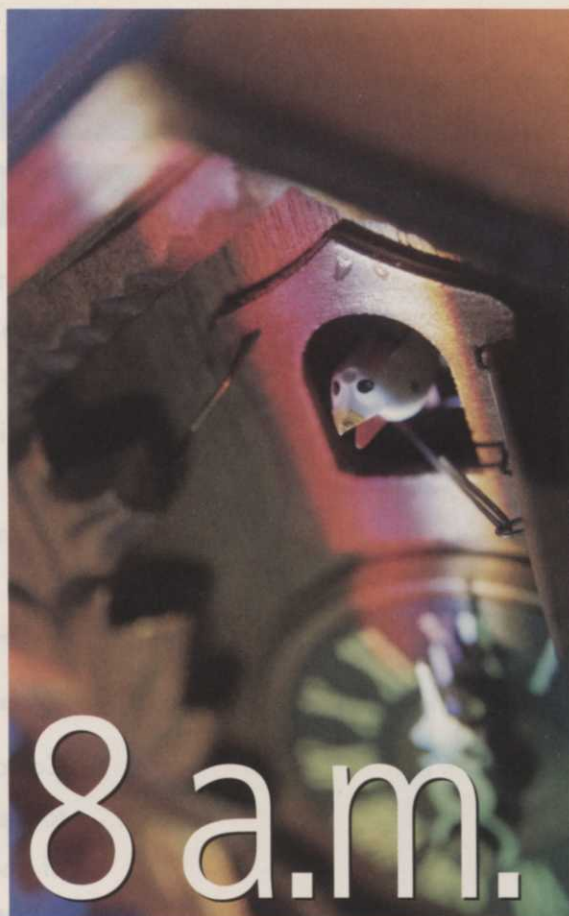
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They say you learn something best when you teach it. Your employees may be the ideal teachers

BY PHIL FOGARTY

All before 8 a.m.

Develop skills and create energy



It's 7 a.m. and the group heading into the meeting room hears country music playing. "That's right, it's Steve's week to train! He should have been a cowboy."

Nods of recognition accompany a few grins. "We didn't even think that he could talk and here he is on his third session. And he's not bad, either."

Steve hits the button on the CD player, stopping the background melody. "Okay, listen up. Bob has the mission statement." Bob's recitation from memory is greeted with groans and sarcastic applause. "Show off!" "Brown noser!" Bob sits down after being handed a new company hat with movie tickets protruding from the brim.

Steve keeps things moving. "Good job, Bob. We're talking about routing today and we need everyone's input. Does anybody have any thoughts on why good routing is so critical?"

Quick and consistent

Another Skills Development Series session is on its way.

The combination of brevity and consistency works a little magic in the participating companies. Thanks to positive peer pressure, everyone gets together each week and they wouldn't dare miss with American Cyanamid's purse at stake (see sidebar).

Standings are faxed around the country after each session so all those competing know what the score is. One training combatant says, "Besides, this thing brings us together each week and everybody's the same for that hour."

Of the 12 Skills Development Series companies participating, all but one have trained every week and documented it with a fax-back form that shares feedback with the SDS group. The 12 routing discussions provided feedback like this:

► "We followed a customer's path from an estimate to a sale, from invoice to service. It helped everyone understand all the parts of the system that affect routing."

► "We learned how to route with a new software program today."

► "We initiated a new procedure today. We'll take recommendations from our employees on better ways to route a customer."

One percent of your time

A company dedicating only 1% of its time each week for training gets other benefits as well. One Skills Developer said, "If we can excite people about learning once a week, they are bound to do some learning on their own above and beyond what we provide."

The *Landscape Management Skills Development Series* is moving its member companies a little closer to being learning organizations each week. Now more than 25% complete, SDS participants will never go back to training "only when they have the time."

Steve feels good about the 35-minute meeting. What great ideas came from this one! He remembers a quote that summed up the session: "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may not remember. Involve me and I'll understand." **LM**

American Cyanamid's SDS prize package

PARSIPPANY, NJ - American Cyanamid, the sponsor of the first *Landscape Management Skills Development Series*, announced the grand prize package to be awarded to the company who trains for all 52 weeks in the contest. In the case of a tie, a drawing will be held to determine the winner of products that are valued at more than \$1,500.

"The SDS has put a spotlight on regular training for LCOs across the country, and AMCY is excited to sponsor such a unique learning program," said Joe Visaggio, market manager, Turf and Ornamental Products at American Cyanamid. AmCy, makers of the popular lawn care products Amdro Pro, Image, Pendulum and Pendimethelin, also provided products to all companies that enrolled in the program, which started in February. JP Horizons, an Ohio-based consulting firm, designs weekly training session outlines for companies to download from www.jphorizons.com, plus coaching and networking support.

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Property at a glance

Location: Rock Creek Ranch, Greenwood Village, CO
Staff: CoCal Landscape
Category: Public works
Total budget: \$210,000
Year site built: 1992-present
Acres of turf: 144 irrigated, 163 native
Acres of woody ornamentals: Unknown
Acres of display beds: 2
Total paved area: Unknown
Total man-hours/week: 400

Maintenance challenges

- ▶ Extensive perennial and wildflower plantings
- ▶ Large scale, communications
- ▶ Ongoing development and construction

Project checklist

(Completed in last two years):

- ▶ Installed pond aeration systems
- ▶ Extensive underground drainage
- ▶ Berm construction to block headlights from residents

On the job

- ▶ 2 full-time staff, 10 seasonal employees, 1 licensed pesticide operator

Rock Creek Ranch

The 1999 Grand Award Winner of the Professional Grounds Management Society for Public Works

Rock Creek Ranch is a 1,200-home community located just outside of Boulder, CO, that has a little bit of everything — parkways, medians, a wastewater treatment plant, parks, ball fields, playgrounds, sculpture, jogging paths, soft trails, native plantings, wetlands and 20 ponds that are pretty to look at but are also used for irrigation. CoCal Landscape, Denver, CO, keeps it beautiful.

Both the size and diversity of this landscape present numerous maintenance challenges but irrigation is the

Editors' note: *Landscape Management* is the exclusive sponsor of the Green Star Professional Grounds Management Awards for outstanding management of residential, commercial and institutional landscapes. The 2000 winners will be named at the annual meeting of the Professional Grounds Management Society in November. For more information on the 2000 Awards, contact PGMS at 120 Cockeysville Road, Suite 104, Hunt Valley, MD; 410/584-9754. Web-site: www.pgms.org



largest. The Front Range of Colorado is arid and the community's plant material, ranging from junipers to Kentucky bluegrass turf, requires strict water management. The irrigation system contains 47 controllers, 2,400 valves and 40,000 sprinkler heads. All of it is managed as part of the community's complex gray-water irrigation system. CoCal Landscape did a good job with that, as it reduced the community's water consumption more than 40%.

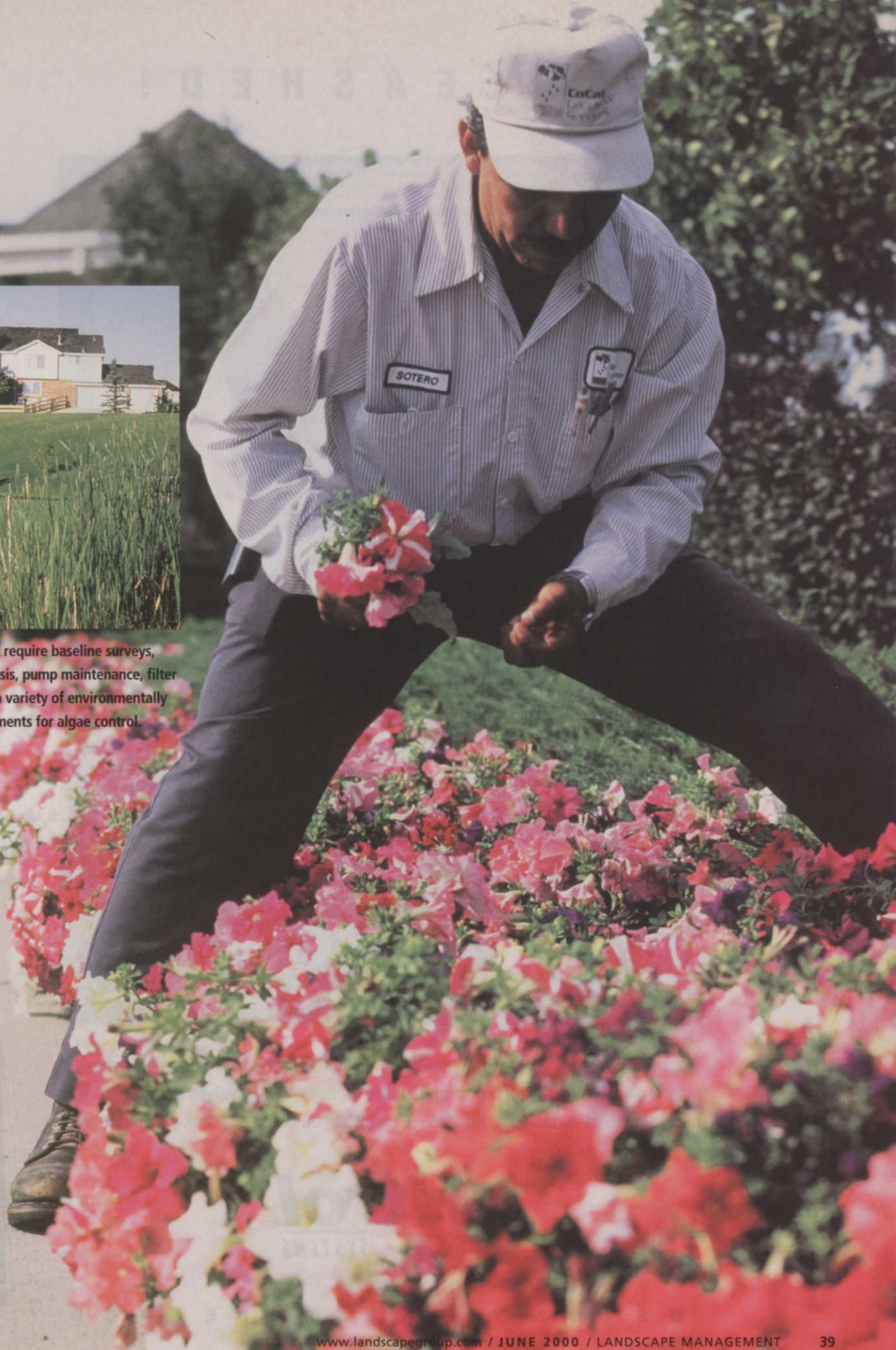
The place isn't called Rock Creek Ranch for nothing. Meticulous trimming around numerous landscape boulders on the property add up to substantial labor time. In all, maintenance personnel edge more than 41 miles of property each month. And, since there are picnic areas, the CoCal crew is always picking up trash and dog feces and cleaning barbecue grills.

Annual color management requires frequent fertilizing, watering, insect and disease control, and deadheading to produce consistent results.

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