

industry almanac

NEWS YOU CAN USE

CC acquires

Bush Hog

SELMA, AL — CC Industries, Chicago, IL, acquired Bush Hog. The new company will operate as Bush Hog, L.L.C. and retain the same management team.

"We have been aware of Bush Hog's commitment to its customers for many years," said Bill Crown, president of CC Industries. "Bush Hog is unique in its ability to focus on and serve customer needs."

VW&R buys Turf Industries

AUSTIN, TX — Chemical distribution leader Van Waters & Rogers (VW&R), Austin, TX has acquired Turf Industries, Dallas/Houston, TX. Turf Industries will join Van Waters & Rogers' Professional Products & Services business unit, which services the structural pest control, public health, turf and specialty agricultural markets.

Simplot, Pursell ink deal

POST FALLS, ID — Simplot Turf and Pursell Technologies (PTI) signed an agreement to market Polyon® fertilizers and other products to turfgrass markets in the northeastern, mid-western and southwestern states.

LCOs seek to recover fuel costs

MARIETTA, GA — Lawn care pros are showing creativity in recovering the costs of gasoline and diesel prices that are significantly higher this season than last. While some say that they will absorb the extra expense, others, answering a PLCAA survey early this spring, offered these tips for recouping this money:

- ▶ raise prices on add-on or extra services that were not part of the contracted annual lawn treatment prices,
- ▶ add new services to sell more to each individual client,
- ▶ take a closer look at routing to cut fuel use,
- ▶ increase the response time for service estimates and service requests so they can be "bunched,"
- ▶ increase the customer count in routes that are already being serviced.

The PLCAA fax-pollled 632 of its members late this winter and asked them what they planned to do about higher fuel prices. Of the 146 that responded, 16% said they were adding a temporary fuel surcharge, but most said they were not because they had already mailed contracts or renewal letters for the season. Some said that they had received prepaids, meaning they would have to go back and ask these customers for more money which was not an op-

THE PRICE OF GASOLINE



tion. Others cited tough competition as a reason for not adding a temporary fuel surcharge, reported Bob Andrews, PLCAA's advisor and owner of Greenskeeper, Inc., Carmel, IN.

Even so, 44% of the LCOs polled by the PLCAA said they raised prices for this season. Some responded that the

raises reflected "annual" increases in the cost of doing business, mirroring rising labor and insurance costs.

"Overall, these increases (fuel), although unwelcome and unexpected, were largely looked upon as another bump in the road," wrote Andrews.

New facility

Great Dane Power Equipment's new 70,000-sq. ft. facility in Jeffersonville, IN, is capable of running five production lines and housing the latest in product research and development as well as service parts distribution, warehousing and offices.



Take a stand at PLCAA's Day on the Hill

WASHINGTON, D.C. — If you've ever wanted to wrap yourself in the United States flag and take a stand on issues you feel strongly about that affect the Green Industry, now's your chance.

The Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) is now accepting registration for its 11th Annual Legislative Day on the Hill, July 24-25 in Washington, D.C.

In addition to getting the chance to present issues to legislators, landscape and lawn care professionals will get the opportunity to honor America's veterans by volunteering their skills and/or equipment for the "Renewal & Remembrance" project at Arlington National Cemetery and Old Congressional Cemetery.

Early bird registrants will have an opportunity to take a complimentary Potomac Evening Cruise on July 23 (only 50 seats available). Also, first-time attendees who sign up by May 1 will be entered in a drawing for free airfare (up to \$500) to D.C. for the Day on the Hill. For more information contact PLCAA at 800/458-3466.

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Irritrol Systems is turning it up with its 2000 Series family of residential valves. These next-generation models are loaded with impressive features. Check them out:

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- Our reliable 2400 electric globe and 2600 electric angle valves also feature a double-beaded diaphragm and internal bleed.
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Circle 111

Two resign as Eco Soil reorganizes

RANCHO BERNARDO, CA — Eco Soil Systems recently announced the resignations of president Douglas Gloff and CFO Mark Buckner as part of its reorganization efforts.

"As we announced last month, the company is reorganizing its corporate functions to position itself for the proposed sale of all or part of its Turf Partners subsidiary to the J.R. Simplot Company and the creation of a distribution channel for Eco Soil's proprietary products through Simplot," said William Adams, CEO of Eco Soil.

Gloff's resignation was effective March 31, 2000. He will continue to direct the transition management team of the Turf Partners subsidiary while serving on the Turf Partners board of directors.

Max Gelwix, vice president of marketing, has been named as Eco Soil's new president. Dennis Sentz, vice president of accounting and controller, has been named as the company's new CFO.

People & companies

John Deere has had its 125-hr., 25 cc Ecopower engine certified as compliant with Tier II/Model Year 2000 emission standards by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). The engines will initially be available in California in Homelite® products for the 2000 model year.

Irritrol Systems appointed Kristina Bergman category manager, fixed sprays and low volume.

The Scotts Company named Dr. Eric K. Nelson senior scientist, turfgrass breeder at its Oregon Field Station.



Bayer Corp. named Heather Flagg market planning manager of its Garden & Professional Care unit.

Barenbrug named Bob Richardson supply manager, Walt Pemrick turf seed marketing specialist, Jill Taber territory manager for the South Coast and L.A. area, and Jay Ingham territory manager for the Central Coast and Central Valley of California. The company also opened a new research site on the East Coast of the U.S.

Jacklin Seed Co. named Steve Rusconi grower services supervisor.



Growth Partners, a marketing services firm for the Green Industry, changed its name to Green Advice. The change was made to reflect the company's service of partnering with companies for long term, profitable growth.

Valley Crest, a wholly owned subsidiary of Environmental Industries, promoted John Cable to vice president and regional manager of Valley Crest's

southwestern operations and Jeffrey Hinners to branch manager at Valley Crest Colorado.

American Granby appointed Joseph Brown vice president of sales and marketing.



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Uniroyal asks for Floramite use increase

MIDDLEBURY, CT — Uniroyal Chemical Co. has asked the EPA to up the maximum number of applications of Floramite miticide per crop to two.

Floramite, which received federal registration in 1999, offers outstanding control of a variety of mite pests on greenhouse, shadehouse, nursery, field, and landscape and interiorscape grown ornamentals.

SIMA Snow & Ice show ahead

ERIE, PA — The Snow & Ice Management Association, Inc. (SIMA), headquartered here, will hold its 3rd Annual Snow & Ice Symposium at the Holiday Inn By the Bay in Portland, ME, on June 1 to 3. The 2000 symposium will, for the first time, include exhibits and an optional tour of the Fisher Engineering Plant. Contact SIMA at 814/835-3577; email: sima@erie.net; Web: www.sima.org.

[CLIPPINGS]

Maryland turf gets new digs

COLLEGE PARK, MD — Turfgrass experts at the University of Maryland are expecting a big turnout for their Turfgrass Research Field Day & Open House on July 12, 2000. That's the date for the dedication of the new Paint Branch Turfgrass Research Facility.

The design of Paint Branch began in 1997, after the redevelopment of the former site, the Cherry Hill Turf Research Facility, was announced. The Paint Branch facility, located on the campus of the University of Maryland, cost nearly \$1.6 million and boasts 35 acres available for research, a 7,000-sq.-ft. equipment shop as well as a state-of-the-art pesticide storage and handling building. The main building includes offices for the facility manager, researchers and technicians, and over 500 sq. ft. of lab research and storage space. Plans for a greenhouse are being finalized.

The move to Paint Branch came at a good time, says Dr. Tom Turner, a Maryland turfgrass specialist. "Cultivar evaluations are an important part of our mission, but Cherry Hill was running out of space. Twenty years ago, most cultivar evaluations had about 30 entries. Now, the average trial includes over 100 entries. We've had to turn down research projects because we had no place to put them."



Surfin' Turf

Greentrac.com

www.greentrac.com

If you've been wondering what all the buzz concerning e-business to business on the internet is about, check out this Web site targeted specifically at the professional Green Industry. Its electronic Request for Proposal (eRFP) service links buyers with vendors who can respond

with competitive bids.

Greentrac.com was founded in 1999 by CEC Properties, Inc., a Green Industry management

firm headquartered in Newport Beach, CA. The site began linking buyers with sellers this past February, and, on April 6, it unveiled on electronic auction (eAuction) feature with more than \$3.3 million in the auction pipeline.

Greentrac.com said a total of \$1.2 million in transaction volume closed its site this past March with a 50% increase in registered buyers and vendors.

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year and increased profits by an unrealistic amount. Unlike other machines on the market we have experienced very little down time with the "AERA-vator" as well as virtually eliminating callbacks due to poor jobs in dry conditions. We look forward to another great year of aeration as we present your product to the public.



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Info Center

VIDEOS AND LITERATURE FOR THE GREEN INDUSTRY

BUBCO'S SPRAYER PRODUCTS BROCHURE ... highlights the Environmist line of covered spray-system products, the Micromax controlled droplet applicator for boom mounting and the Micron Herbi and Herbaflex lightweight hand-held sprayers. It also details supply tanks, pumps, extension arms and accessories.

For a free copy, call 800/474-2532 or visit www.bubco.com.



IRRIGATION PRODUCTS GALORE... can be found in Irritrol Systems' new irrigation products guide for 2000. Anyone in the market for controllers, sprayheads, valves, rotors or microirrigation products will find this catalogue as hard to put down as a murder-mystery novel. And that's before you read how to win a cool Hummer vehicle just by purchasing an Irritrol product. Contact Irritrol Systems at 909/785-3623.

SEED, SEED, EVERYWHERE... in Lofts Seed's catalog, which highlights wildflower and native grasses. Read about Selmer Loft who, in 1923, set out to sell turfgrass seed and eventually passed his knowledge down to sons Peter and Jon, who recognized that the future was dependent on developing improved turfgrass varieties. Think this catalog will grow on you? Call 888/LOFTS CO for a copy.

THE LATEST FROM HUSQVARNA... can be found in the new 2000 product catalog. Mower and blowers, pole saws, power cutters and protective gear grab the attention of anyone interested in tough equipment. There's even snippets on Husqvarna's sponsorship of Joe Gibbs' racing team and world champion lumberjack Ron Hartill. For a copy contact Husqvarna at 704/597-5000.

V & B'S GARDEN TOOLS CATALOG... features an expanded line of 15 garden/landscaping tools and includes a chart comparing the Groundbreakers high-tech design to existing tools. For a copy, call V & B Mfg. Co. at 800/443-1987.





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Market under the microscope

DC Corridor

It's a boom town with cutthroat competition. We visited DC-area readers to find out what makes this market tick. Their experiences might help you compete

BY THE LM STAFF

The Washington DC metro market is big, booming, pushy, overcrowded and competitive. As the center of government, it attracts new businesses, people and development. Area contractors are riding that wave of demand for their services.

What's the dark side? From our personal visits in the Washington DC Corridor (northern Virginia up to Baltimore, MD) we can tell you that traffic is a nightmare, labor is scarcer than a believable campaign promise and industry players told us that competition is down and dirty.

But, why the DC Corridor, you ask? We chose this market because it has much that is happening right now across our industry:

- ▶ Strong economic growth;
- ▶ Consolidated landscape companies;
- ▶ Key industry players;
- ▶ Challenges finding labor, getting around town and handling low-ball competition;
- ▶ Many governments and regulations;
- ▶ Diverse landscape work (national monuments, new housing, major commercial developments, urban projects).

Long-time player

Few contractors know this market as well as *Landon Reeve*, who established Chapel Valley Landscape back in 1968. The company's organizational structure includes separate divisions to handle residential, commercial and water management installation and maintenance services.

But what makes Chapel Valley a "player" in this market? It recently won the coveted 600-acre MCI Worldcom installation and irrigation contract, gets its share of government work and handles a wide variety of high-end residential installation and maintenance jobs. Most of the company's business is focused on the DC corridor and it maintains offices in

Woodbine, MD (south of Baltimore) and Dulles, VA.

Northern Virginia's rapid development



"This market is booming like the 80s, but pricing and margins are lower...and profits don't grow as fast as you'd expect." J. Landon Reeve, Chapel Valley Landscape Co., Woodbine, MD

amazes Reeves. "If I don't visit our Dulles office for a month, I won't recognize the area. It's changing so fast." High-tech firms like MCI, AOL, Cisco and others find the area ideal, he says.

What gets him is the changing nature of competition. With the consolidation of larger players in the market (STM, Ruppert, Scapes, Brickman), Reeves finds his firm is the largest privately owned full-service firm in the Corridor. But he thinks the competition is more complex.

"The Virginia market is red hot, dynamic, changing," Reeves says. "There are more competitors and they are very competitive on the larger projects. In the Baltimore/DC markets, there are more small companies every day."

Reeves' challenges include extensive travel time ("as much as 1/2 hour to 1 hour from jobs") and the squeeze on profits brought by intense competition. "Consolidation has made things more competitive for market share."

Market maven

As regional manager for the Davey Tree Expert Co., **John Dingus** has worked on just about every key federal government project in the District and beyond. Besides large commercial and residential landscape projects, Davey continues to service Arlington National Cemetery, the Federal Reserve building complex and a variety of projects involving the Smithsonian, Kennedy Center for the Arts, the White House, the Capitol grounds and other high-visibility sites. His office alone handles \$9 million in services per year.

"At one time, we had maintenance contracts on every major federal building along Constitution Avenue, from 1st St. up to 21st St," he recalls. When Congress enacted a small business set-aside in the mid-1990s, Davey lost much of that work due to its size. A key element of its revised strategy is to seek work on commercial de-



Employees of The Davey Tree Expert Co. install a large tree on the Capitol grounds.

"If you bid on Arlington National Cemetery and you lowball it, you'll die. This is the granddaddy landscape of them all. We cut 100 acres every day, rain or shine."

John Dingus, The Davey Tree Expert Co., Chantilly, VA



velopments, such as the USA Today's new 25-acre complex in McLean, VA. Installation projects like this usually lead to long-term maintenance services.

Davey's specialty of brokering and installing large trees is the perfect niche to build long-term installation business, Dingus has found. Recent projects include installing large trees at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History, planting re-

placement cherry trees around the Tidal Basin and the installation of the impressive FDR Memorial (including 260 8- to 10-in. trees and nearly 8 acres of sod).

As for his competition, Dingus is too busy to fret much. Some consolidated companies have pulled back from much of their design/build work, he notes, which has "neutralized" the competition.

"There is a glut of work and no one has begun to corner it," he says. "There's more business than you can handle because you can't get the people."

Bidding wars

Anyone handling high-end condominium and apartment complexes in this market knows McFall & Berry Landscape Management, with offices in both Virginia and Maryland. As vice president of operations and branch manager of the McLean, VA, office, **Scott Hall** has seen changes come and go.

"The pace of building is phenomenal,"

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“The competitive bidding situation is tough — there are more bidders and they’ll work for the same or less than we did 10 years ago”

Scott Hall, McFall & Berry Landscape Management Inc., McLean, VA

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he notes, “and the competition is overwhelming. Six or eight years ago, we used to have three people there at pre-bid meetings. Now there are 10 or 15.”

“We do our best to bid but it’s tough. Property managers have to work with investors and they have to have their numbers,” Hall explains. “But every time we gave up work (to another contractor), we got it back within a year. We’ve done the work; we know the job better.”

A selective businessman

You know the economy’s busting at the seams when you can get rid of customers.

That’s what **Michael Abert**, owner of Landscape Projects, Bethesda, MD, told us. Just like others in the area, Abert could

“We routinely fire 5 to 10% of our clients each year.” Michael Abert, owner, Landscape Projects, Bethesda, MD

be running two or three more crews but can’t find the labor. Landscape Projects, which grossed \$1.5 million last year, specializes in providing landscaping for high-end residential lots in the area.

Isn’t firing your own customers a little too laid back? “We routinely fire about 5 to 10% of our clients each year for being an insignificant account or because we don’t like them,” Abert says.

“We don’t negotiate. Customers ask us to lower our price and we say no, this is America -- it’s a free market and you can go somewhere else. That may be the only offer they get because everyone is so busy.”

No fear of consolidation

The way **Lou Kobus** sees it, consolidation has been good for his \$3.2-million busi-

ness, Village Turf, in Mount Vernon, VA. He lumps big, consolidated companies and low-ballers together, saying that many big firms are more concerned with market share and will often bid at excessively low

“We’ve gotten more business from consolidation because, while a customer may go with the bigger company for a year, they always come back to us.” Lou Kobus, owner, Village Turf, Mount Vernon, VA

prices to get business.

Consolidation isn’t the only thing he believes has made his business more sought-after. Customers are more knowledgeable than they used to be, he says. “They inquire more. They’re looking for someone who knows the regulations. They’re looking for people to solve problems, not create them.”

Pending pesticide restrictions will only increase homeowners’ need for quality lawn care companies, he says. “Homeowners will be unable to put things down themselves and will need us to do it.”

Growth requires efficiency

Bruce Allentuck of Allentuck Landscaping seems like he’d have his company’s projected growth mapped out for the next 20 years or so. He does have a plan, but, like almost everyone in the area, he has to deal with obstacles such as the labor shortage

“In five years, I see more satellite offices for everybody as the market continues to grow out.” Bruce Allentuck, owner, Allentuck Landscaping, Gaithersburg, MD

and an area encompassing three different bodies — Virginia, Maryland and DC.

Allentuck sees consolidation as an aid to the labor crisis. “I’ve seen a lot of unhappy employees leaving, which benefits us,” he says. “I’ve also seen a lot of unhappy customers. The consolidated companies will go through a bumpy time and that will level off. We’re in a huge market. I know we’re barely scratching the surface.”

More efficient operations would also promote the kind of growth Allentuck would like his \$1.6-million company to experience.

“First, there’s the traffic,” he says. “Then, we have three governments and lots of cities and counties, all with different zoning regulations affecting design/build. Dealing with this is all about managing. Eventually, we’d like to have satellite offices to make things more efficient.”

Big fish in a big pond

With sales of \$28 million in the Washington, DC area (\$21 million in Maryland), The Brickman Group is one of the largest landscape companies in the area. Regional manager **Jeff Topley** oversees eight branches in Maryland and four in northern Virginia, and 125 employees.

As a result of being big, problems automatically affect operations and employees. Local governments have been more of a sticking point for Brickman, so much so that high on Topley’s wish list is his desire to see Virginia, Maryland and DC become more unified in their approach to business.

“If there was a way to get Virginia, DC and Maryland on the same wavelength to become more business-friendly, that would be a good thing,” Topley says. “Virginia tends to be more business-friendly than Maryland, and DC is a free-for-all. DC

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