

Net jabber mostly for yucks

Screwdriver is probably dead. I haven't seen him in years and nobody mentions his name anymore. I thought of him for the first time in 20 years as I was reading postings on the Yahoo message board for ServiceMaster (NYSE-SVM). ServiceMaster is the parent company of the TruGreen companies, the world's biggest lawn and landscape operations.

I track it and the message boards of several other Green Industry companies for several reasons, not the least being that I'm a part owner of them. My stodgy investments (tiny by most standards) during the tech boom don't look so unexciting to me anymore in light of the financial horsewhippin' Yahoo and Amazon laid out on me.

What's in a name?

Ah, Screwdriver. I got to thinking about him again after trying to figure out the significance of some of the strange nicknames on the message boards, particularly the lively ServiceMaster board.

Characters calling themselves KaginKing, Encore, Bigmouse and (my favorite) Dangermousekaboom maintain a running commentary about the company and, sometimes, about nothing much at all.

Several seem to harbor a grudge against the company, or certain members of its management. They take every shot they can. They engage in arguments on the board with company defenders.

Occasionally, someone posts what appears to be solid information. Insider stuff. Whether it is or not, who knows? Mostly, I go the board for a good chuckle, which brings me back to Screwdriver.

He used to frequent a local hangout. He was a slight man, wrinkled and leathery, and I can still see his sun-creased face bathed in the haze of an unfiltered Lucky

Strike. I never knew much about him, other than that he worked at a local quarry. I also knew he was proud of his new false teeth, which were a topic of lively discussion among the regulars for a week or so.

"They only cost \$150," he told anyone who showed an interest, usually flashing an enormous self-satisfied grin. In fact, he'd eagerly pop the false teeth out of his mouth and exhibit them on the polished bar whenever he was chided by other regulars, guys with nicknames like Sly and Eagle.

Come to think of it, I never knew any of these other characters well either. Not even their real names. But, for a short while, we all had a good time, even Screwdriver.

I know it's a poor substitute for the entertainment my former pals used to provide, but I check the net message boards from time to time to see what people have to say about the doings of several Green Industry companies. I've staked a small part of my financial future on them — the companies, not the people with the funny names.

Contact Ron at 440/891-2636

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Teaching old dogs new tricks

The success of any business lies in the quality of its people. Even with all the technology that's been developed, people are still needed. No computer or device can react with the passion and understanding of a human being, and this will never change.

Your ability to communicate with, teach and lead people will determine the success of your business and your life. It's never too late to learn how to get people to like you and do what you need them to do. With this in mind, I have two clichés I use almost weekly: "Treat people the way you want to be treated," and "little things make a big difference."

Details matter

My clients in The Winner's Circle frequently tell me their crews don't follow instructions. When I hear that, I always wonder if the crews have a clear understanding of the job they're supposed to do. Verbally describing what you want your crew to do at Mrs. Jones' house and drawing a sketch on a napkin from breakfast leads to confusion. Handing your team leader a highly detailed work order, an organized drawing and even some photos of the site eliminates many problems. Salespeople should be forced to put every last detail on their quotes so when a job is sold and a work order is generated, nothing is missed. Many successful companies I have worked with or visited send the team leader out to a job site prior to starting a project so they can see the whole picture and avoid potential difficulties.

Ask yourself, "If I sold my business for big bucks and

went to work for another landscape professional to stay active, what would I expect from the owner?" Chances are you would expect a lot more than you're currently doing in your own company! Treat people the way you want to be treated. Leaders know how to get people to do what they need them to and still be loved.

Little things get big results

So many little things make such a big difference that it's silly not to try them. For example, several times a year Grunder Landscaping cooks burgers and hot dogs on Fridays on our own company grill. It's amazing how much excitement is generated from \$150 worth of food.

On hot days, I'll turn on some music and make milkshakes for everyone. For once, it's me serving my staff, not them serving me, and they get a kick out of that!

Our managers are expected to stop and buy drinks and snacks while out monitoring jobs and help a new hire when he or she is struggling. Everyone is expected to help the last crew unload in the rain. Most of all, we constantly say, "Thank you."

Start treating your team the way you want to be treated and look for little things you can do for them. Soon, your old dogs will be jumping through hoops for you.

— Marty Grunder is the founder and president of Grunder Landscaping Co., a national award-winning company in Dayton, OH with annual sales of more than \$2.4 million. He is also founder of The Winner's Circle, a consulting company offering expert help in management, marketing and motivation. Contact Marty by calling (937) 847-9944 or visiting www.grunderswinnerscircle.com.



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NEWS YOU CAN USE

Medallion labeled for landscape use

BASEL, SWITZERLAND — Medallion (fludioxonil) fungicide, manufactured by Syngenta Professional Products, received a new label from the EPA for control of certain foliar, root and stem diseases in azaleas, begonias, gerbera daisies, roses and more than 40 other popular container grown and landscape plants.

Roundup sales boost Monsanto

ST. LOUIS, MO — A record 4% increase in sales of Monsanto Co.'s Roundup herbicide lifted the company's second quarter net income to \$389 million compared to last year's Q2 net income of \$248 million. The company said sales during the first six months of 2001 would have improved by almost 2% compared with first-half 2000 sales, if the effect of foreign currency exchange was excluded. Worldwide sales for Monsanto's agricultural productivity business rose 8% to \$1.57 billion.

BASF implements restructuring

LUDWIGSHAFEN, GERMANY — BASF has completed a reorganization into 38 regional and 10 global business units under its "Fit for the Future" motto. The new structure will allow the company to respond quickly and flexibly to worldwide customer needs, it says.

Chipco's Finale granted state label

MONTVALE, NJ — Finale herbicide, produced by the Chipco Professionals

continued on page 18

Acquisition expands and strengthens Brickman's reach in midwestern markets

BY SUE GIBSON/
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

LANGHORNE, PA — Consolidation among landscape maintenance companies continues with the August 1 purchase of Duke Weeks Landscape Division by The Brickman Group Ltd.

Duke-Weeks, which started as an in-house landscape department for the Duke Realty Corporation, generated nearly \$35 million in revenues from a variety of commercial services offered in several midwest and southern markets.

Brickman's move to buy Duke-Weeks gives it a new presence in several markets,

such as Cincinnati, Minneapolis, Columbus, Greenville and Nashville. It also gives Brickman a stronger presence in several very competitive markets where it is already established, including Cleveland, Dallas, Indianapolis, St. Louis, Raleigh, Atlanta, and Chicago.

Most of the former 300+ Duke-Weeks employees will continue with

Brickman. Mark Flowers, former division president, will now manage Brickman's Atlanta office.

Brickman will now employ approximately 5,100 employees and have proforma revenues for 2001 of more than \$300 million from 88 branches in 25 states.



CLIPPINGS

Yazoo/Kees expands plant

BEATRICE, NE — Yazoo/Kees recently expanded its production plant by 57,000 sq. ft. to bring the total building size to 167,000 sq. ft. As part of the expansion, the company has also added a \$1 million Milbank painting system and robotic welders.

"We continue to plan for the future and believe the future looks bright for Yazoo/Kees and the Husqvarna Turf Care Company," says Anders Berggren, president of Husqvarna Turf Care Company. "We feel very optimistic about this expansion as



Anders Berggren, president of Husqvarna Turf Care (left), is congratulated by Bill Cook III, president of the Gage Co. Economic Development Board, on the plant expansion.

well as the new Yazoo/Kees products that will be unveiled in the near future."

Grass is greener on the other side

BY JASON STAHL/
MANAGING EDITOR

Lured by water bill credits, homeowners out west are ripping out their grass. But irrigation and landscape contractors are hardly complaining.

When the Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) began offering homeowners money to rip up their lawns in an effort to conserve water, you could easily imagine irrigation and landscape contractors gasping and grabbing their chests. No turf means no need for landscape maintenance, and certainly no need for irrigation, right?

Wrong, says Joe Fortier, and Fortier should know. He's the founder of Mojave Water Management, an irrigation consulting firm, and a former employee of the SNWA who helped develop and implement many of its conservation programs.

"It's actually providing more work for irrigation and landscape contractors," Fortier says of the "cash for grass" program. "When people want to retrofit, they have to retrofit the landscape and irrigation to drip irrigation for plant materials that are there. And there's usually not a big reduction in lawn maintenance because landscape professionals still come back, clean up the yard and maintain the irrigation system. Sometimes pruning and clean up takes the place of mowing."

For or against?

The program actually creates additional work for Green Industry professionals and credits homeowners up to a maximum of \$1,000 on their water bills. It also makes everyone feel good about doing their part to conserve a valuable resource. But there could be a day when people like Fortier will not support the program.

"If it stays a volunteer program, I'm all for it," Fortier says. "If it becomes mandatory, I'm against it."

Don Crawford, Western Director of Landscape Services for Camden Property Trust and board member of the Water Conservation Coalition, agrees with Fortier: "This program is only smart if it's done at the right place at the right time."

Even though commercial properties can earn a water bill credit of up to \$50,000 (and Crawford has taken advantage of that), he won't just rip up turf everywhere.

"I won't take out grass where it doesn't make sense," Crawford says. "If I'm watering a skinny strip of turf and getting more water on the hardscape than the turf, it makes sense to replace the turf. We're doing these things anyway because it's the right thing to do."

The right solution?

Irrigation contractors are benefitting from additional work the program has created, but is it really helping to conserve water? A study done by Arizona State University Professor of Urban Horticulture Chris Martin suggests that it may not be.

"Two things happen: the drip irrigation system is either mismanaged or not managed at all," Martin says. "The homeowner will just set the clock and walk away. Water used in the landscape tends to follow the seasonal course of evapotranspiration — it increases in summer and decreases in winter. With drip, the pattern is unchanged from summer to winter."

"The best way to conserve water is to plant fewer plants," he says. "If you're looking at an absolute savings of water, replacing turf is a good thing. You're reducing canopy cover and water application. But it's not going to magically save water."

'Cash for grass'

It appears as though "cash for grass" programs are catching on around the country. New Mexico, California and Arizona have instituted similar financial incentive plans to save water.

■ The City of Corona, CA, for instance,

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offers free water conservation classes to the public. One class in irrigation design is sponsored by a local irrigation supplier. After homeowners complete all four classes, they can apply for a mini-grant of \$500 to make their yard more water efficient.

■ In Glendale, AZ, homeowners can receive a \$500 rebate for converting 50% or more of their grass to water efficient plantings.

■ In Florida, there's a bill in the state legislature that would allow people in deed-restricted communities to grow something other than water-intensive St. Augustinegrass.

■ The National Wildlife Federation offers an official backyard wildlife habitat seal to those who curtail their lawns in favor of native plants that feed and shelter indigenous wildlife and require less pesticides and water.

continued from page 16

Products group of Aventis Environmental Science, was granted a state label for turf use by the California Department of Pesticide Regulations.

ServiceMaster Q2 income drops 23%

DOWNERS GROVE, IL — ServiceMaster announced a 23% drop in its second quarter (Q2) net income and reduced its earnings outlook for 2001. Q2 2001 earnings per share (EPS) were \$.17 on net income of \$51 million compared to Q2 2000 EPS of \$.21 on net income of \$66 million. "In TruGreen, slower growth in the residential lawn care business and unprofitable contracts in the landscaping construction business continue to put pressure on results," said Jon Ward, president and CEO.

Eco Soil to reorganize

SAN DIEGO, CA — Eco Soil Systems Inc. will reorganize its core business, including actively seeking to sell non-core assets in an effort to pay down debt and improve the company's working capital position. The company has also substantially reduced headcount and implemented salary cuts for senior level management, among other efforts to reduce expenses.

Century Rain Aid opens new offices

MADISON HEIGHTS, MI — Century Rain Aid opened five new branch locations: Springdale, AR; Phoenix and Surprise, AZ; Riverhead, NY; and Warrendale, PA.

[CLIPPINGS]

5 ways to use H2B to your advantage

1. Count to 120 backwards. No, it isn't a sobriety test. Count back 120 days from when you want your work permits to begin and be sure your petition is filed on that date to ensure the earliest chance of getting your approval on time. Unfortunately, the law doesn't allow a petitioner to file more than 120 days out regardless of what the various governmental delays may be in processing.

2. Hurry up and slow down. Be prepared for the process to be slow. You may not have approval as early as you would like. Respond quickly to any requests your agent, attorney or, if doing it yourself, governmental agency may have to complete your petition.

3. Proof of existence. Be ready to provide documentation to substantiate your

seasonal need with financials and payroll records. The national office for the U.S. Department of Labor is taking strides to ensure all regional offices are interpreting petitions the same. Be ready to provide substantial documentation to substantiate your seasonality/seasonal need.

4. Next in line please. Screen your recruits carefully for deportation history. Many times you can only go by their word. Have a list of backup recruits in case your first choices do not pan out.

5. Be kind and unwind. Be patient with your agent/attorney processing on your behalf. The program still works, but delays will still occur.

— Terry Foley, Foley Enterprises,
Austin, TX. He can be reached
at 800/623-7285.

Info Center

VIDEOS AND LITERATURE FOR THE GREEN INDUSTRY

Got turf problems?...Then get the new pocket guide, "Turfgrass Problems: Picture Clues and Management Options," from the Natural Resource, Agriculture and Engineering Service (NRAES). The guide is 214 pages and costs \$24.95 plus shipping and handling/sales tax. Order the book from the NRAES, Cooperative Extension, 152 Riley-Robb Hall, Ithaca, NY 14853-5701.

Spindle assemblies...for walk-behind and riding mowers abound in Stens' new 2001 catalog. The selection includes replacement spindles for AYP,

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Lock up seed purchases: higher prices on the horizon

BY RON HALL/
SENIOR EDITOR

SALEM, OR—If you're anticipating a lot of seeding work this fall and next season, consider buying your seed soon.

Unfavorable growing conditions in prime turf growing regions of the United States will cause seed prices to rise but there will be enough seed of almost all species and varieties to meet your needs. As of this writing you could still find perennial ryegrass seed at bargain prices due to a large carryover from the previous year's harvest, but that will change.

"We overdid a good thing," says Mike Baker, general manager at Pennington Seeds' Lebanon, OR, facility. "You have a good thing going and it's awfully hard to know when to slow down, but the market tells you — and it did."

"We're looking at a 15% reduction in

yield in perennial ryegrass," adds Don Herb, president and general manager of Ore Gro Seeds, Inc., Shedd, OR. "When we get into May and June of next spring there could be little carryover of any quality seed at all."

Herb says that a combination of a mild, dry winter and several days of 90°-plus weather this past May as grass plants were pollinating caused the short crop in some production fields in the Willamette Valley.

"It certainly seems like a good bit of the carryover is getting used up for early shipment," adds Pennington's Baker.

Prices of Oregon-grown turf-type tall fescue seed will be stable but will rise because of a shortfall in the K-31 tall fescue crop, most of which is grown in Missouri.

Drought affected the dryland production of common Kentucky bluegrass, too. Instead of the anticipated 130 million-lb.

crop, marketers are looking at a yield of about 105 to 110 million lbs. For this reason, prices on these commons, most of which are used in mixtures, will rise.

"But, the proprietary varieties, which are grown on irrigated ground, are in good supply," says Glenn Jacklin, Idaho/Washington Manager Jacklin Golf. "Inventories should be stable and the quality looks very good this year."

"Adequate" is the prediction for most varieties of bermudagrass seed as well, says Pennington Seed's Russ Nicholson.

The take-home message from this year's turf seed harvest is a simple one: "Take care of all of your needs for spring 2002, and get it locked up because we might see some strengthening in price," says Tom Stanley, Southwest Sales Manager, Turf-Seed, Inc., Hubbard, OR.

People & companies

Environmental Industries



Law

named **Richard Sperber** President and Chief Operating Officer. The company also named **John T. Law, Jr., Ph.D.**, Director of Technical Services for the West Coast, and **Andrew J. Mandell** senior vice president and chief financial officer.

Bozzuto Landscaping Co., Greenbelt, MD, promoted

Bruce Leonard to area manager and **Randy Abshier** to vice president. The company also hired **Tom Hopkins** as area manager.

Dow AgroSciences LLC appointed **Martin Posset** turf and ornamental product communications manager, **Beau Miller** turf and ornamental market research manager, **Dan Loughner** field biologist, **Kerry Avirett** Texas sales representative, **John**

Price Ohio sales rep, and **Ray Miller** Florida sales rep.

Aventis Environmental Science's Chipco Professional Products group named **Joseph Grippi** sales representative for western Michigan and northern Indiana and **Scott Parker** sales representative for southern Indiana, northern Kentucky and central Illinois.

Oregro Seeds hired **Hagen Ledebor** as outside sales representative for the southwest.

The J. R. Simplot Company's Turf & Horticulture group

named **Steve Franzen** western region director of sales for its fertilizer division. **U.S. Lawns** added its 82nd franchise, U.S. Lawns of Simi Valley, CA.

Miramar Wholesale Nurseries



Smagacz

promoted **Kelley Smagacz** to purchasing manager and appointed **Debbie**

Binczewski controller.