

Ready to buy — don't get lazy now

Interested in investing in a franchise? Do your homework and "trust your gut instinct," says Charlie Elliot, general manager of The Bison Franchise Network, a Louisiana-based marketing organization. "If you go to see a franchiser and it doesn't feel right, you're probably correct," he says.

Check into the company's business track record and franchisee turnover rate, along with evidence of any lawsuits filed against the firm. "The company should also have enough cash in the bank to carry it through," says Elliot. Compare the pricing of the franchisers and what they offer. Find out which services you pay for and how much they cost over time.

"It's not like a stock where you call your broker and it either goes up or down. This is a life-changing decision," says Elliot. "I'm amazed at how lazy some people are when they look at franchises. If you're lazy when you look at a franchise, you'll be lazy when you run one. It takes hard work to run a franchise."

One of Weed Man's most vocal and visible proponents has been Phil Fogarty, Cleveland, OH, co-owner of one of the company's regional U.S. franchises. "As an independent, I could go all over town and make as many mistakes as I wanted," he says. "I paid for that freedom with a lot of missed opportunities."

U.S. Lawns, owned by Environmental Industries, Inc., Calabasas, CA, concentrates on attracting franchisees that provide full-service maintenance and application services for commercial accounts.

"Our model demands customer intimacy and service excellence," insists Hutcheson.

He believes the landscape maintenance marketplace is so huge that a quality operation can gain as much as 2% market share

in any sizable market and still return an acceptable profit to a franchise owner.

"We're working with the passion of the owner/operator and the support of a very large company," he adds. "That's hard to beat in a local market."

Along with the advantages of centralized

buying, franchisers also tout the efficiencies of special techniques or equipment.

For the Green Industry entrepreneur looking for support, there has never been more franchise choices. **LM**

— The author lives in Cleveland, OH, and is a frequent contributor to LM.

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Circle 123

Treat trees

Avoid hassles and ensure good-looking landscapes by staying aware of municipal tree ordinances

right

BY MIKE FITZPATRICK

Municipal tree preservation ordinances are a relatively new reality in the landscaping industry. All types and sizes of projects are affected — everything from simple landscaping on existing residential properties to huge subdivisions and commercial construction projects. As cities and suburbs continue to expand, homes and offices are being built in natural, wooded areas. Unfortunately, construction in these areas can cause extreme damage to trees, diminishing not only the land value but also its aesthetic appeal.

Growing popularity

People recognize that trees add value to residential and commercial property, and that's why tree preservation ordinances are also becoming increasingly popular.

Most real estate agents agree that a property with mature, healthy landscaping and trees can sometimes sell for 20% more. Mature trees are also an aesthetic asset because they make a property look stately and established. People enjoy having trees around them because they provide inviting shade and make an area more livable. And trees provide obvious environmental benefits such as absorbing pollution,



Home sites that contain mature trees command higher prices.

reducing land erosion, maintaining the water table and providing habitats and food for birds and other wildlife. If placed correctly, trees can even save on energy costs by helping cool or heat a building.

Assuring compliance

Tree preservation ordinances are designed to prevent tree loss and reduce damage during development, replace trees

continued on page 44



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*A recent survey indicates that 55% of consumers would switch from a company that doesn’t offer recurring payments by credit card to one that does (all else equal).



Saving natural areas with mature trees is good for communities.

continued from page 42

that are lost during construction, plant trees where none occurred previously, and maintain preserved trees after construction on residential and commercial property. Unfortunately, tree preservation ordinances vary from community to community, which can make it difficult and time consuming for you to assure compliance. The best way to approach this problem is to check with the municipality's forestry department before you begin landscape renovation on a site.

Since the majority of tree preservation ordinances require you to perform a tree inventory and prepare a preservation plan before beginning work on a site, it's worthwhile to hire a certified arborist to perform this inventory. The arborist can determine the species and size and number of trees, as well as which trees are healthy or diseased and what care they may need. Include a certified arborist in your planning meetings with the property owners and architect to ensure that the tree preservation plan is effective and practical.

After the municipality approves the plan and you have the appropriate permits, be sure the site workers know which trees need to be saved by marking the trees and explaining why the trees and their critical root zones are to be protected.

One complex project

In a recent project at Middlefork Farm, a planned housing development located north of Chicago, arborists not only had to follow the municipality ordinances but also the preservation requests of the property owners. While working with the developer and the government agencies, a tree

preservation plan was designed to provide an ideal residential community with an established neighborhood feel. Century-old oaks and hickories reside on the site, but since the trees hadn't received care for at least 15 years, many were being choked by invasive buckthorn, which had grown as high as 30 feet.

A significant challenge during the project was minimizing damage to the sensitive root zones of the site's 100-year-old oaks. During renovation or construction projects, the root zone is the part of the tree most often damaged. There are three primary factors that result in long-term damage to tree roots: soil compaction from machinery and materials, grade changes, and severed roots from improper trenching and excavating.

Have weekly field meetings

During the Middlefork Farm renovation project, a certified arborist participated in weekly field meetings with all contractors and equipment operators. The meetings helped the site workers understand the extensive root zones and how to preserve them. The workers also learned the appropriate techniques to protect the trees during construction, including how to fence off the area around the critical root zone and how to conduct supplemental watering, mulching and fertilization that will promote root growth.

To prevent soil compaction around the critical root zones, the certified arborist helped plan in advance all the construction roads, parking places, and equipment and material storage areas.

Where majestic oaks were once barely visible, there are now scenic woods, wetlands, fledgling savanna plants and more wildlife at Middlefork Farm. The work on the site has given the trees the greatest chance for long-term survival.

But the tree preservation work doesn't stop there. Now that the project is complete, it's necessary to monitor tree health continuously and implement complete ongoing tree care, including fertilization, mulching and pruning. Middlefork Farm is now more ecologically balanced and scenic than it has been in decades. Residents are willing to pay a premium for the beautiful surroundings, and have the satisfaction of knowing they live in a place that's a model for balancing development and tree and land preservation.

— *The author is a certified arborist with the Tree Preservation and Land Restoration Division of The Care of Trees.*

You can reach him at 847/394-4226 or

mfitzpatrick@thecareoftrees.com

Tough Jobs Demand Tough Equipment

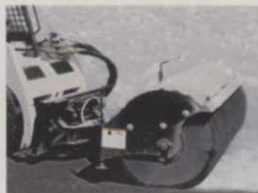


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Circle No. 125

Property at a glance

Location: Sylvania, OH

Staff: Sylvania Recreation Department

Category: Parks, Recreation Area or Athletic Fields

Total budget: \$560,500

Year site built: 1989

Acres of turf: 135

Acres of woody ornamentals: 1

Acres of display beds: 1

Total paved area: 15 miles

Total man-hours/week: 70

Maintenance challenges

- ▶ Maintain high quality turf despite high traffic
- ▶ Performing maintenance around activities
- ▶ Poor soil for athletic fields (heavy clay)

Project checklist

Completed in last two years:

- ▶ Installation of four new ball diamonds
- ▶ Planting of over 100 woody trees
- ▶ Installation of paved access paths

On the job

- ▶ Five full-time staff, 13 seasonal employees, three licensed pesticide applicators

Pacesetter Park

2001 PGMS Grand Award Winner for Parks, Recreation Area or Athletic Fields

Pacesetter Park in Sylvania, OH, gives "field traffic" a whole new meaning. With 25 game-only soccer, lacrosse and flag football fields, eight ball diamonds, two open-air shelters and 66 acres of practice facilities, maintenance facilities and a state-of-the-art playground, it's the epicenter of all recreational activity in this northwestern suburb of Toledo. In 2000, the entire facility averaged between 191,000 and 200,000 players, spectators and other community users.

Obviously, this intense traffic makes maintenance a challenge. Grounds workers have become experts in aeration, fighting compaction in soil that's heavy in clay. Mowing is performed three to four times a week at a height of 1 3/4 in. All work must be completed by 3 p.m. Monday through Friday, as evenings and weekends are reserved for games.

Pacesetter Park was the first recreational facility in Ohio to install the Toro Touchnet irrigation system, which works



Pacesetter Park's grounds crew members spend a good deal of their time lining and re-lining the numerous on-site athletic fields.

off a computer and satellites to allow pinpoint precision of watering cycles and easy troubleshooting. There are over 500 irrigation heads on the soccer facility.

PGMS

Landscape MANAGEMENT

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 2002 winners will be named at the annual meeting of the Professional Grounds Management Society in November. For more information on the 2001 Awards, contact PGMS at:

720 Light St. • Baltimore, MD 21230 • Phone: 410/223-2861. Web-site: www.pgms.org



Mowing has to be scheduled around the park's numerous athletic activities.



With over 135 acres of turf to care for, grounds crew members must schedule jobs appropriately and complete them before 3 p.m. each day.



It's cleanup time

BY CURT HARLER

Will the motors of future brushes and mowers be powered by zinc and air?

It's not as far-fetched as you might think.

Briggs & Stratton, Milwaukee, WI, is working with a Carlsbad, CA, firm called Metallic Power (MP) to develop power systems based on zinc/air fuel cells.

While they require less power, cell phones using zinc/air batteries are commonplace. Some power backup systems for personal computers also use zinc/air. In fact, most applications between one and 10 kilowatts are candidates for zinc/air.

The zinc/air system is a completely closed-loop system with nothing to add, nothing to discard, and nothing wasted, the companies say. The cell is safe and three times as energy efficient as gasoline. Californi-

ans will be happy to hear that the system reuses the zinc over and over, is quiet and completely zero emission — so CARB standards are no hassle. "It can be used indoors," says Jeff Colborn, CEO of MP.

The demo unit MP delivered last year fulfilled Briggs & Stratton's test requirements. The companies say they hope to work on prototype projects in the future.

The system consists of a zinc-recycling unit as well as zinc/air fuel cells. Zinc pellets one millimeter in diameter combine with oxygen from the air in the presence of an electrolyte, forming zinc oxide — the same stuff used in skin creams and sun block.

The recycling unit uses wall electricity to convert the zinc oxide back to fresh zinc, which is then recombined with the electrolyte to be reused.

The companies figure the cost of zinc/air to be comparable to gas-powered units.



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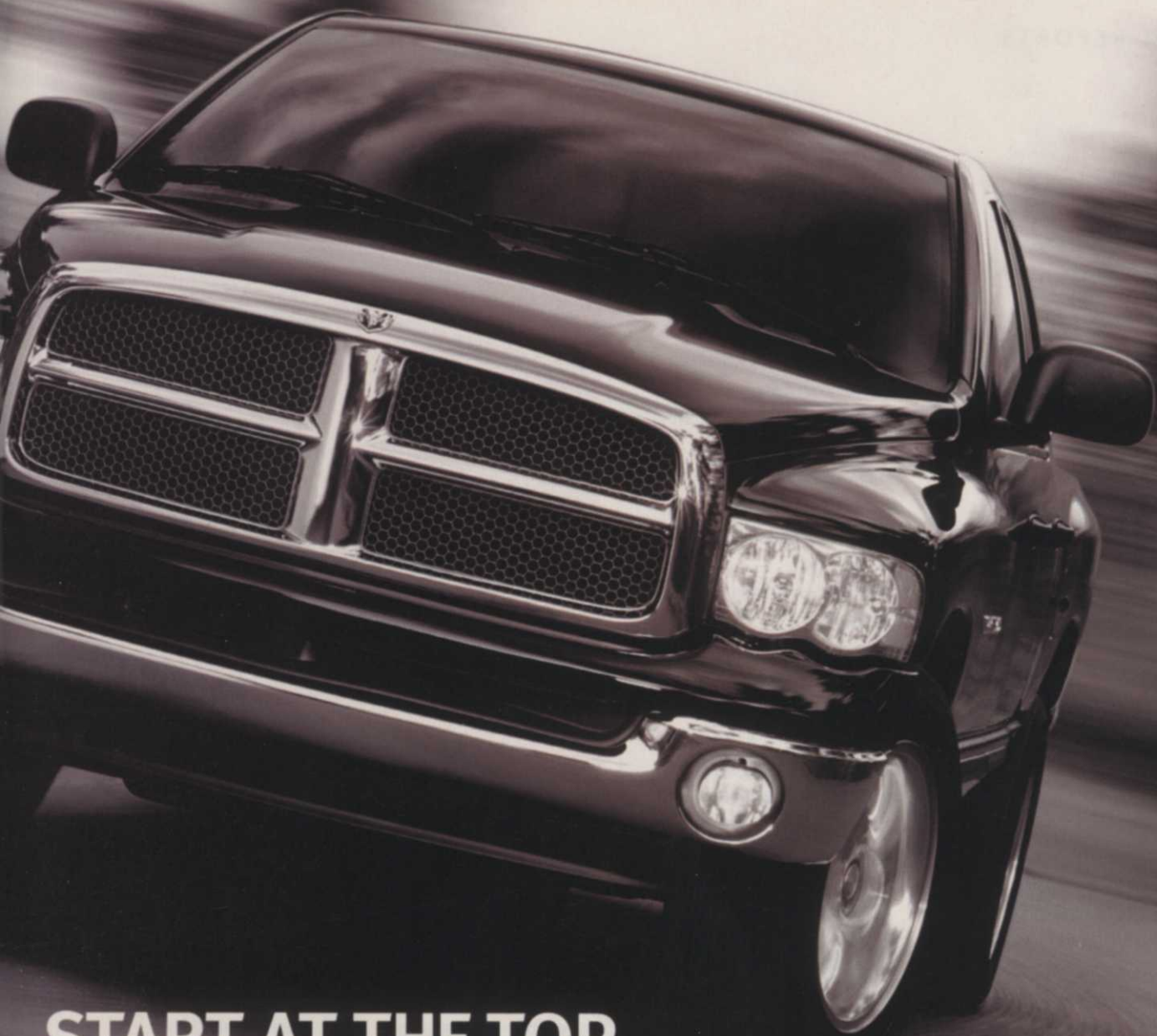
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continued on page 50



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continued from page 48

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Don't bristle over sweepers

On the job, the question is not "paper or plastic?" Rather, it's whether bristles of nylon, rubber, or steel do the best job for removing debris.

David Vick, general manager of sales at RedMax, recommends using a nylon brush for cleaning grass clippings, wood chips, sawdust, mulch or other debris from sidewalks.

Rubber paddles work better to clean debris from new construction sites or for removing light snow from walks or driveways. Likewise, the rubber version should be better for cleaning up aeration plugs or smoothing sand traps.

Some manufacturers are moving from steel bristles to polypropylene bristle sets. "We have used steel bristles but found them to wear and take a set at a much faster rate than the poly," says Dwayne Shaufler of Sno-Way. He notes the poly strips can be rotated periodically from front to back for even longer life.

Keep in mind that bristle brushes are more gentle on new seedings. If the job involves rock picking or heavy debris, however, go with steel.

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continued on page 52