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The logo features a stylized green leaf icon to the left of the text "Roundup PRO". "Roundup" is in a bold, black, sans-serif font, and "PRO" is in a larger, bold, blue, sans-serif font. Below "PRO" is the word "Herbicide" in a smaller, black, sans-serif font.

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Students to the rescue

This grounds manager finds that student help is often the answer to a strapped budget and a tight schedule

BY JASON STAHL /
MANAGING EDITOR

Last winter is one that Ken Stanton, Grounds Supervisor of Grand Valley State University in Allendale, MI, would like to permanently erase from his mind. It seemed his crews had to wage a war against snow and ice on a daily basis. If it hadn't been for Stanton's cache of student help, the hard winter might have broken his crews.

"They were very helpful in having the academic buildings ready for early morning classes, on mornings when snow had fallen overnight," Stanton says. "They performed a specific task that would otherwise need to be covered by staff people working on overtime."

And that's exactly what student help does — it relieves budgets and the backs of an overtaxed grounds staff. Stanton devotes 10% of his budget to student wages, and it's well worth it to him. The student workers do everything from string trimming around buildings and shrub beds to washing vehicles — any-

thing that eases the workload of the smaller, in-house grounds staff.

Off to work

The two areas where the student workers contribute the most are snow removal and trash pickup. After each home football game, a group of student workers cleans up the litter left behind in the stands. In coordination with the on-campus student employment office, this group signed a contract with Stanton that outlined their duties and responsibilities, and the amount they would be paid. Stanton sees that the group is

About GVSU

Grounds Supervisor:

Ken Stanton

Location: Allendale, MI

Budget: \$522,000

of students: 19,000

of full-timers: 9

of man-hours per week:
1,120 (in summer)



provided with a grounds department vehicle, backpack blowers, gasoline, and bags for emptying trash containers.

"This system has been in place for many seasons at GVSU and has proved to be a successful method of implementing student help," Stanton says.

A student group is also under contract to remove snow and apply salt to all of GVSU's academic building entrances and steps seven days a week for three months (December, January and February) from 5 a.m. to 7:30 a.m. The group is provided with instructions and maps, as well as grounds department vehicles, hand snowblowers, snow shovels and bagged salt.

Managerial challenge

Student workers may save grounds managers stress on the labor side of the job, but they pose a challenge on the managerial side. Training is crucial since some students either have no grounds experience or, worse, no work experience whatsoever.

"That makes it necessary to train them in some of the 'basics' of having a job, such as following instructions, working in a group with other people or individually, showing

up and being on time for work, and doing a good job while at work," Stanton says.

With this in mind, student grounds workers at GVSU go through a short orientation program prepared and administered by Stanton that's designed to acquaint them with the Facilities Services building, equipment operation and usage, safety procedures, and a checklist of do's and don'ts they're expected to follow. If

GVSU student help tasks

- ▶ Light mowing and string trimming
- ▶ Sidewalk and curb edging/trimming
- ▶ Litter pickup and trash can emptying
- ▶ Weeding and mulching
- ▶ Installing and watering annuals
- ▶ Assisting with tree and shrub plantings
- ▶ Washing motor pool vehicles
- ▶ Shrub bed maintenance
- ▶ Hand snow shoveling and applying salt

At left, GVSU Grounds Supervisor Ken Stanton helps a student start her blower. At right, a student root feeds a tree with liquid fertilizer.

these procedures aren't followed, the consequences can be harsh.

"Students who find themselves in a position where they're horsing around or are misusing the campus equipment or vehicles are asked to punch out and go home for the day," Stanton says. "Misuse of the campus equipment is grounds for immediate dismissal."

Stanton has learned a thing or two in his 25 years of experience in grounds management, and one of those things is that student workers need supervision. That's why, over the last two years, he has hired a student supervisor in the summer to help him with hiring, guiding students through the orientation process, and directly supervising the students.

"If the students aren't given good instructions and proper direction, they'll wander around and not accomplish much for you," Stanton warns. "That's why appropriate supervision of student workers is critical." **LMI**

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Tame the morning circus

Get your team off to a productive start with these simple-to-implement strategies

BY D. DOUGLAS GRAHAM



Time wasted represents lost opportunity in landscape and lawn service businesses. Every minute of wages paid to an employee not producing a service for a client is money forever lost. It's a double whammy

in that both the expense of the employee's wages and, more significantly, revenues that the employee could have been generating are lost.

Owners who build systems that reduce "unbillable" time run more efficient, profitable

operations. If you don't think your operation is as efficient as it should be, step back and take a critical look at it. Start by looking at the "morning circus," a notorious time waster for many operations.

A mess in the morning

This "circus" is generally defined as the madness that occurs when your office staff, managers and field employees all arrive at your business at the same time each morning.

Stop right there. Why does everybody have to arrive at the same time? A better idea — stagger the arrival times of your employees, including having your managers precede your production people by at least 15 minutes.

Another common and obvious time waster is inadequate or poorly planned vehicle parking areas, or the haphazard parking of trucks and trailers. Confusion reigns when trucks are being backed up, moved or rearranged before the day's work begins.

"The morning circus can kill you," says Joe Loyet of Loyet Landscape Maintenance, Inc.,



Joe Loyet

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JOHN DEERE

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St. Charles, MO. "In this business, you're working against the clock, so when people are milling around the coffee machine while their supervisors are trying to get organized, it takes a big chunk out of the bottom line."

Loyet, like many maintenance operators, learned to marshal his troops through a process of trial and error. His staff of 120 is split between two branches that work almost exclusively with commercial properties in the St. Louis metro area.

"Preparation is just as important as punctuality," Loyet says. "All the day's work orders are posted when the guys come in. We fuel the trucks the previous evening and re-

pair all equipment in advance. We keep backup equipment available, too.

"The crews take responsibility for much of this," Loyet adds. "Each takes care of his own lawnmower blades at the end of each day."

Tight organizational focus

In Loyet's tightly run operation, all maintenance employees arrive at the office at 7 a.m. and depart for their jobs no later than 7:15. There are no exceptions save for mechanical difficulties, disaster or sudden death.

Lawnscaping production supervisors and mowing production supervisors marshal the troops and get them on the road promptly.

"The branch managers get involved when this isn't done, and they take that responsibility very seriously," says Loyet.

The company also maintains detailed job tracking reports that indicate how long it should take to perform each job profitably, which shows employees that the company is seeking efficiency throughout the workday.

All of this is part and parcel with Loyet's tight organizational focus. Every contingency is covered, every job carefully mapped out, every conceivable problem anticipated in advance. Everyone on staff knows what he or she has to do to make the wheels roll.

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Snow game's 'midnight madness'

ERIE, PA — The opposite of the "morning circus" is the "midnight madness." If you're in the snow removal business, perhaps you can appreciate Peggy Allin's winter schedule.

Peggy is Vice President of Information & Human Resources for the Allin Companies, based here, and wife of snow push king John Allin. She's also the dispatcher for the Allin Companies' snow services that will account for slightly more than half of the landscape firm's \$2.9 million revenues this season.

During snow season (which sometimes begins in October and stretches into April here), Peggy's "day" begins at midnight. That's when the decision is made, during a snow event, to mobilize a small army of contract snow pushers.

Here's a timeline of the rest of her night:

12:15 a.m. — Call the area supervisors

and alert them to get their teams ready.

1:00 a.m. — Peggy arrives at the Allin Companies' headquarters and gathers the necessary production and route sheets, which are neatly stored in their appropriate slots within arm's reach of her desk in the dispatch office. She

arranges the paperwork neatly on a work area behind her desk.

1:15 a.m. — She calls the area supervisors to find out if any crew members are missing.

1:30 a.m. — Calls are made to find (or awaken) missing drivers.

2:00 a.m. — She starts putting together sidewalk clearing crews. She has a

total of 272 people on her list, and she keeps calling until she fills out the crews. (Not everybody is enthusiastic about pushing a snow shovel in a pre-dawn storm.)

2:30 a.m. — Sidewalk clearers arrive at company offices to pick up equipment

and route sheets. They have to fill out paperwork — their hours and the materials they use — after they clear their areas.

2:45 a.m. — It's time to call out the salt trucks. Allin's four trucks aren't equipped with plows; they just spread salt.

3:00 a.m. — Check with the area supervisors and find out how their crews are doing.

4:00 a.m. — Contact the sidewalk crew supervisor for a progress report.

5:00 a.m. — A final check on everyone to determine who's ahead of schedule and who still needs help.

6:00 a.m. — The backup dispatcher arrives at the Allin Companies.

7:00 a.m. — The remainder of the office staff arrives.

7:30 a.m. — Area supervisors begin asking for permission to send drivers home as their routes are completed.

By mid-morning, all of the paperwork from the previous night's efforts has been tallied and entered into the company's records. Peggy is home and sound asleep.

"We keep incredibly good records. We track everything," says John Allin.

— Ron Hall / Editor-in-Chief



Peggy Allin gets ready for the night shift.