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# Seed supply shortages likely

**Lock in orders of your favorite grass seed varieties. The buyers' market may be about to end**

BY SUSAN H. SAMUDIO, M.S.C.

**L**andscapers have had it good for the last several years in that grass seed has been abundant and prices moderate. But things are changing, and market analysts point to a coming turnaround in the grass seed industry. For the first time in five years, there will likely be an undersupplied market. Your favorite grass may become hard to find this summer.

#### **Acreage slashed**

Throughout the Pacific Northwest, grass farmers have suffered losses and oversup-

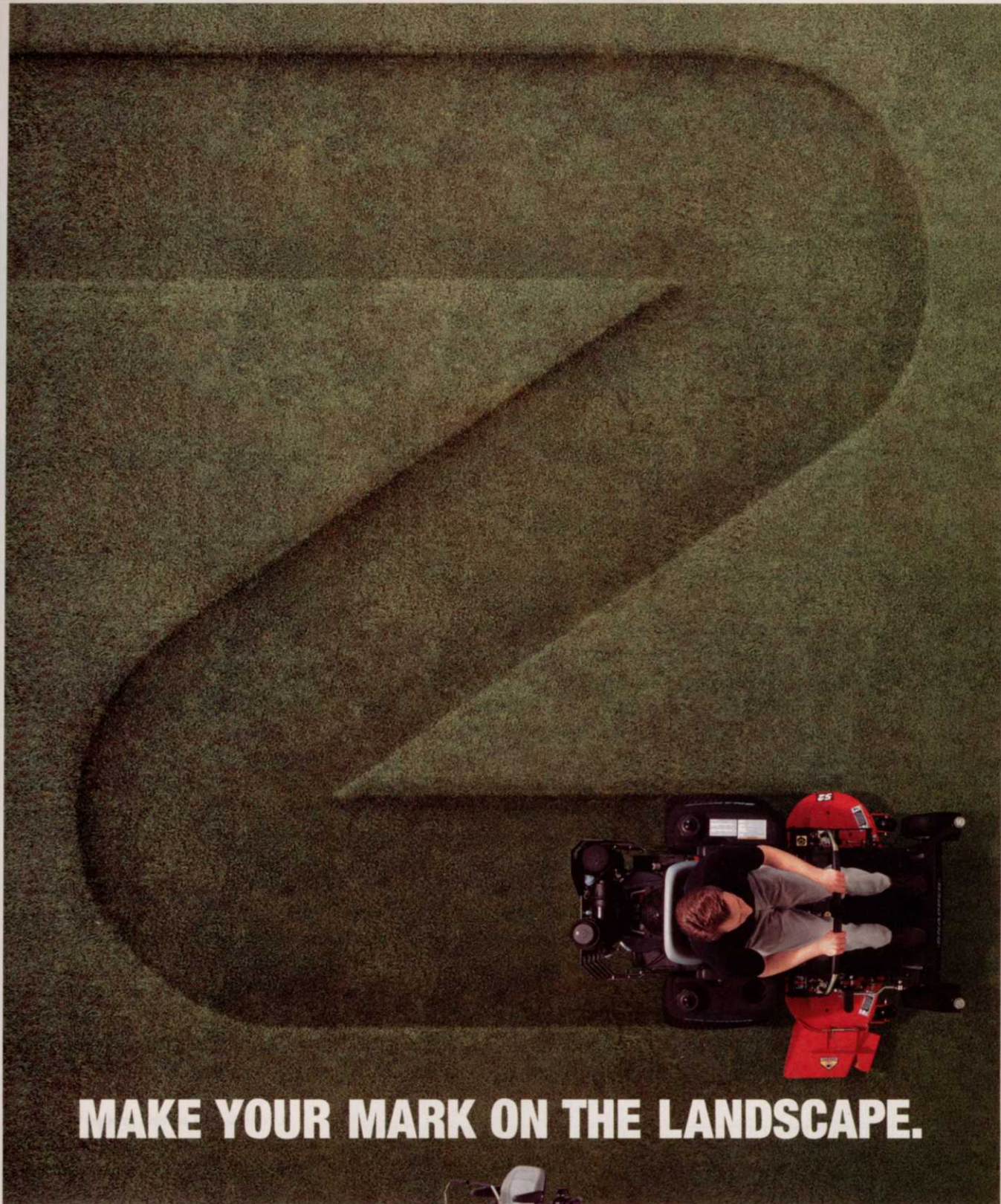


The author in a spring-plowed bluegrass field on the Rathdrum Prairie.

ply for the last three years. They've recently taken thousands of acres of grass seed out of production. Today's acreage for many companies is at levels not seen since the 1980s. The reasons behind the mass plow-out are varied. But for the end user, it spells spot shortages of popular varieties and the possibility of higher prices.

Many factors affect the seed supply: competition between grass and other crops for production, fall weather, field burning, bankruptcies and crop carryover, to name a few. Low seed prices and abundant supplies have left most grass seed growers and companies barely breaking even. To reduce the oversupply and make farming more profitable, production on almost every turf

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species has been cut as contracts run out on old acreage.

When grass prices are high, seed farmers often put as many acres back into grass as they take out. However, with the way prices have been the last few years, other crops like wheat, oats or clover appear more lucrative. Therefore, seed farmers are increasing their acreage of these crops and plowing their grass seed fields.

**Balancing the ryegrass crop**

Perennial ryegrass has had one of the biggest plow-outs. Oregon's perennial ryegrass acreage in the certification program dropped over 13,000 acres from 76,435 acres between 2001 and 2002 (below). Older fields have continued to be removed since last summer's harvest. Steve Rusconi, Simplot Grower Services Representative, says, "At a minimum, I expect a 15% reduction in perennial ryegrass supplies for 2003." Expect to pay more for perennial ryegrass this year — prices have already begun to go up this spring.

Leah Brilman, Director of Research at Seed Research of Oregon, also predicts a short ryegrass crop, adding that the perennial ryegrass carryover was gone by early spring.

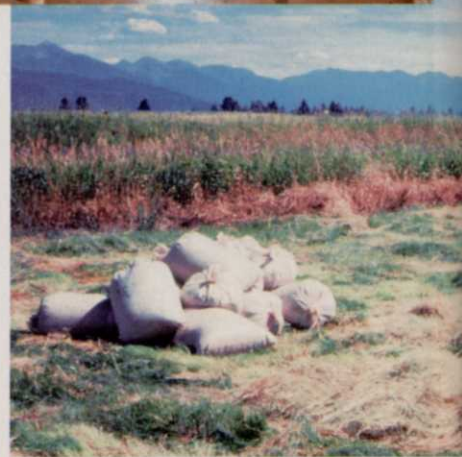


Bagged seed in Jacklin Seed's Post Falls, ID warehouse.

Similar reductions occurred with the fine fescues, which dropped 7,000 acres from 23,765 acres from 2001 to 2002. Nevertheless, seed supplies are expected to remain about the same as last year for the fine fescues, and prices should remain stable. Production of the bentgrasses has also remained about the same.

Tall fescue production in Oregon increased by 7,600 acres to 115,401 acres between 2001 and 2002. The new National Turfgrass Evaluation Program tall fescue trial planted in 2001 was the main reason for this increase. Since the 2002 harvest, however, tall fescues have joined the plow-out frenzy.

"I have heard several estimates that indicate over 50,000 acres of grass seed production has been planted to soft white wheat," says Gale Gingrich of the Marion County OSU Extension Service in *Seed Today* magazine.



Expect an adequate seed supply even with the plow-outs, since there was a large carryover of this crop from 2002. Prices are expected to rise this fall, however. Older varieties should be readily available, but new varieties will probably be in short supply.

**Ky bluegrass sings the blues**

Big problems loom in the future for Kentucky bluegrass production. Field burning, which has been used for decades to stimulate Kentucky bluegrass seed production, is on the way out in Idaho. A total burning ban may go into effect within 18 months.

A coalition of several groups that includes environmentalists, health officials, tourism interests and concerned citizens have lobbied against grass field burning for several years. They may be able to get bills in the Idaho legislature passed this year.

Burning was banned in Oregon and Washington before 2000, but a ban on burning in Idaho poses a bigger threat to having bluegrass production in Idaho due to the climate and inability to do annual cropping.

**ACRES PASSED FOR OREGON SEED CERTIFICATION 2000-2002**



# Leadership insights

GROWING GREEN INDUSTRY LEADERS

SUPPLEMENT TO LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

## Show clients that you value their business

BY DAN FOLEY

- 1 Thank your clients.** Sincere words of thanks and appreciation are always welcomed by a customer.
- 2 Be the "best cost" provider.** Employ the best practices and use the best equipment. Don't over-spend your customer's money. Do the job right the first time. Don't penalize customers with extra costs because of your internal errors. "Value engineer" the work with your clients to maximize results.
- 3 Be empathetic and considerate.** Think like a customer, and understand the client's situation and mindset. Implement the "partnership" approach. Always think "win/win."
- 4 Be professional.** Participate in industry events to continually gain knowledge. Educate the customer. Suggest new ideas/improvements to our clients. Be proactive. Not only should you always conduct yourself professionally, your appearance should say "professional," too.
- 5 Embrace the "we" culture.** Avoid the "not my responsibility" syndrome. All of us are accountable for

delivering on our service promise for our customers.

- 6 See quality from the customer's perspective.** Consistently produce phenomenal results in the customer's eyes. Discover the client's desired results. Follow up with our Quality Judging program.
- 7 Ask for feedback, listen, and take action.** Develop and use customer surveys, and ask questions such as —How are we doing? Is there anything else you need?
- 8 Be reliable and consistent.** Under promise and over deliver. Meet deadlines. Communicate in advance if a deadline needs to be extended.
- 9 Be committed to training all of your staff.** Don't practice on customers.
- 10 Communicate. Communicate.** The best communication is face to face, but don't hesitate to use the phone, e-mail or newsletters either. Train crew leaders to deliver customer visitation reports on every site visit. Remember, communicate. ■

*Dan Foley is owner of D. Foley Landscape in Walpole, MA.*

### From the front lines

#### Train your employees on importance of service

To deliver exceptional customer service, every employee in every department from top to bottom must understand the importance of that service and buy into a company's efforts to achieve it.

Architerra, based in Indian Creek, IL, takes employee training seriously, but it wasn't until 2000 that owner Tracey Lester realized the need to train employees on how they relate to clients.

The company joined JP Horizons' Training Challenge program with a steadfast vision for success.

"We knew we would be faced with eye rolls and deep sighs when we pitched it to the bunch, only because we had tried things in the past but the follow-through was lost," says Lester. "We held firm to our commitment, and awesome things started to happen."

Crew leaders became more involved with clients, company communication strengthened and employees developed training ideas. New excitement and leadership was prevalent throughout the company.

Architerra has created a training circuit to let employees know how they can improve and grow within the company. Employees gain confidence in their skills and their potential, and crew leaders gain trained individuals.

"This program will help us obtain our main goal, which is to provide the best in client satisfaction, quality service and overall performance," Lester says. ■

"There are two primary choices in life: to accept conditions as they exist, or accept the responsibility for changing them."

—Dr. Denis Waitley



# Running LAPS

BY JIM PALUCH / PRESIDENT JP HORIZONS

## In service, little things mean a lot

**T**he most significant opportunity for leadership development is allowing interaction between your team and your customers.

For some owners this becomes a scary proposition, especially the controlling owner who thinks only he can treat the customer the way it needs to be treated. I have watched many of these owners and often thought they would be better off allowing their employees to talk with the customer. The opportunity to interact with clients can have a magical effect on the company through developing leaders, enhancing relationships and increasing profits. Client interaction is simple when the process is understood.

Bob Coulter, past head of people strategy for Club Corp. and now a key program developer for JP Horizons, talks about customer interaction in a three-step process. Following are highlights that your leaders can implement to add to your customer relationships.

**1 THE WARM WELCOME** – Teaching how to say hello, extend a handshake and look the other person in the eye is the foundation of this step. Pay attention to how people greet each other. The individual that has true leadership potential knows these basics. Follow up with simple courtesies that, unfortunately, the client often does not hear from a contractor or vendor, such as: “Mrs. Smith, thank you for taking the time to meet with us on this pre-construction meeting. The next half-hour will certainly help in the overall success of your landscape.” In a training session, create a list of warm welcome opening statements and continually

practice them in foreman meetings and training sessions.

**2 THE MAGIC MOMENT** – Magicians are masterful at doing the unexpected. Magic moments in customer service are those unexpected things that will stick in clients’ minds, keep them talking about you, and most importantly, telling someone about your company. A magic moment can be a foreman presenting a computer-enhanced “after picture” of a key focal area in a pre-job walk through. It could be asking whether the client minds if you take notes so you capture the important details. It can even be picking up a piece of trash or snipping a branch during a site visit, just to emphasize your attention to detail and quality. Creating and role playing magic moments and asking in company meetings, training challenge sessions or production meetings who created a magic moment will bring an awareness in those individuals with the potential to be leaders.

**3 THE FOND FAREWELL** – As contractors, this fond farewell stuff may sound a bit mushy, but rest assured, the fond farewell is what will bring the audience to its feet. It is based on the ability to smile, shake hands and make eye contact. A parting statement that creates confidence, ensures follow-through and continues to develop positive feelings from the client toward the employee and the company is the grand finale to this magical performance. A parting statement such as: “Mrs. Smith, with the input you have given me, the expertise of our crews and the detail

*Continued on page 3*

### BOOKSHELF



“Growing Dreams,” by Jim Paluch, is full of content and practical ideas as it systematically introduces the concepts of organizational excitement, a blueprint for every owner to use to energize their company and team. \$11.96 (plus tax for Ohio residents) and \$3.95 for shipping and handling.

“‘Growing Dreams’ is full of basic information put in a usable form. Anyone can grasp the ideas and put them to use immediately.” – Don Hartwell, President of Spruce Lane Farm, Calgary, Alberta

“Your chapter about Keeping The Good One reminded me of one of my key words for our best team members – “She or He is a real KEEPER” When it’s all said and done, it’s all about our people and you obviously get that. ‘Growing Dreams’ was a great read, a wonderful perspective for many of our processes and what a great operational blueprint for landscape businesses everywhere!” – James Martin, President of James Martin Associates, Vernon Hills, IL

“Just like Oscar and Curtis, I began at an early age mowing lawns around the neighborhood. I knew as a very young boy that I wanted to make horticulture my profession. My passion for pleasing customers and being successful has always dominated my life. I found so many things in this book that I could relate to. I’ve shared the book with many of my customers and all of my staff. This book is a “must read” for everyone who wants to be successful in the business world.” – Jay Mears, Plant Center Manager of Lancaster Farms, Suffolk, VA

## Leadership Insights Q&A

**Q** How can the industry focus leaders on delivering quality to the customers?

**A** "It is the value and focus the organization places on quality that determines the focus of its leaders. If profits and other issues are more important, then the company's quality to focus will follow." — *Bob Franey, Total Landscape Inc., St. Louis, MO*

"Identify what customers want. Look at where we as leaders have our companies doing the right thing and where we are weak and why. Once you know that, plan and implement the improvements." — *Mike Leuders, Leuders Environmental Inc., Needham, MA*

"The best tool I have found for keeping our leaders focused on the customer is a business plan that allows them to keep score of the customer's satisfaction. We know once we have a customer for three years they are ours for the long run. New sales are a must, and of course we track that, but we also look very hard at how the customer votes on our service with their renewal "ballot". — *Phil Fogarty, WEED MAN, Euclid, OH*

*Continued from page 2*

of this design, we will complete a project we all will be proud of. Thanks, and please call or e-mail if you have any questions." Allowing your foreman and crew people to develop statements like this, practice them in group settings and leading discussion on how clients will feel hearing them will produce a magical transformation in your future leaders.

One last thought on this "Warm Welcome, Magical Moment, and Fond Farewell" concept. It can work the

same incredible magic in relationships between employees, departments, peers, associates, and most importantly our families. ■

*Jim Paluch and the JP Horizons team, through decades of combined experience in business, bring people solutions to companies through innovative training, creating compelling visions and systematically growing leaders. Contact them through their Web site at [www.jp horizons.com](http://www.jp horizons.com).*

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Superior customer service should always be a company's top priority, regardless of location and clientele.

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Participating in ALCA leadership leads to lasting relationships.

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Husqvarna President Dave Zerfoss explains how delegating can help companies discover new leaders.

#### 7 How did we do?

Utilizing surveys to gauge customer satisfaction helps companies keep clients front and center.

### TRAINING TIP

Evergreen Lawn in Michigan gave disposable cameras to its crews and asked them to take pictures of high-quality and poor-quality work. Most of the pictures returned were of high-quality work, and the crews were able to see everyone's perception of quality. Some things that crews do that are not part of their services make a property look high quality, such as edging asphalt, washing trash cans, making sure the owner's newspaper is on their step, and so on. Sharing perceptions of quality opened the minds at Evergreen Lawn to greater performance. (*From The Training Challenge by JP Horizons.*)

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Vizmeg Landscape, Inc.  
Waterloo Landscaping  
Western Lawns, Inc.  
Wilson's Garden Center  
Yard Smart

# Going the extra mile

Ultimate Services and Allen Landscaping service high-end clients on opposite coasts. They provide a study in contrasts with a common goal – superior customer service.

BY CHERYL HIGLEY

**H**is phone rings at 9 p.m. on a Saturday. On the line is a distraught client who can't sleep because a bee is on her sun porch. His only choice is to go and capture the bee. Sounds like a tiny problem, but it's all in a day's work for John Chiarella, owner of Greenwich, CT-based Ultimate Services.

Chiarella's clients are demanding East Coast movers and shakers with big money, and his approach to customer service is tailored to meet their requests – no matter how unusual. That's why it isn't uncommon for a client unhappy that workers left footprints in her snowy backyard to expect Ultimate Services to refill the prints with snow.



**John Chiarella**

"My background is in horticulture, but you almost have to have a degree in psychology and psychiatry," Chiarella explains. "I don't know of anywhere else in the country where clients are this demanding. You have to be able to deal on their level, which is why no matter how bizarre of a request or how expensive it might be, you just do it."

Head to the West Coast, and you'll hear a completely different story.

Jeff Allen, owner of Allen Landscaping in Santa Rosa, CA, understands that East Coast mentality; but it won't fly in the Valley, where laid-back flexibility rules the day.

"I've run into those types of situations, but I don't play. I'm a local, and we operate much more in the California lifestyle," he says.

His clients are accustomed to that

*Continued on facing page*



Ultimate Services crew members work together to create a landscaping masterpiece for a client. Owner John Chiarella says he and his employees share a strong work ethic that always puts the clients first.



Jeff Allen, owner of Allen Landscaping, in Santa Rosa, CA, takes a hands-on approach to ensure his clients' landscaping visions are realized.



# Building family ties with ALCA

BY CHERYL HIGLEY

**R**ick Doesberg has spent more than 30 years as a member of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America, including the last 20 in various leadership positions.

Doesberg, an ALCA past president, raves about the benefits he has gained from taking an active role in the organization.

"From a business standpoint, what we are and what we do we've learned from ALCA," he says. "By participating in leadership, I've developed management skills that have allowed me to be a better leader within my own company. I can't count the value I've gotten

from my relationship with ALCA."

A firm believer in the phrase "You only get out of something what you put into it," Doesberg says participating in ALCA events provides outstanding networking possibilities and is a good first step in moving toward a leadership role.



**Rick Doesberg**

Those interested in taking a more active role need only to identify a committee that interests them and call ALCA to volunteer.

ALCA leaders will meet at the Summer Leadership Meeting, being held in

## ALCA

Tremblant, Quebec, in June to set goals for the organization. According to Doesberg, that meeting is a perfect example of ALCA's lasting impact.

"Today's ALCA leaders have been coming to this meeting since they were children because their dads were in ALCA leadership," he says. "They're now in the family business and taking on leadership roles. These kids have known each other a long time, and now they're sharing that leadership together."

For information on becoming active in ALCA, visit the web site at [www.alca.org](http://www.alca.org). ■



**Jeff Allen**

*Continued from opposite page*  
attitude and even embrace it.

For example, one of Allen's clients was going into semi-retirement and wanted to work with the crews one day a week.

"For fun we sent her an Allen Landscaping shirt and hat and said if she wanted to work with the crew she had to wear it. And she did," Allen recalls.

For high-end clients, time is money, and both say making an efficient use of their clients' time is essential to creating long-term relationships.

"There is a tremendous amount of nurturing and trust that goes into this. And it takes a long time to develop that type of relationship," Chiarella says.

Allen agrees: "People's time is valuable, and getting time from them to educate them and show them what we're doing is critical. Communication is a big part of the relationship. We let them know our thoughts, but we understand the ultimate choice is theirs. We're in this for the long haul, and we make that clear."

Handling high-end clients takes a special knack, but both agree one constant that transcends locations and checkbooks is strict attention to outstanding customer service.

"Our motto is 'We Service the Client.



**Ultimate Services offers a unique aviary department, with beekeepers who raise bees that are used to pollinate clients' flowers and harvest the honey.**

Period.' Regardless if your customer is paying you \$500 or \$50,000, you have to carry the same mentality when it comes to customer service," Chiarella says. "The numbers are different, but the quality and service we deliver is the same. Now matter how difficult the clients are, service them with a smile and don't take anything personally. In the end, it's all worth the effort." ■



# By the numbers

BY DAVID ZERFOSS / PRESIDENT HUSQVARNA

## Delegation as a leadership skill

**D**uring my many years in the Green Industry, I've been privileged to work with hundreds of landscape contractors in various capacities, and I have developed a great admiration for those of you working in the field. You work hard, you take pride in your work and you are open to new ideas to grow your businesses.

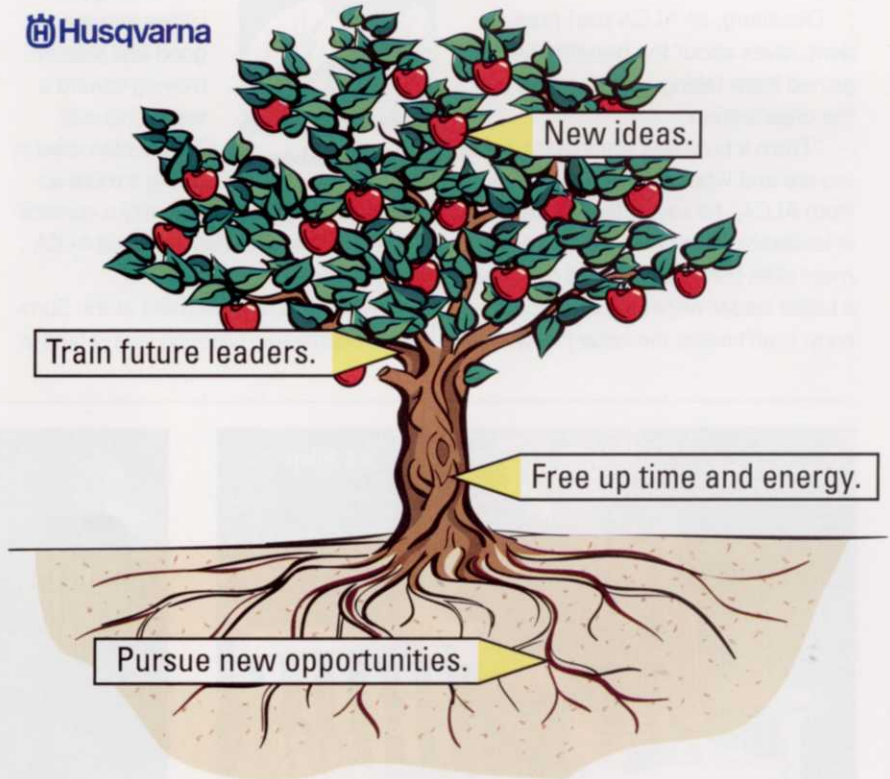
Why do you put in those long hours? If you're like me, you're trying to build something for your family and invest for a rewarding retirement. To accomplish this, you have to encourage breakthrough thinking among everyone in your company and also learn to delegate effectively to prepare your company for the future.

Delegating is one of the most overlooked keys to business success. It is also one of the most difficult skills for business owners to cultivate. You built your company from the ground up. Everything your company has achieved up to this point has your blood, sweat and tears all over it. It's difficult to let go and take even a small step away. But your company's future depends on your ability to let a few things go. Without effective delegation, your company will cease to grow and will eventually begin to fall behind.

We all know the obvious benefit of delegating tasks and responsibilities. Delegating spreads the work out and helps you do more with less. Just as a growing tree must send out new branches to support its new leaves and fruits, you too must be willing to let your company broaden its reach and reap new rewards in its own way.

There is another, less obvious benefit to effective delegation. By thoughtfully delegating assignments, roles and

 Husqvarna



tasks to others within your company, you have a unique opportunity to cultivate your company's future leaders. Going back to the tree analogy, think of this as the thoughtful pruning, fertilizing and care that enables a tree to become stronger, more resistant to adversity and ultimately more productive. When you let your employees stretch their abilities and try new things, you give them valuable, on-the-job-training that will enable them to become strong and effective leaders in the future. You also empower them to be your company's new "branches," leading your company toward new opportunities for growth and success.

Learning to delegate effectively will also make you a stronger leader. We've

all heard the adage about a chain being only as strong as its weakest link. When we try to do everything ourselves, we often become our weakest links – overworked, burned out and lacking fresh insights. On the other hand, when we delegate and nurture, we fuel our companies with fresh perspectives and ensure that each link in our chain is as strong as the next.

Look around your organization. Who has leadership possibilities? Begin to delegate projects to these new leaders and encourage breakthrough thinking. Continue to develop and nurture them through their growth process, and watch your business grow to new heights. ■

# Survey keeps clients front and center

BY CHERYL HIGLEY

Loorne Hall, owner of Western Lawns in Oklahoma City, OK, wants to know what his customers think. Three years ago, he launched a customer survey to gather that feedback – for better or worse.

“Some customers are good at letting us know how we’re doing. Others we never hear from. But we wanted to know what all of them are thinking about Western Lawns,” Hall says.

Each month, approximately 200 sur-

veys are sent at random with billing statements. The goal is to survey each customer at least once a year. The comprehensive survey rates Western Lawns on the sales, service and administrative process on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest.

An account manager follows up immediately on any survey returned with a score on any line of less than 5 (did not meet expectations) or any negative comments. All surveys are summarized in the customer’s file for quick reference.

Filed doesn’t mean forgotten, however. Monthly reports are distributed

showing the average score for each line item and the total average score. The reports also show average scores from previous years, which gives Western Lawns a benchmark for improvement.

“Our goal was to know if we were just meeting or if we were beating our customers’ expectations,” Hall says. “It is important to measure the entire process. If you deliver good service but the sales process was poor or billing was wrong, the customer will be let down. Too often, people forget customer service is about the total experience.” ■

## Finding My Replacement Thrival Campaign

Thrival Campaigns were developed by JP Horizons as a simple tool to allow companies to help employees focus on a specific result that will be accomplished and then systematically define and follow through on the specific actions that lead to this result. The process develops focus, clear expectations, accountability and a motivated team through their accomplishments.

One concept discussed in the Leadership Jam programs was “Great leaders are always looking to replace themselves.” The following Thrival Campaign can be used to help leaders develop their replacements:

THRIVAL CAMPAIGN			
CAMPAIGN		SPECIFIC RESULT	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>			
	Action	Who	When
Dynamic Action 5:		—	—
Dynamic Action 4:		—	—
Dynamic Action 3:		—	—
Dynamic Action 2:		—	—
Dynamic Action 1:		—	—

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Company: \_\_\_\_\_

- **Campaign:** Finding my replacement.
- **Specific Result:** I have identified and prepared the individual that could fill my position requirements, allowing me the opportunity to grow and making my role more valuable with the company.
- **Dynamic Action 5:** I have a clear description of my next move, the skills to continue to develop and the replacement for my present position.
- **Dynamic Action 4:** I hold regular one on ones to coach my team through their thrivals and update the company on the progress.
- **Dynamic Action 3:** I have presented the team thrivals to my manager, discussed the candidates, reviewed a timeline for my growth and put it all into appropriate personnel files.
- **Dynamic Action 2:** I have met with my team one on one, reviewing the position description with them, discovering their interest and putting together a Thrival Campaign for their growth into the position.
- **Dynamic Action 1:** I have held a meeting with my department or crew to openly review my role and brainstorm what the position description should be. I have put their ideas on paper and back out to them.

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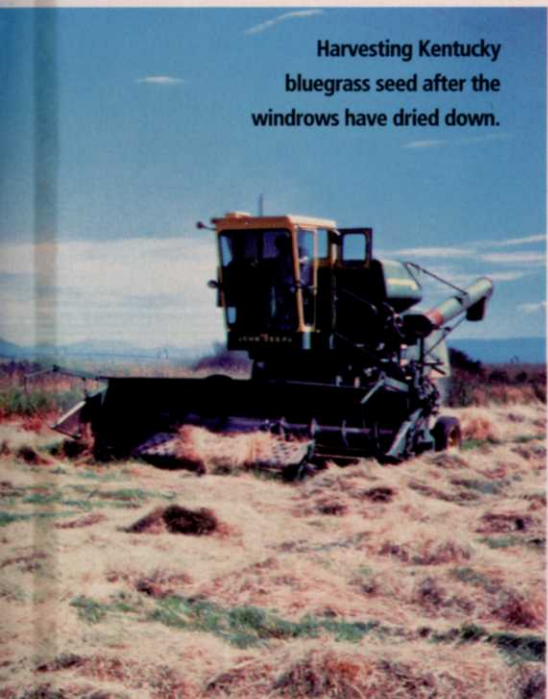
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Harvesting Kentucky bluegrass seed after the windrows have dried down.



Without this tool, most Kentucky bluegrass cultivars have greatly reduced yields. The loss of field burning and moving production to higher-priced irrigated land is making Kentucky bluegrass production costs increase. As with the other species, farmers are switching to other crops as contracts run out.

"Bluegrass acreage is way down in the Basin this year," says Dave Johnson, Simplot Grower Representative in the Columbia Basin of Washington. "There's probably only half as much acreage as two years ago." He expects average yields on the 2003 crop but notes increased weeds.

Last fall was very dry throughout most of the Northwest. The National Climatic Data Center determined the three-state region of Oregon, Washington and Idaho had below normal precipitation in nine of the 12 months in 2002, and that a short-term drought lasted from May to December. This affected the after-harvest greenup on grass fields and the effectiveness of some of the fall herbicides used to clean the fields.

## PLS means value in seed buys

To be a savvy consumer, compare the cost of pure-live seed (PLS) per pound between lots. Purchases based on PLS ensure that you obtain the most viable seed for your money.

As an example, let's say Lot A has 98% purity, 85% germination from a seed test, and sells at \$0.60 per pound. Lot B has 85% purity, 80% germination, and sells at \$0.55 per pound. Which is the best buy? To calculate the cost per pure live seed, you would use purity multiplied by the germination and then divide by the cost per pound. Using this formula, Lot A actually costs \$0.72 per pound of PLS and Lot B costs \$0.80 per pound. Lot A with the higher price and quality is the better buy.

"Many plow-outs have been on the non-burned areas, including many that had poor fall greenup because of poor moisture," says Steve Bateman, Simplot Grower Representative on the Camas Prairie in Idaho. "The farmers are just taking them out since the seed yields won't be there. Bluegrass production in the state of Idaho is down about 20,000 acres."

Predictions from Kentucky bluegrass production areas all point to a reduced supply of both common bluegrass and proprietary varieties, which will make it harder to obtain good quality seed lots. Prices are expected to go up as this becomes more evident.

The dry fall in 2002 also created problems in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Rusconi says that about half of the new perennial ryegrass plantings and some of the three-year-old fields look weak. Growers are doing their best to push the plants by adding fertilizer. Many will also use growth regulators this spring to enhance seed yields. Brilman adds that the dry fall may affect the tall fescues more than the perennial ryegrasses since they aren't as resilient. She expects the tall fescues to have smaller heads and more light seed than usual.

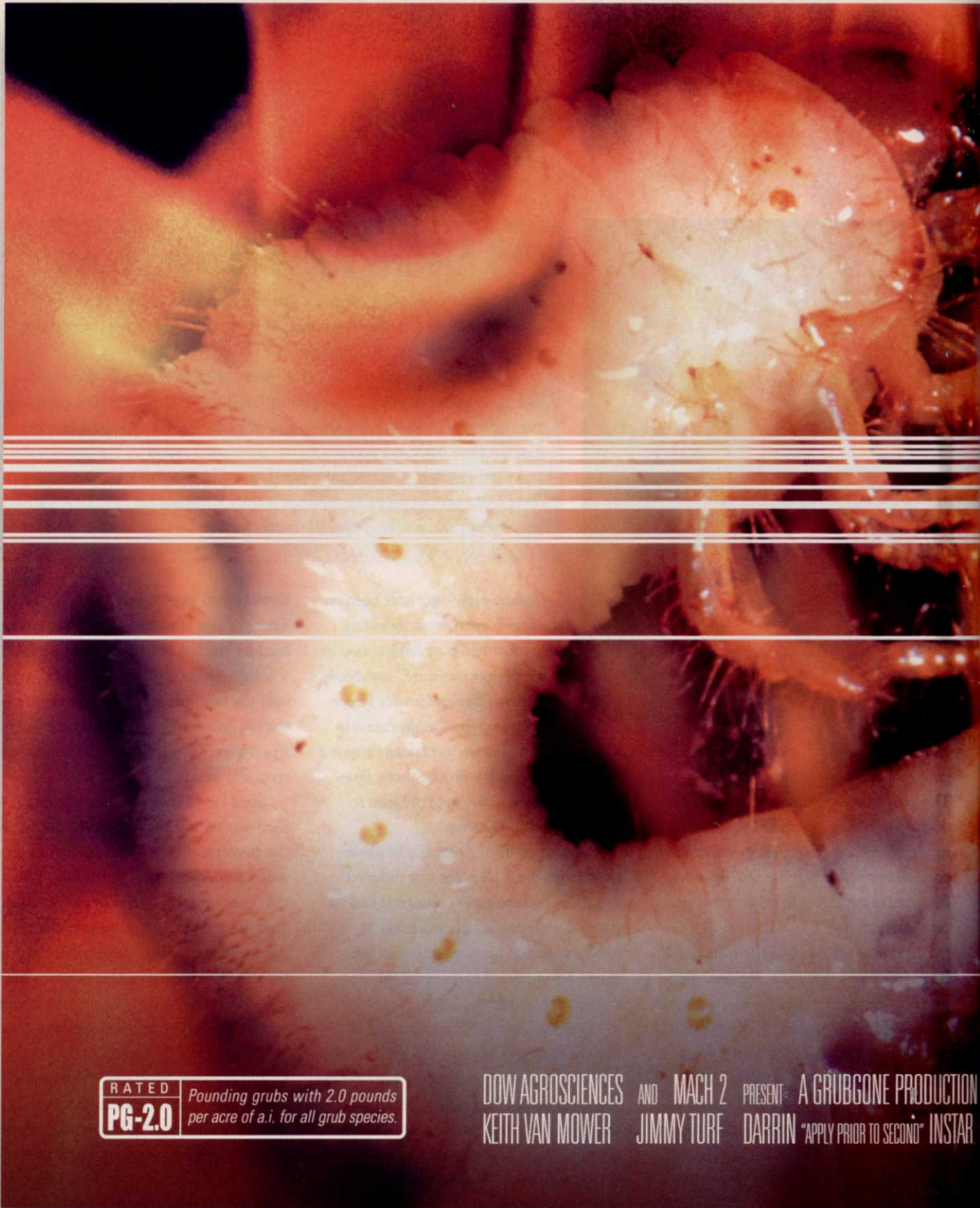
### Know what you're buying

Those of you who have only been buying seed for the last five to six years are used to a "long" market with plenty of seed, where only the best lots sell. This year there's less seed to go around, and consumers will pay a premium for seed lots with "zero other crop and weeds."

Seed labels include information on the seed purity, inert (plant chaff, etc.) and the percent of weed seed and other crop seed by species found in the bag. Lots that contain some weed or other crop seed are going to be more prevalent this year, especially with the dry fall reducing the effectiveness of pre-emergence herbicides. Before you buy, know which weeds will be a problem in your area and choose accordingly.

Expect spot shortages of some favorite varieties in both the perennial ryegrasses and Kentucky bluegrasses. Adjust your seed purchase plans, especially on newer varieties. Contact your supplier early for bookings, or have alternative varieties in mind when you're ready to purchase seed.

— *The author works for J.R. Simplot/Jacklin Seed. She can be reached at 208/777-6152 or [ssamudio@simplot.com](mailto:ssamudio@simplot.com).*



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**MACH 2 PRESENTS**

# MAX POWER 2: DELIVERANCE DAY


from the Director of *"More Decimation, Same Dollar"*

*No more prayers for rain, baby.*



SARAH HUNT FILM "MAX-POWER 2" THE CHAFER TWINS SVEN "EUROPEAN" CHAFER MARIO "MASKED" CHAFER  
RAY JUNE BEETLE AS HERSELF MUSIC BY LEPIDOPTERA CO-PRODUCERS SCOTT "ORIENTAL" BEETLE AND DARA "JAPANESE" BEETLE

**Maximum power for  
season-long grub control.**

 Dow AgroSciences

**MACH 2\***  
Specialty Insecticide

# Summer pond *dreams*

**This maintenance program will increase your customers' enjoyment of their special water feature**

BY JEFF RUGG / MLA, ASLA

**H**ere's what your customers envision when you're installing their pond: the murmur of water over smooth boulders, neon blue-green flashes of dragonfly wings, a tranquil pool of water dotted with red and yellow water lily blossoms, and colorful birds singing in the surrounding ornamentals.

Here's what your clients aren't thinking about: the maintenance required to keep their visions of the water garden alive. That will be your job.

But don't fear. It's not difficult if you follow the basic plan outlined in this article. And it can (and should) be profitable.

The maintenance will be essentially the same whether the pond is a basic water garden with plants and fish or a deep koi pond with no plants at all. That's because the biological ecosystems of all pond or water gardens are essentially cold-blooded. The life cycle of every organism, from bac-

teria to the largest cypress tree, is tied to the temperature of the air and water. Timing is the key to performing all maintenance chores pertaining to the plants, fish and other animals, filters and water. Maintain ponds on a thermometer basis, not by the calendar.

As the water temperature rises from 50° F to 70° F, begin preparing the life within the pond for active growth. This includes the fish if there are any.

#### **Keep tabs on water temperature**

When the water temperature approaches the mid-50s, consider changing the water in the pond. That's the temperature when the water from a hose tap or well is about the same as the water in the pond. Don't change more than 30% of the pond water. If the pond contains fish, test the water for ammonia, nitrite, nitrate, pH, alkalinity and salt levels. Test the water to be used for filling or for water changes, also. The level of nitrates in tap water can be deadly to fish,







Take care of your koi (inset) properly and your experience with your pond will be that much more enjoyable.

but you won't know that until the fish are in bad shape, so test first.

Generally, the pond won't require a complete cleanout. Clean debris from around the pond's edge and then fill it back up, using water treatments as necessary to neutralize chlorine and ammonia.

Don't allow the pond to dry out or it will kill off most of the microscopic ecosystem components along with some plant roots growing in the gravel. An imbalance in the ecosystem allows algae to grow quickly.

Some trees such as oaks continue to shed leaves in the spring. You may need to clean the pond skimmer often if the leaf fall is particularly heavy. Remove all the leaves from the pond or else their tannin will make the water look like tea.

#### **Fawn over the fish**

Advise clients to begin feeding the fish as the water temperature rises above the mid-50s. Some food brands have more veg-

as the water warms. They can begin providing a food higher in animal protein when the water is in the upper 60s.

Advise them to feed the fish small amounts of food at one time, only enough the fish will find before it sinks or is caught in a skimmer. Smaller feedings will spread out the waste levels over time, and the bacteria will be able to keep up. Excess food promotes algae and higher levels of toxic ammonia. At colder temperatures, there are fewer bacteria available to consume the ammonia.

As the water temperature rises into the upper 60s, the fishes' immune system begins to strengthen. Even so, watch for signs of disease or parasites such as white patches, white spots and white edges on the fins and tail. Red streaks in the fins or on white areas of the body can be chemical or parasite problems. Red ulcerated areas are probably bacterial disease areas that can rapidly spread throughout the fish population.

Salt is the first treatment for most parasites on koi and goldfish. Three pounds of salt per 100 gallons of pond water will kill most pests. Since salt can damage plants, move the fish to a properly filtered holding tank for treatment. Use salt that is free of all additives such as anti-caking ingredients. Kosher pickling salt and sea salt for marine aquariums are best. Don't use water softener salt.

Koi and goldfish begin spawning when the water temperature rises to the upper 60s. They can overrun any plants during this activity, so use Aquamats or soft roping material if necessary. Eggs hatch in four to six days depending on water temperature. Most eggs and fry won't survive without special care. Be on the lookout for rising ammonia levels in a pond after spawning due to the increased activity of the koi and the decomposition of the eggs.

Frogs and toads may be attracted to

etable protein in the mix for cool-water feeding, following the natural pattern of food availability. Plant material like algae is available early in the season, and animal material like fish and amphibian eggs, insects, tadpoles and small fish are available

## POND MANAGEMENT

ponds as they look for places to breed. Male frogs and toads can create a nuisance by singing too loud for some clients, and it may be necessary to remove them.

Insects that have overwintered as larvae or pupas in the water will hatch and complete their life cycles as the water warms into the '60s.

### Green it up

Submergent plants may be added to the pond when the water temperature reaches the mid-50s, hardy shoreline plants and water lilies as it warms into the 60s. Begin fertilizing plants when the water is in the 60s. Divide and repot plants when they're just starting to leaf out or when the water is in the 60s.



Above is a healthy pond free of leaves. A simple fish net (inset) is handy for removing leaves. Left in the pond, their tannin makes the water look like tea.

Algae are a big pond maintenance problem. Because it can grow in colder water than plants and bacteria that compete with it for nutrients, it



**PLCAA Salutes...**

## Green Industry Community Service Volunteers



*"Getting up to push a spreader around a cemetery becomes an honor, not a chore. And we get a chance to make the lawn care industry shine in a way that you couldn't in any other way. It isn't about regulatory issues anymore, it's about how much value a piece of lawn can bring to the meaning of life for everybody."*

—Phil Fogarty, Coordinator of PLCAA's Renewal and Remembrance Program at Arlington National Cemetery

Each year lawn and landscape companies and industry suppliers from across the country dedicate their time, expertise and equipment to beautify Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. The Professional Lawn Care Association of America salutes these volunteers and sponsors for their commitment to honoring the men and women who fought for our country. For a list of past volunteer companies, contact PLCAA at 800-458-3466 or by e-mail at [plcaa@plcaa.org](mailto:plcaa@plcaa.org).

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