

Wouldn't it be fantastic if . . .

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

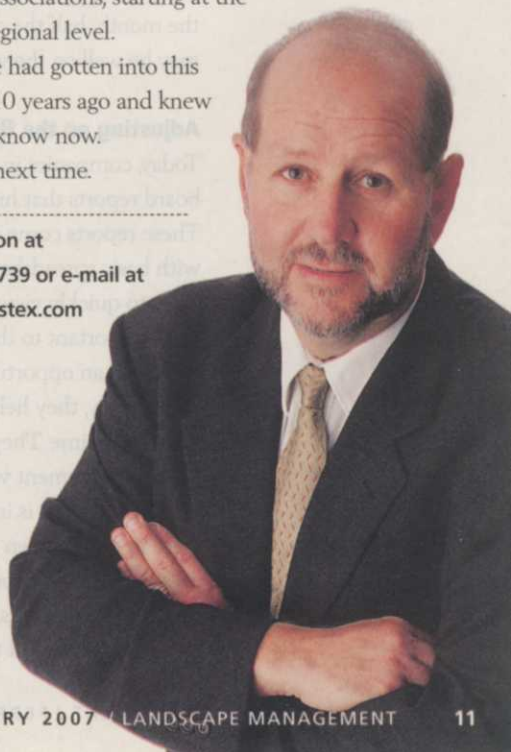
- ■ ■ those of us in the snow business got two to three inches of fluff every third day the rest of winter, or at least until spring starts when the landscape/lawn service cash begins rolling in again. (No snow on Sundays, of course.)
- . . . all of our workers spoke fluent English and had valid driver's licenses.
- . . . pest insects, weeds and diseases never developed resistance to the products we use. (Hhmm, what would this say about evolution?)
- . . . every general contractor stayed on schedule and dealt with their subs honorably, including promptly paying them for work performed.
- . . . customers recognized the effort and dedication it takes for landscape/lawn company employees to gain industry certification.
- . . . our legislators displayed more common sense and less politics on the immigration issue, meaning passing measures to secure our borders and instituting workable temporary guest workers programs.
- . . . these same lawmakers put up the necessary, money, manpower and technology in place to make this happen, not only on our borders but at the overburdened administrative centers where guest workers are vetted and their applications processed.
- . . . our biggest business competitor was also a good friend.
- . . . every employee showed up for work on time every day. And none of them ever showed up hung over.
- . . . more of us got involved with programs, such as Project Evergreens GreenCare for Troop, Extreme Makeover and Habitat for Humanity.
- . . . we dramatically reduced the number of power equipment operator injuries and fatalities.

- . . . contracts were written in plain English and were easier to understand.
- . . . we could spend every weekend reuniting, recreating and relaxing with family and friends, even during May and June.
- . . . destructive hurricanes avoided Florida, the rest of the East and the Gulf Coast again this season.
- . . . there weren't so many different taxes to pay. And they weren't so high.
- . . . when disagreements arise, we would arbitrate first and litigate when all else failed.
- . . . customers followed our plant care instructions, especially irrigation.
- . . . mower blades never needed sharpening and vehicle tires never went flat.
- . . . we didn't have to worry so much about somebody trying to rip off our trimmers, skid-steer loaders and service vehicles.
- . . . every chemical applicator followed product label instructions and kept their application equipment clean and properly calibrated.
- . . . newcomers to this industry participated in industry associations, starting at the local or regional level.
- . . . if we had gotten into this business 10 years ago and knew what we know now.

Until next time.

Contact Ron at
216/706-3739 or e-mail at
rhall@questex.com

Wouldn't it be great if our biggest competitor was also a good friend?



These reports, if used consistently, can help companies manage the key drivers of their businesses real time.



Build a dashboard report

BY BRUCE WILSON

Too many companies look at their financials at the end of the month to see how they did. For even the best of companies that is a minimum of two weeks after the month is over and six weeks after it starts. Receiving the financial statement by the 15th of the month is typical.

When you are doing well, it's not a big problem. But when performance is marginal or profits are declining, you want to be able to do something about it. If you get your financial statement midway through the month, half the current month is over, and you may be well on the way to another weak month.

Adjusting on the fly

Today, companies in all industries are using dashboard reports that highlight key financial indicators. These reports come prepackaged or can be created with basic spreadsheet software. They allow managers to quickly view the critical data, the key drivers most important to their organizations. That gives managers an opportunity to adjust on the fly. If used consistently, they help companies manage their businesses real time. They provide a good idea where the financial statement will come in when it does arrive.

This concept is important to companies that operate in six or seven month markets. Often companies do more than one-third of their season sales in the first eight weeks. If those weeks are weak in terms of profit, and the whole year could be lost.

So, what information should the dashboard for a maintenance company contain? Start with:

- ▶ Weekly labor to budget either in hours, dollars or both
- ▶ Enhancement work billed per week
- ▶ Enhancement backlog
- ▶ Proposals given
- ▶ Proposals closed

Some companies have more indicators on their dashboards. Use information that's easily tracked and is actionable.

For instance, most companies can get labor reports with their payroll. If you are on a two-week pay cycle you may not be able to get dollars every week, but you still can get hours from time cards. If you know how many hours you have budgeted to spend, you can easily tell when you are over and make the necessary adjustment that next week to get back on track.

Tracking enhancement sales is really important to the bottom line. Whatever your enhancement crew size, you need to know how much work you need to produce to pay for that crew. That is why weekly billing is important. If you are not billing enough you know you need to cut people or increase the amount of work over the balance of the month.

So as you can see, this advance information can help you, as a manager, keep financial performance moving in a positive direction. All it takes is a weekly look at your dashboard.

— The author is a partner with entrepreneur Tom Oyler in the Wilson-Oyler Group, which offers consulting services. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.

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Walk out of your shop and back in again.
If you were a top candidate, would
you want to work here?



A better way to hire

BY BILL HOOPES

To win, you just can't allow yourself to hire losers. Focus hard on how and whom you hire. You simply cannot afford preventable turnover. Most causes of turnover are controllable. It begins with the selection process.

Recruiting tips

- ▶ **Improve the content of your classified ads.** Don't run ads for "lawn techs" or "landscape crew" unless that is what you want to hire. An ad that attracts a higher-grade candidate gives you something to work with. Start your ad copy with a grabber heading like "Great Green Industry Careers." Emphasize the opportunity to learn, succeed and grow on the job. In the copy, talk about working independently and outdoors. Emphasize your benefits and that you provide a positive, team-oriented work environment.
- ▶ **Use a variety of recruiting sources.** Pay your staff a referral bonus. Employees referred by current staff turnover at a lower rate than all others.
- ▶ **Use the Internet.** Today's workers look for jobs there. There are several good Green Industry sites that are easy to access. Google landscape/lawn care jobs and see the options.

Interviewing tips

- ▶ **Improve your interviewing environment.** Stop sending all the wrong signals. Walk out of your shop and back in again. This time look around. If you were a

top candidate, would you want to work here? Was the window so dirty you couldn't see inside? Did you step over a pile of cigarette butts to get in the front door? How were you greeted? Was the office clean, how about the staff? All these factors send signals. To hire the best, the signals have to be positive.

People will take a job if it looks good but only keep it if it feels good. We are talking about making the job look good. All a candidate knows is your reputation in town and what they find when they show up. So, clean up, post an interview schedule and have someone greet candidates as they arrive.

- ▶ **Don't "wing it" in interviews.** Plan and rehearse interviews. Provide a private setting. There should be no interruptions. The candidate and the candidate's application should be your only point of focus. The candidate needs to feel he/she is the most important thing on your mind if you want to be the most important thing on his.

- ▶ **Explain what the job is, what the expectations are.** But start with a firm handshake. Plan five open-ended questions that help you learn as much as possible about previous performance. Forget what he/she liked. You want to know what the candidate did, how he/she handled similar situations and what the outcome was. Past performance is the key.

- ▶ **Make a decision.** If the candidate is your piece of cake, second and third interviews almost never change opinions. Get a commitment now.

— The author is founder of Grass Roots Training in Delaware, OH. Contact him at hoopes@columbus.rr.com or visit www.grassroots-training.com.

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In the Know

BUSINESS

NEWS YOU CAN USE

Louisville Bats mix baseball with lawn care

BY RON HALL / Editor in Chief

LOUISVILLE, KY — Do you think your clients might be impressed if they knew that the guy taking care of their property was a trained professional sports turf groundskeeper?

The owners of the Triple-A Louisville Bats baseball team think they will, and since they brought Aaron Boggs on board in March 2006, they're more convinced than ever that's the case. Boggs, the former head groundskeeper at nearby University of Louisville, brought a ton of enthusiasm and lots of turf knowledge to the organization. Now that he's getting better grounded in the business end of commercial grounds care, the company, 4-year-old Homefield Advantage Turf Care, is starting to become a player here.

"We're unusual as a lawn care company because of the number of people we have who have earned degrees in turfgrass or horticulture," says Boggs, himself a graduate of Eastern Kentucky University.


But what really sets Homefield Advantage apart is its working relationship with Louisville Bats, in particular its award-winning head groundskeeper Tom Nielsen. Indeed, while their responsibilities are different, Boggs and Nielsen, report to the same owners and work in adjacent office spaces in beautiful Slugger Field near downtown Louisville.

That relationship, fostered on a long-time

friendship of the two turf pros, gives Homefield Advantage's four fulltime employees access to Nielsen's knowledge and some specialized (and expensive) turf care equipment. This has allowed Homefield Advantage, which put on six seasonal workers this past season, to offer a range of services — from chemical lawn care to property maintenance and renovation — while keeping capital expenses in line. At least for now. Continued growth is definitely in the books, says Boggs.

Relying, at least in part, of the baseball team's name and marketing clout, Boggs says demand for the company's services are exceeding expectations, and he will add another fulltime employee to start the season.

"Our goal is to provide the best agronomic service that we can, whether it's a home lawn or the sports fields at the local school," he adds. "We're going to bring the same products that we use at Slugger Field to our customers' properties."



General Manager
Aaron Boggs said
customers love
using real turf pros.

New Komatsu Zenoah HQ

LAWRENCEVILLE, GA — RedMax/Komatsu Zenoah America moved its U.S. headquarters to Lawrenceville, GA, from its previous location in Norcross. The Lawrenceville building will provide plenty of office space, nearly double the previous warehouse space, and room to accommodate the company's planned growth.

Snow pros get CSP study guide

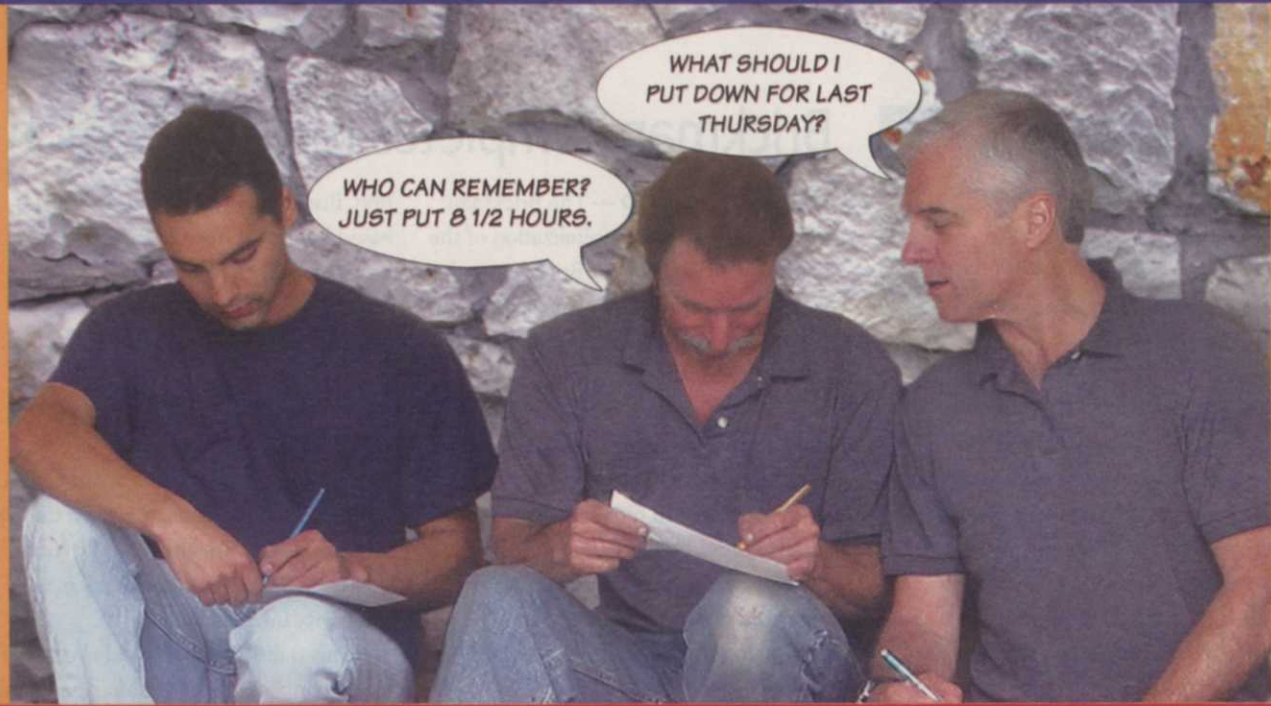
ERIE, PA — SIMA is set to unveil a comprehensive study guide for prospective Certified Snow Professionals. "We have worked with volunteer CSPs and an outside consultant to create a complete study guide that will help snow and ice management professionals prepare for the only national certification in the industry," said Julie Seggi, SIMA training coordinator. Visit www.sima.org.

Pesticide law now in effect

Oregon lawn care companies and others who use herbicides and pesticides to control vegetation and pests, are now required to electronically provide the State Department of Agriculture with information about the type of chemicals used, the quantity and where they are applied. The state's Pesticide Use Reporting System went into effect on Jan. 1. It's expected the legislature will extend its lifespan beyond the original sunset date in '09.

[CLIPPINGS]

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Employee Time Card

Name: **DAVID B.** Dates: **12-16**

Day:	Start:	Lunch:	End:	Jobsite:	Activity:	Hours:
Monday	7	1/2	3:30	Brentwood	Gen	8
Tuesday	7	1/2	3:30	'	'	8
Wednesday	7	1/2	4	'	'	8 1/2
Thursday	7	1/2	4	Crestview	'	8 1/2
Friday	7	1/2	4	'	'	8 1/2

Employee Signature: *David B.* Total Hours: **41 1/2**

Employee Report

Burns, David Date Range: 2/12/2007 through 2/16/2007

Day	Date	Jobsite	Start	Stop	Cost Code	Hours	Total
Mon	2/12	Brentwood	7:08 AM	12:05 PM	Irrigation	4:57	
			12:41 PM	3:22 PM	Irrigation	2:41	7:38 hours
Tue	2/13	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:07 PM	Irrigation	4:55	
			12:43 PM	3:23 PM	Irrigation	2:40	7:35 hours
Wed	2/14	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation	4:50	
			12:46 PM	3:49 PM	Irrigation	3:03	7:53 hours
Thu	2/15	Crestview	7:17 AM	12:19 PM	Planting	5:02	
			12:50 PM	3:46 PM	Planting	2:56	7:58 hours
Fri	2/16	Crestview	7:13 AM	12:07 PM	Planting	4:54	
			12:44 PM	3:39 PM	Planting	2:55	7:49 hours
Total						38:53 hours	

Signature: *David B.* Burns, David

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> Crews on the MOVE?

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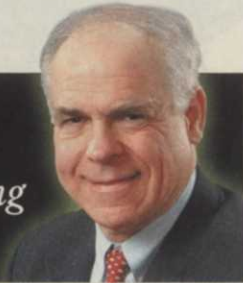
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In the Know

LEGALLY Speaking



BY KENNETH D. MORRIS, ESQ. L.L.C.

Q I plan to expand my operations to another state this year. Is the trademark or trade name on my company's name national? Or does it only apply locally?

A Your company's name is a trade name. While a trademark is used to identify and distinguish the trademark owner's goods from those of another and to indicate the source of the goods, a trade name means any name used by a person or business to identify his business. Trade names cannot be registered in the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. If you meet the tests to register your company's name as a trademark, i.e. that it is distinctive as established by the evidence, you should register the trademark before expanding its use to another state.

Q The trucks we use have a very distinctive logo involving color and design. Can we protect them so no competitor can copy that design on its trucks?

A Yes. Assuming there is no prior conflict, you may be able to register the design as a trademark logo.

Kenneth D. Morris, a Philadelphia-based attorney with more than 30 years corporate and law firm experience, offers information on industry legal issues in each issue of LM. Contact him via www.kenmorrislaw.com.

Note: The above should not be interpreted as offering legal advice in any jurisdiction where such practice is not authorized. Engage competent counsel familiar with your jurisdiction when legal issues arise.

Brickman completes recapitalization

GAITHERSBURG, MD — The Brickman Group closed on a recapitalization of the company on January 23. Brickman is the largest landscape maintenance company in the United States, approaching annual revenues of \$500 million.

The transaction was undertaken to provide an exit strategy for CIVC Partners, Brickman's private equity partner since 1998, and to refinance Brickman's public bonds. The recapitalization gives the company more favorable private debt, said the company.

The family will continue to run the business, says Scott Brickman, CEO and president.

"Nine years is a long time to be partners with a private equity group like CIVC," Scott Brickman, CEO and president of the company, told *Landscape Management*. The relationship lasted so long because both partners — Brickman and CIVC, based in Chicago — had established an excellent relationship, he said.

To facilitate the recent recapitaliza-

tion, Brickman brought in Los Angeles-based Leonard Green & Partners, a new private equity partner.

"We went through an exhaustive process to find a new partner like CIVC who shared our values and we are thrilled to have selected Leonard Green," said Brickman.

After the transaction Leonard Green will own slightly less than 50% of the equity leaving the Brickman family, management and existing stockholders with a majority interest.

"This transaction will not have any effect on Brickman's leadership, operations or strategic plans," stressed Brickman.

"Following this transaction, nothing will change with regards to our operations or the direction of our business in any way. I, along with the leadership here at the company, will continue to run the company as we have for many years pursuing our vision of building strong teams, which provide outstanding quality and service to our customers."

EPA revises pesticide applicator rules

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has begun developing revisions to federal pesticide applicator certification and training regulations. First enacted in the mid-1970s, the rules have changed little over the last 30-plus years and now practically every state's pesticide application certification and training requirements exceed the federal standard.

EPA last year issued discussion papers touching on the issues that a proposal updating the federal certification and training regulation would address including: expanding the scope of the regulation to cover the use of general use prod-

ucts by commercial applicators and not-for-hire applicators; setting a competency gauge for commercial applicators and other occupational users of pesticides; standardizing requirements; revising the definition of "under the direct supervision;" establishing a minimum age for pesticide applicators; and modifying recertification requirements.

EPA officials stated in November that a proposed rule would likely be issued in December of 2008. Sometime this year the EPA is expected to update discussion papers and will use the feedback it receives on those documents to begin drafting the rule.

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In the Know

Tips for keeping your equipment fleet productive + profitable

Healthy equipment that runs efficiently and achieves top production is the hallmark of a profitable large-equipment fleet. To achieve this goal, equipment must be effectively maintained at the lowest cost. The following tips from John Deere Service Marketing Manager Diego Navarro helps equipment fleet managers accomplish maximum productivity and uptime while minimizing costs.

Condition-based maintenance. Condition-based maintenance requires proactive action based on the machines condition. Technicians read the health of the machine and provide services based on that information. Techniques of condition-based maintenance include a complete oil analysis and a root cause analysis.

"Root cause analysis helps us get to what is really causing the problem. It's treating the disease instead of just relieving the symptoms," said Navarro.

Particle counts and filtration. Hydraulic system filtration is vital to extend the component life of any machine. Technicians initially determine the particle count by examining the oil for foreign particles. Then, filtration can take place

to reach the target.

"You may need to use bypass filtration, which is an aftermarket product. An on-site filtration caddy, on the other hand, can clean the hydraulics very fast while you're performing other services. The bypass will take two or three weeks to reach that cleanliness," Navarro said.

Another technique, magnetic filtration, is effective for components such as axles, and primarily used to capture iron particles.

"Iron (can) damage veins, oxidize the oil and consume the additive," Navarro said. "When you change oils, not all the iron goes out."

Proper lubrication. Mixing lubricants is a risk machine owners won't want to take.

"When your machine needs more oil, and you simply add any product you find instead of sticking with what's already being used in the machine, you are instantly changing the formulation," Navarro said. "This

A technician cleans an excavator's hydraulic reservoir with a Super Caddy filter to extend component life.



can often affect the machine negatively and accelerate wear."

Mixing lubricants can cause copper generation. Copper comes from bronze, an alloy used in all high-pressure systems in the pumps. If copper leaches from the pump's bronze, alloys weaken and pump efficiency suffers, resulting in contamination of the system and components.

▼ Electronic machine information download. One useful tool to maximize uptime and keep operating costs as low as



possible is a system that allows for electronic machine download. Machines with this type of system can record up to 10,000 hours of operation information, from fuel

consumption to pressures and temperature and more. For example, this kind of data can be retrieved from John Deere excavators using a tool called Machine Information Center, Navarro said.

"Machine Information Center is vital to keeping costs in line," he said. "It helps you determine how much time your operator spends idling or working, or when the way he is operating the machine is wearing out the tracks. The result is hours and hours of information that can really help the fleet supervisor manage cost and maintenance."



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