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Adopt some aphorisms to live by

Don't run with scissors. Stand up straight. Make sure you wear clean underwear. Call if you're going to be late.

From the time we are born, we become inculcated with mom-isms. Somehow it's not considered brainwashing when it's from a parent. Moms and dads repeat these words, ad infinitum, because of their love and concern for us. Some we vow never to repeat to our own children — "because I said so" or "because I'm your father, that's why" or "as long as you live in my house ..." — but we inevitably hear those words flow from our mouths anyway.

As we age, those phrases etch themselves in our brains. I don't think I've ever run with scissors, and I regularly catch myself slouching and force myself to sit up straighter.

From birth, we're exposed to others' words of wisdom. Those that strike a chord with us, we tend to adopt. Over the years, I've come across several that resonate just right. Here are a few:

▶ **The days are long; the years are short.** I overheard this in a conversation while sitting in an airport. It so aptly describes life as a parent. And it seems to be truer the older I get.

▶ **The only way out is through.** This one comes from my father (at least, that's where I first heard

it). Sometimes we face difficult tasks and wish they would just go away, but they don't. Get started and plow through to the end.

▶ **There is no gravity; Earth sucks.** OK, this is not so much an aphorism as a funny line that my sister had on a sign outside her college dorm room. But it does remind me to not take things too seriously *in this life* when they aren't going well.

▶ **Believe nothing you hear, and only half of what you see.** Perhaps this line from Mark Twain isn't something I should share because I make my living as a writer. Still, it reminds me to think critically about the information with which I'm presented, to consider the source and make value judgments about its validity.

▶ **That which does not destroy us makes us stronger.** Another good line — this one from Friedrich Nietzsche — about how to struggle through difficult times.

▶ **I love deadlines. I like the whooshing sound they make as they fly by.** A little self-indulgent, I'll admit. As a fellow writer, Douglas Adams clearly understood the fleeting nature of publishing.

▶ **Imagination is more important than knowledge.** I probably could write an entire column on the quotes of Albert Einstein, but this one is particularly important to me. It suggests the most valuable tool we can have is a life-long curiosity and love for learning.

▶ **Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.** Another from dear old "Al." Anyone who has read even a little bit about quantum mechanics knows there is far more in this world that we don't understand than we do. And there is simply too much that happens that simply can't be explained by science.

I'm curious what words of wisdom you choose to live by. Please e-mail me your favorite sayings, who shared them with you and what significance they have for you, and I might use them in a future column.

And Mom, don't worry. When I left the house this morning, my underwear was clean.

From the time we are born, we become inculcated with mom-isms. Somehow it's not considered brainwashing when it's from a parent.



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THE GRAYING OF SPRAYING

An aging workforce and an increased focus on turf quality have inspired manufacturers to make application equipment lighter and more nimble.

BY CURT HARLER

AS THE LABOR force changes and fuel costs rise, sprayer and spreader weight becomes important. No longer will a company's full-time workers put up with wrestling heavy, awkward equipment around a customer's lawn.

That is especially true with application equipment. Fifteen years ago, workers were expected to tame a 600- or 700-lb. spreader loaded with 100 lbs. of material — and be happy to push it up and down day after day. When they finished that chore, they had to drag a 1.25-in. hose around to the customer's back yard and finish up with spraying. Is it any wonder that even the kids quit the job?

"This business is out of its teenage years and into senior workers," says Bob Brophy, director of lawn products for Minneapolis-based Turfco. "You can't expect to give workers heavy, cumbersome equipment and have them stick with the job day after day."

He says his company's goal is to produce equipment that is easy on workers' bodies but still provides precise, profitable application of material: "You have to remove the hard labor part of the job."

In addition to older workers, more women are in the lawn care workforce — and they typically are not anxious to wrestle with machines that weigh several times what they do.

"It used to be machinery could be heavy and hard to handle and it didn't matter," Brophy says. "Young guys would work with it all day. Now, you've got to build machinery that full-time workers can handle."

On the other hand, a landscaper can't compromise with either equipment ruggedness or the end results.

"The level of maintenance required of professional turf care at office complexes and high-end apartments keeps ris-



Turfco sees ergonomics as an important factor in machine design.

ing," notes Bill Kenney, vice president of SmithCo, Philadelphia. "The demand for sharper appearance is increasing. To do that, you've got to take the big, heavy stuff off the ground."

A gentler generation

That means landscapers should be concerned about getting machinery that is light on its feet. A golf course, for example, has the luxury of waiting to make its applications for a couple of days after a heavy rain. By contrast, lawn care professionals (LCPs) have schedules, and it is important a service be performed on schedule so the truck can be in another neighborhood the next day. Yet that sprayer can't leave behind rows of tire tracks in an otherwise nice lawn.

That is the reason why many manufacturers today build machines with large pneumatic tires. "Our edict to our engineers was to design a machine that would be under 20 psi — fully loaded," Brophy says. That is barely tiptoeing, when one considers that a 200-lb. worker will have a heel-imprint impact on a lawn of about 100 psi.

A machine that might have tipped the scales at 600 lbs. two decades ago today weighs under 500 lbs. "But the important thing is not how much a machine weighs; it's what its

"YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE THE BIG, HEAVY STUFF OFF THE GROUND."

— BILL KENNEY, SMITHCO

"YOU CAN'T EXPECT TO GIVE WORKERS HEAVY, CUMBERSOME EQUIPMENT AND HAVE THEM STICK WITH THE JOB DAY AFTER DAY."

—BOB BROPHY, TURFCO

footprint is on the ground," Brophy maintains. "The key is to keep the footprint light and to have enough rubber on the ground.

"With a 20-psi footprint, you can even go out when it's raining and do what you have to do," he adds.

SmithCo has a unit that has a 7-psi footprint — it can roll on a golf green, so it certainly will not hurt the appearance of the typical lawn.

"Bigger is better with tires," Kenney says. He notes that it is imperative to have enough tread on the unit so it is safe and controllable when moving downhill over wet grass. "You can't sacrifice controllability," he emphasizes.

With controllability comes maneuverability. Self-propelled units are more maneuverable than tractor-driven ones. Not only do they weigh substantially less as they move across the turf, but they can scoot around trees and readily follow the contours of flowerbeds and other landscape features. "That is a really big deal," Kenney says.

David Herd, president of Herd Seeders, Logansport, IN, actually likes his units heavy and builds them almost entirely of metal. His spreaders often are used to spread fire ant control and other sand-based materials. Even if they are used for seed-

ing, he says one of the biggest problems with seeding is getting good seed-to-soil contact. A seeder with a bit of heft will press the seed into the ground nicely.

Herd seeders are typically mounted on an all-terrain vehicles (ATV) or similar units, so the backache factor is eliminated.

Down the road

Is there a trade-off in quality with the lighter applicators? Manufacturers uniformly say there's not.

"There have been enough advances in plastics, fiberglass and stronger alloys that we can make a lighter-weight machine with the same service life that we had years ago," Brophy says.

But not everyone is entirely sold on plastics. "The only plastic on our units is the fan," says Herd. And the fan only went plastic two years ago when aluminum prices jumped and a local supplier proved he could provide a quality mold.

The base on Herd units is cast iron, and the hoppers are galvanized sheet. "The reason is strength," Herd says. "A landscaper can bolt this onto an ATV or pickup and the hopper will stay attached." He says he does not like plastic hoppers because they can only be attached so tight to a casting: "With galvanized steel, we can put a lot of torque on it."

Kenney sees SmithCo's main savings in weight coming from reducing the size of the unit's primary mover or power plant. He has no doubts about the quality of the construction of today's sprayers.

"It's all industrial-grade materials — the electronics, the hydraulics, the tanks," he says. "There are no exotic materials in our bodies or tanks. It doesn't require that."

However, instead of putting a 30-hp tractor out on a lawn, SmithCo puts a 10-hp spray unit on the lawn. The result is a lighter vehicle — and a lighter footprint on the grass.

There are other cases to be made for toughness, as well. Herd notes that material sloshes around inside the hopper and that causes motion. "Where the screw goes through the plastic, it will get chewed up," Herd says. "A galvanized hopper might look like the wrath — dents and dings — but it will work."

Herd says he "couldn't buy a dinner" with the profits he makes from replacement hoppers. And most of those sales, he says, are to landscapers who rolled a unit or backed into it with a truck.

A tough product will pay off in the long term. Manufacturers agree that the labor issue as a part of applicator design criteria is not going away anytime soon. The result is that lighter weight spray equipment will send equipment to market that is gentler on workers and allows landscapers to be more gentle with the turf, as well. LM



At left, the heft of Herd Seeder units are considered an advantage.

Below, today's SmithCo units feature a lighter footprint.



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LAWNCAREPRO

LM'S OPERATOR OF THE MONTH » BY RON HALL



Darrel Nail takes care of the details. "He's a systems guy and thrives on staying abreast of what's the newest and the best," Gary LaScalea, the founder/owner of GroGreen Lawn Care, says of his vice president. "We're opposites in many respects, and I'm convinced that's why we've been successful." Nail shares what he learned from LaScalea to help him run a successful operation.

What led you into a career in lawn care? While I was in high school in Mississippi, I was a member of the FFA and worked for a local hay farmer. I worked for the Smith family for three years and really liked the farming. After graduating, I moved back to Tucson, AZ, and attended school. I moved to Dallas in 1982 and worked in fast food management, working 60 to 70 hours a week for not very much pay. In the spring of 1984, I applied for and got a job as a lawn care specialist with ChemLawn. I enjoyed being outside, seeing the results of treatments, talking with customers and educating them about turf care. I fell in love with the industry.

How and when did you join up with GroGreen and its owner, Gary LaScalea? In 1986, Gary LaScalea transferred to our ChemLawn branch as branch manager. As the company began to change, Gary took me under his wing, and I worked various management positions supporting his role as branch and regional manager. Even though we both went in different

directions for a short while, Gary and I stayed in touch. Jumping forward to October 1996, Gary, who had started GroGreen, his own company, a year earlier, asked me to help him implement his new software and computer system. That winter, we converted his customer base to the new software. In January 1997, he asked if I wanted to come and work with him. I sold my small mowing business and went back into lawn care.

Describe how your relationship with the company has changed.

Throughout my career with GroGreen, Gary and I have been very involved with the operation of the business. The first couple of years we spent most of our time out spraying lawns and returning to the office, usually to find a bunch of curled up faxes that had fallen to the floor. As the company grew, our roles matured — more employees,

more trucks, more training. Today, I oversee all company operations, training, customer service, employee relations and employee motivation. I also keep pushing for continuous improvement.

What do you like most about your job? What do you find most challenging? I get great satisfaction watching employees grow in their positions. I enjoy being part of a fast-paced, growing company, and helping it grow. The most challenging aspect of my job is staffing, especially the job of making decisions that affect employees and their families. That can be difficult.

In light of the economy, what kind of a spring is GroGreen having? We are having a good spring. The weather has been nice and we're doing better than last year. Last spring it warmed up; then got cold, and it took a long time for

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: GroGreen Lawn Care, Plano, TX

FOUNDED: 1995

PRINCIPALS: Gary LaScalea, founder and owner; Darrel Nail, vice president and general manager

NUMBER OF OUTLETS: 2

EMPLOYEES: 30

SERVICES OFFERED: lawn care, tree and shrub care, pest control, aeration, grub control, fire ant control

BUSINESS OUTLOOK: "Regardless of competition or pricing issues, we're not going to backpedal on the quality of products or services."

FAMILY: Darrel is married to Debra; three children, Melissa, Rachael and Anthony; and two grandchildren, Anthony and Aiden

HOBBIES: trout fishing and riding his Harley-Davidson Ultra Classic

WEB SITE: www.grogreen.com

the grass to green up. I have a theory on lawn care and the economy: When the economy is depressed, people still want lawn care because it isn't a very big expense compared to other things they do to keep their properties looking nice.

THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF MY JOB IS STAFFING, ESPECIALLY THE NECESSARY JOB OF MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS."



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A John Deere debris bucket makes quick work of cleaning up the heavier stuff winter left in the landscape.

PICKING UP THE PIECES

Spring cleaning begins when the snow melts. It's amazing the variety of dreck contractors find when the weather warms. But an array of tools makes the job easier and more efficient.

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR

JEFF HILE HAS picked up leaves, pinecones, soda cans, beer bottles, cigarettes, paper, plastic and small rodents.

OK, the inventor of the LawnShark doesn't claim to, advise (or advertise) picking up small rodents, but in talking to him one gets the feeling that if a creature didn't beat a hasty retreat, it would meet a gruesome fate when the debris-clearing device passed overhead.

"It has gone in so many different direc-

tions in what people really want to pick up with it," says Hile, director of sales for Lawn-Shark USA. "There are some people who want to pick up chicken manure and straw. You can thatch your lawn with it."

Debris management covers a wide range of activities, from spring cleaning and leaf pickup in the fall to clearing trees and branches from construction sites. And while there are scores of things to clear away,

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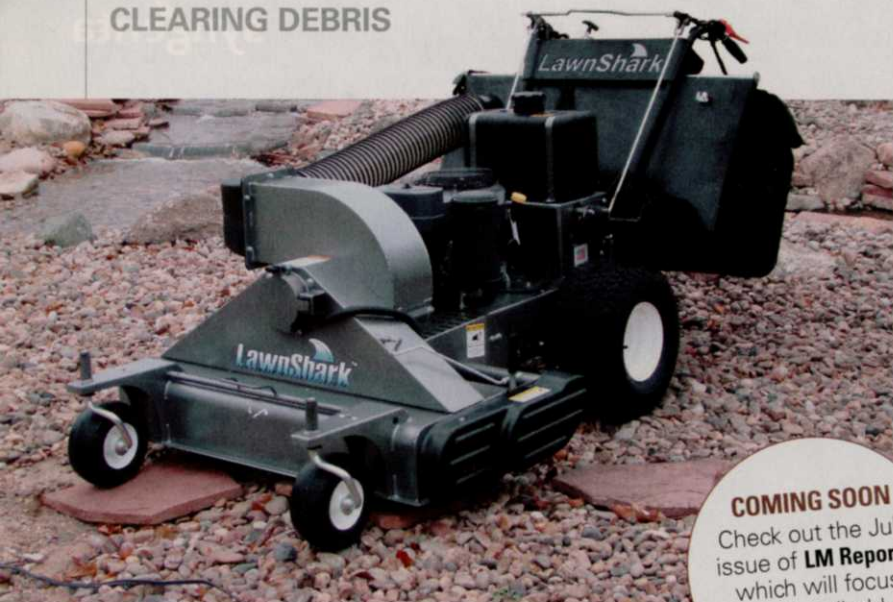
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CLEARING DEBRIS



COMING SOON
Check out the July issue of **LM Reports**, which will focus on handheld equipment.



The LawnShark (top) can thatch lawns, pick up leaves and clear debris from parking lots.

The Toro Co. offers a number of handheld blowers, but also manufactures tow-behind units, like the Pro Force blower pictured here.

continued from page 68
there seems to be nearly as many machines and attachments to do the job.

Handheld equipment

Blowers and vacuums are the stalwarts of the handheld debris management category. A variety of companies offer handheld and backpack blowers and vacuums.

Shindaiwa recently introduced two new gas powered blowers, a two-cycle model (EB802) and a hybrid two-cycle/four-cycle model (EB8520). Both come with a newly engineered backpack that increases operator comfort and efficiency, says Paul Wheatcraft, director of marketing for Shindaiwa, which recently became a division of Japan-based Yamabiko Corp.

Shindaiwa engineers teamed with a university to do a study exploring how users wear

the backpacks to figure out where the pressure points are on the body. The result was an ergonomic, easy-to-use system, Wheatcraft says.

“Our new model is actually a little heavier than the previous one,” he notes. “Put on the previous one and then put on the (new model). You swear it weighs less because of the way it distributes the weight.”

There is a quiet mode switch on both units that is set to limit the throttle, keeping the decibel level below 65 dB.

“If you’re out in the open where noise is not an issue, you can (use) maximum power,” Wheatcraft explains. “But if you’re operating in an area where you need to restrict (noise), just flip the switch. You don’t have to have your ‘quiet’ blower and your ‘powerful’ blower — you just have the one machine.”

Power to the pros

The Toro Co. offers four models of corded electric blowers and blower/vacuum/mulchers.

“On the cordless end, nobody’s really been able to solve the problem of weight versus power on a blower,” notes Matt Medden, Toro’s marketing manager for handheld equipment. “Blowers typically require a decent amount of power to move air. It takes a lot of power to move those fans.”

Toro claims to have the most powerful blower available, but it depends on what you’re measuring.

“The market has tended — at least in the last five or six years — to compete on miles per hour, but it’s the combination of miles per hour and airflow that really matters,” Medden says. “We claim, on the upper end of our products, that we have the most powerful blower, gas or electric.”

Another blower may offer more air speed, Medden says, but they can’t produce the same “air horsepower,” to use Toro’s term.

And because they’re electric, Toro’s models tend to be less expensive and quieter than their gas-powered counterparts, he says.

Bigger debris

The LawnShark, like its elder competitor the Billy Goat, can be used on a variety of surfaces and in far more ways than simply leaf pickup. Hile recalls responding to a contractor who

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