

# THE KUBOTA FACTOR

#### Kubota Turf Equipment

These days, often the difference between making do and making a profit is the quality of your equipment. Kubota turf equipment is built with your business in mind—to deliver a higher level of performance; to be more fuel-efficient; and to provide more comfort and conveniences that make each job more productive. That's what turf pros all across the country call the "Kubota Factor."

**B26 TLB** – Tractor, loader and backhoe—this is the perfect all-in-one tractor for landscaping work. Now with more horsepower, greater versatility and enhanced operating performance.

**Z200 and Z300 Series** – Compact or full-size? Gasoline or diesel? Either way, you get a high-performance zero-turn mower with a powerful Kubota-built engine. All models deliver high levels of torque to handle your toughest turf challenges.

**RTV500** – Starts quicker. Runs quieter. Stops smoother. This all-purpose utility vehicle packs a powerful 15.8 HP Kubota-built gasoline engine, yet is small enough to fit into the back of a long bed pickup. Z200 Series



Financing available to qualified customers through Kubota Credit Corporation, U.S.A. For product and dealer information, call 1-888-4-KUBOTA, ext. 403 or go to **www.kubota.com**. Optional equipment may be shown.



## WORKINGSMARTER

JIM PALUCH The author is president of JP Horizons Inc. Visit www.jphorizons.com.

# The '8th Waste' can be the worst

or those of you who are familiar with the Working Smarter and Lean philosophies, you know there are seven types of waste. As a quick review, they are transportation, inventory, motion, waiting, extra processing, overproduction and

defects. As you see, waste can be an issue in every part of our businesses - and learning to identify it is the first step.

For the real Working Smarter enthusiast, you may also know of an 8th Waste. If left unmaintained, it can be more detrimental to your business

> than all the other types of waste combined. The eighth waste most people never think of is: unused employee creativity.

Our people will always be our most valuable asset. That is not a new concept. I have often said, every great thing that has ever been accomplished or will be accomplished has and will happen through people. It makes sense that it will be our people who will learn to find and drive out waste, and

it's up to us to make sure each individual realizes his or her important role in doing just that.

I'm willing to guess, however, too often we fall far short in providing the opportunity for this great asset to creatively find solutions and produce at its fullest potential.

#### A continual process

We work to eliminate waste so that our people can work smarter. Remember, however, they are a critical part of the equation. You not only want employees to perform more efficiently, but you want them thinking about continual improvements they can initiate at every opportunity. Imagine what we could accomplish if we consciously worked to provide our team with the opportunity to engage their minds and exercise their creativity on a regular basis. Despite what some may say, everyone can be creative in the sense that they can provide a new perspective or idea on how to improve the business they help support.

A Working Smarter culture flourishes and falters with your team's ability to gain contribution at all levels. If your culture is reluctant to provide opportunities based on job title or seniority, think of all the wasted creativity that is being passed over. The greatest idea may come from the 15year crew member who knows his job better than anyone, or from the new hire who has not been around long enough to know better.

What if your culture promoted the following habits?

> An idea board with incentives for posting Working Smarter ideas.

> A management team that regularly asks the newest hires, "How do you think we can do this better?"

> Time set aside each week, without compromise, for your team to communicate on ways to Work Smarter.

> Time set aside each week, without compromise, for crew members to ask one of their clients about ways they can add more value through their service, even if it requires a translator.

Look at your culture and your strategy for improvement, and be cautious not to overlook the waste that can build up in unused employee creativity. Never discount the potential that rests in fully using your greatest asset: the great people who make up your organization.

More than 250 Green Industry companies have participated in JP Horizons' Working Smarter Training Challenge (WSTC), typically saving tens of thousands of dollars annually. To learn whether your organization qualifies to participate in the WSTC, visit www.jphorizons.com/LM.htm today.

#### MONTHLY CHALLENGE

Find a way to engage every single one of your employees in an activity that helps them each Work Smarter.

Active rung dia mand the parameter of the run of the second dia states and a parameter in the second dia states and a president of the second dia states and a president of the second dia states and th

FREEMAND

You have enough things to worry about. But with FreeHand<sup>™</sup> 1.75G herbicide, hand-weeding isn't one of them. FreeHand 1.75G gives you up to 8 weeks of broad-spectrum preemergent weed control. And since FreeHand 1.75G utilizes two highly effective active ingredients and two unique modes of action, it's a great resistance management tool, too. Free your crew up to do other things, with FreeHand 1.75G.

betterplants.com | 800-545-9525



### **HEBENCHMARK**

KEVIN KEHOE The author is the owner-manager of Kehoe & Co. Contact him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

# What the gross margin benchmark means to your business

hat kind of gross margins can I expect this year? I get asked this question every week. The easy answer is "lower," as pricing becomes even more aggressive. This price decline is a simple fact of life in every segment of the Green Industry thanks to the current oversupply of contractors relative to the shrinking stock of work. The tougher question is how to react to this market condition.

Table 1 shows the year-over-year impact the economy is having on gross margins in two seg-

#### **TABLE 1: GROSS MARGIN DECLINES**

Year	Design/build	Grounds Mgmt/Contract work	
2009	48%	47%	
2008	54%	55%	

#### **TABLE 2: BEFORE AND AFTER**

Factor	Before	After
Revenue	\$1,709,091	\$2,000,000
Labor (payroll and taxes)	\$546,909 [32%]	\$700,000 [35%]
Material expense	\$170,909 [10%]	\$240,000 [12%]
Subcontractor expense	\$51,273 [3%]	\$120,000 [6%]
Total cost	\$769,091 [45%]	\$1,060,000 [53%]
Gross profit	\$940,000 [55%]	\$940,000 [47%]
Average wage rate	\$12.50	\$13.26
Production hours	43,753	52,808
Markup on materials/subs	25%	25%
Hourly labor price	\$32.71	\$29.35

ments: design/build and grounds management. Because pricing in the bid/build segment is so aggressive, it is difficult to pinpoint a benchmark. But I have observed gross margins as low as 19% in this segment.

The best strategy is to focus on gross profit dollars in your pricing and estimating instead of target fixating on gross margin percentage. After all, percentages don't pay for overhead, dollars do. The example below outlines a "before and after" picture of the financial impact of a lower gross margin.

Keeping in mind the primary objective of achieving the same gross profit dollars to pay for our overhead, the strategy combines a decrease in the hourly labor price and a production hours efficiency gain in exchange for an average wage increase (because of increased overtime). This strategy requires no additional equipment and minimizes increases in overhead costs.

In our example, we reduce the price of labor by 10%, from \$32.71 to \$29.35. A more competitive price should result in increased sales. As a result, labor hours would necessarily increase by 9,000 hours to produce the new work. But by budgeting for 5.5 hours of overtime per man per week (increasing the average wage from \$12.50 to \$13.26) in exchange for a 5% efficiency gain on the current work (equivalent to two hours per week per employee), we can cover all those hours without adding people or equipment.

If lower gross margins are a constraint and fact of life, you will have no other choice but to respond creatively to lean out your pricing and your production to maintain your gross profit dollars.

As for the old gross margin percentages, forget about them for now. They are an old benchmark that represents the way it was. We all have to deal in the now.

Joining the many who pay less and get more.

That's intelligent.



LOOK INSIDE to see how our new, low list prices are helping contractors save big.



RAIN BIRD.

"Anytime you can reduce your price and maintain quality, you're at an advantage." Dick Casci, President Ridgewood Landscaping Inc. "Lower pricing will help me win more business during this challenging time." Craig Herring, Owner/President Cypress Lawn & Landscape

AIN BIRD

RAIN BIRD.



More contractors are talking to their distributors about new, lower Rain Bird list prices—and more contractors are saving big. If you haven't already, now is the perfect time to ask how much you can save. That's because we've added even more durable, water-saving products to our lower-priced line-up, giving you over 50 options to choose from.

Testimonials not attributed to individuals shown in photograph.

RAIN & BIRD

Turn the page to see just a few of these lower-priced products.

Calculate your savings and find these plus more low-priced products at www.rainbird.com/savings

	-		40
6.00	- 41	175	4.981.40
4-		171-	1.5
wit			
40		1	

## Save up to 45% on proven Rain Bird products.



"Based on 2009 U.S. Rain Bird," Hunner," Netafim," and Initrol " list pricing effective May 1, 2009.



### **JACOBS'JOURNAL**

Contact Dan at 216/706-3754 or via e-mail at diacobs@guestex.com. DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR



# **Renewal & Remembrance**

ASHINGTON - A couple months ago, our daughter's 8th grade class followed a rite of passage in Northeast Ohio. They visited D.C., something I'd done nearly 30 years ago with my classmates.

She and her friends visited the major museums and monuments including Arlington National Cemetery. And I can't help but think her experience, like mine, was one of muted reverence. Our daughter, Sammie, is aware the country is at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, and she's certainly studied our many conflicts in American history classes. But at 14, it's not easy to appreciate the sacrifice war extracts on society. It's difficult to understand the freedoms we've come to expect when you've not had to work or struggle for it. I was no different.

I'm sure Sammie thought about those interred around her as she watched her friends lay a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns or as she walked passed John F. Kennedy's grave or the memorial honoring the seven astronauts lost in the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster. And I'm sure those thoughts vanished quickly as an ice cube in the summer sun as she and her friends got back on the bus and headed to the next site. I was no different.

Two years ago, I returned to Arlington National Cemetery as part of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) Renewal & Remembrance, an annual environmental enhancement project. And I was blessed to be able to attend again last month. Contractors from 28 states donated their equipment, time and energy to renew the hallowed grounds and to remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice. This year, there were about 400 adults and 50 children involved in the program. Some contractors closed their businesses for several days to participate in Renewal & Remembrance, no small feat in this economy. The work includes liming hundreds of acres, adding cables and installing lighting protection to trees, installing plants and trees, and updating irrigation systems.

It's a truly humbling experience - returning to Arlington National Cemetery as an adult. Walking past rows and rows of white tombstones is a reminder of the fragility and fleeting nature of life.

The numbers are staggering. There are more than 300,000 people buried at Arlington National Cemetery - soldiers from every war since the American Revolution. And the number grows, on average, by 30 every day.

Etched in many of the tombstones are the wars in which the soldier who lies below participated. How can I not be humbled when there are three wars listed or the man lying there took his last breath when he was half my age.

Walking through the grounds I came across a stone, its carving worn with age. The lettering, still legible, indicated an ID number and had the words Unknown U.S. Soldier. It saddens me to think no one comes to visit the man, that somewhere there was a family that never learned the fate of their son, brother or husband. I said a quiet "thank you" and moved on.

Many who donated their time that day, as they do every year, were veterans or relatives of veterans. Some have sons or daughters currently on active duty and in harm's way. I don't know what path my daughter will choose in life. I can only hope, one day, perhaps when she brings her children to Arlington National Cemetery, she will finally understand and appreciate the sacrifice of those laid to rest there.

> Walking past rows and rows of white tombstones is reminder of the fragility and fleeting nature of life.

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

# WALK-BEHIND MOWERS



- Front or rear drive? There are two types of self-propelled mowers, there are two ways to go. Front-wheel drive models are easier to turn, making them ideal for maneuvering around hardscape features, and rear-wheel drive models offering better traction, which helps on inclines.
- To mulch or not to mulch? A mulching mower is eco-friendly, but a bag collection system keeps the clumps off the lawn and thus the rake on your truck. Some mowers offer both options so you can be all things to all clients
- Minimal maintenance. It's important to strike a balance between a mower that requires routine maintenance (and thus, devoted time and labor) vs. a unit that, when something breaks, is pretty much beyond repair.

#### Cub Cadet -> Commercial

Tougher than the bolted design found on many mowers, the 1748 widearea walk-behind mower of-

fers a fully welded, one-piece engine platform and mowing deck. Features include a 7-gauge steel skirt, reinforced solid-steel plates and a 48-in. Command Cut System cutting deck. Its patented Vari-Touch foot controls allow drivebelt adjustments on the go from 8 to 24 lbs., providing traction on wet or hilly terrain. *CubCadetCommercial.com or 877/835-7841* 

#### Ariens Co.

The new EverRide Wasp Hydro with a 52-in. deck offers twin 10cc hydraulic pumps and motors, as well as a 19-hp Kawasaki Kai engine. Complete with a 7-gauge laser cut steel deck, it also includes long-life, maintenance-free spindles and heavy-duty, heat-treated blades. Additionally, a belt-drive system offers loop handle, operator presence controls, which gives sharp turning-radius trimming ability. *Everride.com or 920/756-2141* 

#### Honda Commercial Mowers ->

Both the new self-propelled, hydrostatic drive HRC216HXA (pictured) and push-type HRC216PDA mowers feature Honda's exclusive MicroCut twin-blade mulching technology. Other features include a dome shaped deck design that facilitates both bagging and mulching while delivering finer clipping particles; a front bumper that provides mower deck and engine protection, as well as convenient tie down; durable, lightweight Xenoy wheels with axle protectors; and a large-capacity grass bag with on/off feature.

ORTS

HondaPowerEquipment.com or 800/426-7701

#### Gravely

The new Hydro HE 1948FL Pro-Walk mower features 19 hp and a cutting width of 48 in. The drivetrain systems consist of Hydro-Gear 10cc pump and 12-cu.-in. wheel motor, Ogura GT 1A Electric Clutch and 16-in. drive tires. Operator ergonomics include an electric starter system and large-diameter fuel cap for quick refueling. Additional features include semi-pneumatic casters, which are designed to never go flat; a loop-handle Pro Steer Ground-Drive Control with Intuitive Action; and a heavy-duty plastic side discharge chute. *Ariens.com or 800/472-8359* 

#### **Hustler Turf Equipment**

With improved features, the re-designed commercial walkbehind TrimStar Hydro offers users a heavier-duty transmission than before, along with improved handling and stability. The redesigned TrimStar also provides a one-step height adjustment system, with a deck lift that has just one lever instead of several sets of pins. To cater to a variety of needs, three deck sizes are available: 36, 48 and 54 in. Additionally, an electric-start option is available for the 54-in. configuration. HustlerTurf.com or 800/395-4757

continued on page 28

See the new interactive exhibitor list at www.gie-expo.com.

# You'l have a GIE+EXPOL

#### Ready to kick some tires?

GIE+EXPO is OPET sponsored by:

Step outside at GIE+EXPO and into a shopping playground. Not only is GIE+EXPO the largest buying, selling and learning marketplace in the industry, it also offers the only 19-acre outdoor demo area - open 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. on October 29 and 30. Test hundreds of the latest products, and shop for items that will make you more profitable in 2010.



"When we get to the show, we know what we are shopping for. It is helpful to try it out and see how the specs work in on-site iob scenarios.

Carl Hreha Owner, Carl's Lawn Care Columbus, NJ



Thursday, Friday, Saturday | October 29-31, 2009 Kentucky Exposition Center | Louisville, Kentucky www.gie-expo.com | info@gie-expo.com (800) 558-8767 or (812) 949-9200



14th largest tradeshow in the USA!

REGISTER TODAY AT WWW.GIE-EXPO.COM By registering now you could win Flight Certificates\* to anywhere in the Caribbean that American Airlines flies. Sponsored By: Ariens & American Airlines/American Eagle \*Blackout dates and restrictions apply.



#### continued from page 26 Scag Power Equipment

Available in 36- and 48-in. deck models, the all-new Scag SFW belt-drive, floating-deck walk-behind features a cutting height adjustment system that requires





## The products you need, when you need them.



Wholesale distribution of specialty agricultural chemicals, serving the following industries: Landscape - Nursery - Golf

Vegetation Management • Pest Control • Fumigation • Public Agency



no tools. Operators will spend less time greasing thanks to the low-maintenance design. A lighter overall weight allows for easier handling when traversing curbs and other obstacles. The company also offers a two-year mower warranty. *Scag.com or 920/387-3150* 

#### The Toro Co.

The new Toro GrandStand series features a retractable platform that allows for operation from both stand-on and walkbehind positions. All four models in the series incorporate the Toro Turbo Force deck and twin-lever steering controls for ease of use. Choose from 48- or 52-in. cutting decks with a 19- or 23-hp Kawasaki engine. The weight distribution can be customized to suit individual preferences, and operators have the freedom to easily shift their weight to further influence the machine's traction. *Toro.com or 800/348-2424* 



#### Briggs & Stratton 1 Yard Power Products Group

As the latest feature added to the Snapper SE Series of mowers, the Pivot-N-Go variable drive system allows operators to easily adjust the speed of the mower to their own pace. The more the handle pivots forward, the faster the ground speed. Speed choices range from 0 to 4 mph. The system is available on two models: The SPVH21675 (pictured) features a 21-in. mowing deck and rear-wheel drive; the SPVH2265 features a 22-in. mowing deck and front-wheel drive. Both feature the ability to mulch, bag or side-discharge grass clippings. *Snapper.com or 414/259-5333* 

#### Husqvarna 1

The nine mowers in the new hydro walkbehind line feature fixed and floating deck designs ranging in size from 36 to 61 in. All models are powered by commercial-grade Kawasaki V-Twin engines ranging from 15 to 23 hp. The new drive system features a Kanzaki 10cc tandem style pump, Parker wheel motors and an easy-to-access control knob for tracking adjustments. A pistol-type operator interface includes an integrated operator presence control, thumb slide locks for neutral, and easy-to-reach drive levers. The speed control lever also features an automatic pump bypass in the neutral lock position to prevent creeping and assist with cold starting. A foot-operated brake helps secure the units for easier transport. USA. Husqvarna.com or 800/HUSKY-62

#### Ferris Industries 🗸

Now available in 36-, 48-, 52- or 61-in. cutting widths, the ComfortControl Dual Drive mower features an exclusive Torque Tuned Blade system. It's powered by a 15-hp Kawasaki V-twin engine, and

> offers dual transmissions for improved performance and downtime. A Cruise Control Bar with independent steering override allows the operator a

multitude of handling options. An electronic Sensor-Grip operator presence system detects the operator's hands on the handlebars. This anti-fatigue safety system requires no additional pressure to operate the mower, and it works by detecting moisture from the hands of the operator — with or without gloves on. *FerrisIndustries.com or 800-933-6175* 

# Light Your Way To New Revenue And Profits. See How During One Of These Great Discovery Days...

# Chicago, IL 9/17 & 18/2009 Louisville, KY 10/30/2009 Las Vegas, NV 11/17/2009 San Antonio, TX 12/3/2009

Architectural & Landscape Lighting www.NiteTimeDecor.com



information today! 1.800.687.9551

### LAWNCAREPRO

LM'S OPERATOR OF THE MONTH >> BY RON HALL

Sam Lang grew up in a small Georgia town located midway between Augusta and Macon. He earned degrees in economics and agronomy from the University of Georgia — and in 1984, was recruited by and worked for Orkin Lawn Care, headquartered in Atlanta. Looking north (but not too far north), Lang saw opportunity in North Carolina's Triangle region, and that's where he established his lawn care company in 1989.

Sam, your company is in its 20th year. How are you celebrating your milestone?

We are a close-knit group here at Fairway Green, and we plan to have a family and employee celebration after the seeding season.

You grew up in Georgia and are a proud graduate of the University of Georgia. What possessed you to build your business in and around Raleigh, NC? The decision to open in Raleigh was based on demographics. The Triangle area had a highly educated population with a high- to medium-income level. The Research Triangle Park area had experienced tremendous growth in high-tech jobs. IBM was based here, and the bio-tech industry was beginning to establish itself. All of this growth was enhanced by the presence of the University of North Carolina, Duke University and North Carolina State University. Growth was happening - and future growth seemed certain.

Your market is in the socalled transition zone, and has just about every species of turfgrass imaginable. What kind of challenge is that to your company? Common Bermuda was brought here from Africa in the 1700s, and there is a lot of that. Before the recent economic turndown of last fall, about 600 people a week were moving to the Triangle. A large percentage of these newcomers were moving here from more northern states, and were accustomed to Kentucky bluegrass lawns. We've had a challenge educating them about the types of grass that grow well here. We also have to provide them with realistic expectations in regard to the services we provide.

Over the years, you have been a big supporter of the turfgrass program at North Carolina State University. How has

# that relationship benefited you and your company?

Having a close relationship with NC State has been a huge factor in the growth of Fairway Green, and it has enhanced our credibility. Dr. Fred Yelverton and the entire faculty have been a valuable resource for us. Being able to call on some of the best scientists in the turfgrass industry for help is unique, and gives confidence to the customers we serve.

# How would describe your involvement with Fairway

**Green today?** I remain very involved in the daily operations of Fairway Green. I have been fortunate to have a management team that allows me to pursue other interests outside of the company. For example, my wife, Carolyn, and I own farms and are venturing into the livestock business.



company: Fairway Green, Raleigh, NC

FOUNDED: 1989

PRINCIPAL: Sam Lang president

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 2

SERVICE AREA: Raleigh and surrounding counties, Charlotte and surrounding region

#### EMPLOYEES: 26

SERVICES OFFERED: traditional and organic fertilization, tree and shrub care, ornamental bed weed control, insect and disease control, fire ant control, aeration and slit seeding, sports fields service

#### INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT:

board member and past president of the Turfgrass Council of North Carolina (1992-2002); board member of PLCAA (1996-1998); helps secure funding for the NCSU Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research and Education

HOBBIES: bird hunting, training dogs, raising livestock, and family travel

FAMILY: wife, Carolyn, sons Max and Cormac, and daughter Walker Rose

WEBSITE: FairwayGreen.com

A **RELATIONSHIP** WITH NC STATE HAS BEEN A **HUGE FACTOR** IN THE GROWTH OF FAIRWAY GREEN."