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# Fifty

and counting

Two Green Industry firms and one association also celebrate a half century in business. *By Tom Crain*

## Suburban Landscape Service St. Paul, Minn.

WHEN JAMES GOOSELAW started Suburban Landscape Service (SLS) in 1962 near the then new Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport and the Metropolitan Stadium where the Minnesota Vikings and Twins played, dairy cows and cornfields surrounded all three. The term “landscape company” wasn’t understood by the upscale and affluent St. Paul-based customers that SLS would soon serve. From time to time, homeowners hired “gardeners” to plant perennials and pull weeds; “construction companies” built major projects such as retaining walls, patios or gazebos.

Gooselaw soon got customers to understand what a landscape company could do. Brandishing a master’s degree in horticulture, a fresh-pressed uniform and a logo on his truck, this landscape pioneer knocked on many doors in the exclusive and leafy St. Paul Summit/Grand/Crocus Hill neighborhood on the Mississippi River bluffs.



He landed lucrative contracts mowing, weeding, planting and installing elegant landscapes and hardscapes to complement these estates.

For 38 years, Gooselaw operated quietly and successfully with a simple formula of doing maintenance three days per week, landscaping the next three days and remaining closed on Sundays. He used sustainable practices before they were commonly desired by customers, including composting waste materials, mulching and retaining water through swales and rain gardens. He had three employees and kept a low profile,

Suburban Landscape Service’s current owner, Collin Merrill, and his uncle James Gooselaw, who founded the firm in 1962.

relying only on word-of-mouth marketing.

In 1998 Gooselaw hired his nephew Collin Merrill. Two years later he bought out his uncle, becoming the owner at age 25. Merrill rehired Gooselaw to be the on-site project manager for three years before he retired.

To grow the business quickly Merrill identified which of the company’s current residential customers also owned business property. Three customers did, and he landed all three for the company’s first of many commercial accounts.

Today, Merrill has grown the company from revenue less than \$500,000 to \$1.75 million with 20 employees. The customer mix has gone from 100 percent residential to a 66/33 percent residential/commercial mix.

To continue its growth SLS has teamed up with Gertens, one of the best



Longtime members of the ALCC include, from left: Jim DelPonte (DelPonte Landscape); Lew Hammer (retired); Carl Anderson (retired); Wallace SaBell (SaBell's Enterprises); Chuck Ferdig (Complete Landscape Care); and Stanley Brown Jr. (Alameda Wholesale Nursery).

FIVE  
DECADES  
OF SERVICE

## Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado Denver

FOR 50 YEARS, the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) has tackled important regional issues such as responsible water use and immigration reform.

ALCC was first formed in Denver as the Landscape Contractors of Colorado with 20 members. One of ALCC's early accomplishments was replacing the term "landscape gardener" to "landscape contractor" in the 1964 Colorado Nursery Act to gain respect for the industry. According to ALCC past president Stan Brown, president of Englewood, Colo.-based Alameda Wholesale Nursery, the goal of the association was to raise professionalism by improving the image of the industry and educating its members.

"In the early days, 'fly-by-night' contractors and those installing jobs in an unprofessional manner were a much bigger problem than today," he says. "So we tackled this problem head on with the offering of educational programs addressed by seminars

at monthly dinner meetings included in the membership dues. We started out each meeting with a prayer and sponsored nickel beers that brought in 100 to 120 attendees each time."

ALCC launched its first trade show in 1978 at Adams County Fairgrounds, 20 miles northeast of Denver. "That first year there were more exhibitors than attendees," Brown says. This year, at what's now called the ProGreen Expo, there were 6,500 attendees and 650 exhibitors. It's the program with the highest member satisfaction and the largest line item in ALCC's budget besides membership dues.

The list of ALCC's community service projects over five decades is long and impressive. The combined retail value of the work totals more than \$1 million.

Today, the ALCC has 650 members and a strong network of six chapters. Each chapter delivers services to members and the public, sponsoring educational opportunities and hosting social events.

"Associations like ours are successful because of the many volunteer hours donated by our members," says Kristen Fefes, who's served as ALCC's executive director for the past 12 years. "Our members truly care about the communities in which they work, and giving back has always been an important tenet inside the association."

Service projects have included tree planting on the 16th Street Mall and Denver Tech Center in the 1970s; renovations at the Central City Opera House and the Brandon Center for Battered Women in the 1980s; and specialty gardens, school playgrounds and libraries in the 1990s and early 2000s. In recent years, ALCC members gave Fort Collins neighborhoods new garden plots to grow their own veggies; a Colorado Springs hospital an outdoor place for healing; and Denver's KidStreet Children's Hospital an improved outdoor play area.

Now that the ALCC successfully celebrated its golden anniversary with a gala in July, Fefes is looking forward to the next 50 years.

"The association's key accomplishments are endless and its programs are many," she says. "For example, our responsible water usage and xeriscape leadership experiences that grew out of the 1980s continues to change the industry each time another drought cycle occurs."

Additionally, the association has led on immigration reform, forming Employers for Immigration Reform in 2006 with the Colorado Nursery & Greenhouse Association.

"Immigration reform is far from over," says Fefes. "And like many of our sister organizations in other states, we'll continue to be an integral part of this conversation."

known garden centers in the Twin Cities, and Stoneman Masonry to deliver a larger array of products and services. It also added snow removal services.

One major initiative in the anniversary year has been the launch of a professional landscape design/build division, SLS Design.

"This process has empowered our customers and streamlines their experience with us," says Merrill. "One of the main differences in landscaping today versus 50 years ago is the explosion of outdoor living spaces that incorporate fire, water and kitchen features. My Uncle Jim finds it hard to believe that a current customer would spend \$3,500 on a granite countertop for an outdoor kitchen."

One focus for SLS Design has been to sell energy-efficient landscapes. Merrill tells clients about how properly designed landscapes can decrease heating and cooling bills and reduce noise and air pollution.

"We can show results of our design team managing our property's landscape elements reducing cooling costs by 15 to 50 percent and heating costs by 25 to 40 percent," he says. "While energy-efficient landscaping requires some initial capital, it can provide enough energy savings that returns initial investment in an average of eight years."

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## Mark M. Holeman, Inc. Indianapolis, Ind.

MARK M. HOLEMAN, INC., a full-service landscape firm, started out as a local asphalt servicing company that landed a lucrative federal contract assisting with the building of the new interstate highway system, which reached its "spaghetti best" in and around Indianapolis. The company also was awarded a landscape contract to add trees for beautification along the major intersections of the interstate system that wound through Indianapolis.

After years building the interstate, the company reemerged as a residential landscape firm.

At its current location since 1980, Holeman's services include design/build, maintenance, integrated pest management and snow removal. Its 10-acre landscape nursery contains an extensive collection of plant material with a major water feature pond.

"We stock a large variety of trees, shrubs, perennials and groundcovers, including many large specimen and uncommon species," says Rich Blankenship, vice president-nursery manager and an Indiana-accredited horticulturalist who has been with Holeman for 21 years. He is also past president of the Indianapolis Landscape Association and current president of the Indiana Nursery & Landscape Association. "As rhododendrons and azaleas are a specialty of ours, we always have our favorite varieties available."

At its 50th anniversary celebration June 1, the very day 50 years ago the company opened its doors for business, Holeman raised more than \$3,700 for the Little Red Door Cancer Agency to create a community garden. Members of the community came together at the company's headquarters to donate food, products and services to be auctioned off for the cancer charity.

Though founder Mark Holeman is retired, his legacy for involvement and support of landscape associations, foundations and horticulture societies is



HALF-CENTURY MARK

Employees of Mark M. Holeman, Inc., surround company founder Mark Holeman and his wife at the 50th anniversary celebration in June.

exemplary. During his tenure, he served as president of the Indiana Nursery & Landscape Association, Indianapolis Landscape Association, Indianapolis Museum of Art Horticultural Society and Indianapolis Museum of Art Board of Governors, among other things.

Continuing Holeman's tradition of affiliation and support of professional associations, the company has a long list of organization memberships.

What's changed over the last 50 years? Blankenship is amazed at the differences in equipment between now and then, including bucket trucks used to lift workers and cranes for difficult tree removal.

"When Holeman conducted tree removal in the 1960s, it was all done by hand," Blankenship says. "It was a painstaking process requiring a lot of manpower and considerable time."

Blankenship also notes how far internal communication has come.

"I used to have to go to a pay phone to communicate on a job site," he says. "Now, smartphones, GPS and even mobile offices with Internet access provide great convenience and efficiencies."

Finally, Blankenship can't help but point out the definition of what a luxury outdoor living space means to his residential landscape customers.

"A luxury outdoor space used to mean the installation of a large rectangular swimming pool, formal tennis court and a BBQ pit. Now, it's all about creating unique intimate outdoor living spaces where you can cook in a full kitchen and recline in a full living room. It's a great trend for the industry." LM

*Crain is a freelance writer based in Northeast Ohio.*



[CRABGRASS]

[NIMBLEWILL]

[BENTGRASS]

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# A history of

The technology and products Green Industry suppliers have brought to market

**1689**

The first **Husqvarna** factory is established as a weapons foundry.

**1837**

**John Deere** fashions a polished-steel plow in his Grand Detour, Illinois, blacksmith shop.



**1876**

**Kohler Co.** produces its first engine.



**1939**

**Dodge** introduces the "job rated" concept to help customers choose the right truck for the job.

**1945**

**Pennington Seed** is founded.



**1946**

**Dow Chemical** introduces the broadleaf herbicide 2,4-D.

**1957**

**NAFA** launches.



**1959**

**Husqvarna** starts production of chainsaws and power lawn mowers.



**1966**

**John Deere** introduces the first commercially available rollover protection devices (ROPS), later releasing the patent to the industry without charge.

**Kohler Engines'** 1 millionth engine comes off the assembly line.

**1969**

**Target Specialty Products** opens.



**1977**

**Walker Mowers**

**Walker Mower** is designed.

**1980**

**Syngenta** legacy company Ciba-Geigy supports the formation of PLCAA (now PLANET) and attends its first trade show.



Redding Nursery develops **DeerPro**

**Winter Animal Repellent** to protect evergreen trees and shrubs from winter deer browse damage.

**PermaGreen Supreme** is formed.



**1986**



Matt and Irene Shooner found

**Focal Point Communications** to provide customer newsletters to lawn care operators.



**U.S. Lawns** launches.

**1987**

**Versa-Lok**

introduces a solid, top-pinning segmental retaining wall system.



**1989**

**PhoneTree**

pioneers automated messaging.



**NAFA** moves fleet management certification program fully in-house.

**1992**

**PhoneTree** wins product of the year for the second year in a row at Consumer Electronics Show.

**1993**

**Syngenta** introduces **Barricade** preemergent herbicide.

**Drafrix Software/PRO Landscape** is founded.



**Tree World Plant Care Products Inc.** acquires the North American distribution rights for Plantskydd.

**1994**

**Bayer** introduces Merit, a grub and insect control product.



**Dow AgroSciences** launches Snapshot specialty herbicide for controlling both grassy and broadleaf weeds.

The new **Ram** launches with a full range of gas and diesel engines, and the highest chassis load and tow ratings.



**Techniseal** launches complete line of paver cleaning/sealing products.

**1995**

**Husqvarna** launches a solar-powered, self-propelled lawn mower.

**1997**

**PermaGreen Supreme** debuts first Ride-On Spreader Sprayer.

# innovation

have helped the industry advance over the years. Here are just a few milestones.

1998



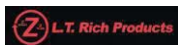
DynaScape opens.

Walker introduces first zero-turn mower with EFI engine.

1999



BASF invests in the future of turfgrass by moving to North Carolina's Research Triangle Park.



L.T. Rich opens its doors.

2001

Bayer launches TopChoice, preventive fire ant protection.

2002

Bayer and Aventis merge to form Bayer Environmental Science.



2003

BASF introduces Pendulum AquaCap herbicide featuring a patented microencapsulation technology to reduce odor and staining.

**Modeco Systems**

Modeco Systems develops TimeScope mobile time- and production-tracking solutions.

2004



Quali-Pro forms (as a part of Farmsaver, which was purchased the same year by MAI).

Redding Nursery receives EPA registration for **DeerPro Winter**, making it available to commercial applicators across the country.

**LandOpt** is founded by George Fechter, Daniel Stearns, John Davies and Dan Eichenlaub.

2006

Quali-Pro is fully integrated into MAI.

2007

**Dow AgroSciences** brings Dimension 2EW specialty herbicide to market for crabgrass control in a water-based formulation.



**Drafix Software** releases PRO Landscape Version 13, introducing professional landscape design software that includes 3-D rendering for both photo imaging and CAD.

Hunter acquires MP Rotator from Walla Walla Sprinkler Co.



2008



**Pine Hall Brick** introduces StormPave permeable clay pavers.

2009

Hunter acquires landscape lighting company FX Luminaire.

**Target Specialty Products** celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



**Earthway** introduces the S25 ground-driven push sprayer.

2010

**DynaScape** launches cloud-based business management software.

2011



**Syngenta** introduces Tenacity herbicide, the only pre- and postemergent herbicide that can be used before, after or at seeding.

Walker founder Max Walker dies.

**U.S. Lawns** celebrates 25 years.

**Kohler Engines** unveils two new Tier 4 Final emission-compliant, heavy-duty diesel engines without a diesel particulate filter.

**Quali-Pro** merges with Control Solutions Inc., an MAI company, to form the core of MAI Environmental Solutions.

2012

**John Deere** celebrates its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary.



The **LandOpt** Network achieves a growth milestone of 20 active contractors.

In the fall **BASF** launches Pillar G Intrinsic brand fungicide with both disease control and plant health label language.

**Drafix Software** launches PRO Landscape Companion for iPad.

**U.S. Lawns** adds Alaska branch.



Production of the new 2013 **Ram** 1500, with best-in-class fuel efficiency, begins in the third quarter.

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## THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

# Managing face time

**S**elling has never been more challenging. That's because it's becoming more difficult to get real face time with prospects. Therefore, when you do get face time, it's critical to manage it effectively. Use the following principles to assist salespeople to ensure they don't waste anyone's time.

### When presenting to a prospect

Presenting to prospects can be sensitive. Following these seven steps will make it a little easier:

**1. Provide them with your agenda** at the start. For example, *"My goal is to arrive at a decision today based on your timeline. If that works for you, shall we begin?"*

**2. Review the prospect's desires and needs.** Prospects often forget their own needs, so go ahead and remind them briefly. For example, *"As we discussed, you were interested in ... and indicated that several things were of special importance to you."*

**3. Start with the big picture** to get them excited. Avoid too many technical details; it bores the prospect and saps the energy from your presentation. Above all, be brief and leave plenty of time for Q&A.

**4. Talk about price early** and then recommend that it be addressed at the end during the Q&A.

**5. Watch the body language and eye contact.** If they are not "with you," stop! Address concerns directly. For example, *"It looks as if you have a concern."* Or, *"It looks as if you are busy and in a rush?"*

**6. Use trial closes** to address disconnects. For example, *"Is this what you have in mind when hiring a contractor for this job?"*

**7. Maximize the visual content** of the presentation. Have pictures and charts and minimize the bullet point slides.

### When closing and negotiating

Don't stop after the presentation. You still have to seal the deal. In doing so, be sure to:

**1. Offer options.** This includes some price negotiation (if you bid it fit), scope and spec adjustments, and benefits that address the prospect's

primary fears, risks and desires.

**2. Validate objections.** For example, *"Price is always critical when making a decision like this. What is your pricing range for budget and enhancements?"* Or *"There are several ways to manage your cost."* Or *"That's a real concern shared by many of our current clients when we first we started with them. Might I share an example?"* Always have an example you can share that addresses the particular concern.

**3. Be brief** when responding to objections. Do not defend or justify your service or pricing strategy. Simply state your logical response and ask if this fits their needs.

**4. Use real-life examples** to illustrate your points. Start with the words, *"We faced the same issues on a job last week and here's how we handled it."*

**5. Paraphrase and summarize** at the end to check for agreement before you ask for the close.

**6. Ask for the close directly** by referring to the contracting process and the signature you need to get them started.

**7. Use silence** after you ask. Sit back and let them make the first move.

### When following up

Most of the success salespeople experience is the result of persistent follow-up. Great preparation and great calls only get you about 50 percent of the way to selling success. Follow-up gets you the remaining 50 percent. Here are several strategies for follow-up:

- ▶ Send a handwritten thank you note.
- ▶ Send an email summary of the meeting and the actions you intend to pursue, assuming you did not get a final "no".
- ▶ Follow through on your promises to deliver information and materials.
- ▶ Send "news" items to the customer. These can be scanned articles or web links that refer to an issue that arose in the sales call.
- ▶ Be available. Communicate times for calls and be there.





## AT A GLANCE

**NAME:** Bill Hildebolt, Ph.D.

**COMPANY:** Nature's Select Premium Turf Services

**LOCATION:** Winston-Salem, N.C.

**YEAR FOUNDED:** 1994

**INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT:**

I authored *The Professional Entrepreneur, When Cowboys Grow Up*. All proceeds go directly to the PLANET Academic Excellence Foundation (AEF).

**BUSINESS PHILOSOPHY:** Our tagline is "Our Service Reflects Our Good Nature."

**FAMILY:** My youngest son works for us and my oldest son has his own business with his wife. I also have two beautiful grandchildren.

**HOBBIES:** Golf and wood-working

**WEBSITE:** [www.naturesselect.com](http://www.naturesselect.com)

Ethics may not be as valued today as they once were, but successful businessmen and women should hold themselves to high standards, says **Bill Hildebolt**, owner of Nature's Select Premium Turf Services in Winston-Salem, N.C. The No. 1 promise the former president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) makes his customers is "integrity, honesty and respect," and he feels those values still are appreciated. Hildebolt talks about challenges, running an ethical business and what it's like to see the finished product.

**How has the industry changed since you first started?**

The technology and equipment have really improved. When I started the business almost 20 years ago, I based it on biological and renewable farming procedures. Peoples' reactions were "What is this?" But now, almost two decades later, you can't even pick up a magazine without hearing all about those practices. That's how everyone is operating nowadays, and though some companies make it sound like a new idea, it's something we've been doing from the start.

**What's the most important lesson you've learned?**

I've learned that I will not let my competition drive or change my ethics. I was in the corporate world for 20-something years and even though we were dealing with trade secrets and had steep competition, it was an ethical

environment and nobody would think of trying to get ahead by stealing or cheating. That was back then. Business was built on ethics. Then I started my own business and the whole ballgame changed. I had competitors stealing from us or putting Roundup on our lawns. It was like the Wild West. You want to retaliate, but it's better not to go down that path.

**Do you see that as the biggest challenge the industry faces?**

How to compete against low ballers and still maintain your high standards is the big challenge. It's important to maintain your personal and business integrity by practicing good ethics. In this day and age, customers are using social media or services like Angie's List to find out about you. In the past you had one person aggravated if you cut a corner, but now that one person goes online and tells the

world. The ultimate advice is to deliver the best quality service possible so your customers won't even think of looking anywhere else.

**Do you think the lawn care segment in particular faces any challenges?**

Marketing and sales are the biggest challenge for the lawn care business. With the housing market and economic crisis, it's very difficult to add on new clients. We've become so frustrated with marketing that we have put our money into getting referrals. That's been the best way to get new customers.

**What's your favorite part of the business?**

I think one of the most satisfying things about lawn care is seeing your finished product. In the Green Industry, after we do a lawn renovation, we get to drive by those properties and see a magnificent-looking green carpet and know that we did that work. It's an amazing sense of accomplishment.

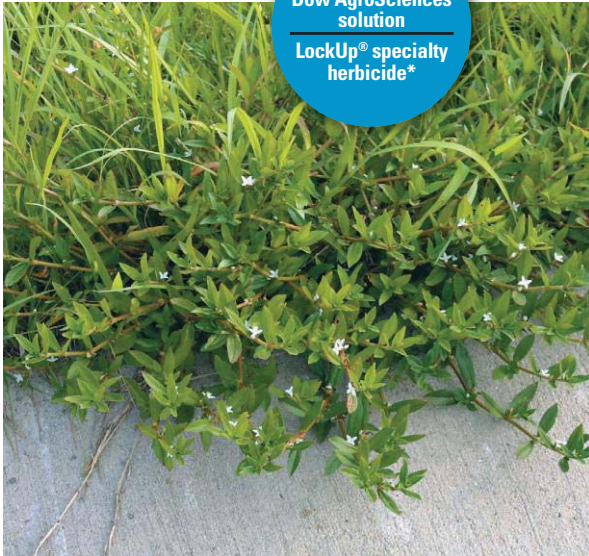
Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience covering the landscape industry.

THE ULTIMATE ADVICE IS TO **DELIVER THE BEST QUALITY SERVICE POSSIBLE** SO YOUR CUSTOMERS WON'T EVEN THINK OF LOOKING ANYWHERE ELSE."

# WEEDWATCH

STANDING SENTINEL TO PROTECT PLANT HEALTH

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## VIRGINIA BUTTONWEED

*Diodia virginiana*

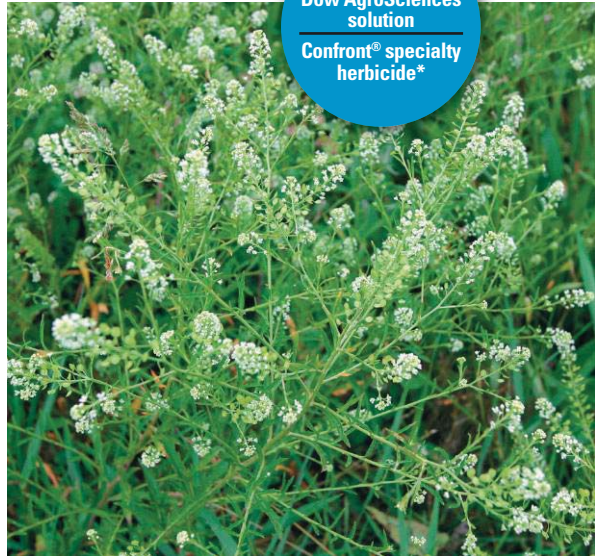
### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This spreading perennial grows along the ground. Stems root at the nodes and can be hairy.
- ▶ Its leaves are opposite and lance-shaped, and often have a yellow molting from the presence of a virus commonly associated with this weed.
- ▶ The seeds are thick and oblong, darker green on the upper surface and lighter green below.
- ▶ Star-shaped, white flowers grow between the leaf and the stem.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Removing Virginia buttonweed by hand is often ineffective, because creeping roots or fragments left behind may re-establish.
- ▶ Apply two- or three-way products containing synthetic auxins such as fluroxypyr, dicamba or clopyralid. Granular products containing penoxsulam are also labeled for Virginia buttonweed control. Multiple applications of granule or liquid products may be needed for complete control.

Recommended  
Dow AgroSciences  
solution  
Confront® specialty  
herbicide\*



## VIRGINIA PEPPERWEED

*Lepidium virginicum*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This annual weed develops as a basal rosette, eventually producing flowering stems with a bottle-brush appearance.
- ▶ Its seedlings, which grow on long petioles, are hairless and oval-shaped.
- ▶ Rosette leaves are lobed along both sides of the leaf. Leaves that grow along the flowering stem are linear and without petioles.
- ▶ Stems are erect and branched, reaching heights of 20 in.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Virginia pepperweed germinates in cool soil, and can invade fall plantings of cool-season turf that have not yet developed. Low mowing will prevent seedheads from developing, and minimize the development of new seed.
- ▶ Apply a postemergent herbicide to plants that are actively growing in the seedling to flower stage. Some products containing both triclopyr and clopyralid can be applied to cool- and warm-season turfgrass.

\* Confront is not for sale or use in New York's Nassau or Suffolk counties. State restrictions on the sale and use of Confront and LockUp apply.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit [www.DowProvesIt.com](http://www.DowProvesIt.com) or call 800/255-3726.

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