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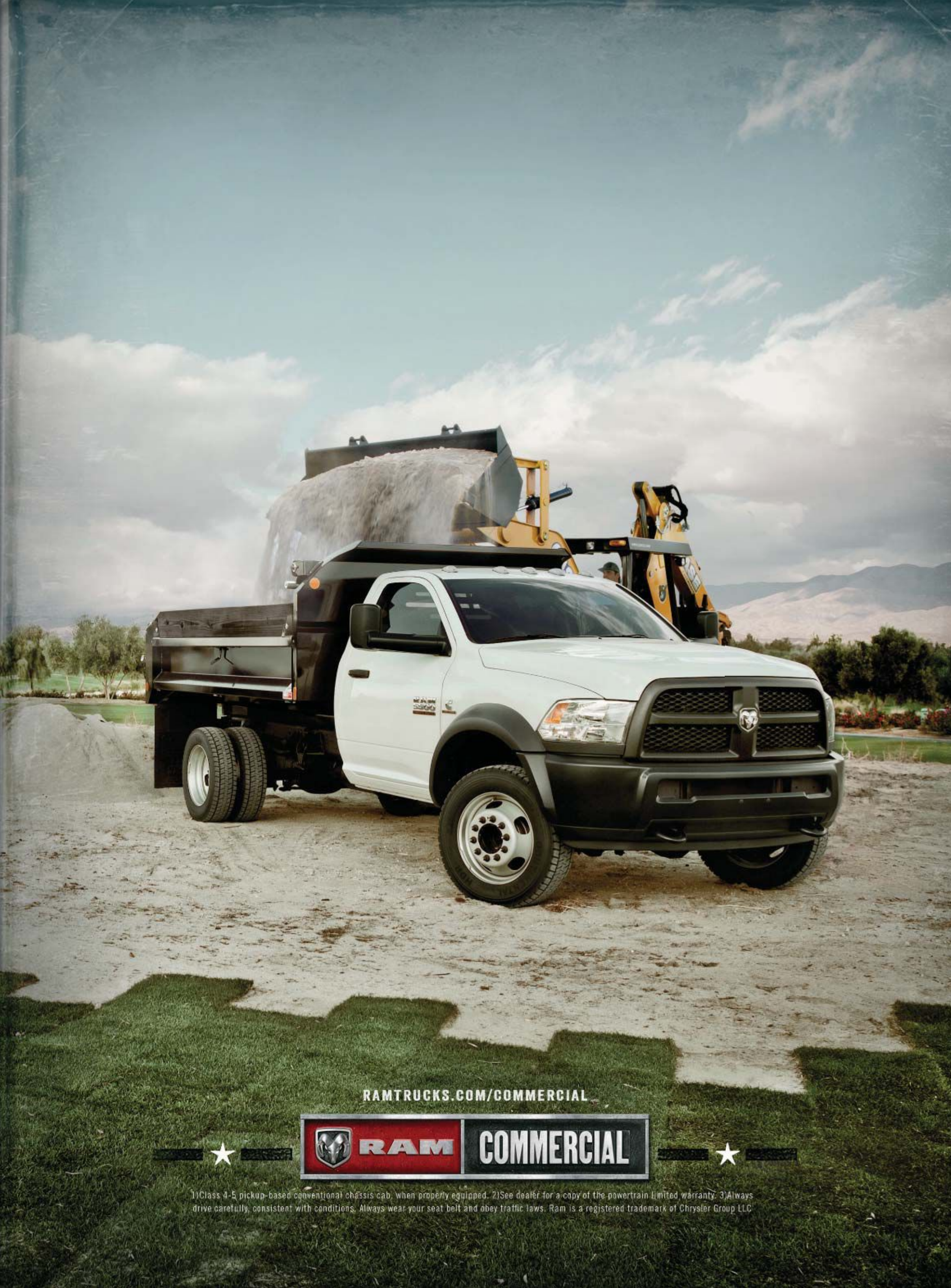
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» To supplement the cover story, check out a list of helpful Affordable Care Act resources, how insurance carriers are involved in the changes and how to figure the small business tax credit.

» Interested in altering your leadership style? Check out "How to achieve change" (from page 24).

» Snow Strategy columnist Phil Harwood offers tips on contract reviews (from page 42).

ILLUSTRATIONS: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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Reducing costs, improving lives

Research shows about 40 percent of all health care expenses in the U.S. stem from preventable chronic illnesses that are most often caused by three lifestyle choices: physical inactivity, poor diet and tobacco use, according to the Cleveland Clinic.

At the same time, the Affordable Care Act is forcing employers' hands to offer health care to all workers or pay a penalty, and with that pressure comes the heightened desire to control costs. What if there were a way to reduce costs while improving employees' productivity and overall well-being? That's where workplace wellness comes into play.

I hear about wellness all the time from my sister Gina. In addition to being one of my best friends, a half-marathon runner and a supermom to my 18-month-old nephew, Andy, she's a client wellness coordinator for Gallagher Benefits Services and a former wellness program manager for a major manufacturer. She knows a thing or two about getting employees healthy and the importance of doing so.

Consider that medical costs fall by about $3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs and absenteeism costs fall by about $2.73 for every dollar spent, according to a 2010 report published by the journal *Health Affairs*.

These ROI measures are reason enough take a look at wellness programming, but that doesn't mean implementing such efforts is easy, as my sister sees firsthand in her work.

That's why I turned to her for a few simple ideas any company can use. Here are some of her thoughts.

Begin with free. Gina says most insurance carriers offer some wellness offerings, such as a tobacco quit line, discounts to weight-loss programs and the like, but many employees don't take advantage of them. Start by finding out what's available to your firm and promoting those internally. Don't forget about other potentially free resources from groups or associations you belong to. There also may be government funding available. For example, Ohio's Bureau of Workers' Compensation offers a wellness grant program.

Start a wellness committee. You may be thinking, "This is all great, but I still don't have time to coordinate it." Why not delegate some duties to an employee wellness committee? They can brainstorm ideas, create a newsletter or bulletin board and conduct a survey to see what offerings employees would take advantage of if they were available (such as healthy snacks, blood pressure screenings, smoking cessation classes, etc.). Also consider grouping wellness in with safety. Communicating wellness information during safety tailgate talks is a better venue than sharing it at a benefits enrollment meeting when everyone's just concerned with their rates.

Have a strategy. A "Biggest Loser" program may be fun and effective on a short-term basis, but is it sustainable and is it achieving long-term goals? Maybe not. Gina recommends a company wellness strategy focusing on the Big 4 areas of tobacco use, nutrition, exercise and stress management. Why? These are the areas linked to preventable chronic illnesses that cost us all so much.

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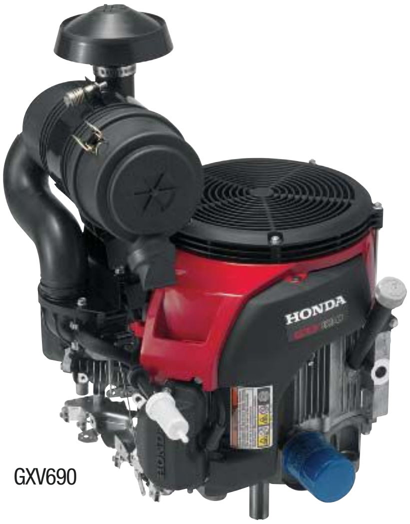

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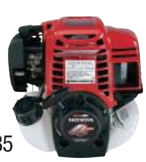

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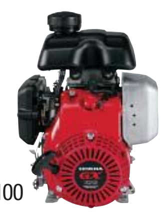

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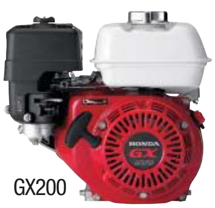

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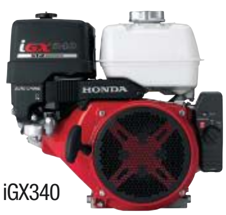

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National Mall upgrades to propane mowers

One-third of the park division's mower fleet has changed over from diesel, thanks to a PERC donation.

BY **MARISA PALMIERI**

More than 24 million people visit the National Mall each year, and the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC) is betting that more than a few of those visitors will notice the shiny, new propane-fueled mowers maintaining the high-profile grounds.

On June 24 PERC donated six Exmark Lazer Z S-Series lawn mowers with Kohler Command Pro Propane EFI engines to the National Mall and Memorial Parks (NAMA), a division of the National Park Service. NAMA encompasses the Mall and many of the national memorials around Washington.

The donation amounts to approximately $70,000 in equipment.

"This is an opportunity to showcase this technology in a place where millions of people come every year," said Roy Willis, PERC president and CEO, after a ribbon-cutting ceremony outside the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. "We hope some decision makers see these propane mowers and ask the question, 'Why can't we do this back home?'"

A National Park Service employee takes a newly donated propane mower for a spin near the Thomas Jefferson Memorial on June 24.

The four 72-in. and two 60-in. Lazer Z S-Series propane-fueled zero-turn riders will comprise one-third of the Mall's mower fleet and replace diesel-fueled mowers. PERC selected these models for the donation because they are the first to employ Kohler's Command Pro Propane EFI engine—a technology that was developed and commercialized through PERC funding.

The combined deployment of the mowers and two electric vehicles, also donated at the ceremony, added NAMA to the list of national parks advancing the Green Parks Plan, a National Park Service initiative to reduce dependence on foreign oil, mitigate the effects of climate change and conserve energy.

"We are always looking for ways to integrate sustainable practices into every part of our operation," said Bob Vogel, National Mall and Memorial Park superintendent. "The electric cars and generous donation of propane mowers from PERC will help the National Mall meet its sustainability goals with a clean-burning, American-made fuel."

Switching to propane mowers is expected to lower carbon monoxide emissions by 80 percent compared with gasoline, reduce fuel spills and save NAMA money on fuel and maintenance costs, PERC says. Kohler estimates its engine increases fuel efficiency by 25 percent compared to a carbureted gasoline engine and also reduces overall mower operating costs.

The mowers will be refueled using a propane cylinder exchange system from Thompson Gas.

OPEI confirms officers, board

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) named its 2013-2014 officers and board of directors at the OPEI Annual Meeting in Williamsburg, Va., in June.

"OPEI is entering this new fiscal year stronger than ever, both organizationally and financially," said Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI. "The OPEI board reflects the impressive scope and breadth of our membership. Our membership is at a record high, representing small engine manufacturers with a range of power sources, utility vehicle manufacturers, and a myriad of small engine equipment manufacturers and suppliers serving a broad range of industries and uses."

Officers for the 2013-2014 year include:

- OPEI Chairman Todd Teske, chairman, president and CEO, Briggs & Stratton Corp.;
- OPEI Vice Chair Paul Mullet, president, Excel Industries; and
- OPEI Secretary/Treasurer Lee Sowell, president – outdoor products, Techtronic Industries.

Continuing service on the OPEI board are:

- Immediate Past Chairman Daniel Ariens, president and CEO, Ariens Co.;
- Marc Dufour, president, Club Car;
- Peter Hampton, president, Active Exhaust Corp.;
- Jean Hlay, president and COO, MTD Products;
- Steven Bly, executive vice president, Echo;
- Ed Cohen, vice president, government & industry relations, Honda North America;
- Michael Hoffman, chairman and CEO, The Toro Co.;
- Tim Merrett, vice president, AT&T Global Platform Turf & Utility, Deere & Co.; and
- Fred Whyte, president, Stihl.

New to the board this year are Tom Cromwell, president, Kohler Engines, Kohler Co., and John Cunningham, president, consumer products group, Stanley Black & Decker.

MAILBOX


NEWS+VIEWS

Looking up

WHO'S IN CHARGE OF YOUR FLEET?

NAFA

Heads up

I loved "Looking up" (Hear Me Out, June). It was refreshing with excellent application at the end.

I've been to Italy but not to Cinque Terre; it sounds like an awesome trip. My "looking up" moment was when I was in Florence and I looked up at the "David," that was breathtaking for me.

Ed Laflamme, LIC
The Harvest Group
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PHOTO: BETH GERACI

Minutaglio passes at 64

John Minutaglio, aka John Mini, founder and president of John Mini Distinctive Landscapes in Congers, N.Y., passed away June 21. He was 64 years old.

"This is not only a great loss for our family and our company, but also for the entire industry," said Minutaglio's son, Mark. "My father was a pioneer and an innovator, setting new standards and raising the bar in the landscaping industry. Growing up, I can recall how proud he always was of our company's achievements and the team that will carry us forward for years to come."

Since the company's inception in 1973, Minutaglio built it into a leading and well recognized interior landscaping, exterior landscaping and holiday decorating businesses with $11.3 million in revenue in 2012. Minutaglio's family says he took great pride in growing the business, along with the help of his family, employees and his business partner and Senior Vice President Jack Harris, who continues to operate the business. The company won more than 100 national awards for quality and environmental improvement.

Minutaglio served as a coordinator of the landscaping program at the New York Botanical Garden and created its curriculum for interior landscaping.

BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON | The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

To branch or not to branch

At some point, it seems that every successful owner is eager to branch out. Perhaps the company needs to expand in response to growth, gain a competitive edge or capture and create opportunity.

Opening a branch can reduce travel time and put the crews closer to their customers. It can also be a solution if your company outgrows its main facility.

However, sometimes the reasons aren't so clear.

When contemplating opening an office in a new location, ask yourself:

› What position does my company hold in my present market?

› What does the new market look like? Is it wide open?

› How will I allocate my resources in a new market?

› How many contracts are lined up to support a new location?

› Can I financially and opportunistically sustain another office?

Guidelines for getting started:

› Determine start-up costs, review existing financials and lay out a new budgeted income statement for the new branch. Forecast revenue to avoid underestimating cash-flow requirements. Keep fixed costs to a minimum. See how long it will take for the branch to operate cash positive or how long you'll have to underwrite the branch until it's self sustaining. Do this first.

› Ask yourself "Is it necessary?" Unless your company is operating at a high level, sales growth, profitability, high customer and employee retention, you are probably not ready.

› Before opening in a new market area, do a thorough evaluation of the area you're planning to enter. Cultural nuances differ from community to community. Study your new area prior to committing to it to make sure it's a good fit.

› Ensure you have the technologies needed to share work between locations, good company controls and systems and processes that can be duplicated in a remote office.

› If your main problem is space or travel time, you probably do not need a full branch, but rather a satellite yard.

› Whether a satellite yard or a branch, you should put a trusted leader from your team in charge of the facility to help maintain your company culture and values and implement your systems. Guaranteeing standardization of your service and culture is one of the most important elements needed to help the new office be successful.

› Determine how the satellite or branch will be supported both administratively and operationally. A satellite may not need administrative support on site but does need support. It also needs a mechanic.

› If you're considering a satellite yard, beware of the duplication of overhead, which can more than offset the cost savings of reduced travel time and other proposed operational efficiencies. Most likely you'll need a specific growth plan to grow the book of business for the new operation.

› The HR component is critical. You most likely will benefit from having employees of the new facility live in close proximity to the new operation. Moving current employees to the new facility is fraught with challenges. Many car pools are upset; some employees can't or won't move. Attracting new hires to the facility will take time and effort, as will interviewing and hiring. Often employees will agree to move and give it a try only to start looking for a new job, so expect some negative surprises.

› If you're the owner, plan to be visible at the new facility, possibly even work there one day per week. This way, you can see how it's working and improve on what's not.

› Have a Plan B. Prepare for the worst. Have an exit strategy in place in case it doesn't work out. Make sure your lease agreements are flexible, and scale back if it's not working or if you lose a key piece of business.

Opening a new office can be promising. The key is to first challenge the plan, then put people in place to make sure it's executed to perfection.