

# WALKER TALK

SERVING

NCE PROFESSIONALS

## **"Independent thinking" in Indiana**

*For Dave Reynolds,  
being fashionable  
is being profitable*

# WALKER TALK

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## Walker Product Philosophy

**S**ome people might think a mission statement or product philosophy is just "words on paper" and a waste of time. But to get into business and stay in business, it is important to know who you are, how you got to where you are, and then have the vision of where you want to go. A written statement or philosophy helps in the guiding process.

Seventeen years ago, our company adopted a product philosophy that had been used by another company in another industry. It seemed to fit our situation — since we were just starting to "poor boy" our way into the lawn mower business:

The only way for a small company to enter an established product market and stay there is to design products with **irresistible superiority** and **uncompromising quality**. A conventional product with conventional performance may be acceptable and even attractive when offered by a large established company; the same product offered by a small company cannot hope to survive in the marketplace where profit margins are small, competition is strong and consumer loyalty to existing product lines is great.

Designing and manufacturing a product that has brought success and satisfaction to our customers is the basis of the success and growth Walker Manufacturing has enjoyed over the last several years. Our philosophy continues.

WALKER TALK is published by Johnson Hill Press, 1233 Janesville Avenue, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538  
Phone (414) 563 6388. Printed in the U.S., copyright 1994



*Bob Walker*

Bob Walker  
President

# For Dave Reynolds, being fashionable is being profitable

*"Independent thinking" in Indiana*

Take exit 90 off Interstate 65 in Indiana and turn left twice and you'll be on the door step of Reynolds Landscape Maintenance. Located in Franklin, Indiana, approximately 20 miles south of Indianapolis, Reynolds maintains 78 residential properties in and around Franklin and mows 80 acres of industrial turf. The company started mowing lawns better than 20 years ago,

before, in the words of owner Dave Reynolds, it "became fashionable to be in the maintenance business."

Reynolds is a full-service landscape/maintenance company that offers customers a complete menu of services, including mowing and maintenance, fertilization and plant and hardscape installation. On this cool spring morning, a few days before the running of the Indianapolis 500, Dave and his crews learn they'll be without an employee.

So Dave's wife Carolyn pitches in. "She still enjoys mowing, and she won't mind helping out this morning," Dave relates.

With that, Reynolds' residential crew takes to the field. On the way, Dave admits that being fashionable doesn't define his way of doing busi-



*Last year, Carolyn and Dave Reynolds recorded their best year ever in lawn maintenance.*

ness. Not to say he's out of step. He just does things his way. His way, he explains, is measuring growth by profit margin, not by number of accounts. Experience is a great teacher.

In its heyday, Reynolds employed 25 people and mowed as far north as Indianapolis. The majority of its accounts now are within a couple mile radius, and the compa-

ny only has four full-time employees. Yet it is far more profitable than it was during the "bigger days." Last year, Reynolds recorded its best year ever, operating at a 24 percent profit margin.

After a short drive, the pickup and trailer pull into a high-end residential community where the crew will maintain more than a dozen yards, each with an average of

12,000 to 15,000 square feet of lawn to mow. Carolyn and Dave Pride-more, a four-year Reynolds employee, start mowing, while Dave offers a brief history of his company.

Reynolds Landscape is located on the 160-acre family farm. The house in which Dave was born is little over a stone's throw away. His daughter and her family live there now. Dave built all of the buildings on his homestead. The vegetable gardens that ring the buildings and a camper that appears ready to go at

for the business. Dave and Carolyn eventually left the partnership and pursued the maintenance business which was relatively unaffected by the crunch.

The couple went full throttle into mowing and maintenance, picking up accounts in Indianapolis where they had been doing some landscaping. At one time, notes Dave, four crews drove 60 miles round trip daily to the city. Gradually, but persistently, they drew the business closer to home, and changed its focus from the apartment complexes they were

mower out on jobs."

The mower became a mainstay on the crew and really helped change the direction of the business. Dave — with Carolyn working right along beside of him on her Walker — focused on older residential homes in the area. They were ideal properties for the Walker, Dave explains. Yet this first Walker was more than a helper, it was an advertisement. "Customers' neighbors would see the mower and want me to use it on their lawns," he adds. "The mower helped set me apart from competition, and still today, there is no one out there in our area really competing with me and

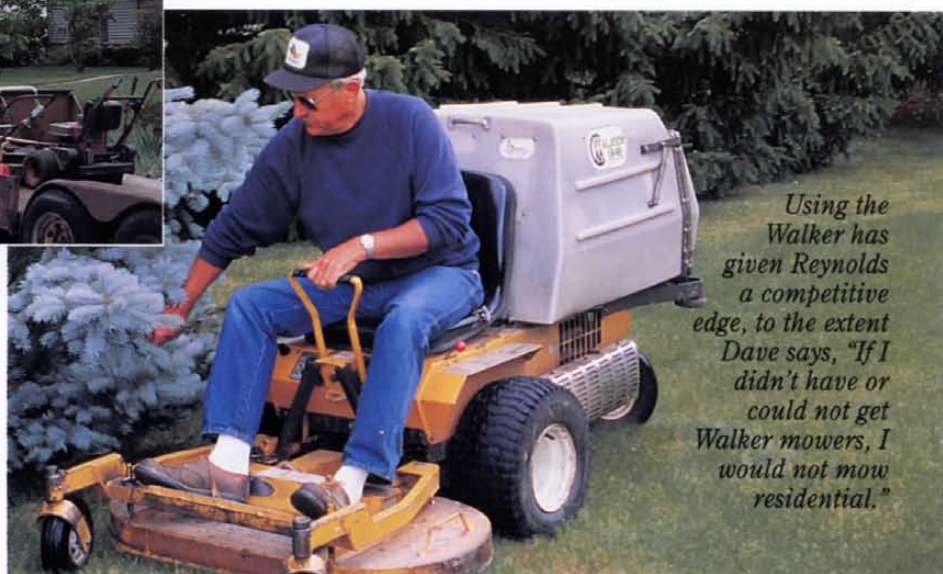


*Reynolds equipment lineup may not look new and fashionable, but looks aren't everything — performance is!!*

a moment's notice give away Dave's two hobbies, gardening and "picking and a grinning" at bluegrass festivals.

His first job — not counting milking cows and doing other farm chores — was for Arvin Industries in Franklin and later he spent three years with Chrysler where he was ground traffic manager for the company's Mopar Division. When the plant closed and Dave was offered a job in another part of the country, he decided to stay put. Not that there was ever any question about leaving.

In 1972, Dave and Carolyn formed a partnership with another couple and opened up a garden center/landscaping operation. The economic downturn in the later '70s, however, caused a slowdown



*Using the Walker has given Reynolds a competitive edge, to the extent Dave says, "If I didn't have or could not get Walker mowers, I would not mow residential."*

doing to a combination of the commercial and residential mix they now have.

It was just prior to the transition in the early 1980s when Dave saw his first Walker. As he tells it, "I bought the first Walker I saw." What he doesn't usually tell is the fact he bought it for Carolyn to mow their yard at home. He didn't think the mower could compete with his large area riders and intermediate walkers. Using the Walker around home gave him other thoughts, so, in his words he began "sneaking the

my Walkers." He puts it rather succinctly when he says, "If I didn't have or could not get Walker mowers, I would not mow residential."

Carolyn pulls around to empty the catcher. Dave points to her mower, the newest of his Walkers, and says with pride, "For its first 1,463 hours we spent only \$6 on repairs."

To be sure, Dave is extremely vigilant about preventive maintenance and all of his equipment receives excellent care. Yet he says he still has reason to boast about

that figure as well as other features such as ease of operation, durability and the mower's ability to collect grass. Each of his three mowers is equipped with a grass-handling system and a 42-inch deck.

When asked about the economics of collecting clippings today, he says he doesn't subscribe to the theory they are better left on the lawn. "If customers can afford to have their lawns mowed by a contractor, they can afford the one application of fertilizer leaving clippings behind will return in nutrient value." He's also amazed by the amount of debris his mowers pick up. "There's more than grass in the collection system," tells Dave. "There's twigs, cigarette butts, and the remnants of paper bags, etc., all of which when left behind make a lawn look less attractive."

It helps to have a place to dispose of clippings. Dave dumps his right at the farm. He lets them compost and uses them later in his gardens and for plant installation projects.

### Up and running

As the Reynolds' crew "click off" the yards, Dave picks up a string trimmer and quickly applies a finishing touch. "There's not much of this work when you use a Walker," he relates.

Although he credits his mowers for much of his success, Dave knows that it takes more than a mower to make a business grow.

In this business, success hinges in large part on the ability to identify a niche. Despite having an "industrial crew," Dave feels his niche is not in that "competitive" market where, he laments, jobs are won or lost not on mowing performance but instead on bid performance. He likes residential properties, generally speaking, because customers actually see and fully appreciate the work his crews do. He prefers older, established communities where



*Despite the fact Carolyn worked beside husband Dave when they started their lawn maintenance business, Dave bought their first Walker for her to use around the home. Dave says initially he had to "sneak" it out on crews.*

customers are not continuously selling their homes and moving on.

In fact, close to 30 percent of Reynolds' residential customers are retirees. Nearly all of them take an active interest in how and what Dave's crews are doing.

For some maintenance contractors, that would be a liability, but not for Reynolds. Besides enjoying gardening, bluegrass jam sessions

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### **"I bought the first Walker I ever saw."**

are an indicator that Dave would also enjoy getting to know people and their landscape needs.

Before he picks up his trimmer again, Dave tells how being a contractor today differs from the way it used to be. In fact, he credits his best year — last year — to management skills gained over several years' experience. That includes the purchase of Clip software which reduced his billing time from three to four nights each month to one hour and having a good core of employees whose

collective experience with Reynolds adds up to 24 years.

"Without good people, you can't make it in this business," he emphasizes. Just then, Carolyn gets Dave's attention and points down the road, "Here comes Bill."

It turns out that Bill is one of Reynolds' retiree customers. He can't stand the thought of having an invoice in his mailbox, so each week he seeks out Reynolds' crew and pays cash for the mowing job to be done later that week.

"Cut it short," he tells Dave. "See you next week."

"I really enjoy these people," remarks Dave. "Every week, every day is a little bit different. Yet it's so close to being the same it inspires a high comfort level."

Keeping lawns properly maintained is half the battle, he adds. His customers have come to expect the manicured look his crews deliver. The other half is keeping customers happy. To that extent, Reynolds crews go the extra mile. Maybe it's taking trash cans back to the house on trash removal day, or stopping the mower to remove an unsightly weed or two. Every little bit helps to separate your crew from others on the street.

The small crew gathers for an impromptu strategy session. They've already mowed and trimmed five homes. After they clean up the clippings, they'll move the rig to the next street over and mow another 11 properties.

"We're making good time, today," tells Dave. "When properties are close like this, we could do 25 a day."

"I want to do this full time for another five years. Then maybe gradually back it down to three days a week, filling the time in between with a few more festivals and more gardening."

"I don't miss corporate America. I wish everybody could enjoy their work as much as I do!"

# YOUR VALUABLE CUSTOMERS

**H**ow much are your customers worth? Most business people, including owners of lawn maintenance companies, know the value of their equipment, their supplies and their employees. But they all too often overlook the value of the one dimension that keeps them in business, their customers.

To be sure, all lawn maintenance contractors intuitively know their customers are worth plenty. Quite frankly, without them, they wouldn't be in business. But when asked to place a dollar value on customers, don't be surprised if 90 percent of

customers are retained, the more valuable they become. A typical customer, for example, might be worth 30 mowing trips a year. Simple math says that at \$40 a trip, that customer is worth \$1,200. Keep the customer for five years and the figure jumps to \$6,000.

During those five years, most lawn maintenance companies will add a few additional services to the monthly invoice. A mowing job worth \$40 might be supplemented by additional trimming or pruning service; aeration, overseeding and possibly dethatching; and fertilization and/or spring and fall installations.

For full-service firms, even the smallest maintenance customers have the potential to grow into sizable accounts. Factor in the growth potential and watch customer value increase; the \$6,000 can double, even triple.

The key, however, is to retain the customer long enough to be able to grow the customer.

A customer's value increases even more when owners realize how much they're spending to replace those who've left. Included are costs associated with recruiting; e.g., advertising and other promotional activities; bidding and overall becoming familiar with a new property.

## Intangibles

Take a moment to reflect on a two or three current customers and the differences that separate them

from each other. Pets, gates, preferred mowing times and length of cut all fall into the "getting acquainted" category. In vernacular, it costs time and money to get to know new customers and perform up to their expectations. Experts in the field have termed this the cost of establishing a "service script."

In the lawn maintenance business, too, first-time properties have a tendency to need a little extra work. Do you charge for this work, or is this something you plan on

getting back later? If it's later, then that customer has suddenly gone up in value.

Intangible worth doesn't end at a property's border. How many times have you said over the last five years, "My best form of advertising is word of mouth?" The truth is, the best of the best comes from customers who've been with you for years.

There's a flip side, too; the worst kind of advertising is negative publicity, the kind you receive when a disgruntled customer leaves.

When lawn maintenance contractors say they're in this business for the long haul, what they're really saying is they're in this business to ensure their customers will be with them for a long time to come. Firms that keep their defections to a minimum are doing something right. Nine times out of 10, they're also operating at a higher profit margin than those firms forced to continually look for new customers.



## *It costs money to establish a service script.*

them not only underestimate the value, but miss it by a "country mile."

Why? Because determining customer worth goes well beyond adding up gross receipts for a year or two. A customer's value is in direct proportion to tangibles such as how long they've been customers and how much it would cost to replace them, and to intangibles such as the role they play as silent promotional partners and the value they hold just by being familiar with the way you do business.

Knowing the value of customers is as important to the bottom line as knowing key financial ratios. More importantly, when positioned properly, this knowledge will serve as a reminder to everyone to treat customers as if their very business depends on it. And it does!

## The tangibles

It's axiomatic: The longer

## FIVE TRACTORS



**Model S** — For large homeowner or light commercial use, 11-hp Kawasaki engine



**Model C** — For commercial and institutional use, 16-hp Kohler engine



**Model T** — For the mowing maintenance professional, 20-hp Kohler V-twin engine



**Model D** — With water-cooled engine for long life and economy, 16.5-hp diesel or 21-hp gasoline Kubota engine



**SD configuration** — For operators who never want to collect grass clippings or vacuum, all four basic tractor models are available in the side-discharge configuration

# The Walker Line

## *Twelve ways to spell versatility*

## THREE MOWER DECK STYLES



Three grass handling system (GHS) decks available in 36-, 42- and 48-inch cutting widths.



Four side discharge (SD) decks available in 36-, 42-, 54- and 62-inch cutting widths.



A 42-inch mulching deck.

*NOTE: All mower decks are interchangeable and will fit on any tractor. However, Model S and Model C should be limited to maximum widths of 42 and 54 inches, respectively.*

## FOUR ATTACHMENTS



Two snowblowers: a 36-inch single stage, manual lift and a 42-inch two stage, uses quick-change implement hitch and power lift. Optional soft cab.



Spring tine dethatcher clips on front of 36-, 42- or 48-inch deck.



A 47-inch rotary broom uses quick-change implement hitch and power lift. Ideal for lawn dethatching, sweeping and light snow removal.



A 46-inch dozer blade, with quick-change implement hitch and power lift, is useful for moving snow, loose dirt and gravel.

# Florida's prestigious Del Tura Country Club

*When grass grows an inch a day you need a system*

Florida grass is different from other grass types around the country. Sure, it has a reputation of being a tough customer on mower decks. In the peak growing season, it also grows like there is no tomorrow. As head of the lawn maintenance department for Del Tura and Del Vera Country Clubs in North Fort Myers, Phil Di Bernardo knows that for a fact. "Sometimes I swear you can sit and watch the grass grow. It's got to grow an inch a day," he tells.

With aggressive growing conditions like that and 1,200 homes in Del Tura and 270 in Del Vera to maintain, Di Bernardo can't afford the luxury of watching the grass grow.

Instead, he has to keep his crews out there mowing. To keep pace in the summer, that means sometimes mowing six days a week and always mowing at peak operating efficiency.

It's simple, explains Di Bernardo, an eight-year veteran at Del Tura. "We have a system." As he explains it, the system is more than a machine, it's several machines and a technique that works.

## The machines

In 1986, Di Bernardo moved to Florida from the Buffalo, New York, suburb of Tonawanda where he had worked in a machine shop for better than 30 years. A layoff forced his early retirement, but retirement wasn't what he had planned at all. He and his wife moved to Del Tura on July 16. Phil says on the 28th, he



*Top: Each Del Tura Walker is fitted with a 42-inch mulching deck that uniformly trims the grass to 4 inches high.*

*Bottom: "Leap frogging" crew (in background) speeds to the next property. When there are 1,200 properties to maintain, there is little time to ponder how to get the job done.*

was working for the maintenance department mowing lawns. "I expected to do this until I found something else to do," he recalls. Something else came along quickly. He was promoted to a group leader, and when his boss left, he was asked to manage the maintenance department.

At the time, Del Tura was in the middle of its growth spurt. Approximately 550 homes out of the current 1,200 were completed. Phil had 13 people working for him, and he knew that things had to change to keep up with projected growth.

One of his first changes was to substitute Walker mowers for the club's wide area mowers.

"When I first came to Del Tura, there were two Walker mowers," he tells. "Now there are 17, 13 at Del Tura and four at Del Vera. I found that it was more efficient to have the smaller riders mow everything, from the front and back side of the homes to the common areas and fields.

"Just from the repair factor alone," he adds, "it made sense to go with one brand name machine. As far as the Walkers go, there isn't a machine out there that beats them for these types of lots. I know that because I always try out different machines, just in case there is one better and faster. There isn't."

## The system

Watching the Del Tura crews work is like watching "poetry in



*Phil Di Bernardo corrals fast-growing Florida grass with Walker mowers and a system that works*

motion." There doesn't seem to be a wasted breath as crews and machines purr through the yards and open areas.

As described by Di Bernardo, a mowing team is really four crews, comprised of eight Walker mowers. Each crew operates two mowers. A crew member operating an edger leads the team into action, the mowers follow up, followed by the weed trimmer crew and the blowers.

The mowing crews work in tandem, each taking on successive yards. One crew member will do the back of one yard, the other the front, and the one who finishes first

does the side. When the lawn is finished the crew "leap frogs" to the next available yard.

The technique allows one crew to "do a house" in six minutes. On average, notes Di Bernardo, a mower can do 27 houses a day which translates into 54 houses per crew per day. That's a lot of grass.

Crews gain more than a little speed by not collecting clippings, explains Di Bernardo. Each Walker is equipped with a 42-inch mulching deck that uniformly trims the St. Augustine grass to 4 inches high. Three mowers are held back in spare to act as quick substitutes for

ones that go down on the job. With that many mowers and that much lawn to mow on a daily basis, breakdowns occur.

In the summer, Del Tura crews get to work at 7:00 a.m. and work until 4:30 p.m. On Friday, they are scheduled to work only until noon. The extra half day is built in to accommodate rain days. And so are Saturdays if need be, points out Di Bernardo. But if the work is done, maintenance crews can string together a longer weekend. Not bad for mowing in Florida during the peak growing season.

### **The place**

Del Tura and Del Vera country clubs are termed adult communities. Del Tura is the older of the two. In addition to having 1,200 homes, the community sports 27 holes of golf, two tennis courts, a shuffle

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### **One Del Tura crew can mow 54 yards a day.**

board, croquet court, five pools and a club house with two ballrooms.

Del Vera, just across the main road, will eventually be bigger than Del Tura. It will have more homes and even more amenities than its predecessor, notes Di Bernardo.

If it's not challenging enough to work with some of the toughest grass in the country during peak growing season, Di Bernardo finds himself working for a company that has aggressive growth plans of its own. Does the combination make him nostalgic for Buffalo? Not at all because like Buffalo, Florida has winters, too, when the grass slows and so does the work. And Di Bernardo hasn't been away that long to forget what winter is like in Buffalo.

**G**ib Charles, owner of Greening-Up Landscape Maintenance, Inc., Fort Collins, Colorado, is a prototypical landscape maintenance contractor. He is successful, he has a great reputation and he has built his business by following sound business principles. But like all too many businessmen and far too many contractors, the road to the top of his profession was more winding than it had to be because, in Gib's words, "he didn't know how to run a business."

Born and raised in Normal, Illinois, Gib moved to Fort Collins in 1973 to attend Colorado State University. He never left. Attracted by the mountains, the lifestyle and cross-country skiing, Gib found a

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**Every question contractors raise about their business has a financial implication.**

new home. After college, he worked in the mountains marking trails on his skis and later found a job at a local ski shop doing what he wanted to do most, cross country ski and talk about the sport with others. To fill in "boring" summers, he started mowing lawns.

As Gib relates, he used to mow lawns on his dad's rental properties while growing up in Normal. A \$50 gift from his grandmother helped him buy his first mower in Fort Collins. A truck with 130,000 miles on it provided the transportation. The year was 1978. He had no business plan, but was still able to grow the business. Before the season ended, he needed a helper so he hired the girl he was dating.

For five years, Gib skied and mowed, in that order. Mowing gave him something to do in the summer, other than counting the days before the first snow would fall.

That changed after he married

## Colorado's Greening-Up **DOING BUSINESS, THE BUSINESS WAY**



*Being a psychology major in school didn't give Gib (standing) the tools he needed to grow a business, to know the difference between fixed and variable costs or to understand the mystery of return on investment. Rest assured he has the tools in place now. Seated is employee Tim Roberts.*

Sandy, his first employee, and after they started a family.

"It was either get serious about the maintenance business or get a full-time job" he tells. "So skiing abruptly turned into a hobby and lawn maintenance became a career.

Symbolically, that same year Greening-Up retained its first commercial property, a sorority house, and Gib bought his first mower that had a deck larger than 21 inches.

"We were proud of our first

commercial property," Gib relates. "Later we found there was more to mowing commercial than pride, there was actually profit involved."

In 1983, Gib picked up a couple of condominiums and began forming relationships with property managers and board members that would eventually help steer his business away from residential and toward maintaining more condominium complexes. Today, 14 out of Greening-Up's 30 clients are condominiums and multiple-family prop-

erties. Neighborhood "greenbelts," a factory complex and two residential properties comprise the rest.

### Business savvy

The transition to becoming a serious maintenance contractor would not have been complete and maybe it wouldn't have happened at all if Gib had not joined the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado in 1984. He attributes those early management seminars and discussions with peers to the development of important business skills. Being a psychology major in school didn't train Gib to know the difference between fixed and variable costs or to understand the mystery of return on investment.

But Gib learned. He learned how to cost out jobs, to bid and to track costs, which he considers the most valuable tool anyone in this business can have. Every question contractors raise about their business has a financial implication whether they know it or not, notes Gib. To answer those questions and to be able to budget successfully, they have to know how much they're spending — they have to track their costs — and they have to know how much they're making.

### Zero defection

If tracking is Gib's most valuable business tool, customer retention is his primary business goal. The two go hand-in-hand, since you can't track what you don't have.

Gib is proud to admit several of his first commercial accounts are still with him, including the sorority house. "Our goal is to provide such great service a customer would never want to leave us," he reports.

Like most successful companies,

Gib found a niche and learned to serve it successfully. His niche, the condominium/multifamily market, has the reputation of being a difficult one to serve. Not so, says Gib. His experience has been nothing but positive.

"Maybe it is Fort Collins, maybe I'm lucky," he adds, "but this market has been good to us." Forever modest, Gib doesn't admit his success hinges in large part on plain hard work and dedication, and a 100 percent effort that helps ensure zero defection is more than a pipe dream. Gib, for example, doesn't miss condominium board



*Neighborhood greenbelts like this one are expansive enough to warrant a wide-area mower. Yet they also require a manicured look, so the Walker mower provided the answer.*

meetings, many of which meet on a monthly basis. At more than a few of them, he does at least one "walk-about" a year, where he actually escorts board members around the property, shows them what was done last year, points out problem areas and talks about revisions.

Interaction with board members is essential to success in this market, notes Gib. So is developing good business relationships with property managers. Even though a board will make the final decision about a contractor, the property manager is very influential. Earn their respect, adds Gib, and they will remain loyal.

## TOUGH SELL

"It's hard to become famous in your own town." That's how Gib describes his slow budding relationship with Walker mowers. "From the first time I saw those little yellow mowers, I formed an opinion they were expensive, took up too much room on my trailer and didn't cut any better than the intermediate walk-behinds I was currently using." The fact the mowers are manufactured right in Fort Collins had little or no impact on Gib.

With his opinion formed, Gib went through several demonstrations and shunned them all, never doubting his original assessment. But his employees were a little more open-minded.

In 1989, his crew foreman convinced Gib to try the mower out on a new property. Says Gib, the mower hadn't changed since the last time he saw it. It was still expensive and took up too much room on his trailer. But more importantly, he remembers, during this demonstration on this property, he couldn't make the Walker scalp. It cut better than his walk-behinds and it was faster. Being a pragmatist, he bought a used one.

Five years later, Gib has six Walkers and 11 mowing decks to go with them. Each receives better than 500 hours of work a season.

Greening-Up still has a wide-area mower for rough areas and a couple of intermediates for spaces that won't accommodate a 42-inch Walker. As far as his Walkers go, Gib says they have become an integral part of his business. Since taking on the mowers, Greening-Up has cut its overall mowing time by 20 percent. That's the good news, he adds. The bad news is for contractors who don't have Walkers. "It took them a while to become famous in their own town. But once they did, they set the standard. Now it's tough to compete without a Walker."

# WALKER NEWS



*The Woburn Abbey in England just purchased its second Walker.*

## Trivia Corner

Walkers have been spotted mowing some well-maintained, well-known grounds around the USA and in several areas of the world:

- Arlington National Cemetery
- Kennedy Space Center  
(Visitor Center)
- Stanley Works Headquarters  
(New Britain, CT)
- Filoli Estate (Woodside, CA)
- Great America Amusement Park (Santa Clara, CA)
- Pinehurst Resorts International  
(Vista Area)
- Residence, Prime Minister of Australia
- Parliament House of Australia
- Richard Petty Residence  
(North Carolina)
- Edsel Ford Estate (Michigan)
- Del Tura Country Club  
(Fort Myers, FL)
- Leisure World (Laguna Hills, CA)
- Leisure Village West  
(Manchester, NJ)
- Royal Botanical Garden  
(Hamilton, Ontario, Canada)
- Woburn Abbey (England)
- Belfry Golf Club, (England)
- Exeter Cathedral, (England)

*Special Note: By factory policy, Walker Mowers have not been donated to any organization or property owner for promotional purposes.*

## Dean Walker's alma mater uses Walker

Nineteen years after Dean Walker graduated from college, the machine he designed is now mowing the campus of Northwest Nazarene College, Nampa, Idaho. A Walker dealer from Boise, Idaho, Valley Tools, made a demonstration in March and the superintendent of grounds found "it would be the perfect machine for our new baseball field and several high traffic areas on the main campus." A new MT48GHS Walker Mower and snowblower attachment were purchased in May. It just shows, sometimes things come full circle.



*NNC Grounds Superintendent Jack Thompson with new Walker mower.*

## Walker plant expansion

Plans are underway for a 40,000-square-foot addition to the Walker factory. Ground breaking is set for August '94 and completion by November. The new area will extend 200 feet east of the existing building and will be used primarily for warehousing of component parts and finished product. This expansion will make possible a projected 50 percent increase in annual production of Walker Mowers over the next several years.




*'95 models feature new engine options.*

## New engines for '95 models

An updated version of the 11-hp Model S Walker Mower is available for '95. The new version installs an FE350 Kawasaki 11-hp engine with advanced design features for efficiency and long life — overhead valves, pressure lubrication with oil filter and reciprocating balancer. An oversize Donaldson air filter is also included with the engine installation. The new Model S retains the same compact dimensions and easy handling as the original version. With a "modern" engine, this model will optimally meet the needs of large homeowners and light commercial mowing operations.

For the Model T, an upgrade engine option installs a 25-hp version of the Kohler Command V-Twin (the 20-hp engine will continue as standard equipment). The 725cc high-performance OHV engine includes "Power-Bore" cylinders (nickel-silicon plated bore) and an oil cooler in addition to the standard engine features. Extra power offered by the 25-hp engine is especially useful for operators using the 62-inch side discharge deck.

# "A Walker is more than a mower, it's my way of life"

A man with short dark hair, wearing a blue and black jacket with pink accents, is sitting on a white Walker lawn mower. He is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The mower has a logo that says "WALKER GHS" and "GAS HANDLING SYSTEM". The background shows a grassy area with trees under a blue sky.

**F**ive years ago, an accident left Jeff Vining paralyzed from his chest down. A break between his sixth and seventh vertebrae rendered him a quadriplegic.

Through incredible faith and spirit, and the support of a loving family, he has not only learned to live with his handicap. He has learned

to make a living — mowing lawns. But this is not a story about mowing lawns. Nor is it a story about Walker mowers. It's a story about the triumph of human spirit and how an individual overcame incredible odds to "walk tall" in face of overwhelming obstacles.

Jeff Vining was an outdoors man almost by birthright. He spent little if any time indoors. He loved sports — there was hardly a sport in which he couldn't be competitive — and he owned his own business laying stone, a trade he had learned from his family while growing up in Griffin, Georgia.

In his words, "I used to do it all." The "all" came to a sudden end four and one-half years ago when he was surfing in Florida. A wave crashed into Jeff's body, sending him paralyzed to the bottom. After two yells for help, he was pulled from the water, only to discover later what he feared at the time. The collision had broken his neck, leaving him paralyzed from the chest down. Later he would discover he had some movement in his arms and hands, but below his chest he was totally paralyzed. He had feeling, but no movement.

Jeff spent a total of five months in two hospitals healing from his injury and learning to live with his disability. "If the break had been a little higher, I would have been paralyzed from the neck down," he tells. "A little lower and I would have total use of my hand." As it was, Jeff was a quadriplegic and doctors gave his family little hope that he would be able to do little more than sit in a chair for the rest of his life.

But the doctors underestimated Jeff. His family equipped their home to accommodate a wheelchair and never gave up on their son. His mother's and father's eyes today tell the story — Jeff has made them proud.

Almost from the start, Jeff would



*With two mowers, a trailer and a specially equipped van, Jeff Vining is able to mow almost any yard.*

not accept the grim prognosis. "I could sit in the chair and twiddle my thumbs, or make good with what I had," he tells. What he had in addition to an injured body was a mind that told him not to quit. He worked day and night for months on strengthening his muscles. Even back then, he wouldn't accept a "powered" wheelchair because it denied him an opportunity to get into better shape. Nor would he ultimately accept the constraints of any wheelchair — powered or otherwise.

After gaining back some strength and confidence, Jeff and his family toggled up a golf cart which he used in place of his wheelchair outdoors. With his territory broadened, he looked for other outside activities that would help strengthen his mind and body. The backyard provided part of the answer. If Jeff could rig up a mower so he could use it, he would try the unthinkable: to mow his yard. The Snapper rear-engine rider provided the other half of the solution. The Vinings customized the mower with a bass-boat seat, replaced the foot clutch with a rod, and installed U-bolts on the steering wheel.

The first few outings were more than a little tough. One time, the mower even bounced Jeff off the seat onto the ground. A similar experience happened the first time Jeff went to the movie theater after the accident. The wheelchair went out of control, tipping him onto terra firma. In both cases, Jeff's response was the same. "Bring that over here and let's go." And go he did.

He was 27 at the time. His life had been turned upside down, and he had two options: either sit at home and do nothing, or try to do something. He opted for the latter, and pursued the mowing business that his parents owned. "Nobody wanted me to mow their lawns for them," he remembers.

"After all, would you want me mowing your lawn," he asked jokingly. So he actually mowed his neighbors' lawns while they weren't looking. His boldness earned him a handful of yards. "I couldn't charge a lot for mowing them," he relates. "But just having the opportunity was worth more than anything the money could buy."

Two years ago, a local funeral



home gave Jeff his first real break when he won the bid for their two properties. That same year, he attended a landscaping exposition and discovered the Walker mower. "It was the only mower at the show I could slide right on," he tells.

Jeff's parents purchased two used Walkers. He needed the second

also stimulates his mind. He says he can get lost out there mowing, just thinking about ways he can improve and grow in the business. And when he's not mowing, Jeff explains just having the freedom to get outside and mow allows him to better accept his wheelchair.

### Getting the job done

Jeff refers to his Walker as a wheelchair equipped with a 16-hp Kohler engine and a 42-inch mowing deck. Once on its seat, Jeff can mow with the best of them. Getting to the site and getting back home provides the biggest obstacles, yet Jeff has overcome them, just like he has overcome other challenges.

His biggest frustration, he tells, is employees. "When you can walk, your employees are no better than you. When you're in a chair, you're no better than your employees." Jeff needs one able-bodied employee to unload the Walker, do the trimming and blowing, help him change decks if he needs to and to reload the trailer. If he's mowing with his

one of his units into a blower. Since he can't sweat, Jeff also needs access to a water hose to help keep his body temperature down. He's equipping his next Walker with a water tank, so he can spray himself down on the go.

At home, he explains there are any number of ways to use the mower as an outside wheelchair. He's even thinking about configuring a rabbit run and hunting off his Walker.

"The Walker is my way of life," he emphasizes. "There's no place I can't go with it, and I'm as comfortable on the Walker as I am in the wheelchair."

### Future plans

Down the road, Jeff is looking to fulfill two immediate dreams. He wants to get the business so it is profitable. "It takes most new businesses five years to make a profit," he relates. "It will take me a little longer." And, he wants to help other people in "chairs."

To that end, Jeff and his family are developing 65 acres of land nearby where, in addition to a home, they will construct a training center. Among other things, Jeff wants to start a repair facility where he can turn his ideas into reality. He also wants to share his knowledge about mowers and teach peers how to repair them. More importantly, he wants to develop a facility that will teach peers how to make it on their own, to give them the strength and ability to see there is life beyond the "chair."

There really are not enough words to describe Jeff and his family, and their attitude toward life. One innocent comment from Jeff sums it up fairly well, however. Says Jeff, "I'd rather be depressed that my equipment is broken down, than be depressed about life."



*Jeff says his Walker mowers have increased his independence both at the work site and at home.*

mower as a backup. With his two mowers, a trailer, and a van equipped so he could operate it, Jeff was truly in the mowing business. His logo was "Wheelin to Please," and please he did to the extent he would do almost any job.

"I would cut grass for free, because it's therapy," tells Jeff. "It stimulates my muscles." Mowing

catching deck, he also will need some help to dump the unit. Beyond that, he is self-sufficient.

Always subscribing to the motto, "Do as much as you can possibly do," Jeff is constantly thinking of ways to cut down on his dependence.

At the site, he says he will eventually develop and run a weed trimmer off the mower's PTO and turn

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