

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

TLC
Montana
Style

*Total Lawn Care's owner
Neil Deering*

**NEW ENGLAND MAINTENANCE
TWIN TALES FROM IOWA
LOOKING FOR A USED MOWER?**

VOL. 8

WALKER TALK

CONTENTS VOL. 8

3 **TLC Montana Style**

A strong sense of stewardship creates foundation for success at Total Lawn Care (TLC)



6 **Better late than never**

Maine contractor waits seven years for his first Walker

9 **Walker News**

10 **Looking for a used mower?**

Second hand doesn't mean second rate

12 **Keeping it simple in Pella, Iowa**

Pulley manufacturer appreciates ease of maintenance and operation

14 **Pella's other Walker**

Different terrain challenges Vink Lawn Care

16 **T & S Landscape and Lawn Care bridges growth gap**

People, equipment and technique build framework for expansion

19 **Safety is no assumption**

Training takes number one priority

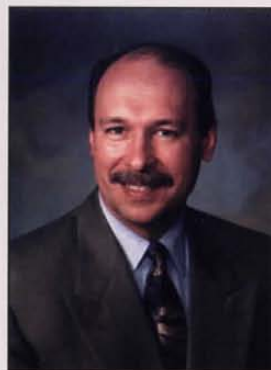
WALKER TALK is published by Johnson Hill Press, a subsidiary of PTN Publishing Company.
1233 Janesville Avenue, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538.
Phone (414) 563-6388. Printed in the U.S., copyright 1996

FINDING YOUR BEST OPPORTUNITY

It is amazing to hear stories of how businesses are started and how people find their best opportunity. There is often a struggle and a series of false starts and dead ends. Such is the history of Walker Manufacturing. I watched my father, Max Walker, work hard all of his life on several different projects. Often, there was not much to show for the effort except a lot of hard work. Finally, in developing and manufacturing the Walker Mower, it seems the company has found its "best opportunity." There is nothing more satisfying than to reach the point where you are working at your best opportunity and there is return for the effort.

How is opportunity found? Part of it is beyond our control. Some talk about luck or being in the "right place at the right time." I personally think

along the lines of "good providence" from the Giver of all good things. Yet there is a part we play — opportunities don't come to people who do nothing. There is persistence in looking for opportunity, not just settling for a job. Some people never find their opportunity because they are paralyzed looking for the "big" opportunity, failing to see what is right at hand and forgetting



to get started. From what I've seen, the path to the best opportunity is often disguised by an unimpressive start using the small resources at hand. Beyond that, working hard while continuing to think, dream, pray and keep an open mind should bring you to your personal best opportunity. I believe such an opportunity is available to each person who makes the effort to find it — this is the American Dream.

As a company, we have been pleased to have many reports that our machine is helping people find opportunities, build companies and work at their best. In turn, that makes it a "best opportunity" for us.

Bob Walker
Bob Walker



Owner Neil Deering says of employees like Grace Wandruff, above, "I only hire people who want to do a good job at whatever they do."

After mowing a residential property, Neil Deering, owner of TLC (Total Lawn Care, Inc.), Kalispell, Montana, looks back at the lawn. He drives away slowly, his smile seems to soak in the manicured property with its signature Walker cut.

"That's why we're successful, right there," he says. "The quality of cut is so far above anything else. There just is no competition. No matter how slow

you go on another mower, you can't get that quality of cut."

Deering possesses an obvious pride in the work he does, and in his crew. "Did you see them turn around and look at the lawn, too?" he asks. "They love doing great work. Without good people I'm nothing — just another guy on a lawnmower."

A SENSE OF STEWARDSHIP

Ask anyone who is really successful what makes their business go and

you'll hear some common threads. Deering believes it has to do with people, commitment and goals. Spend some time with him and you soon learn there's much more to his success than he tells. He is a stickler for quality, he treats people the way he likes to be treated, he works hard, he likes to have fun. And when it comes to lawn care, he can be uncompromising.

"If there is one thing that has made our business successful it's that I have a real strong sense of stewardship. It's

hard talking about a sense of stewardship without sounding self-serving. But you have to have it in order to care for a property. I try to impart that to my employees, and I hire people who can grasp it."

KNOCK-YOUR-SOCKS-OFF SERVICE

TLC has been in business since 1990. The first year, the company billed \$65,000. This year Deering projects to do over \$500,000. Not bad for only 5 years of controlled growth.

Deering explains TLC's success by the number of Walkers he operates.

quality of our service slip. Ours has been real steady, planned growth. I actually plan my growth with Walkers. We don't have a big potpourri of equipment. We know what works for us. It would be real easy to expand faster, but if we expanded faster than the 'knock-your-socks-off service' we have tried so hard to provide, then we would lose everything we have gained."

TLC currently handles about 270 accounts, enough to keep 3 crews mowing 7 days a week, 26 weeks a year. Based on square footage, two-

is residential. "On a weekly basis, we mow 3 million square feet of turf with 5 Walkers."

The company employs 13 people. Crews rotate so that on any given day, 6 to 8 employees are servicing customers. "I have one crew that just does flowers, landscaping repairs and all that. The rest are mowing. That's my bread and butter."

When the season ends and the snow begins to fly, Deering converts his entire fleet for snow removal. His larger trucks plow roads while the smaller trucks take on Kalispell's commercial parking lots. After a heavy snow, TLC trucks spread out across the city hauling Walkers behind them. "I actually generate more dollars per hour with Walkers doing sidewalk snow removal than I do mowing. I average 12 snow removals a year. Last year was a record year with 19. We had a contract with the city and did almost the entire downtown. It was a great year."

MOUNTAIN MAN

Deering didn't always aspire to lawn care. In the 1980's, he was a mountain man operating a remote ranch in northwest Montana. Deering would drive to the secluded outback in June and stay until after Thanksgiving. Meanwhile, wife Rosemary stayed in Kalispell.

Each year in November, he came down from the ranch with about \$4000 of earned income.

During winters, to stay busy, he renovated old houses. He took \$2000 and bought an old house, then spent the other \$2000 fixing it up. He repeated the process several years running, renting out each house when completed.

As his inventory of houses accumulated, all those properties required significant maintenance and



"I aim for one big account in an area," Deering says. "Once I get that big account, then I move out into all directions around it. But I won't move into a new area until I know we can service it."

"We have 6 Walkers, and we'll probably add another at the end of the season. We've expanded at the rate of one Walker a year."

When it comes to man-hour productivity, Deering can't imagine owning anything but Walkers. "This is a service business and I won't let the



thirds of TLC's business is commercial, the rest

lawn care. "I would be mowing and trimming bushes at a house, and pretty soon a neighbor would come over and say, 'I see you over here mowing every Thursday, would you cut our grass while you are at it?'" Not one to turn away work, Deering obliged anyone who asked.

"Soon it got to be so much work, I couldn't get the toilets fixed," he laughs. "So I hired a neighbor kid who was looking for a summer job and I bought an old 5 hp rider."

About this time it occurred to him that mowing could actually become a business. He told himself, "Hey, I like working outside, I like working with plants and trees and flowers, I like having a nice lawn. This really could be a business." Still, he loved the ranch.

Then one year, Deering came down out of the mountains and his son didn't recognize him. "Talk about being crushed. Emotionally, it was a real punch in the stomach. I had the greatest job on earth and I knew then I had to give it up."

So in 1990, Deering switched gears. He hung on to the houses for security, but he refocused his energies on the new business which he called Total Lawn Care — TLC.

MORE MOUNTAINS TO CLIMB

"The first year I bought my first Walker," relates Deering. "I had seen a Walker here in the valley and I saw what it could do. Once I got on it and ran it, there was no comparison. I tried some other riders, but they didn't stack up with the bagger and zero-turn."

"The second year I bought a second Walker and I hired another operator. Then I started getting really excited about the whole process. I started putting the numbers together and looking at the big picture and I said, 'Wait a minute, this thing is headed in the right direction, we're rolling!'"

Deering hesitates when asked about getting a larger tractor for some

of his bigger commercial accounts. "I'm real leery about buying a big machine that can make a huge cut because I just don't think it can do as good a job or look as nice. Besides, the Walkers have a 5 foot deck and I can pull it off in about 2 minutes then use the machine for something else."

This year, Deering added the bigger deck, a 54" side discharge deck. "It's tremendous," he says. "It dis-

hours, I'll know it'll take me 2 hours. I just know."

Deering cares for his Walkers with the same attention to detail that he cares for his customers' properties. "My Walkers get cleaned everyday," he says. "They get sharpened blades everyday. I have two certified mechanics putting their ears to these machines everyday. We change oil every 50 hours. And we keep a good mainte-



With a Walker, everything my people touch looks great," Deering relates. "You can't put a value on that."

charges the clippings real good. At first, I was worried it might leave little wind-rows and stuff, but it works great. So we bought it thinking we would use it to cut big open vacant lot type accounts, but it leaves such a good-looking cut we're using it on some of our better accounts."

BIDDING WITH WALKERS

Walker efficiencies play a fundamental role in his bidding process. "I'll ask a new customer what he's been mowing with and he'll tell me this or that kind of rider. Then I'll ask him how long it takes and if he says 4

nance log where everything is written in, so we know exactly what has been done to each machine."

The only things he pampers more than his Walkers are his customers. "We're here for customer service, nothing else. If I'm not taking someone's headache away, I'm not in business. In any business, and especially this one, quality is perceived by how well we do what we say we are going to do. Can we deliver? The Walkers help us deliver. With a Walker, everything my people touch looks great. You can't put a value on that." **WT**

mowing done, you can't be spending time repairing or maintaining equipment.

Arie's partner is his wife Joyce who is also employed at the college. They do their maintenance work after school hours which means a lot of long lawn hours in the spring and fall, usually mowing until dark. Summers are a little more relaxed.

The couple moved to Pella about 20 years ago, after selling their farm. They bought their current home — the only two-story structure on the street — because it had enough room to accommodate a family with six children. In fact, one of their daughters started the lawn business and

When you maintain 57 properties and have only a small window of time in which to get the mowing done, you can't spend time repairing equipment.

then found full-time employment elsewhere. Arie started to mow (with a garden tractor and push mower) to help those first customers out. Fourteen years later, he and Joyce are still mowing and enjoying it. Their business is strictly lawn maintenance; they farm out the chemical side. During the winter they remove snow for approximately 10 of their customers.

According to Arie, Pella's mowing and maintenance season extends from the first week in April to sometime in the middle of December. The Vinks do no advertising; it's all word of mouth. And strangely enough, they hardly know their customers. "We read in the trade magazines about how you should always stop by to talk with customers. Our customers don't really want to talk. They



Their 16-hp Walker with side-discharge deck was the first new mower the Vinks ever purchased. It was also their first outfront mower. The flexible deck design comes in handy when mowing on uneven terrain, notes Arie. A one-time farmer, Arie Vink says mowing grass is about as close to farming as ever wants to get again.

want their lawns maintained and that's about it," remarks Arie. "They don't want to be bothered." Their only communication is once a month when the bills go out.

"When we were on the farm, we both liked to chop grass (haylage) for the cows," explains Arie, adding they milked about 40 cows at their peak. Mowing grass brings back some of the nostalgia, but not all of the hard work.

"This is about as close to farming as I want to get again," he adds. That's one reason their next new mower will be another Walker, this time with a 20-hp engine and a 54-inch deck. Bigger means faster which means...getting the job done well before the cows come home. **WT**



Tulip Time in Pella

One week after Tulip Time, central park in downtown Pella looks rather quiet. The week before, however, main roads leading into town were reportedly backed up 10 miles. And the town itself buzzed with literally tens of thousands of visitors.

The large structure in the background is the Tulip Toren. First erected in 1940 and rebuilt in 1968, the tower stands as a memorial to the early Dutch settlers. During Tulip Time in early May, the colors of the flag of the Netherlands are flown from the 65-ft high twin pylons, and a red carpet welcomes the Tulip queen and her court.

the 1994 season, my son and I found we had reduced our mowing times by as much as 50 percent on the properties we maintained."

Since that rather dubious start, the Bennetts have not only added more mowers to their equipment lineup, they've added attachments, too, including two de-thatchers, an angle broom, a single-stage snowthrower and a bed edger. They even apply lime and fertilizer with a spreader designed by Walker distributor George Hayes of Bethel, Maine. All of the attachments help get the chores done in less time.

ROLLER COASTER RIDE

Steve and Nate operate Steve's Lawn and Garden in Scarborough, Maine, not far from Portland. Between the two of them and one employee, sometimes two, they mow approximately 50 properties. Nate runs the mowing crew while Steve, an "on-call" fireman for the town, concentrates on small installation projects. The mix contributed \$150,000 to the revenue rolls last year.

The figure is modest compared to what Steve used to generate during his company's heyday. In business since 1971, first in maintenance and then more heavily in construction and installation, Steve, by the mid 80s, had grown the company to 13 employees strong. Unfortunately, the bust that swept the construction industry in New England forced Steve to reconfigure the business. He downsized the installation side and picked up more maintenance

accounts. Despite the restructuring, his interest started to wane, until Nate's arrival full time a few years later.

Today, the company generates 80 percent of its revenue from maintenance, the remainder from installation projects. The customer mix is 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial and includes some of the nicest looking properties around the city.



"It's unbelievable how many uses there are for the Walkers and their attachments. Each application saves time and money."

Thanks in part to the tough years, Steve appreciates the term profitability now more than ever. Most if not all of his maintenance properties — both commercial and residential — are within a three mile radius of his

home. And he's a stickler on price. He knows how much it costs to do a job profitably. As he puts it, "I won't work just to have the work."

"Stubborn he may be, but thrifty he's not," says Steve about himself while mimicking native lore. After all, he recently purchased a 20-ft enclosed trailer to haul around his mowers and decks. It also doubles as a work shop/storage facility and rolling advertisement. This Maine

native also owns a skid-steer loader and backhoe for installation jobs and a couple of dump trucks to haul away grass clippings.

All of his equipment, including his Walkers and their

One of Steve's Lawn and Garden two 20-hp grasshandling models. In addition to mowing, the company uses the Walkers for edging, dethatching, blowing snow and clearing walks with the power broom attachment.



attachments, have a healthy return-on-investment (ROI) ratio. He claims the mowers alone allowed the company to expand its weekly mowing last year to 600,000 sq ft, an increase of 38 percent from 1994,

without having to hire extra personnel. This year, he is maintaining 850,000 sq ft of lawn, again with the same number of employees. It takes Nate and another operator 4 to 4 1/2 days to complete the mowing cycle. Saturday is a make-up day. Steve is available to help, too, if mowing gets behind, although he says his son hesitates to call him in on prime accounts because "I don't keep a straight enough line."

Both father and son also emphasize the key roll that attachments for their Walkers have played in the company's recent growth. The bed edger, for example, has trimmed edging time in half, to the extent there are only a couple of properties where they still edge with a hand-held edger. Steve applauds the snowblower and power broom attachment for their yeoman work on sidewalks during the tough New England winters, not to forget the dethatchers for spring cleanup and the spreader for quick

"I took the Walker to my largest commercial account, and immediately became intimidated and frustrated with the mower as I found the zero turn feature, the rear steer, the front mount mower, the quick response and overall speed of the mower much different from the riding tractor I was used to. I managed to finish mowing and trimming the property (92,000 sq ft) in about 5 hours. I loaded up to go home, feeling as though I had made a very serious mistake, when I realized that it usually took two people, using a riding tractor, two trim mowers and two string trimmers, 3-4 hours to complete what I had done in five hours alone. Plus I had not used a trim mower, and had done little string trimming."



When not hauling around mowing equipment, the 20-ft enclosed trailer doubles as a work shop/storage facility. It also provides an excellent advertising medium. Right: Nate demonstrates how a Shindaiwa power broom works to remove dirt and debris.

and easy lime and fertilizer application.

"It's unbelievable how many uses there are for the Walkers and their attachments," says Nate. "Each application saves time and money." More significantly, they have helped Steve and his son keep their prices in line and maintain their competitive edge.

No, the mowers and attachments haven't made the Bennett's business; they've just helped make their business more competitive. **WT**

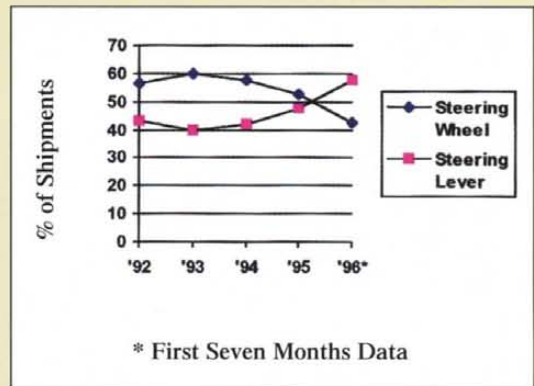


STEERING LEVERS PASS STEERING WHEELS

For the first time, according to fiscal '96 YTD statistics from OPEI (Outdoor Power Equipment Institute), manufacturers of commercial riding rotary mowers are producing more machines with steering levers than with steering wheels. This represents a remarkable shift in market acceptance of the lever type mower since the late 60's and early 70's when steering levers were first introduced on commercial riding mowers by several companies (Excel, Deines, Grasshopper). This type of machine, commonly known as a 'zero turn radius' mower, was first viewed as an oddity in comparison to the steering wheel controlled machine. Conventional wisdom in the industry was that steering levers would never be widely accepted. After some 25 years, the effectiveness and productivity of the steering lever machine in the mowing application has been established and steering levers are finally "getting respect."

With the introduction of the Walker Mower in 1980, Walker is proud to have participated in the steering

lever revolution. Walker Manufacturing advanced the industry by being the first to offer a compact mid-size tractor with built-in grass collection combined with steering levers and zero turn radius performance.



GERMAN AND SWISS DEALERS VISIT FACTORY

On January 19 and 20, twenty visitors representing dealers from Germany and Switzerland came to the factory in Fort Collins, CO. Mr. Sven Gillfors and Mr. Wolfgang Lorli, Gillco Scandinavia AB, factory representatives for Walker in Europe, also traveled with the group.

A detailed tour of the factory was given along with presentations directed toward marketing, product orientation, new products and product improvements. The weather cooperated so there was even an opportunity to "mow" some brown Colorado grass.

WALKER CELEBRATES 25,000

Walker Manufacturing owners and employees celebrated producing the 25,000th Walker Mower on January 9, 1996. This milestone was reached 16 years after the first units were produced. During the factory celebration, Bob Walker, President, commended almost 100 employees for their quality workmanship and teamwork, making it possible to reach this point. From

the beginning, Walker has concentrated on designing and producing a line of compact zero turn radius, mid-size riding mowers and attachments. The growing demand for this type of equipment has fueled growth for the Walker Company; sales have doubled in the last five years. Walker Mowers are



sold across the United States and worldwide with export sales accounting for 25% of total sales.

NEW VIDEO HIGHLIGHTS OPPORTUNITY IN LANDSCAPING FOR PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED INDIVIDUALS

After a spinal cord injury at the age of 27, Jeff Vining of Griffin, Georgia was left an incomplete quad-

riplegic with limited use of his hands and arms.

In spite of the challenges, Vining had the idea to develop a lawn maintenance business. He selected a Walker because he was able to operate the machine without making modifications. Today he owns two Walkers and maintains both commercial and residential accounts.

An inspirational new 15 minute video, produced by International

Marketing Exchange Inc. and directed by Robin Pendergrast, tells the story of Jeff Vining (See original story in Walker Talk Vol 4).

Walker Manufacturing helped fund production of the video which will debut at EXPO '96, in Louisville, at the Walker booth. The video will be available for sale and distribution in August. A portion of the proceeds will be donated to national horticultural therapy groups.



Looking for a used mower?

Second hand doesn't mean a mower is second rate

More than a few lawn maintenance professionals and groundskeepers rely on used equipment either as front line workhorses or as dependable backups. When properly maintained and upgraded, used equipment can be nearly as effective as equipment fresh off the assembly line, at much less the cost. The kicker? If not approached with caution and more than a little up front knowledge, buying used equipment can end up costing the new owner more, much more, than he or she anticipated.

The following are a few guidelines prospective buyers of used equipment might want to consider before writing the check.

GIVE IT THE "ONCE-OVER"

To borrow a cliché, having an opportunity to buy a used Walker mower can be like having money in the bank. These mowers are built to last and with just a little tender loving care and routine maintenance they can perform wondrously for thousands of hours of rigorous mowing.

If you're fortunate enough to find a used Walker, remember this: Like any piece of commercial mowing equipment, the Walker mower takes its share of punches. Although routine maintenance and the replacement of wear items will keep it running like new for years to come, the lack thereof will conversely compromise its ability to perform and decrease its overall value to the operator or the used equipment buyer.

Before purchasing a used Walker or any used mower, take a moment to give it a "once-over" inspection. If you are not comfortable judging the condition of mechanical components, it would be a good idea to have a qualified small engine mechanic help you make the inspection. While the following inspection items apply specifically to Walker Mowers, the general outline should be useful for other brands of riding mowers.

The following items represent the most expensive components and should be carefully checked:

Engine

- Compression • Spark plug (bad if oily or fouled) • Oil (dark oil or heavy sediment indicates poor maintenance)
- Look for oil leaks • Check cleanliness of cooling fins and cylinder head

Rebuild, or buy new? Good question.

If you operate commercial power equipment, you no doubt have been confronted with the decision to rebuild/replace an engine, or buy a new machine. Making the right decision — one that is most cost-effective — depends on two things: the quality of the engine in question and overall shape of the unit it powers.

As a general rule with commercial quality, hand-held equipment, if the engine repair costs more than half of what you paid for the equipment, the smart decision is to buy a new piece of equipment. If the repair costs are less than half, repairing or replacing the engine may be a valid option, if the rest of the unit is in good condition.

On commercial quality mowers, the decision generally comes down to replacing or short-blocking the engine versus rebuilding.

Engines in the small horsepower range (under 5 hp) are

better candidates for replacement or short-blocks than rebuilds, especially with shop labor rates in the \$35 and \$50 range. Higher horsepower engines, with cast iron cylinder sleeves, usually can be affordably rebuilt. Remember, though, that rebuilding means just that — turning the crankshaft, reboring the cylinder sleeves, grinding the valves, in addition to installing a new set of rings, pistons and rods. Anything less than a complete rebuild usually won't stand the test of time and punishment.

On larger engines like the 16 horsepower and higher commercial engines that power Walker mowers, rebuilding is usually cost-effective. When done by a qualified technician, the end-product will last as long as a new replacement. One more consideration: rebuilds or short blocks usually offer only 30 to 90 day warranties against defects compared with new replacement engine warranties of 2 to 3 years.

shrouds on air-cooled engines. Check radiator fins on water-cooled engines • Check air cleaner: filter, baseplate, cover. Look for dust in carburetor throat indicating dust ingestion. *Note: On 16 hp Kohler engine, check carburetor throttle shaft for wear.*

Transmission(s)

- Transmission fluid should not be black, smell burned (overheated) or appear milky (water contamination) • Check cleanliness of cooling fins (especially underneath) and condition of cooling fans • Look for oil leaks on input shaft and control arm shaft.

Gearboxes

- Low oil or no oil is a red flag • Look for oil leaks • Check input/out-

If the oil on the dipstick is black and looks like tar, then the engine hasn't received proper maintenance — and chances are the rest of the machine has suffered from the same mistreatment.

put shafts for excessive play or backlash. Raise drive wheels and check axle for looseness.

In addition to the engine, transmission and gearboxes, a quick inspection of wear items will give you an idea of what will be needed and the overall cost to put the machine in top shape. Look at the following parts for wear: • GHS blower housing and impeller • GHS grass chutes (especially elbow inside catcher) • Deck caster wheel bearings and pivot bearings; also tail wheel bearings on tractor • Remove deck—it should slide freely off support arms. Check deck support arm pivot for excessive play. • All hoses (air, water, fuel) • Exhaust system (holes or leaks) • Drive belts and pulleys, check how belt fits in pulley to indicate worn

pulley • U-Joints on PTO drive line for looseness • Mower deck housing, especially skirt and internal baffles • Battery • Tires • Electrical system; look for any “cobbled up” connection or “temporary” wires.

RUNNING TEST

The following checks are made for function: • Start engine—it should start easily • Allow engine to warm up, check acceleration off idle. Look for exhaust smoke, vibration or unusual noise as indications of problems • Check movement and function of all controls (throttle, choke, forward speed control, steering levers, clutch, parking brake) • Test all safety switches and safety latch on GHS catcher door • Drive the machine to warm transmission oil, then drive up against a wall or fence to check transmission power output. There should be enough power to slip both drive wheels • Operate PTO clutch and brake. Brake should stop blades 5 seconds after clutch disengagement • Check operation of Powerfil oscillating spout and Grass-Pak “full” signal inside catcher.

A belt that runs too deep indicates excessive wear and the need to replace the pulley.


The effort to make a pre-buy inspection will pay. As the prospective owner, you first want to make sure to pay a fair price for the equipment you're buying and then have it perform to expectations when you get it home and in the field.

How much is your used Walker worth?

The answer might surprise you. The average trade-in value of a '93 Walker, for example, is estimated to be anywhere from 46 to 53 percent of its original cost. If that sounds pretty reasonable, consider this: Your 1988 Walker is holding its own, too, to the tune of somewhere between 26 and 36 percent of its original cost. That's after who knows how many thousands of hours in the field.

A Walker's ability to hold its value is good news for Walker owners, on several fronts. It means that when you buy a Walker, you're first and foremost buying a durable mower, one that will last and generate income for years down the road. It also means that when it comes time to trade in or replace your mower, you'll have something with which to bargain. The nice thing, too? Thanks to a factory philosophy of not altering major components from year to year, your used Walker in most cases can be easily updated. Which also helps to retain the value of older units in the field, including your used Walker.

The philosophy at Walker Manufacturing is not only to produce the best mower possible at a fair price, but to produce one that will keep mowing year after year.

It's important, too, to buy from a reputable dealer or individual. In other words, buy from someone you know and avoid the possibility of buying stolen equipment. Remember, too, that dealers can provide training and they oftentimes guarantee equipment for a period of time. One last note, no matter who you buy your used equipment from, ask for the operator's manual. If it's not available, write to the manufacturer to obtain a copy. 

Todd Poe and Bruce Miller, A & S Turf Equipment, Peoria, Arizona, contributed to these articles.

Keeping it simple in Pella, Iowa

Pulley manufacturer appreciates ease of maintenance and operation

Pella, Iowa is not your ordinary midwestern town, not by a long shot. Founded in 1847 by 700 Hollanders, the community still savors its Dutch roots. In early May, tens of thousands of visitors literally jam city streets for the annual Tulip Time festival and anytime throughout the year there are tastes, sites and sounds that echo a strong Dutch tradition.

But that's only part of the story. Pella also boasts a zero unemployment rate thanks to three manufacturers: the Pella Corporation, makers

"It was made in America and I didn't find any tin on it, no springs or rods and it was such a simple design."

of Pella Windows; Vermeer Manufacturing, known for its trenchers, tree care products and agricultural equipment; and Precision, Inc., manufacturer of flat belt conveyor pulleys and idlers for the bulk handling industry.

Together, the three companies employ somewhere around 5,000 people, more than half the population of the entire town.

Sheridan Cook is employed by Precision, the smallest and youngest of the three companies. Although the company is only 17 years old, it operates six plants, three in Pella and three at two other Iowa locations.

Three years ago, Cook, who is superintendent of buildings and grounds, was walking around a home and garden show in nearby Des Moines. His *modus operandi*? To find a mower to cut the seven acres of turf at the headquarters facility in Pella.

"The Walker caught my eye," he tells, "because it was so small and was so easy to service. I looked it over from top to bottom. It was made in America and I didn't find any tin on it, no springs or rods and it was such a simple design."

The next day, Cook compared notes with one of the company's owners who had also seen the mower at the show. "We agreed it looked like the machine for us," tells Cook. But agreement wasn't enough. Both wanted to see the mower in action. So they brought in five mowers, including a Walker, for a hands-on demonstration. Each was put through its paces, mowing a strip of turf adjacent to the other so results

could be easily compared. Cook said the demonstration showed the Walker excelled in finish of cut. It also outperformed the others in ease of operation and serviceability, he adds. The following day, Precision had a new Walker.

Today, the superintendent says he can't say enough about the Walker. As he tells it, the mower has cut mowing time between 40 and 50 percent. In fact, one operator can cut all seven acres at Precision in one full day of operation, from Thursday noon until Friday noon. That includes mowing around flower beds, curbs, walks, pine trees and other landscape elements that provide a colorful setting. During the three years the company has owned the machine, there has been no down time except for a starter solenoid that shorted out (under warranty and a new one was in his hands within two days, says Cook). The mower still has the original belts. It also receives a bath at least six times a year with the

Sheridan Cook pitted the Walker against four other brands. He says the Walker excelled in finish of cut and outperformed the others in ease of operation and serviceability.



power washer and the underside, including the mower deck, receives a coating of oil before winter storage.

Cook, a retired general contractor, has been with Precision nine years. As his title suggests, in addition to keeping the exterior of the three Pella plants in shape, he's also responsible for the interiors, including construction of a new 15,000 sq ft addition to plant number one this year. He also travels frequently to the compa-

ny's other facilities around the state.

When he says he looked at the Walker from top to bottom before making the purchase decision, you can rest assured he did. Cook has a technical background, enjoys reading blueprints and just plain gets a kick out of equipment. He has an old Massey Furgeson garden tractor at home, completely redone, and another at Precision, also totally redone — both by his own hands.

The one at work is used to mow the rough areas behind the plants.

"Having a machine that's quality built is extremely important to me," he relates.

"We have no plans to ever trade the Walker. It should last forever."

Indeed, mowing once a week around the plant won't stress the 16-hp Kohler engine and 42-inch h

grasshandling deck it powers. Still, Cook services the machine every 25 hours — more often than the factory specs call for. Three sets of sharpened and balanced blades sit in wait back at the shop.

It's easy for Cook to get side-tracked when talking about the service side of a mower, or about anything mechanical for that matter. He talks drum-pulley vernacular like he's a design engineer. And construction? You would almost think he's still in the business full-time. Yet that's only part of his life. He enjoys operating equipment, too, including the three Arctic Cat snowmobiles he's owned over the years. He also owns a small ranch and enjoys riding. In fact, he still works horse shows in the Pella area. So how a machine — or a horse — handles is important to Cook.

"I gave my wife a two-minute lesson on the Walker and within 10 minutes she was mowing proficiently," he tells. "Since buying the Walker, I've been paying more attention to zero-turn riders and I literally see nothing out there that compares, especially in terms of serviceability, ease of operation and maneuverability. Sure there are machines that do a great job for specific applications, e.g., wide-area mowers are better suited for large expanses of turf, but nothing compares to a Walker for overall use.

"I can't say enough good about the machine. Anybody who buys a zero-turn rider should buy a Walker." Then he pauses...

"If I owned a lawn maintenance company, I would have a Walker, too."

WT

"If I owned a lawn maintenance company, I would have a Walker, too," says Sheridan Cook, superintendent of buildings and grounds at Precision, Inc. in Pella.

Pella's other Walker

Different Terrain Challenges Vink Lawn Care



Arie and Joyce Vink began mowing lawns 14 years ago to help out their daughter. They're still mowing strong today.



One of the first things Arie Vink noticed about using his Walker: trimmer work was dramatically reduced.

Arie and Joyce Vink have been maintaining lawns in Pella since 1982. They've mowed and maintained properties with steep hills, newly constructed landscapes, low lying areas and just about anything a mowing contractor can encounter. On any given day their trailer can be seen on commercial accounts in Pella including a restaurant, auto dealer, cemetery, church, motel and apartment complex, or on high-end residential properties, or on the golf course community nearby.

To be sure, if variety is the spice of life, the Vinks are living with plenty of spice. Yet it wasn't until six years ago that they bought their first new mower, a 16-hp Walker with a side-discharge deck. Before then, they operated with a collection of used albeit well-maintained riding and walk-behind equipment. The Walker was their first upfront mower.

Arie, a one-time farmer and now a custodian at Central College in downtown Pella, says the Walker has

really changed the way they do business. Trimmer use has gone down dramatically since they purchased the Walker. So has their use of trim mowers. Even relatively steep hills that used to require a walk mower can be maintained with a Walker. As Arie puts it, "With a low center of gravity, the Walker really hugs the ground."

He also pays special tribute to the flexible deck that doesn't scalp the undulating terrain, and the machine's maneuverability, something that comes in real handy when doing trim work. His Walker is especially productive mowing around head stones in the cemetery.

Like Precision's Cook, Arie was especially attracted to the ease of serviceability of the Walker mower. As he puts it, when you have 57 properties to maintain and only a small window of time in which to get the

mowing done, you can't be spending time repairing or maintaining equipment.

Arie's partner is his wife Joyce who is also employed at the college. They do their maintenance work after school hours which means a lot of long lawn hours in the spring and fall, usually mowing until dark. Summers are a little more relaxed.

The couple moved to Pella about 20 years ago, after selling their farm. They bought their current home — the only two-story structure on the street — because it had enough room to accommodate a family with six children. In fact, one of their daughters started the lawn business and

When you maintain 57 properties and have only a small window of time in which to get the mowing done, you can't spend time repairing equipment.

then found full-time employment elsewhere. Arie started to mow (with a garden tractor and push mower) to help those first customers out. Fourteen years later, he and Joyce are still mowing and enjoying it. Their business is strictly lawn maintenance; they farm out the chemical side. During the winter they remove snow for approximately 10 of their customers.

According to Arie, Pella's mowing and maintenance season extends from the first week in April to sometime in the middle of December. The Vinks do no advertising; it's all word of mouth. And strangely enough, they hardly know their customers. "We read in the trade magazines about how you should always stop by to talk with customers. Our customers don't really want to talk. They



Their 16-hp Walker with side-discharge deck was the first new mower the Vinks ever purchased. It was also their first outfront mower. The flexible deck design comes in handy when mowing on uneven terrain, notes Arie. A one-time farmer, Arie Vink says mowing grass is about as close to farming as ever wants to get again.

want their lawns maintained and that's about it," remarks Arie. "They don't want to be bothered." Their only communication is once a month when the bills go out.

"When we were on the farm, we both liked to chop grass (haylage) for the cows," explains Arie, adding they milked about 40 cows at their peak. Mowing grass brings back some of the nostalgia, but not all of the hard work.

"This is about as close to farming as I want to get again," he adds. That's one reason their next new mower will be another Walker, this time with a 20-hp engine and a 54-inch deck. Bigger means faster which means...getting the job done well before the cows come home. **WT**



Tulip Time in Pella

One week after Tulip Time, central park in downtown Pella looks rather quiet. The week before, however, main roads leading into town were reportedly backed up 10 miles. And the town itself buzzed with literally tens of thousands of visitors.

The large structure in the background is the Tulip Toren. First erected in 1940 and rebuilt in 1968, the tower stands as a memorial to the early Dutch settlers. During Tulip Time in early May, the colors of the flag of the Netherlands are flown from the 65-ft high twin pylons, and a red carpet welcomes the Tulip queen and her court.



T&S Landscape and Lawn Care bridges growth gap

People, equipment and technique

Where do you want to be seven years from now? Scott Hayward, owner of T & S Landscape, Chester, New Hampshire, asked himself that seven years ago and today he owns and operates a \$1 million plus operation. Scott is the first to admit he hasn't done it by himself. He's had a lot of help, from employees, from the equipment they operate and from little things that just make landscape companies stand out.

PEOPLE POWER

Scott's business is really three businesses in one. T & S Landscape is the business he and his brother Tom (the T of S) started right out of college. The company is comprised of two divisions, a maintenance division and a landscaping division. Both are geared toward commercial properties.

The third leg is a new venture, Sports Turf Technology. As the name implies, the company maintains and renovates athletic fields. Although Scott owns both companies and

Scott Hayward (left) with maintenance supervisor Rick Carter. T & S concentrates on larger commercial properties, in both its maintenance and landscaping divisions. According to Scott, the company's two Walkers provide a consistent and fast cut, even during wet New England springs.

oversees all three distinct operations, he relies heavily on supervisors to carry the day and to make a profit.

On the maintenance side, Scott looks to Rick Carter to manage two mowing crews and provide customers with timely chemical and fertilizer programs. Among properties they service are area hospitals, office complexes and condominiums. Residential properties, once the heart of the business, were recently sold because, in Scott's words, "They came with too much curb time." As he explains, being in the lawn business in Chester is unlike other, more metropolitan areas of the country. Residential customers, especially, are spread out, making it difficult to mow and maintain them profitably. During the early stages of his growth, when his overhead was lower, the residential business was more lucrative. Not anymore.

Rick's counterpart in the landscaping division is Kirk Huehls. Interviewed by Scott last fall, Kirk arrived this spring just in time to oversee a huge commercial installation project. Kirk manages anywhere from 10 to 15 workers at the site. When completed, the project will include the installation of more than 600 plants and trees over 62 acres of landscape. By completion, crews will have put down 92 rolls of erosion control fabric over 38 acres and applied in excess of 10,000 pounds of custom-blended grass seed.

Sports Turf Technology, a separate company, was initiated last year and already it is expected to break even in its

first full season of operation.

"We specialize in renovating athletic fields without disrupting play," tells company manager Bob Bradway. Among his customers are 15 to 20 colleges in the Boston area and a number of municipal parks and public fields.

According to Scott, renovating athletic fields provides excellent growth opportunities. Institutions and municipalities lack both the capital and space to construct new fields so they renovate their old ones, and liability is always an issue which makes upkeep a priority for all of his customers.

With Sports Turf, Scott is positioned for even more aggressive growth. But he emphasizes he couldn't do it without the help of his three supervisors and office manager, not to mention his other full and part-time employees.

"They're all extremely dedicated,"

T & S sold its residential maintenance business because properties "came with too much curb time."

says Scott proudly. His three supervisors all have horticulture degrees and many years of combined experience in the industry. The owner admits they could probably make more money working for larger landscape maintenance businesses or in other areas in the green industry, but his company offers new opportunities and the flexibility and freedom to grow.

EQUIPMENT POWER

One of the opportunities for Sports Turf's Bradway was the equipment Scott had "lined up" for

the new business. "Equipment is the key to maintaining and renovating athletic fields and other large commercial properties," Bob explains. In addition to traditional pieces of equipment such as pull-behind aerators, spreaders, overseeders, top dressers and a turf tractor, the young company operates a deep tine aerator. The latter, he notes, penetrates and shatters the soil to a depth of 12 inches. The process not only increases air, water and nutrient movement, but also relieves compaction on heavily used athletic fields, to the tune of between \$700 and \$800 per acre. Yes, it's expensive to operate, tells Bob, but it's also the only machine that will solve compaction problems.

Sports Turf doesn't hold a monopoly on equipment. T & S operators have their share of metal, too. Kirk's installation crews rely on four main pieces of equipment to get their jobs done, a 3,000 gallon hydro-seeder, two skid steer loaders with attachments and a tractor. And Rick's maintenance crews operate two 20-hp grasshandling Walkers with 48-inch decks and four Toro intermediates as their mainstays. The Toro's are for the hills, Rick explains. And there's plenty of them in and around Chester. As for the Walkers, "They're the cleanest mowers I've ever used," says Scott, whose actual mowing experi-

ence belies his seven years in business. Like so many contractors, he started out mowing lawns before high school. T & S bags everything and Rick relies on the Walkers to get the job done, even during wet New England springs when consistent mowing and speed are both of the essence.

TECHNIQUE, TOO

Walking around the T & S job sites, one can almost feel the energy, drive and dedication of the company's employees. Best guess, it starts right at home with Scott. A con-



Trees...and more trees. Here, T & S installation crew wrestles with one of several hundred trees to be planted on a large, 62-acre commercial property. Big projects are challenging in their own way, says Scott. But crews also enjoy smaller, more detail-oriented jobs.

fessed type A personality who literally ran his way on a scholarship through Wake Forest University, Scott seems to have an unlimited supply of energy and enthusiasm. And despite his rigorous work schedule, the company has just completed construction of a new headquarters barn on a 20-acre site in Chester.



Sports Turf manager Bob Bradway “specializes in renovating athletic fields without disrupting play. Customers include 15 to 20 colleges in the Boston area.

But it takes more than energy and enthusiasm to run a business and even the best employees in the world need guidance. Scott sets the tone.

“I’ve learned over the years, there’s more than one thing that counts in this business,” he tells. “You can’t just go in and wow customers and expect to maintain their loyalty. It’s an accumulation of things that count.” He includes the simple yet important functions of pricing the job fairly, which doesn’t mean being the lowest bidder, to showing up and performing quality work. Beyond that, he adds, perception is reality.

“Appearance is so important especially in this highly competitive market. All points of contact with the customer or prospective customer have to be positive.” Here, he

includes driving habits, attitude of employees, the appearance of trucks and equipment and even answering the phone as vital points of contact.

“They’re the cleanest mowers I’ve ever used.”

These things all count, whether the company is on an aggressive growth path or maintaining a level keel. If you’re bridging the growth gap, like T & S, these things are mandatory, as are the people and equipment to keep the gap as narrow as possible. **WT**

Safe fueling

Filling fuel tanks is as much a part of the daily routine as mowing lawns. And you certainly can’t do one without doing the other. But just like the act of mowing, refueling is something operators shouldn’t but often-times do take for granted.

This summer, take a moment to review the following basics of safe fueling with employees. Keep the list nearby and refer to it often. Remember, you can’t be too safe.

1. Never smoke, and avoid open flames and sparks when checking fuel levels, refueling or handling fuel.
2. Do not fill fuel tank with the engine running.
3. Fuel the mower outdoors. Whenever possible, position mower on concrete or other fuel resistant surface. Fuel spilled on asphalt will cause it to soften. Fuel spilled on turf or bed areas will kill the grass and contaminate the soil. Your company is responsible for any damage to the customer’s property. If fuel is spilled on turf or bed areas, soil must be removed and plants replaced to repair the damage.
4. Start the day with a full tank to minimize refueling on the job.
5. Remember, a hot engine is a major fire hazard. Wait for the engine to cool a few minutes before refueling.
6. It is best for the mower (and fuel tank) to be level when refueling to achieve maximum fuel capacity.
7. Always remove the gas cap slowly in the event of heat expansion within the tank.
8. Avoid spilling fuel; use a funnel or spout to fill. Remove the funnel frequently and make visual checks of fuel level to prevent overfilling the tank.
9. Always wipe up any accidental fuel spill immediately. Replace fuel tank cap and container cap securely before starting engine.
10. Do not overfill the tank; fill up to about one inch below the top of tank.
11. Use an approved fuel container. Do not set gasoline cans on turf or bed areas.

Source: Associated Landscape Contractors of America

Training takes number one priority

Safety is no assumption

In the hustle and bustle of the busy season, it's not unusual to overlook some things or simply put others on a back burner. If safety is one of those things, then you're operating a very risky business, chancing not only the safety of your employees but your customers, as well.

Too many owners and operators think the use of safety equipment and proper clothing will offer adequate protection. All of the armor an operator can put on will not stop the fiery arrows associated with not being properly trained. A biting and often overlooked truth to equipment safety is that training usually takes a back seat to gloves, safety glasses and steel-toe shoes. Yes, safety apparel is a good thing...and mandatory for operators of any piece of power equipment. But it's only one piece of the safety puzzle.

OPERATING/SAFETY TECHNIQUES

There is a direct relationship between being knowledgeable about a piece of equipment and being a safe operator. One of the first steps toward elevating your level of safety is to ensure that all operators are familiar with the equipment they'll be using. An all encompassing safety day at the beginning of the season is a good way to introduce new and veteran employees alike to equipment in your lineup.

An overview of proper operating techniques is a good way to start the sessions, followed then by specific dos and don'ts about safety, as it applies to each piece of equipment within the category.

The truth is, every piece of equipment is different. Different brand mowers are unique, and new equip-

ment operates differently from that which has been used for a season or two. Make sure operators know the subtleties of the equipment and are familiar with its operation.

NEW EMPLOYEES

One of the most common mistakes contractors make is hiring new employees and then not adequately training them before putting them into the field. Any new employee, unless he or she has proven experience, should spend at least one half day in training on equipment. Part of that training can be accomplished in the field, but it should be done only under the direct supervision of an experienced employee.

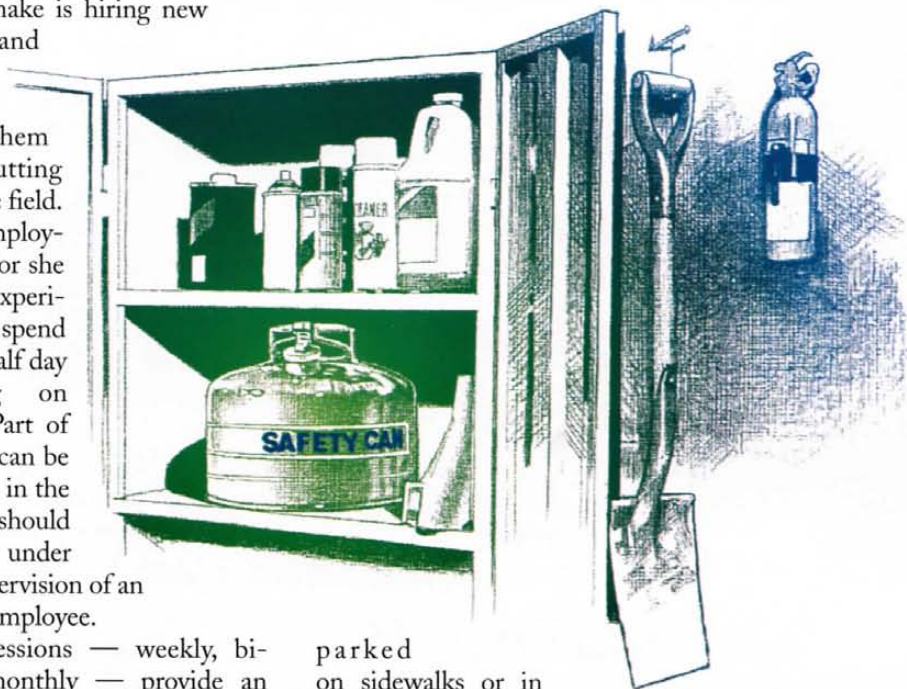
Update sessions — weekly, bi-weekly or monthly — provide an excellent opportunity to introduce all of your employees to recently purchased equipment.

SAFETY IS EVERYONE'S CONCERN

How your employees conduct themselves while on a job site is a direct reflection on your company. Following safe operating procedures is as much a part of their charge as being courteous to the customer, wearing the proper attire and doing a quality job.

While at the job site, being a safe operator does more than protect the operator. It protects other employees,

bystanders and property, as well. Instruct employees to be on the lookout for people or pets approaching a work area and to shut down their equipment until the area has cleared. They should never leave their equipment unattended and running or



parked on sidewalks or in drives.

Mowing adjacent to busy streets and intersections requires observing caution to prevent damage to passing vehicles or injury to drivers or passers-by. With traffic approaching, the blades should always be disengaged to prevent throwing stones. The same procedure should be followed whenever crossing gravel or rough terrain.

Making sure operators are trained to perform in a safe manner, in addition to wearing proper clothing and safety gear, assures safe mowing for everyone! **WT**

WITH "WALKER MOWERS" ANDERSON LAWN CARE WORKS IN THE RAIN



**WHEN INDIANA-BASED ANDERSON LAWN CARE
SET OUT TO TAKE A LARGER SHARE OF THE COMMERCIAL
MARKET, LITTLE DID THEY KNOW THAT THE EXTREMELY WET
SPRING WOULD ACTUALLY BENEFIT THEM.**

Bobbie Anderson, owner of Anderson Lawn Care, told us:

"The week before Memorial Day we were asked if we were interested in taking on 15 bank locations in Elkart, Indiana. There was a catch; the previous mowing contractor had been fired, the grass was overgrown (almost 2 feet high in places), we had to complete the first mowing in one week, and rain was expected for the rest of the week. Without hesitation, we accepted the challenge and mowed the first bank the next day in pouring rain. The Walker ran through standing water, and in some places, grass that exceeded the height of the wheels. We mowed in conditions that our competitors literally stopped by the road to watch us work in... We have signed a 3-year contract with the bank and because of our performance secured additional select accounts in the community. Mowing with the Walker is just another way our service is set apart from the rest."

"There isn't another machine on the market that runs like a Walker."

— Bobbie Anderson

