

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

Mowing
Long
Island

**BUILDING A FUTURE IN FRANCE
DEALER SERVICE VS. IN-HOUSE REPAIR
HOMEOWNER'S AMAZED BY HER WALKER
MOWING IN WALKERTOWN**

VOL. **11**

WALKER TALK

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FAMILY FOCUS

You may have noticed the tagline on recent advertising for Walker: "Independent, Family Owned Company, Designing and Producing Commercial Riding Mowers since 1980." It's obvious we think of our family-owned and -operated business as a strength and distinctive advantage. Some might suggest we are advertising a "weakness" in contrast to the strength and stability of big corporate business. However, as the "pendulum swings" with mergers, consolidation and downsizing in big corporate America, it is becoming apparent that "big corporate" is not necessarily synonymous with strength and stability. This is particularly true when a big company has lost "family focus" and begins to treat people like a commodity.

Family focus, in my definition, is a business philosophy that recognizes the importance of each person's contribution to a company. There is a concern not only for your own interests, but for others with whom you are working ... there is giving credit to others when due ... there is a commitment to stick together in good times and bad. Many small family-owned businesses start out with family focus;

the challenge is to keep it as the business grows.

In our company, we have set policies (e.g. no shift work) to strengthen families. The principle we follow is "strong companies are built by strong persons, strong persons come from strong families (and strong families come from God's hand)." This is not to say that we only have strong family people working, but we try to operate the business to strengthen employees' families.

Of course, the family focus within our company spills over to our relationship with distributors, dealers and end-customers. We are particularly pleased that many of our customers are private owners and small businesses where the family focus is important to them. We're proud when outside observers have reported the Walker Mower owners are "like a family," sometimes even when they're competitors. It comes down to this — people make businesses and people like to do business with people.



Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President

Mowing Long Island with an Irish flair

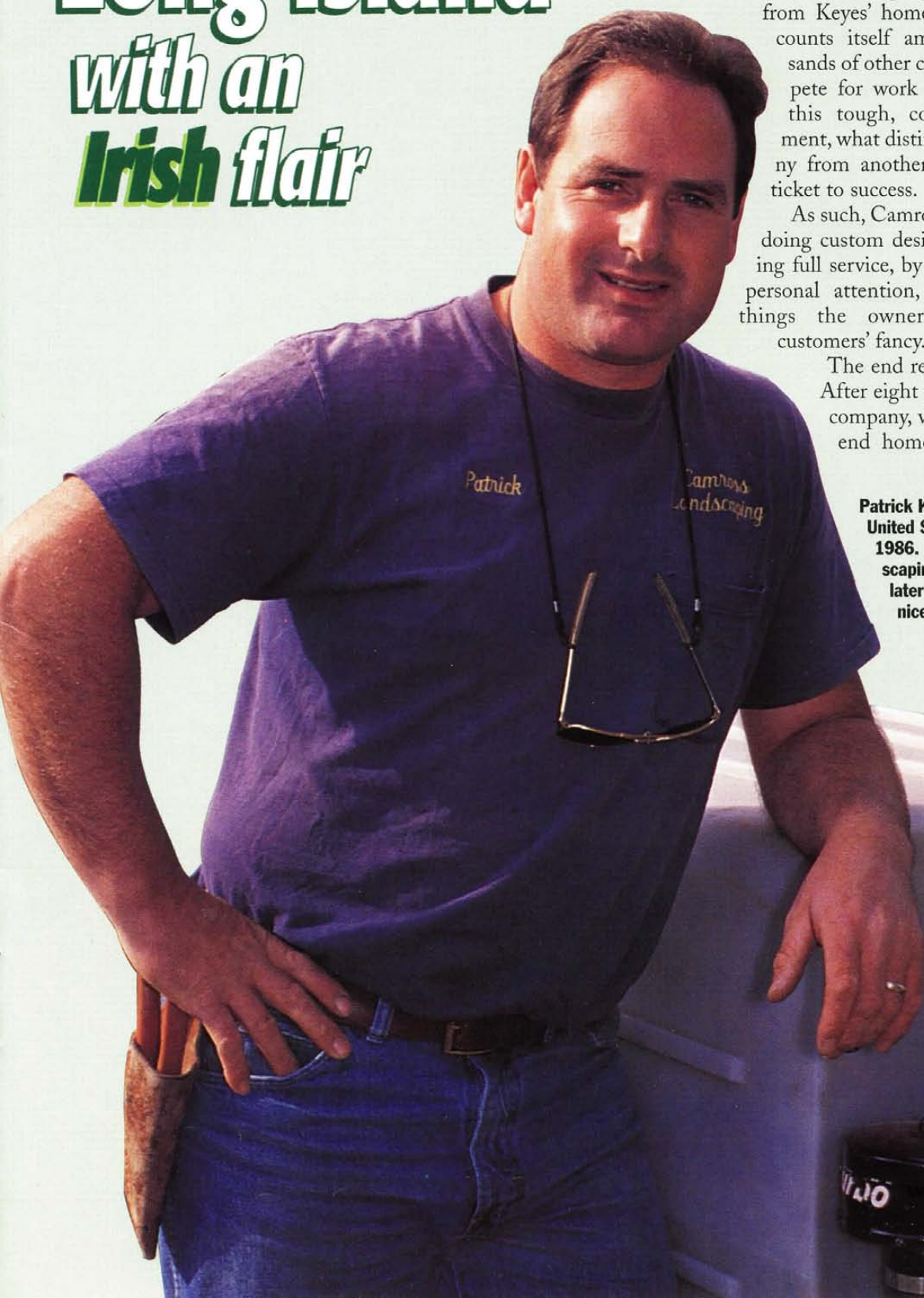
Imagine looking forward to work so much that you literally jump out of bed every morning. Patrick Keyes, owner of Camross Landscaping in Amityville, New York, does just that. He looks forward to interacting with customers, to the challenges associated with growing a business, and to providing a living for his family, something he couldn't have done if he had stayed home in Ireland.

Camross Landscaping — the name came from Keyes' hometown in Ireland — counts itself among literally thousands of other contractors who compete for work on Long Island. In this tough, competitive environment, what distinguishes one company from another is likely to be the ticket to success.

As such, Camross sets itself apart by doing custom design work, by providing full service, by giving all properties personal attention, and by doing the things the owner says "tickle his customers' fancy."

The end result speaks for itself. After eight years in business, the company, which caters to high-end homeowners, has tripled

Patrick Keyes came to the United States from Ireland in 1986. He purchased a landscaping business three years later and has since made a nice living for his family.



its customer base. It lives off a reputation for being not the least expensive company around, but one that delivers, giving customers their money's worth and a little bit more.

SEEKING OPPORTUNITY IN AMERICA

Yes, Keyes is proud of his operation. Yet, several years ago, flying 30,000 feet above the Atlantic, owning a landscaping business was the furthest thing from his mind.

On the way to visit his girlfriend Mary, who was in an exchange program at the time, Keyes met a stranger whose advice about moving to this country was straightforward: "Get into landscaping."

That was back in the middle 1980s when Patrick and other Irish men and women were seeking work, if not their fortune, in areas outside their homeland. As he puts it, "times were tough back then. There just wasn't any way to make a living. Some of us went to London to work; others looked elsewhere for opportu-

nities. I wanted to go to America."

Go he did in 1986 — with determination. He moved to Long Island and worked for a year or so in "The City" before being hired by Patrick Murphy, a landscaping friend in New Jersey. He worked for Murphy, learning the landscaping profession, until a lawn maintenance business came up for sale in Long Island. In 1989, he purchased the business, which included 62 landscape maintenance accounts, enough to get his foot in the door.

"It was a tough go at first," tells Keyes, who only three years in this country had worked at a variety of jobs in addition to landscaping.

Bidding was a mystery, as were other business-related exercises. Not unlike other budding entrepreneurs, Keyes knew how to work, but didn't have a good handle

on the business end of the operation. In fact, he says it wasn't until 1993 — when he married Mary — that he made any money in the business.

"She immediately took over the book work," says Keyes. "She began showing me where I was falling short on the business end. If I needed money for a piece of equipment and didn't have it, she showed me where the money was and told me to go get it. She has a real business head and without her I wouldn't be in business today."

SEPARATING ITSELF FROM THE COMPETITION

In 1993 Camross Landscaping also started to target high-end customers in more exclusive neighborhoods, offering the kinds of services that began to separate it from the competition. Keyes began to leverage his experience and education into more specialized work.

In addition to landscape maintenance, design and construction, he could offer customers irrigation design and installation, tree care, nightscaping and computer imaging. The latter, being able to show customers an image of their landscape design before a shovel had been lifted, has given his business a boost, notes Keyes.

In addition, a diet of design course work during the winter off-season gives the Camross owner the

PEOPLE POWER

A Walker can set you free in two ways, according to Patrick Keyes. 1) Keyes has a voracious reading appetite and the Walker gives him the opportunity to listen to audio books while mowing. 2) More importantly, the machine finishes the job in such a timely fashion that it leaves time for him to do other business-related chores. As Keyes points out, time is a factor for any contractor, but for small ones, it takes on even bigger meaning.



Money doesn't come easy in this business, notes Keyes. So he spends carefully and avoids getting into debt. He doesn't skimp in two areas, however: on his equipment and its preventive maintenance.

Keyes figures the Walker saved him \$24,000 in its first year on the job. In the process, it allowed him to be more competitive, in one of the most competitive markets in the country.

"Times were tough back then. There just wasn't any way to make a living."



reputation as a purveyor of unique perennial gardens.

Behind the scenes, Keyes is working to please customers in other ways, too. "All of our customers have a hot button," he notes. "The key is to find that button." Keyes looks for it early on in their relationship, asking customers what they liked and didn't like from previous lawn services. He focuses on both, making sure his crews repeat the good things, but don't repeat past offenses. If weeds were a particular problem in the past, for example, he would concentrate on ridding the property of the weeds.

"All of our customers have a hot button. The key is to find that button."

It's really as simple as that, he explains, talking about his hard-earned respect. In return, customers really come to depend on you.

"I'm always amazed by how much trust people put in you," explains Keyes, "like asking me if a tree that is well over 50 years old should live or die. Imagine that and I'm only 34," he says with a smile.

Indeed, a big part of Keyes' success is not only his respect for customers, but also for the land. He grew up on a farm in Ireland and always understood the synergy between the people who worked the land and the land itself. As he says, being in the landscape business today is really the closest he could get to farming.

ECONOMICALLY SPEAKING

Unfortunately, being in the landscape business resembles farming all too closely in one area in particular — money doesn't come easy. Having Mary keep the books has helped,



AN IRISH CONNECTION IN NEW JERSEY

Sean Flanagan came to the United States a few years before his friend Patrick Keyes. The reasons were the same, however. Things were tough back home and there were opportunities in this country.

In his first full year here he worked two jobs. The second one entailed mowing lawns and doing other landscaping chores. Thirteen years ago, he pulled the plug on his first job and launched Three Shamrocks Landscaping Co. in Harrington Park, New Jersey.

Flanagan built his business from the ground up, targeting residential properties just like his friend on Long Island did. Today, he maintains 172 homes and two commercial accounts. He operates one mowing crew and one landscape installation crew with six full-time employees.

Labor costs and finding good help are among the most difficult problems facing landscapers in this area, tells Flanagan. That's where his new Walkers come in. He purchased his first Walker in 1989. Last year, he bought his first diesel model, followed by a second one this year.

"Since last year, the mowers have saved me at least one person," relates Flanagan. "They also mow where other machines with bulky catchers can't, and are good at picking up grass and leaves."

Three Shamrocks' crews mow five days a week, but Flanagan and his installation people generally put in six days.

As he puts it, "the work is hard but the pay is good," again emphasizing the importance of finding and keeping key people.

He's happy with his current mix of employees. Two stay on for the winter snowplowing regimen; the others return in the spring when the landscaping and maintenance business picks up.

And pick up it will. New work, primarily by referrals in combination with current customers, will ensure plenty of work next spring, to the tune of maybe forcing Three Shamrocks to add another crew.



Labor costs and finding good help are among the most difficult problems facing contractors in North Jersey, tells Three Shamrocks owner Sean Flanagan. His Walkers have saved him at least one person over the last year.

The only thing really holding Flanagan back is the thought of going back home. The economy is stronger there now, and homeowners may well be looking for professionals to maintain their properties. You never know, Flanagan may have already booked passage back to Ireland, if not for himself, at least for one of his key employees: the Walker diesel with a 48-inch deck.



The Camross Walker gives crews a head start by cutting through early morning dew and by cutting down on time spent handling grass clippings.

says Keyes, but it still can be a struggle making ends meet.

"I've learned over the years to spend money carefully and avoid getting into debt," says Keyes, looking subconsciously at his cell phone. The phone has been a great help to the business but it can also be overused, he explains. It's easy to take things for granted, especially things that needlessly cost your business money.

The same holds true for properties. Some are more expensive than others to maintain, just by their proximity. Keyes, like so many other landscapers, strives to keep accounts close, to cut down on needless travel and loading/unloading time.

And at times, you have to spend money to make money. Preventive maintenance falls into that category. "If you ignore it, it will cost you money," says Keyes, who is constantly reminded of his dad's words when he was growing up on the cattle farm: "If you feed them, you will get your money back."

Likewise with his equipment. In spring '97, Keyes bought his first Walker mower, a 48-inch diesel-powered unit with a GHS deck.

"My friends in Jersey convinced me to buy the mower," he tells. "Last November, I was asked to maintain six condominiums and I really

couldn't do it without hiring another person in the spring. After listening to my friends and looking at the numbers, I decided to buy the mower. It was big bucks, but it also saves me big money."

As he relates, to maintain the property with a walk-behind would have cost him a new \$4,000 mower this spring and one person's salary which, for 10 months, amounts to \$20,000. He figures, in

strict economic terms, that the Walker has saved him \$24,000.

"The machine is a big deal for us even beyond economics," says Keyes. "It gives me a chance to do the job in a timely fashion. And it's so easy to operate I feel good at night."

But that's not all of the benefits, he emphasizes. Adding the mower with the big diesel power allows him to cut through the dew in the morning, giving his crews a head start. And it packs in the clippings which cuts down on emptying time — all important considerations in a competitive environment.

There's another side benefit. Keyes enjoys reading, but doesn't have the time to indulge himself. Riding the Walker gives him the opportunity to chew through grass, and more than a few audio books.

The Walker has been a good investment, he emphasizes, referring back to his money-saving philosophy. "You can buy an inexpensive pair of shoes. When you get them home and they don't fit, they suddenly have become the most expensive shoes in the world. The same holds true with equipment. If you buy equipment that fits your operation — even if it costs more up front — you will be far better off than buying less expensive equipment that doesn't fit."

BEYOND ECONOMICS

If you ask Keyes how much money his business generates, he will get reticent, saying that's something he likes to keep to himself. Suffice it to say, in his words, he makes enough money to afford a good living for his wife and two children, Elizabeth and Henry.

"We work hard, but so does everyone in this business, in this country, for that matter," he adds with a footnote. "That's one thing that's not so good over here. People get too wrapped up in their work. You see people going to work in New York City at 5:00 a.m. and they don't get

"If you buy equipment that fits your operation — even if it costs more up front — you will be far better off than buying less expensive equipment that doesn't fit."

home until after 7:00 p.m. It doesn't leave much time for a family life.

"Yes, hard work has made this country what it is, but at the same time, it comes at a price."

To keep the price within reason, the Keyes family avoids talking about work after 8:00 p.m. unless it's absolutely part of the conversation. They're also looking to control growth, keeping the company at or near its present size. And they take a few weeks off in the winter to go home to visit friends and family.

The time is well spent and puts Keyes in a good frame of mind to begin the spring work on none other than St. Patrick's Day. **WT**

Building a future in France

Nestled along France's southwestern coast is the peaceful fishing village of Loctudy; peaceful, that is, until the European holiday season when the population swells from 3,800 to almost 12,000.

It is not hard to see what draws vacationers. Skirted on the western side with rolling green hills and on the eastern side by the Bay of Biscay, Loctudy lays claim to some magnificent stone castles and vacation homes — many from the 17th and 18th centuries.

“When I told people I was going to buy a commercial riding mower to start a business, they told me I was crazy, but they did not have my dream.”

These are the same properties that gave Dominique Tailhardat, owner of Horticulture Services, an idea eight years ago to build a year-round lawn care maintenance business for the homes of visiting tourists and local residents.

The area provided a unique challenge for Tailhardat, however, similar to the one he was facing when *Walker Talk* paid him a visit. The incomplete work on an addition to his home office highlighted the effort he has put forth to match stone work and maintain the original look of the building. For his new customers, the challenge would be to install and maintain landscapes without disturbing the natural beauty of the area.

LAYING FOUNDATIONS

Like all new entrepreneurs, Tailhardat needed to overcome a few barriers. His first was to convince the

locals there was a need for professional lawn care in the area.

The second was to find equipment that was durable and fast with the capability of doing multiple jobs so he could stay competitive with potential future competition. Tailhardat says the solution to overcoming both was the Walker mower he found during a visit to a Paris power equipment trade show in 1989.

His long-term vision called for a piece of equipment just like the Walker. “When I told people I was going to buy a commercial



In Loctudy, castles and larger homes are converted into multi-family vacation homes, giving Dominique Tailhardat even more potential business.



BUSY BEES

"We like the Walker's versatility because when we mow a lot of lawns at one time, we can park our truck and trailer in a central location and work back and forth between the lawns like "bees with a honeycomb," says Walker operator André LeFaou.

André and fellow operator Alain Voreaux credit the versatility of the Walker with being able to maintain the turf and gardens on Horticulture Services' 250 accounts. André and Alain sometimes work separately, but usually they work together.

Since Horticulture Services designs properties to accommodate their Walker mowers, customers can hardly resist the company's maintenance service.

riding lawn mower to start a business, they told me I was crazy, but they did not have my dream," he says.

BUILDING A REPUTATION

In 1989, the one-man show began mowing lawns with his new Walker Model MS. Soon, heads began to turn. "I showed people this kind of work can be done quickly and efficiently," Tailhardat says. "Customers liked how fast the Walker completed the job, and they liked how I could go everywhere, everywhere, everywhere."

During this time tourism continued to grow, and many of the castles and larger homes were purchased and converted to multi-family vacation homes. For Horticulture Services, this meant more potential business. "People come here for holiday," explains Tailhardat. "They don't come here to work on their lawns. I encouraged them to pursue their lifestyles and other interests instead of always working on their lawns and gardens."



Customers like the Walker mower's speed and its ability to go "everywhere, everywhere, everywhere."

Many vacationers did not understand what he meant until they saw how the work was being done quickly and efficiently. Then, it was hard to resist the service, he says.

BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

"The best way to get and keep a market is to build it by hand," explains Tailhardat, who has a background in construction. And that's precisely what he has done. Many of

Horticulture Services' maintenance customers, for example, were installation customers first. Tailhardat says his landscape designs — with rolling contours and small areas — complemented the Walker mower so well that his customers couldn't help but use the maintenance part of his company to take care of their property.

Properties are designed not only to accommodate Walker mowers. They are designed and built with the

help of current technologies to help make them last longer and be more attractive.

Horticulture Services also looks to enhance landscapes with the installation of special features such as waterfalls and gardens. In all cases, the emphasis is on improving the property while retaining its natural beauty.

Even after eight years in business, Tailhardat still attends trade shows around France to find new and better ways to operate his business and improve his services. He is also a member of a contractors' association in the region.

"People come here for holiday. They don't come here to work on their lawns."

Horticulture Services currently runs three Walker mowers and employs two full-time Walker operators. During the busy season, the work force increases to as many as seven people. The balance of employees, which comes from a local technical school, helps with landscape installations and redesign projects. The company maintains 250 accounts, and after a 25% increase in business last year, the 36-year-old owner has plans to add one more full-time position this spring.

STILL BUILDING

Tailhardat is seeing the rewards of his hard work, primarily through the recommendations of current customers who appreciate, among other things, the stability of his company. "When we mow, it is usually the same people doing the job," he says. "That gives the customer a feeling of stability and increases their comfort


level with us."

According to Tailhardat, customers also appreciate the attractive mowing job, and employees who are sensitive to their needs. In fact, many of them have enjoyed

getting to know Horticulture Services' employees. "If anything slows the lawn mowers down, it is an operator who talks too long with customers," he admits.

At the same time, he acknowledges that his employees' personal touch is still a major part of his business.

Horticulture Services continues

to build its business and reputation. And just like Tailhardat's home office improvement, it is being done with the use of efficient tools and new ideas. When the office is completed, Tailhardat is confident it will blend in with the rest of his home and the surrounding landscape in the same way so many of his projects have done in the past. 

Tall grass can't stop Walker operator Alain Voreaux from getting the job done. With 250 accounts, mowers have to be mowing like "bees with a honeycomb."

When Horticulture Services' truck pulls onto a property, customers can expect an attractive mowing job, and employees who are sensitive to their needs.





Equipment repair

Striking a balance between your dealer and your mechanic

and pick up equipment at a dealer's location. And most commercial dealers, no matter how dedicated they are to serving their professional customers, still require some turnaround time. The \$40/hour price tag that comes with dealer shop time can also be discouraging.

Preventive maintenance service — as long as it follows a manufacturer's specifications — can usually be done cost-effectively in-house. Oil and filter changes, lubrication, belt tightening, and blade sharpening and changing are all services that can be performed with basic tools and a baseline of power equipment knowledge. Minor repairs such as replacing belts and mufflers, fixing tires, replacing wheel bearings and even welding up mowing decks can also be done in-house with some expertise and the right equipment. Companies

long run, in the form of additional parts pickup trips and more repair time that leads to increased downtime. Even experienced technicians may not be "up to speed" in every repair procedure.

Other disadvantages? For smaller companies, there just isn't enough work to accommodate a full-time technician. And even larger companies are often forced to find "odd jobs" to fill in a technician's time sheet. The more downtime a technician has, the more it will ultimately cost to perform service and repair.

Many larger contractors employ in-house technicians who repair everything from string-line trimmers to the company dump trucks. Other larger companies "contract out" service on their fleet truck, yet still maintain their lawn equipment lineup.

Employing a part-time technician works for many smaller companies while others forego the technician route in favor of "handy" crew members or an owner/operator with technical ability. And some smaller companies simply leave the service and repair to their dealers.

What is the most cost-effective way to maintain equipment? That depends on your capabilities and those of your independent dealer. A strong case can be made for using a combination of both techniques.

WRENCHING IN-HOUSE

There's no question, having an in-house technician can save both time and money. It takes time to drop off

**The \$40/hour price tag
that comes with dealer
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with trained, experienced technicians and the right tools, on the other hand, may have the ability to perform nearly any repair service.

Again, wrenching in-house has its advantages. Equipment can be fixed in a timely fashion and the shop rate is reasonable. But it has its downside.

Repairs done by inexperienced employees can be expensive in the

THE DEALER ADVANTAGE

By far, the biggest advantage dealers have over in-house repair is their experience and expertise. Servicing dealers perform countless repair procedures. This means they can generally perform repairs faster than in-house mechanics, and with better success rates.

The two Es — experience and expertise — are especially important when talking about some of the higher-tech equipment on the market. While a simple electrical problem may baffle an in-house technician for hours, a dealer — with factory spec sheets, wiring diagrams, service bulletins and conceivably previous experience with the specific problem — may take only minutes.

Also, new emission standards for hand-held equipment nearly mandate that units be taken back to the dealer for some types of repair and/or adjustment.

The truth is, we live in a specialized world today. A technician

is not just a technician. He or she is trained in a specific industry to diagnose and repair sophisticated equipment. Dealers spend literally thousands of dollars annually to send technicians to service schools, and spend even more money on tools and equipment. The end result is better service for the customer.

Successful commercial dealers are really in business to make life easier for their commercial customers. They find ways to minimize their customers' downtime and keep them in the field where they belong. Hence, dealer service often includes 24- to 48-hour turnaround,

Dealers spend thousands of dollars annually to send technicians to service schools, and spend even more on tools and equipment.

the use of a loaner, and agreeable business hours that allow customers to bring in repair problems either early in the morning or late in the afternoon.

Yes, it sometimes pays to perform the service or repair in the convenience of your own shop. But don't get caught in the trap of thinking that just because you and your technicians do some of the service and repair work that all of it can be done cost-effectively in-house. Lawn maintenance professionals need to strike a balance between in-house repair and dealer service. They shouldn't shy away from repairs that can be done affordably and in a timely fashion in-house or attempt to do everything themselves.

Take a moment this winter to assess your repair needs. It might even pay to determine how much money you spent on repairs last year — at your dealer and in-house. Be sure to add in travel costs to and from your dealer and time spent internally on repairs. You may be surprised to learn that, in many cases, the \$40/hour shop rate is not a bad deal, especially if it saves on downtime and return trips for parts. **WT**

ARE SERVICE CONTRACTS FOR YOU?

If you count yourself among contractors who regularly take advantage of dealer repair services, then a service contract might be something to consider. Not to be confused with an extended warranty program that simply "extends" a manufacturer's warranty, a service contract allows equipment owners to pay in advance for regularly scheduled service work, e.g., tune-ups and oil changes, and for the replacement of high-wear items like belts and blades.

Service contracts, including the price of the contract and what it includes, typically vary from machine to machine. Obviously, the price of a service contract for a riding mower would be higher than a similar contract for an intermediate walk-mower which, in turn, would be higher than a contract for a trim mower or piece of hand-held equipment.

Having a service contract can be advantageous in more ways than one to commercial operators. The key advantage, of course, is that the contract frees the operator to concentrate on doing what he or she does best: mow. Changing the oil, replacing plugs, changing the air filters and more would be done under the contract at specified intervals.

The operator would not have to remember to do the service, only to take the machine to the dealer. The service agreement also frees the contractor from finding a place to dispose of oil and other spent items, and even frees up space which normally would be used to perform the service.

Knowing what you will be paying for service for the year is an advantage all its own. Operators with a service contract can budget the expenses up front, even pay for them if the money is available, or include the contract into a monthly payment plan. The end result either way is that the operator knows exactly how much service will cost for the year for a particular piece of equipment.

This knowledge is power, too, when it comes to estimating and bidding jobs. The cost of the service contract falls under the heading of equipment costs. Instead of having to estimate what it will cost to maintain a piece of equipment, the price is there in black and white to be included in the price of the job up front.

Last but not least, having a service contract sets a framework of discipline to ensure that your equipment will receive timely preventive maintenance. The bottom line for your business will be less downtime and more mowing time for your crews.

Not all contractors are good candidates for service contracts. Again, smaller contractors — those who regularly frequent dealers for service — may find a service contract attractive. If you're in this category, talk with your dealer. Even if he doesn't offer a service contract per se, he may be able to offer a similar service that will ensure that your equipment is ready to go when the season hits and stays that way until the grass slows or stops growing.

Homeowner puts Walker to work at "Serenity Acres"

"I just love my mower."

Why would a homeowner spend upwards of \$9,000 on a mower? Just ask Carol Nelson of Paris, Illinois. In '96, she and her husband Bob purchased a Walker equipped with a Kohler engine and 52-inch side-discharge deck. The acquisition immediately cut her

Their home is situated just above the links and includes two huge decks and a garage recently converted into a woodworking shop. The carpentry work was all done in-house by the husband and wife team.

Carol is a former cabinet

maker/laminator/welder. Bob also enjoys woodworking, not to mention making custom golf clubs.

MOWER MADNESS

Six and a half acres of lawn is a bundle to mow, whether you're a lawn maintenance professional or a homeowner. Before she purchased the Walker, Carol says it would take her two days to mow her lawn and she "wouldn't be human" after the effort.

Late last year, after waging the mowing battle for nearly another entire season, she and Bob visited the local dealer fully intent on buying a zero-turn-radius mower.

"The mower he showed us had two big steering levers and we just didn't like the way it handled," remembers Carol. "Then we asked him about the yellow mower also in the

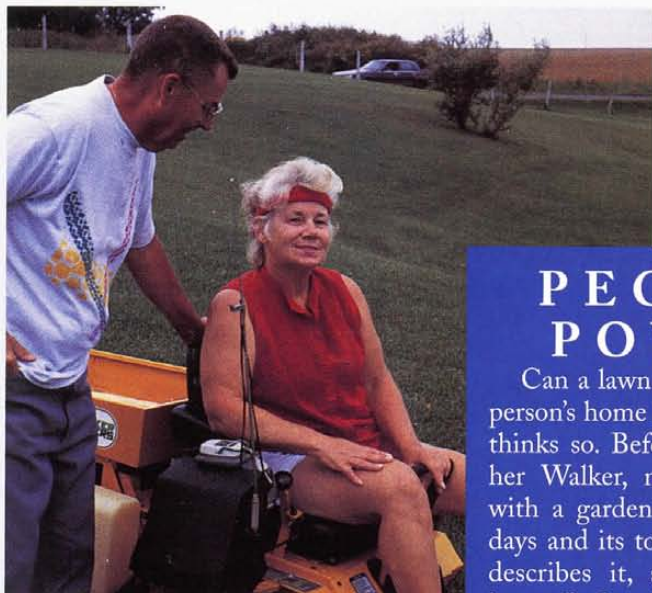
"I just use my pinkie and index fingers to steer the mower."

mowing time down from 16 hours on her garden tractor to only four. And, she says, "When I've finished mowing I still have energy left to do other things around the house."

There are plenty of things to do, too. The Nelsons live on a beautiful 7-acre spread just on the outskirts of town. All but half an acre is mowed, including a seven-hole golf course the couple refers to as "Serenity Acres."

Proud Walker owner Carol Nelson didn't like the first zero-turn-radius mower she saw. In her words it had two big steering levers and she didn't like the way it handled. The Walker, on the other hand, "was rugged and handled like a breeze."





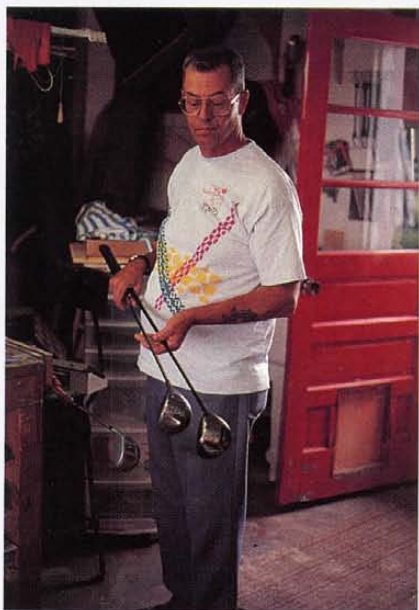
Family members tease Carol about her infatuation with her mower.

PEOPLE POWER

Can a lawn mower enhance a person's home life? Carol Nelson thinks so. Before she purchased her Walker, mowing 6.5 acres with a garden tractor took two days and its toll, as well. As she describes it, she "wouldn't be human" after the effort.

Now, with the Walker, mowing takes only four hours and she has the energy left over to do other things around the house.

Although Carol doesn't want to use the overused term "user-friendly" to describe the Walker, she does anyway. After all, she says apologetically, what other words can one use to describe a machine that saves so much time and energy?



Spare time is not a problem for this couple. Both enjoy woodworking and Bob has a second hobby building custom golf clubs.

showroom." "We had never heard of a Walker, but I liked it immediately. There was no plastic on it, the machine looked like it was rugged, and it handled like a breeze. The nice thing was that it was comparably priced to the other mower, and was even less expensive than a new garden tractor."

But it wasn't until she brought the mower home that its real advantages came through loud and clear.

Carol, who has had carpal tunnel

surgery on both hands, found the steering to be incredibly easy. "I just use my pinkie and index fingers to steer the mower," she says. "I also felt more secure on the hills with the Walker than the garden tractor, and it's an honest machine."

Honest? "The deck was advertised to cut 52 inches and that's just what it cut," she emphasizes. "The 36-inch deck on the garden tractor cut only about 33 inches, and it left a mark. Not the Walker, it cuts the full width and it does a nice clean job."

Listening to his wife talk about the Walker, Bob nods his head in agreement, then smiles.

"You really have to see Carol operate the mower to understand her enthusiasm," he says. "She's either out there mowing with her head phones on just jamming away, or she

is riding to a picnic with her 3-year-old granddaughter Becca-boo."

Bob continues, "She takes her mowing seriously. Before she got used to the mower, she left a weed standing in the back lawn and practiced maneuvering around it."

Carol doesn't mind what her family thinks about her mowing regimen. As she puts it, "I'm totally amazed with my mower. My family, on the other hand, thinks I'm crazy." Crazy or not, Carol says she mows once a week now, maybe twice if it rains a lot. She carries her limb cutters, water and string-line trimmer in the back utility bed, although, she notes, the Walker has cut down considerably on her trimming time. She

"I'm totally amazed with my mower. My family, on the other hand, thinks I'm crazy."

also attaches a small garden cart to pick up debris.

"I don't want to use the term user-friendly because it's so overused," adds Carol. "But that's what the Walker is. The seat and arm rests are real comfortable, and how the mower maneuvers is what really counts."

Her only negative comment is that when the grass is wet, it sometimes sticks to the bottom of the deck. A company that designs such a great mower ought to be able to design a silicon spray that keeps the decks running clean, even in the rain, she points out.

Well, then again, Mother Nature still presents its challenges. In the meantime, Carol is mowing away, to the tune of four hours a week, 32 weeks a year. At that rate, this will be the first and last Walker she will ever own. **WT**



Three is not a crowd when it comes to transporting Walkers to LandCrafters' commercial accounts. The machines are tucked neatly away on a single trailer.

Mowing in Walkertown

When the father, son and son-in-law team comprised of Gerald and Gerry Peddycord and Mike May drive the Walker mowers off their trailers, customers aren't surprised. After all, why shouldn't a lawn maintenance company from Walkertown use Walker mowers?

But it's only coincidence that this North Carolina town located just a few miles northeast of Winston-Salem has the same name as the mowers used by LandCrafters.

"We were intrigued by the Walker name when we were first introduced to the machines in 1994," tells family patriarch and company founder Gerald Peddycord. But pragmatics soon replaced curiosity as the company's first Walker zipped in and around small spaces, easily sucked up grass, and maneuvered like no other riding mower the Peddycords had ever operated.

Before the year was out, the landscaping/lawn maintenance team pur-

chased another Walker. Today it pulls up to commercial accounts with three town namesakes, all tucked neatly away on a single trailer.

"The mowers took the place of our walk-behinds," tells son Gerry. "Everybody liked the way they striped, and we liked the way they maneuvered and handled grass clippings."

Today, the Walkers, complemented by two front-cut Kubota mowers, mow upwards of 100 acres of grass weekly. Most — if not all — of the 20 or so properties are commercial, with the majority being owned by AMP, Inc., the company's first mowing account 23 years ago.

"We were doing only landscaping at the time," remembers Gerald. "I asked AMP if we could do its landscaping. The person in charge of grounds maintenance said the landscaping was spoken for, but the com-

pany needed someone to maintain the property and mow the lawns. I didn't even have a mower, but took the company up on the offer."

The account has been a good one. It not only placed LandCrafters on the ground floor of the maintenance business before it became popular, and more competitive, but it located them in the commercial arena, a market that many lawn maintenance professionals find difficult to break into today.

"The mowers took the place of our walk-behinds. Everybody liked the way they striped, and we liked the way they maneuvered and handled grass clippings."

As Gerald explains, that one property alone has led to 12 more as AMP, a manufacturer of electrical components, developed new sites around the Winston-Salem, Greensboro area. It's also useful to have a high-profile company on your vita when other commercial properties become available, he adds.

"It doesn't hurt to tell a customer you've had an account for 23 years," tells Gerald. Despite the good relationship LandCrafters has had with AMP, the Peddycords, especially Gerald, have seen working relationships change. He has worked with five different people at AMP over the years.

His advice for procuring and keeping commercial accounts, then, would include not only getting to know the person(s) in charge of making grounds maintenance decisions, but networking and getting to know other people in the company, as well. In addition, he says, be persistent. Don't give up on the first or second try. Go back often enough so the people in charge know you and the service you provide.

FAMILY TRADITION

As his father relates the company's early history, Gerry listens intently. Oh, he's heard the stories many times in the past — how you get and keep accounts, especially — and he no doubt hears them even more today as he assumes a higher profile within the company. Although Gerry has, in his words, operated a mower since his earliest memories, it's been only two years since he graduated with a business degree from High Point University and worked full time with his father and brother-in-law.

"I've always wanted to take over this business," tells Gerry. "This type of work has always been satisfying to

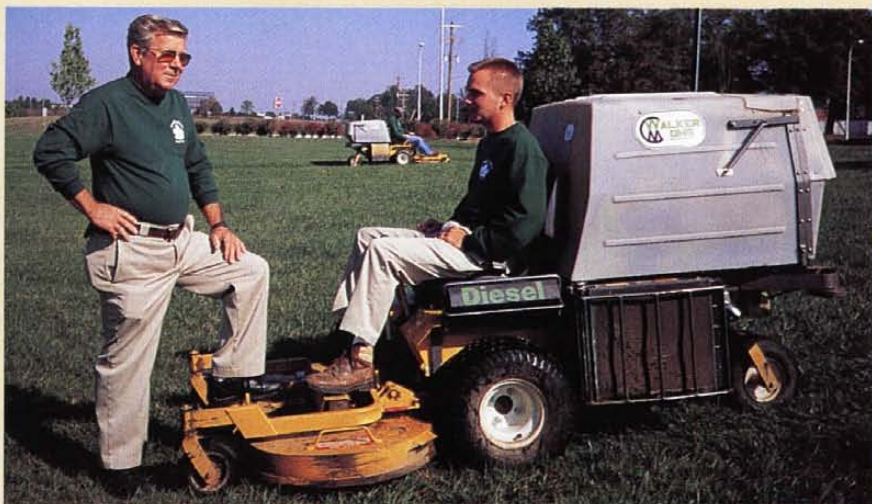
me. It gives me a sense of accomplishment when the day is done." His father nods his head in agreement, although he professes to have had no influence on his son's decision.

"I told Gerry from the beginning he wasn't obligated to be in this business. In fact, I encouraged him to do something else. But one thing is for

sure, since he has made the decision to be with us full time, he has been a great asset."

So has his brother-in-law Mike May, he adds, who has been with the company for the better part of 10 years. May, who manages the company's two crews, along with Gerry, are the primary Walker operators.

"We've had so many compliments



As Gerry Peddycord looks to assume more responsibility in the family-owned business, he looks for even more words of wisdom from his father Gerald. The 23-year landscaping veteran obliges, more often than not focusing on one key idea. As he puts it, the only way to pseudo guarantee your business and grow is "to provide consistent quality at a fair price."



From his earliest memories, Gerry Peddycord has operated a mower. But it wasn't until he graduated from college two years ago that he began working full-time for LandCrafters.

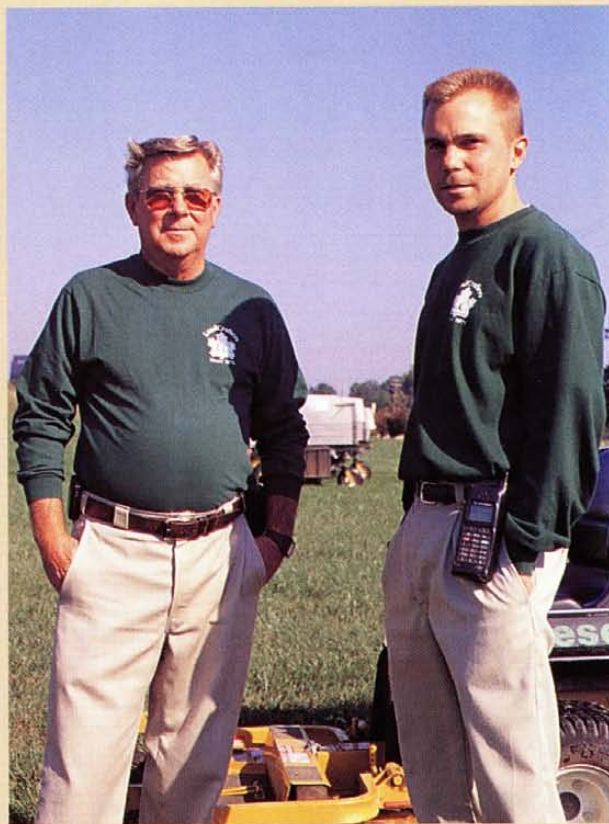
PEOPLE POWER

After 23 years in the commercial landscaping business, LandCrafters knows something about growing and maintaining large accounts. According to company founder Gerald Peddycord, the key is to not only identify and build a relationship with the person in charge of grounds maintenance, but to network and get to know other people, as well. The process helps provide a smooth transition if and when the prime contact either leaves or changes positions within the company.

about the lawns over the last couple of years, that alone makes having the Walkers worthwhile," May relates. "I think customers really like the way they stripe and give the lawns a manicured look. The interesting thing is, I don't think they realize the mower is doing the striping. They think it has something to do with the way we fertilize or some other magic act we perform."

After years of mowing with side-discharge walk-behinds, he also likes the way the Walkers maneuver, especially around automobiles in parking lots. The 48-inch GHS decks not only do a superb job of picking up clippings, but they also contain debris so it doesn't go flying against the cars and sides of buildings.

LandCrafters' newest Walkers are diesels which, the Peddycords explain, provide even more power and torque than their gas-powered counterparts. The company doesn't own any Walker attachments yet, but Gerald



The Peddycord father and son team hook up for a little on-the-job discussion. Gerald insists he had no influence on his son's decision to join the company. He has no regrets, either.

provides and its customer base. Since maintenance already accounts for approximately 80% of business, the company doesn't see much change there. But it has always had a legacy of never turning down work.

In addition to maintenance, the Peddycords will do just about anything a customer asks, from design and installation and doing backhoe, loader and heavy tractor work to dump truck hauling. As the company grows and takes on more commercial accounts, it looks to expand current services to satisfy those accounts.

Times have changed since that first mowing job, says Gerald. This business is real competitive in all markets — in the residential market, in the multi-family market and in the commercial market, too. The only way to pseudo guarantee your position and to grow your

Two additional Walkers with 60-inch decks may be in the offing. The machines would give LandCrafters the best of all worlds; maneuverability and wide-area mowing capability.

says he's taking a close look at a dethatcher or a snowplow or snowthrower for sidewalks.

Even higher on his priority list is the possibility of replacing the front-



LandCrafters customers may not know the striping effect is generated by the Walker mowers, but they like it, says crew manager Mike May.

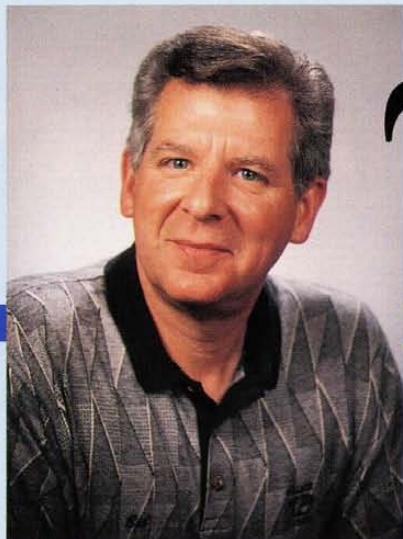
cut, four-wheel-drive Kubotas with two new Walkers with 60-inch side-discharge decks. Then they would have the best of all worlds, says Gerald: maneuverability and wide-area mowing capability.

DOWN THE ROAD

Like so many successful landscaping and lawn maintenance companies, LandCrafters is looking to expand, in both the services it

business is to continually provide a finished product your customers want at a price they can afford.

Sound familiar? It's the same story whether your business is in Walkertown or in another city or state. Sometimes it just pays to live in a city where there's plenty of growth opportunity — like the Triad area of North Carolina where Walkertown is located — and operate a mower with the same name. **WT**



BOB T'S

Tech Talk

Air filters give engines life

The life of your engine is largely dependent on the amount and quality of the air being sucked through the carburetor. An insufficient amount and/or contaminated air will reduce or eliminate long life. "Good maintenance and the best filter are cheap insurance."

The cost of rebuilding or replacing an engine, and the downtime involved, will pay for a lot of filters and maintenance. Maintenance can be some of the most valuable time spent with your mower; yet, we tend to cut corners. Often, the customer says, "I'm doing great maintenance." Yet, an inspection of his failed engine shows dirt ingestion or other

signs of a lack of quality maintenance.

An OEM filter element that is not faulty and is properly in place will **not allow dirt ingestion**. When dirt is ingested, a thorough investigation will usually reveal 1) the media has a hole in it 2) the element seal has been damaged 3) the element did not seal due to improper installation 4) the surface the element seals to is damaged.

Over-servicing the filter — removing and attempting to clean it too often — is the most common cause of dirt ingestion. Only when a filter is clogged to the point that there is a decrease in power or when the air flow indicator (if your mower is so equipped) tells you it's time to change the element should it be removed and replaced.

Here is another important point: Do not attempt to clean an air filter element — replace it. The pitfalls of popular cleaning methods are:

- **Tapping** is not recommended by filter or engine manufacturers; can damage the sealing area, liner or the media.
 - **Blowing with compressed air** is not recommended by many manufacturers; can blow a hole in the media.
 - **Washing** is not recommended by most manufacturers; may result in tiny holes, tears or deforming of the media.
- Replacing filters is cheaper than replacing an engine.

PROCEDURES FOR A HEALTHY ENGINE

- Check air system daily
- Do not clean air filter — replace if clogged
- Look for cracks in hoses or pipes
- Check for loose hose clamps
- Check gaskets and seals for damage or deterioration
- Empty pre-cleaner dust cup or receptacle
- Check foam pre-filter and clean if needed
- Check operation of the turbine pre-cleaner (check movement with the engine running)

When the foam pre-filter needs to be cleaned or the air filter changed, carefully follow the step-by-step instructions in the owner's manual. **WT**

Bob Tomasek is manager of customer service at Walker Mfg.

Walker Talkback

Questions from our Readers and Answers

Q: Why not have a combination catching, discharge, mulching deck?

A: In our work with deck design over the last 20 years, we have not found a way to offer a "combo" deck that offers top performance in every mowing application. That's why we offer dedicated, high-performance decks that are easily interchanged for different mowing applications.

Q: How long will a Walker last?

A: Experience has shown 5,000 hours can be expected with reasonably good maintenance. The air-cooled engine will need to be replaced or overhauled at least once in 5,000 hours; the water-cooled Kubota should go the distance without overhaul.

Q: Are parts available on next-day shipment service?

A: Yes, if requested by your dealer. There will probably be an extra charge for freight.

WALKER CARRIES TRIPP ACROSS AMERICA

It took 12-year-old Ryan Tripp 42 days to traverse America, from Salt Lake City, Utah to Washington, D.C. He traveled 3,116 miles, setting a new mark in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for the longest lawn mower ride.

More importantly, Ryan's ride created awareness of an infant girl in need of a liver transplant from his hometown of Beaver, Utah. Ryan did it on a Walker.

"I've learned how to set a goal and reach it," says Tripp, who along with his father Todd and his grandfather, left the steps of the Salt Lake City Capitol building on Friday, August 15, 1997. They arrived in Washington, D.C. on September 25, where Ryan mowed Capitol Hill's grounds.



Above: Ryan Tripp is greeted by a host of reporters upon completion of his journey. Left: Driving rains couldn't stop the 12-year-old Ryan and the Walker Model T.

"It's been one of the greatest experiences of my life," relates Todd. "I wasn't sure if any other mower could possibly make the trip. I run a lawn maintenance company in Beaver and have worked with many different types of mowers. I was confident the Walker would help us meet our goals. And it didn't disappoint us."

Ryan traveled on a Walker Model T mower.

NEW FACILITY FOR MID-ATLANTIC DISTRIBUTOR

Construction of a new 20,000-square-foot distribution center for GHS Corp. in Denton, North Carolina was completed in November.

The new facility includes a large parts and equipment storage area, dual loading docks and meeting areas.

Since starting in a small garage 12 years ago, Levon Hopkins and his family have made remarkable progress

by introducing and marketing the Walker Mower in this region — now the fifth largest Walker distributor.

Set in the rolling hills of central North Carolina, this new building is a testament to the dedication and hard work of the entire Hopkins family and their employees. Congratulations!



Above: A 20,000-square-foot distribution center set in the rolling hills of North Carolina is testament to the dedication and hard work of the Hopkins family and their employees. Left: Levon Hopkins cuts the ceremonial ribbon on the new building.

EUROWEEK '97 HELD IN ZURICH

October marked the first time a European conference was held in Zurich for Walker distributors. All 10 distributors for Europe were represented. Two other United States manufacturers co-sponsored the event: Bluebird International and Billy Goat.

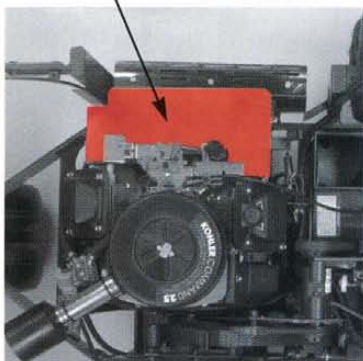
Sven Gillfors and Wolfgang Lorli, Walker factory representatives in Europe, organized and hosted the conference. The four-day program



included private meetings, product and marketing presentations and outdoor demonstration.

Walker has been marketed in Europe since 1987 and today the sales are 7.5% of Walker's total business.

MUFFLER GRASS SHIELD



Order Kit # 8531
(see Recall Bulletin #9799)

WALKER PRODUCTS

54-INCH DECK WITH TILT-UP

The DSD54 deck with a tilt-up feature has been introduced for '98 models.

It incorporates the same tilt-up design as the 42- and 48-inch decks.

A retrofit kit is also available for earlier 54-inch decks.



THREE UPGRADE KITS FOR EARLIER MODELS

- Belt tension idler spring on DSD52/62 deck changed to gas spring to eliminate spring breakage due to harmonic vibration. Order Kit #8761. Models affected are DSD62 prior to D8-39725 and DSD52 prior to D9-39743

- Install muffler grass shield (see picture at lower left of page) on Model MT S/N 95-21329 through 96-26874 to prevent grass clippings and leaves from collecting on hot parts and potentially starting a fire. Order Kit #8531 (see Recall Bulletin #9799)

- Cold start kit (see below picture) for Model MT, beginning S/N 95-21329 and on; assists engine cranking below 40° F; lever releases transmission drive belt. Order Kit #8638



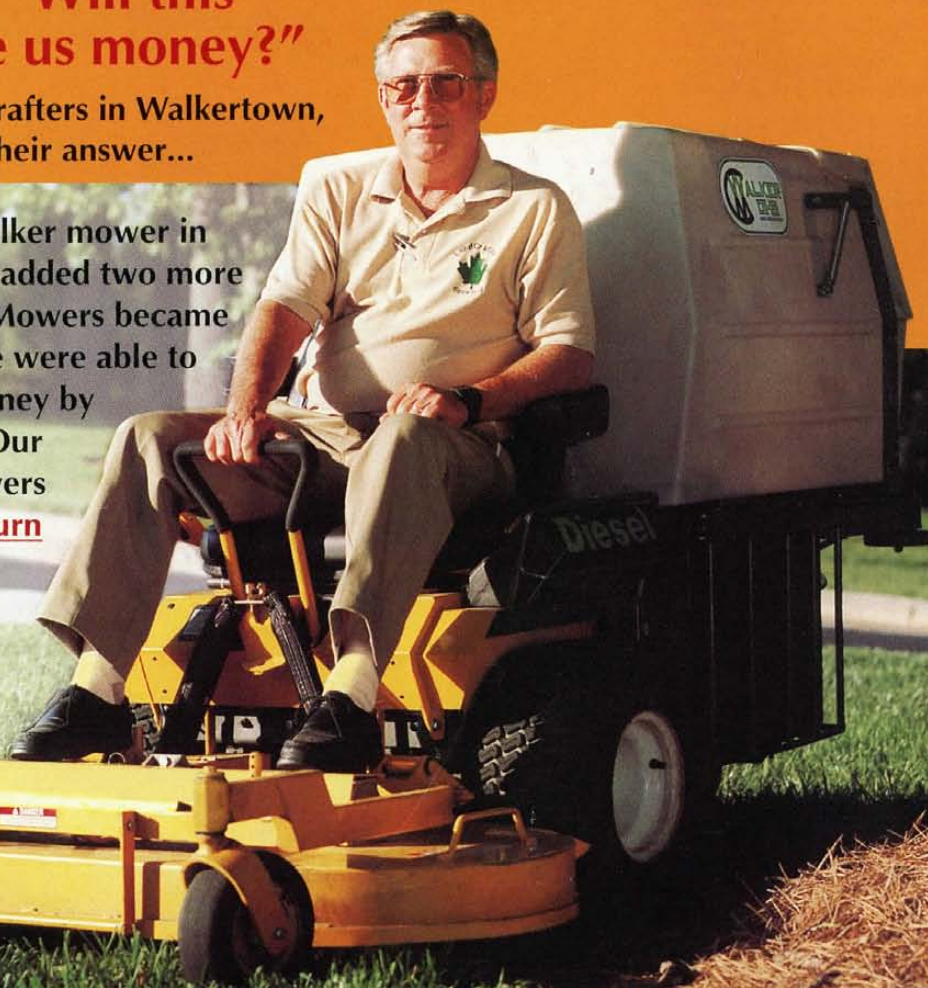
Order Kit #8638

Walker *pays back in* Walkertown, North Carolina

The KEY question is, **"Will this equipment make us money?"**

Gerry Peddycord of Landcrafters in Walkertown, North Carolina, wrote us their answer...

"We purchased our first Walker mower in 1995. Since then, we have added two more to our fleet. After Walker Mowers became a part of our operation, we were able to save valuable time and money by working more efficiently. Our investment in Walker Mowers has yielded the **highest return** compared to any other equipment purchased in 23 years of operation."



"It's good to have Walker Mowers on your side in such a competitive market."

—Gerry Peddycord

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