

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

Fine- Tuning in Michigan

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS IN BOISE
NETHERLANDS TRENDSETTER
BIG ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER
FACES BEHIND THE WALKER NAME

VOL. 13

WALKER TALK

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CONSOLIDATION

It struck like lightning early last year; large and medium-sized landscape contracting companies began to merge into consolidated "national" companies — largely the work of investment bankers anxious to make a public stock offering and cash in on the vitality of this industry. Undoubtedly a move of this size affects the industry. It is a time for the small and medium-sized independent contractors to do some soul searching as to how they will fit in to the future of the industry.

You should know that Walker thinks there remains a tremendous opportunity for smaller, independent companies in the landscape industry. In fact, we believe our "backbone" customer has been and will continue to be the smaller company.



A primary reason this is true is that labor is a major component of this industry. Larger, consolidated companies do not have a particular advantage in that department.

How do smaller landscape contracting companies compete when there are giants? The same way Walker competes with the giants in our industry — find your niche or specialty, move and adjust quickly, play to the strengths of a smaller organization, and treat suppliers, employees and customers right. See the article "Big Isn't Always Better" on Page 8 for more on this subject.

One more effect of national-sized companies will be to approach suppliers for a better price (volume buying). Certainly, there will be equipment manufacturers that will sell direct to these big accounts. For our part, Walker has made a decision to not sell direct but to continue to "sell with service" through dealers. We believe our biggest opportunity and fortune rests with customers who need dealer service.

Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President

Boise, Idaho company

builds lasting relationships with mowers and customers

Mike Barbero, owner of Real Estate Maintenance Co. in Boise, Idaho, was introduced to his first Walker 12 years ago. He purchased two at that time and has since purchased another. Identical in configuration, the three are powered by 16-hp Kohler engines and have 42-inch GHS decks. They all have one other thing in common: They're still going strong.

Barbero is the pragmatic sort. He doesn't see any sense in buying new equipment when the old works perfectly well. Sure, he's had a few repairs to make over the years. The Walkers have been repowered once, the shells repainted, hoppers replaced, and they each now sport new tilt-up decks. Beyond that, they've delivered every day since they left the dealer's lot.

A savvy lawn maintenance veteran, Mike Barbero looks to develop lasting relationships with his equipment, his customers and his employees.

"I saw the Walker for the first time at a garden show in Boise and knew immediately that it was the right mower for this town."

"I just can't see spending \$10,000 when these machines are doing a great job," adds this 18-year lawn maintenance veteran. "And you don't always need to upgrade, you don't always need the additional power of a 25-hp engine."

EQUIPMENT FOR THE JOB AT HAND

What Barbero needed 12 years ago was something other than a belt-drive intermediate to mow his properties. His Boise properties were dotted by lots of berms. And the area received more than its fair share of rain.





Real Estate Maintenance Co.'s 12-year-old Walkers continue to deliver a top-quality cut. "Wherever we want the best cut we use the Walkers," says owner Mike Barbero.

"My belt-drive intermediates were driving me crazy," he relates. "I was only a two-person company with a heavy schedule back then. Every time it rained they would slip, and I would get behind."

"The intermediates are versatile and great for hills. But nothing beats the Walker for riding."

"I saw the Walker for the first time at a garden show in Boise and knew immediately that it was the right mower for this town."

The following year at the Louisville EXPO, Barbero saw his

first hydro intermediate walk mowers. He purchased a couple of them. Today he operates with eight intermediate walk mowers to handle the hills and berms, along with three Walkers.

"You have to fit the equipment to the jobs you have," says Barbero, who today maintains approximately 30 commercial accounts, including shopping malls and office parks in and around Boise. "The intermediates are versatile and great for hills. But nothing beats the Walker for riding. It's maneuverable, does a great job of cutting and has excellent catcher capacity. Wherever we want the best cut, we use the Walkers."

One of those areas is a new, 35-acre Blue Cross of Idaho site. A recent consolidation of several area Blue Cross locations, the new facili-

ty employs 550 people and has approximately 21 acres of landscape to mow and maintain.

"We've given Mike control of the maintenance of this facility," relates facilities manager Bill Poindexter. "His company offers a variety of services. We trust his work. I can talk to anyone from his crew and they will be able to answer my question or take care of any request."

"As far as the mowing is concerned, it looks awesome, especially right after they mow. There's no question the Walker Mowers lend to the look of the property. But it's really the mowers in combination with the people who operate them, not to mention Mike's reputation, that count."

Real Estate Maintenance Co. just didn't step into Blue Cross and show its credentials. Barbero and Poindexter have known each other and worked together for the better part of 12 years. In fact, on most of the properties he maintains,

Barbero has worked long and hard at developing lasting relationships with property managers. One can say Barbero puts as much stock in lasting relationships as he does with equipment that has delivered timely service over the years.

"Contractors just can't walk into the commercial market and expect to make an impact," he relates. "Before being in lawn maintenance I was in the real estate business. The relationships I developed there gave me an opportunity in lawn maintenance. I've continued to work on developing good relationships with area property managers."

EXPANDING A NICHE

"Boise is a great place to live, but don't tell anyone that," Barbero says. There's enough growth in the city



Mike Barbero (left) with Blue Cross facilities manager Bill Poindexter. Real Estate Maintenance Co. just didn't step into Blue Cross and show its credentials. Barbero and Poindexter have known each other for years. In fact, on most of the properties he maintains, Barbero has worked long and hard at developing lasting relationships with property managers.



Mike Barbero with (left to right) Joel Bowers, Larry Rayburn and Denise Updike. This owner considers himself fortunate to have the kind of employees that will help grow his company.

already. Long-known for its agriculture, specifically potatoes and sugar beets, the city is home to one of the largest chip makers, grocery chains and building contractors in the country. Boise, and surrounding Treasure Valley, is also going through an incredible housing boom. That combination spells opportunity for creative contractors such as Real Estate Maintenance Co.

But growth wasn't a high priority for Barbero until a recent back injury put him on the sidelines. As he puts it, he simply had to grow to survive.

The company, which employs 12 people in peak season and four year-round, seeks to reach a goal of \$1 million annually. The bulk of that business would be in maintenance and add-on landscape installation. More recently, Real Estate Maintenance Co. expanded its niche to take advantage of a licensed irrigator and a licensed chemical applicator on staff.

Off-season, Barbero keeps those who want to work busy removing snow from commercial properties. An average snow year might call out

nine Real Estate Maintenance Co. plows 10 or 12 times for snowfalls in the 2- to 3-inch range.

This winter also saw the introduction of a new service, a business franchise called Christmas Decor. Like snow plowing, the new venture will work to extend Real Estate Maintenance Co.'s season, in this

“Contractors just can't walk into the commercial market and expect to make an impact.”

instance with the installation of Christmas lights, garlands, wreaths and other decorations.

“We're one of about 160 franchises nationwide,” tells Barbero. “I think there is great potential in this market in both offering a service to current customers and maybe building a new customer base among high-end homeowners.”

Like any lawn maintenance contractor will tell you, the key to continued success and growth is its

employee base. Barbero can't say enough about his employees:

- Larry Rayburn and Joel Bowers — lawn maintenance foremen who coordinate the mowing crews
- Denise Updike — lawn maintenance foreman who specializes in detail work
- Eight or nine crew members who can be relied upon, as Blue Cross's Poindexter says, to answer any question or deliver on any client request.

“Growth really isn't possible today without good employees,” emphasizes Barbero.

With employees in place, with equipment, with new services and with his contacts, this owner has set the stage for steady growth for the next several years. In fact, there soon might be room for a new 25-hp Walker with a wide-area deck.

“If the mower had been available when I started the business, I would have purchased it,” says Barbero. “But right now I'm set.”

But things change. Even 12-year-old Walkers have their limitations. **WT**

The NETHERLANDS trendsetter

Sjaak Vliegenthart says Groenprojekten Weverling strives to be a "walk in front" company, trying new things that will keep it ahead of competition.

Being a standout comes easy for the Netherlands. As a matter of fact, when space satellites photograph the earth, the country often reflects a large, gleaming light.

The reflection is caused by a vast number of greenhouses where bulbs are grown and then shipped around the world. Another standout is a landscape management company in the town called Monster — just west of Rotterdam.

Groenprojekten Weverling is a full-service landscape maintenance and installation company known for its commitment to customer service and innovation. Owned by Fred Weverling and in business for 59 years, this company has grown from year to year to the point where it now employs 70 people, has three sites, and maintains between 600 and 700 accounts per month.

"We like to be a 'walk in front' company," says Sjaak Vliegenthart, 2nd director and employee of almost 15 years. Being "out in front" is exactly where Groenprojekten has had to be as it has encountered various competition over the years, including the government which is allowed to compete in the private sector.

"We have a long neck," he adds. "We are a company that is willing to try new things, and has the patience to see if they will work for us." In fact, that is how Groenprojekten found the Walker Mower. Vliegenthart

EMPLOYEE CONFIDENCE

Wim Spaans comes to work every day with one thing in mind: doing the best he can do. Spaans explains that doing his best job requires that he has the best tools. "That is why I choose the Walker. When I come to work every day, I know the mower is going to start and run all day long."

Spaans credits his confidence, in part, to the services he receives from his local dealer, Parlevliet Tuin en Park Machines. This kind of confidence is no small thing for a guy who is responsible for as many as 3 hectares a day with difficult terrain and many obstacles. Spaans says he works 12 hours a day, five days a week for many weeks during the growing season — to the tune of about 700 hours per year.



explains that the Walker Mower is one product that fits in their business.

"We believe in keeping our commitments to people in the best way possible, and we believe the Walker Mower is the best way to deliver on our lawn care commitment."

STANDOUT SERVICE

Being in business means different things to different people. To Groenprojekten it means: "voor uitstrevend bedrijf." Translation: "to want to always be the best." For Groenprojekten, being the best does not always mean making the most money. It also means offering the highest quality of service and hiring quality employees who will listen to customers.

"We want employees who will listen to our customers," relays Vliegthart. "Not every customer knows how to ask for something. We train our employees to talk with customers and to remember to ask questions, so we can give them the full value of our services."

One person Vliegthart cites as a good employee is Wim Spaans, an employee for 11 years. "Wim knows the customers and knows how to talk with them," says Vliegthart. "He also knows how to respond to their needs quickly and thoroughly, which

makes him a valuable employee."

Doing the small things, like being on time for appointments with customers, is one of the customer service techniques Groenprojekten teaches employees. Vliegthart's simple logic explains it best: "When a customer complains, it is not their problem, it is our problem."

A HIGHER STANDARD

Using equipment that suits conditions is another advantage Vliegthart says Groenprojekten has over other competitors.

"We have steady rains from April to June. The Walker allows us to cut lawns when many other companies are not working."

He credits the mower design and refinements, which make it possible to mow in damp conditions, with being able to keep employees busy during times when many other landscape company employees may not be able to work. Using the Walker in these conditions is "like having the right tools in our toolbox," Vliegthart emphasizes.

In the off-season the company trains its employees to be familiar with all the equipment. Many of these sessions are taught by its Walker Mower dealer, Parlevliet Tuin en Park Machines. Two brothers, Joop and

Wim Parlevliet, run the dealership that Vliegthart credits with "keeping their mowers running day or night."

The Parlevliet brothers are accommodating to say the least. Their winter training sessions sometimes include training employees on how to scale trees for trimming. But their primary goal is to take the maintenance employees carefully through the equipment so everyone's job is easier for the upcoming summer.

MAINTAINING AN EDGE


Remaining in good standing within the community and "constantly moving forward" are two other ways Groenprojekten maintains an edge.

Vliegthart explains that as a trendsetter and the largest company in

"We believe the Walker Mower is the best way to deliver on our lawn care commitment."

the area, they are highly visible. "Every move we make is seen," he explains, "so taking the time to find good employees who relay a good image is invaluable."

Giving away their used equipment or selling it at a reduced price to large property owners helps to maintain their good standing, too. But Vliegthart refers back to employees as the people who represent Groenprojekten, and the ones who strengthen their reputation daily.

Despite these efforts, competition is strong and always coming up with something. When asked what advice he had for other companies like Groenprojekten around the world, Vliegthart offered the following statement: "All good things will be duplicated, but never copied if the original does not sit still — the best you can do is stay busy and stay smart." 



(Top) Groenprojekten Weverling maintains a high profile in the community, so it's imperative that it uses the best equipment and employs the best people.

Steady rains, damp conditions and lush growth won't slow the Walker down.



BIG isn't always better

When Walker Mfg. introduced its first lawn mower in the late 1970s, the company was committed to producing a compact, maneuverable machine that would be unsurpassed in performance. Over the years, Walker Mfg. never lost that commitment. Its mowers today — still compact and maneuverable — continue to outperform larger competitors.

The story of the Walker Mower's evolution has been told before, but what hasn't been mentioned is the direct relationship between the success behind these mowers and the people who operate them to make a living. What is that relationship? Simply this: You don't have to be big to be successful. There are ways to compete when your competitors have more resources and are many times more powerful.

GREEN CONSOLIDATION

The impetus for this discussion is the trend toward consolidation in the green industry. It seems as though every week brings news of another merger. The logic behind consolidation is quite simple.

From the buyers' (consolidators') point of view, consolidation gives them an instant presence in a market where they previously had no presence at all.

There are also real benefits to being big: economies of scale, more purchasing powers, and more money for advertising and promotion.

From the sellers' point of view, the idea of being rewarded right now for years of hard work is attractive. And if they decide to stay on, the additional resources present new opportunities.

Consolidation from the sellers' vantage, however, isn't always what it's cracked up to be, but that discussion can wait. What can't wait are some thoughts for smaller companies left to compete with these new "giants."

SMALLER COMPANIES HAVE THEIR STRENGTHS, TOO

The fear is that these new companies will come in and offer a myriad of services at a price your customers can't afford to ignore. In other words, they will be able to buy market share at your expense.

Fortunately, it is not a one-sided issue — big operations have their strengths, but smaller ones have their strengths, too.

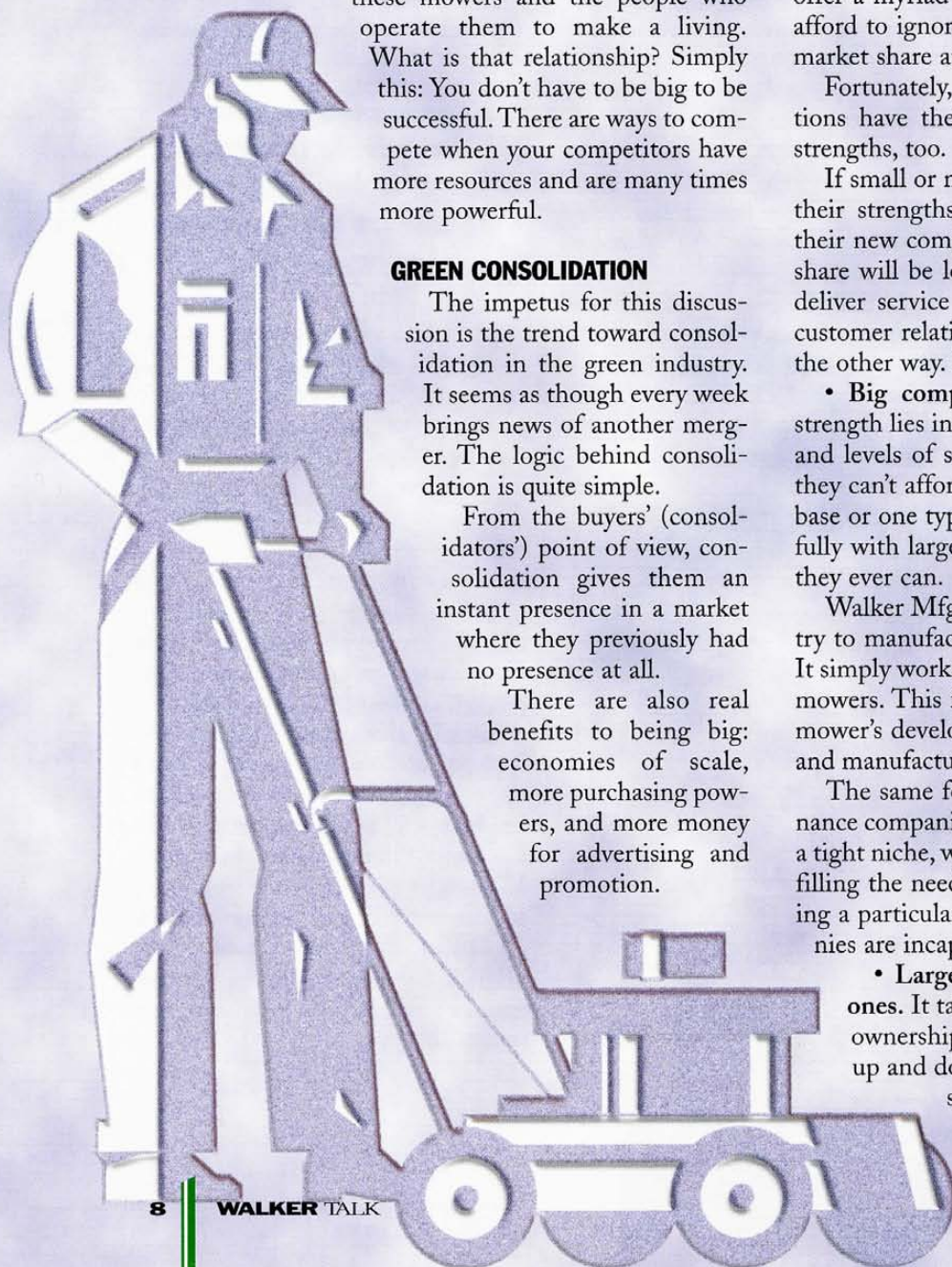
If small or midsize companies fail to take advantage of their strengths, and similarly fail to take advantage of their new competition's weaknesses, business and market share will be lost. But if they focus in on their markets, deliver service second-to-none and continue to nurture customer relationships, market share may just as well go the other way. Here's why.

- **Big companies tend to lose focus.** While their strength lies in their ability to offer several different kinds and levels of service, their weakness lies in the fact that they can't afford to focus in on one market, one customer base or one type of service. One way to compete successfully with large companies is to do one thing better than they ever can.

Walker Mfg. is a prime example. The company doesn't try to manufacture a full line of walk mowers and riders. It simply works on enhancing a line of compact, zero-turn mowers. This focus has allowed management to give the mower's development its full attention, from engineering and manufacturing to marketing, distribution and service.

The same formula will work for smaller lawn maintenance companies. Success will go to those who focus in on a tight niche, who direct their efforts and resources toward filling the needs of a particular type of customer, providing a particular kind or level of service the larger companies are incapable of providing.

- **Large corporations move slower than smaller ones.** It takes time for decisions to trickle down from ownership to management, or for requests to travel up and down the corporate ladder. It's no secret that some of Walker's larger competitors have



been trying to develop a compact, zero-turn mower for years. The fact that Walker had a 15- to 20-year head start put those larger competitors at a competitive disadvantage — one that has become more exaggerated as time ticks by.

The truth is, large companies, whether they're in manufacturing or lawn maintenance, often have to go through a laborious process to get ideas approved and finalized. If a customer asks a small mowing contractor to provide an additional service or step outside the bounds of a bid to enhance the property, the decision is an easy one. The same can't be said for large organizations where decisions are not made at or even close to the grass roots level.

One way to compete successfully with large companies is to do one thing better than they ever can.

- **Large companies have an inherent inability to communicate effectively with customers.** Lawn maintenance is a relationship business. Anyone in this business understands the importance of being accessible to customers. Customers need to know they are only a phone call away from a decision-maker. And it can't hurt if that decision-maker is the owner or president of the company. Walker Mower owners, for example, are only a phone call away from the company president; the same can't be said for customers of larger mower manufacturers.

The unfortunate reality is large companies that lose contact with customers often lose relationships that have been built on understanding and trust.

ATTACK, ATTACK, ATTACK

So if a big competitor comes into your neck of the woods, don't shrink away and hand over your customers. Strive to reinforce those things that have made you successful over the years ... and keep your ears to the ground to discern where you may garner other competitive advantages.

For starters, review why you are in business, revisit your mission statement and who your target customers are, and assess your company's strengths and weaknesses. Then, focus in on your target customers and the services you provide. Make sure to capitalize on your strengths, and work to take advantage of the competition's weaknesses.

In the short run, don't get discouraged because someone is offering a similar service or services at a price point below yours. The old adage applies in lawn maintenance just as it does in any other business — customers get what they pay for. If you can provide superior service at a fair price in a particular market, then your hold on that market should be secure for years to come.

Remember, big is not always better. In a free enterprise system, the entrepreneurial spirit often tips the scale in favor of smaller companies. **WT**



- ✓ 2.76 million pounds of steel went through the Fabrication Department in 1998
- ✓ Approximately 5 miles of angle, bar and tube steel is brought into the Fabrication Department each week
- ✓ The Fabrication Department now brings in more steel in one week than was brought in for the entire year in 1983
- ✓ Approximately 67,000 fabricated parts are moved out of the Fabrication Department each week

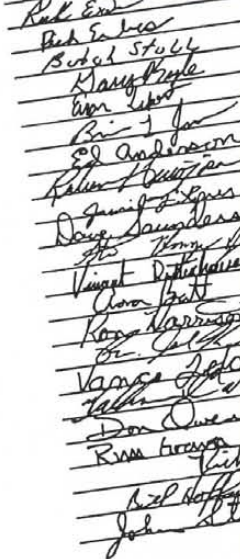
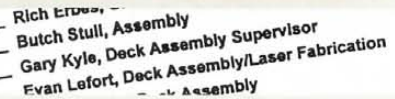
PRODUCTION

... enough pride in their workmanship to sign their names:

Mark Meza, Painting
 ...



Bowling Green
Mus. & Vn.
 John Wences
 Jerry Nes
 Kim & Robin
 Paul Bous
 Joe Hays
 Joe
 Mike
 Gary
 Stanley
 James Mc
 Lowman
 Jan A.
 Robert M
 Christopher
 Tom C
 Rodney
 David



- Collin Jones, Welding
- Laddie Lentz, Mower Deck Welding
- Gene Lawrence, Welding
- Dan Helzer, Custodial
- Jay Wojcik, Painting Supervisor
- Gary Hutt, Painting
- Mark Johnson, Painting
- Jim Christopher, Painting



The Spanish Court, with its reflecting pool and arching water jets, is the largest and most dramatic of the Longue Vue gardens.

Longue Vue House and Gardens in New Orleans

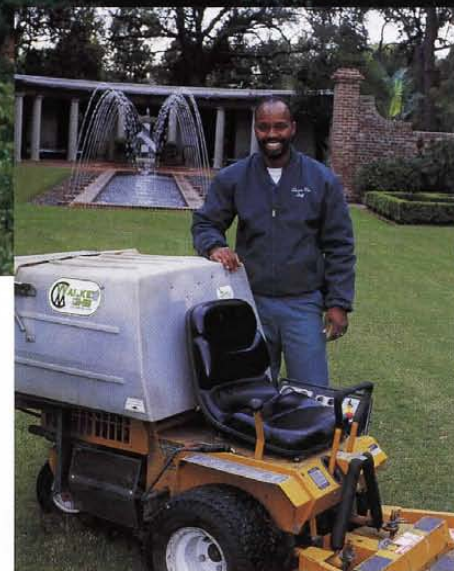
City estate continues to impress, educate

Visitors of Longue Vue House and Gardens can only imagine what it was like attending a formal garden party in the mid-1950s, or entertaining the likes of Eleanor Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, or John and Robert Kennedy.

This historic city estate was created by Mr. and Mrs. Edgar B. Stern and their designers between 1923 and 1968. Located on 8 acres a few minutes from the French Quarter, it fea-

tures a Classical Revival mansion with gardens. The southern section of the gardens was modified in the 1960s. Today, the gardens are highlighted by more than 20 working fountains.

Mrs. Stern opened the gardens to the public in 1968, and the house shortly before her death in 1980. Longue Vue House and Gardens hosts more than 50,000 visitors annually who come to view the beauty of the gardens, and to attend a wide variety of educational programs.



Longue Vue veteran employee Troy Chambers says the Walker's all-around maneuverability and ability to mow in wet conditions make it the best choice.

UNIQUE DESIGN

The house contains its original furnishings of English and American antiques, French and Oriental carpets, modern art, and collections of needlework, textiles and creamware from Wedgwood, Leeds and other British and Continental potteries.

As magnificent as the mansion is, with its late 18th and early 19th century, country-home atmosphere, the centerpiece is the formal gardens.



Head gardener Ann Donnelly and senior gardener Joseph Voltz discuss a little "green" strategy. November is the transition month at Longue Vue when the hybrid Bermuda grass gives way to winter Rye.



When describing some of the challenges associated with maintaining the 8-acre city estate, head gardener Donnelly says, "the pressure of keeping them immaculate every day" is the biggest one.

They're highlighted by the largest garden, the Spanish Court, with its mosaic sidewalks and fountain displays. Other gardens include the Pan, the Portico, and the Walled Gardens which feature roses; and the Yellow Garden, the Canal Garden and the Pond Garden.

The Wild Garden offers visitors a natural forest walk featuring native and indigenous plant materials. This area is presently under restoration.

Today, the gardens are maintained by a staff of four people, along with many volunteers. They are the responsibility of head gardener Ann Donnelly. When asked to describe some of the challenges associated

with maintaining the gardens and grounds, she replies, "the pressure of keeping them immaculate every day."

The estate purchased the Walker seven years ago. Today it mows the lawn twice a week in the summer and once a week during the winter.

"We had a reel mower at the time and wanted to upgrade," remembers 15-year Longue Vue veteran Troy Chambers. They went with the Walker because of its maneuverability, and because it would mow in the wet, moist conditions often prevalent on the grounds. "It was important to get a machine that would evenly displace its weight," he adds.

Since the purchase, the Walker Mower has worked in tandem with three small walk-behind mowers to keep the grounds in shape.

The grass-handling system has facilitated leaf pickup that's nearly year-round thanks to countless live oaks and magnolia trees.

A mulching deck is employed during the November transition from hybrid Bermuda to winter Rye grass. As Donnelly relates, the mulching action does a good job of cutting the grass. Unlike the vacuum action of the GHS deck, it leaves the Rye grass seeds on the lawn where they belong.

The Walker's size and ease of operation are also a benefit to a garden that generates much of its economic support from daily visitors. Small in stature, the Walker has an unobtrusive presence. And it quickly dispatches

the lawn, working eight hours per week during the summer season, and half that in the mild winter months.

"I have a relatively high intolerance for mowing," explains senior gardener Joseph Voltz. "The Walker is not like other mowers. It's actually easy to operate, and it's very maneuverable."

In addition to beautifully manicured lawns, along with live oaks and magnolias, the property is home for camellias, azaleas, roses, sweet olives, crepe myrtles and gardenias as permanent plantings. Throughout the year, they are combined with seasonal displays of tulips, chrysanthemums, poinsettias, pansies and Easter lilies. Periodically, there are also temporary sculpture exhibits in the gardens.

"The Walker is not like other mowers. It's actually easy to operate, and it's very maneuverable."

And there's more work forthcoming. The estate recently opened its Discovery Garden, an interesting and educational, interactive gardening display for children. The newly restored Wild Garden will be unveiled in the early part of 1999.

New Orleans may be famous for its Bourbon Street festivals, riverboats and culinary delights, but the city also features some of the richest culture in the South. Longue Vue is part of that culture and certainly should be on any garden lover's list of places to visit.

WT

Longue Vue is open 10:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday; 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. Sunday. For information call (504) 488-5488.

Doing some fine-tuning *in* *Michigan*



Jonny and Cindy Heinz: being the best landscapers they can be.

Jonny and wife Cindy operate their 24-year-old landscaping business out of a home office. A 2-acre spread easily accommodates their business and private life.

Did you say your grandfather was in the landscaping/nursery business? And your father, too? Then what's left for you, Jonny Heinz, owner of Jonny Heinz Landscaping in Saginaw, Michigan? Quite simply this, "fine-tune my operation so it's the best it can possibly be."

That's precisely where this landscaper is today. Providing landscaping and maintenance services in and around Saginaw since 1975, Jonny Heinz is a purveyor of some of the best this industry has to offer. His properties are colorful and neat as a pin. His operation is also. Trucks and equipment are spotless, well-maintained and updated every few years to ensure reliability.

Jonny is proud of his operation, one he runs with wife Cindy and six employees. Work is divided 75/25 between commercial and residential properties, and he offers a wide array of full-service landscaping services including new installations, renovations, fertilization, turf and ornamental spraying, and maintenance.

HOME BASE

Like so many landscapers, the Heinz couple operates out of its home office. The 2-acre spread, located in the Saginaw suburb of Shields, has plenty of room for two



pole barns that provide storage for, among other things, eight pickup trucks used primarily for snow plowing, sprayers, spreaders and three Walker Mowers.

"We were the first in the Tri-City area to buy a Walker," tells Jonny. "And believe me when I say I did my homework."

He visited landscapers who operated them in the Midwest, on the East Coast and in Florida, where he and Cindy vacation each winter.

"We were the first in the Tri-City area to buy a Walker. And believe me when I say I did my homework."

"He saw a Walker mowing at a resort while we were walking the beach," Cindy recalls. "We just walked up to the operator, introduced ourselves and asked how he liked the machine. We were a little out of place with our bathing suits on, but Jonny really wanted to talk with him."

It was shortly after the Florida beach encounter that Jonny Heinz Landscaping purchased its first two



Magnetic ramps help turn minutes into dollars.

Walkers, 20-hp models with 48-inch GHS decks, from local dealer H&B Equipment. That was five years ago.

"I thought they would save me time and labor, and they have," he adds. With the addition of a third 20-hp model, Jonny figures his Walker fleet saves him approximately one person per week in labor and one day a week in time. In mowing vernacular, what used to take him 5.5 days to mow now takes 4.5 days with one less person. That is part of the fine-tuning process.

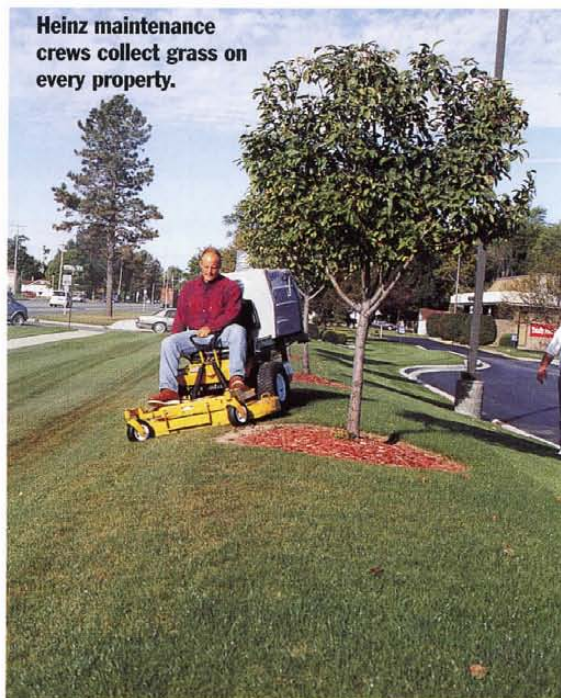
MORE FINE-TUNING

Jonny is a stickler for detail, both on properties and with his equipment. Trucks, mowers, handheld equipment ... the entire lot is impeccably maintained. He even trades his Walkers every two years to make sure he has the latest in mowing technology. He recently sold one to a commercial customer who wanted it for his home.

On the job, this operator, who started out with one pickup truck and a Lawn-Boy mower, does things the old-fashioned way. He tells customers he will hand-rake lawns, and emphasizes the fact that he is as dependable as the sunrise. Whatever he does, he does it to the best of his ability — no questions asked.

His Walkers help out here, too, by providing what he calls "the finest cut on the market." And Jonny claims nothing can touch the combination of a dethatcher and GHS system. The dethatcher loosens thatch and debris, bringing it to the surface while the mowing deck neatly picks it up and places it in the hopper.

For both dethatching and leaf removal, Jonny raises the front of the mowing deck two settings, a move that increases the deck's vacuuming action. The end result is a whistle-clean lawn.



The Heinz maintenance crew collects grass on every property. A dump truck/trailer combination allows for effortless loading and unloading of both grass and leaves. An area compost facility charges \$8 a load for dumping.

CHANGING INDUSTRY

Before starting his own company, Jonny worked for his father in the nursery business. He went on his own because he wanted to get more involved with landscaping and installation. After more than 20 years in business, this entrepreneur often thinks back on how difficult it was to grow the business.

He also looks around quizzically at younger competitors, many of whom seem to be getting in over their heads way too quickly — in terms of the types of jobs they're taking on and in their equipment selection.

As Jonny explains, it takes time to accumulate both the knowledge and equipment required to do a decent job for customers. His advice to new landscapers is to take it one step at a time, find a niche and grow slowly.

The wait will pay off, Jonny emphasizes. "The opportunities for our company have changed dramatically over the years. Just as an example, my customers are more willing now to pay for the level of service we provide — for the quality of work we deliver and the personal attention we give them."

The change is no doubt the combination of customers, especially commercial customers, realizing the value of a well-maintained property, along with their knowledge that in landscaping, as in every walk of life, "you get what you pay for."

AHEAD OF THE POWER CURVE

Successful landscapers and lawn maintenance professionals all have one thing in common: They understand the relationship between time and money. Just thinking about their Walkers, Cindy and Jonny point to little things like the new tilt-up deck, big hopper and speed-up kit that help turn minutes into dollars, or to magnetic ramps that mower operators use to "jump" curbs, then re-attach to the top of the deck. They discovered them at a Florida turf show.

Their office also employs a DTN Weather Center radar package that gives them up-to-the-minute forecasts and a satellite view of a storm's progress.

The system is a requisite during snow removal but also comes in handy during the mowing season. Just by clicking on the screen, viewers can tell whether crews will be rained out or if a storm will quickly pass by. The package costs \$65/month, but Jonny says it is well worth it, even if it only saves one day of labor a month.

If Jonny Heinz Landscaping has one challenge, it's to stay relatively small. There is only so much time in a day, and the couple wants enough time and energy left over to enjoy their four daughters, home and a lake cottage.



Custom-made trailer ramps clip together for easy assembly, then separate for easy storage and transport. The dump truck/trailer combination allows for effortless loading and unloading.



As Cindy points out, there is always pressure to take on more accounts, but the availability of good employees really inhibits growth. They have excellent employees, but finding others is no easy task.

Despite their best efforts to contain growth, the company recently signed a contract with a new condominium complex. The project, with 14 acres of grass to mow, will be up and running next spring. So, too, will a new Walker, and another crew for Jonny and Cindy.

Some things can't be helped, including growth. The Heinz team in Michigan doesn't have a problem with growth, as long as it doesn't infringe on their time and efforts to continually fine-tune the business. **WT**



Bob Tomasek, manager of customer service at Walker Mfg.

BOB T'S

Tech Talk

Blade sharpening can be a real balancing act

The quality of cut that is visually seen in a yard is in direct relation to the condition of the blade that cut it; if all other factors such as ground speed, air flow under the deck, condition of the deck and mowing conditions are good.

Before we get into the procedures for sharpening, let's discuss some of the conditions that will affect the performance of blades.

Angle of bevel — Always follow the manufacturer's recommendation or match the existing angle. A low angle will be easily damaged and wear very quickly. Too much angle will affect the air flow and movement of the cut grass. It also takes more horsepower.

Straight cutting edge — The first inch of the blade is where most of the cutting takes place. A rounded tip is not efficient.

Worn wings — A worn-down top or a groove worn in the bend will have great bearing on air flow and grass movement. Wings that are worn thin may crack and break off, thus becoming a dangerous projectile.

There are many methods for sharpening: hand file, hand grinding, bench grinding and using a commercial blade grinder. Balancing can be accomplished by using a nail, a shaft or a professional rotary balancer. A blade that is out of balance will vibrate. Blade vibration (flutter) will affect the quality of cut and wear out the spindle. The method is not as important as the process itself.

THE SHARPENING AND BALANCING PROCESS

Clean the blade thoroughly. Debris stuck to the blade can greatly affect the balance.

Visually inspect the blade for fractures, especially if there are any deep nicks or gouges that would indicate heavy impact. *Do not* re-use a fractured blade. Any nicks and gouges close to the end of the blade need to be completely removed. This may require a lot of grinding. You must determine if there will be enough blade left to give effective service.

Check the blade for straightness. Rotate both tips to the same position in the deck housing and check that the vertical position of each blade tip is the same to establish straightness. If the blade is bent, do not try to straighten it. Straightening may cause a fracture and breakage during use.

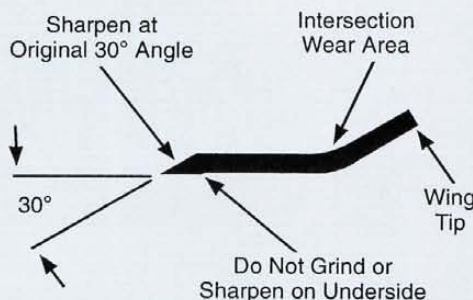
Now, begin to sharpen. Remember to get the bevel angle correct and uniform. The correct angle for the Walker blades is 30 degrees. When grinding on the blade, be careful not to

overheat the metal. Discoloration of the metal indicates overheating, and will take the temper out. To prevent this, switch ends frequently or dip the blade in water.

Check the balance by mounting the blade horizontally on the balancer. If either end rotates downward, grind (remove) metal on that end until the blade will balance.

Reinstall the blade, making sure that it and associated hardware are properly positioned.

Check the blades for sharpness every 10 hours of operation, and more often when mowing abrasive-type grass or operating on sandy soils. A sharp blade will give you and/or your customers a cut you can both be proud of. **WT**



Walker Talkback

Questions from our Readers and Answers

Q: How do I stop clogging the GHS?

A: There are several reasons why it will start clogging. A common cause is overfilling the grass catcher, usually caused by failure of the full signal. But if clogging occurs with a partially filled catcher, the most common cause is a plugged air exhaust screen in the grass catcher. In wet, sloppy mowing conditions, it may be necessary to clean the screen several times each day to maintain good vacuum performance. Refer to the Clogging Checklist in the Owner's Manual for a complete list of items that may be causing the catching system to clog.

TIP:

Clogging at the deck discharge opening usually indicates a **downstream** restriction to the free flow of air and grass clippings.

Q: What is the life of the Eaton transmission? Can it be overhauled?

A: Field experience has shown a normal transmission life of 3,000 hours, although we have seen 5,000 hours. When the transmission becomes weak pulling up hills, it's time to replace it. There is a remanufactured transmission/exchange program offered by the Eaton factory that's administered by Walker. The remanufactured transmission costs a little less and has the same three-year warranty as a new replacement transmission.

Q: When should my Walker be serviced?

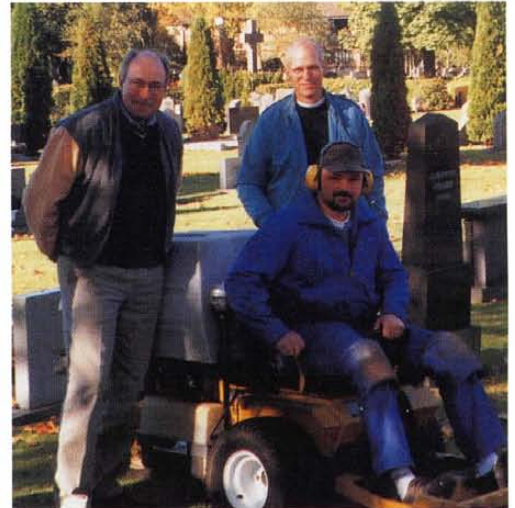
A: The Owner's Manual for each Walker Mower has a Maintenance Schedule Chart giving the complete service program in checklist form.

BOB AND DEAN WALKER SEE EUROPEAN PROGRESS FIRST HAND

In conjunction with attending September's Euroweek 2 in Switzerland, Bob and Dean Walker also visited Sweden.

They visited the Walker distributor (Gronytemaskiner), two dealers and a "typical" church cemetery in Kinna, Sweden.

The Walker operator at the cemetery, Jan-Olof Kjellkvist (pictured with Bob and Dean), is one of many talented Walker operators in Europe.



WALKER DISTRIBUTORS "STAYING THE COURSE" WITH 14TH ANNUAL MEETING

Walker Mfg. Co. held the 14th Annual North American Distributor Meeting September 17 and 18 in Fort Collins, CO.

"Staying the Course" was the theme Walker used to help present new products and discuss Walker's position during recent and future industry changes. Twenty-seven of the 31 North American distributors were represented with a total of 55 attending the meeting.

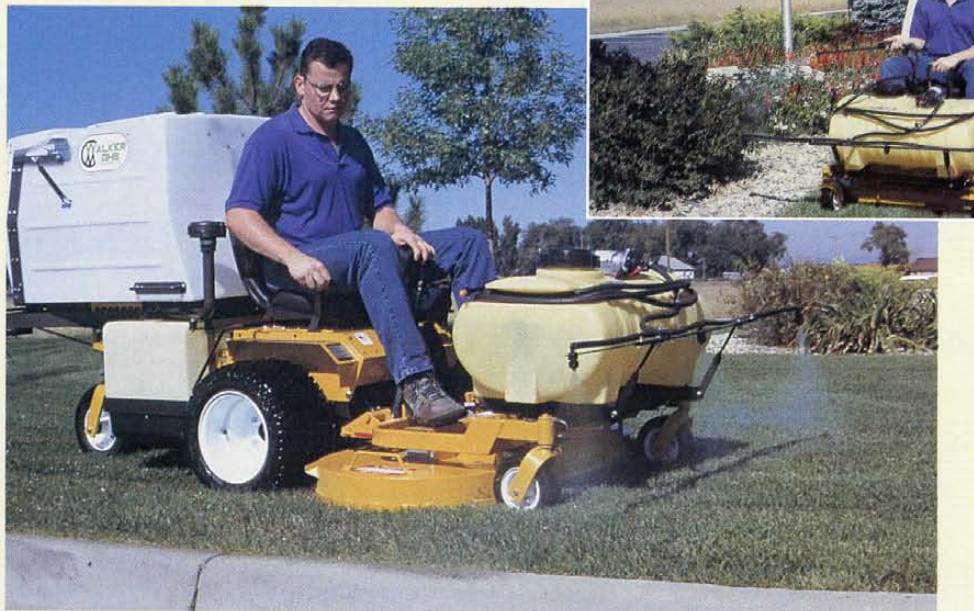
An inspection of operations, a service school, a vendor trade show, and a sales meeting were just a few of the events Walker distributors and their spouses took part in.

The same program was presented to Walker's 11 European distributors the following week in Zurich, Switzerland.

BOOM SPRAYER ADDED TO WALKER LINE

A front-mounted sprayer is now part of the Walker line. The SP6640 Boom Sprayer is easily mounted to all 42-, 48- and 54-inch Walker decks, and offers a 96-inch spray pattern.

A spray gun with a 20-foot hose and adjustable spray tip allows the operator to spray a mist and adjust to a 35-foot stream. The 25-gallon tank contains a sump that allows easy cleaning of the tank and spray system. Equipped with a constant-pressure, Shur-Flo pump and Viton valves, optimum spraying can be achieved at all times with a wide range of spray material.



36-INCH DECKS NOW TILT-UP

Easy deck cleaning and underside maintenance are now offered for the 36-inch decks. Using the same tilting action as the 42, 48 and 54, operators can now do fast maintenance and also enjoy the benefits of this space-saving feature while in off-season storage or on a trailer. For older decks, a retrofit kit is available by ordering Kit #8604.



FOAMED-RUBBER DECK TIRE REPLACES SEMI-PNEUMATIC

The semi-pneumatic deck caster wheel (P/N 5715-3) is being replaced with a foamed-rubber "Carefree" tire. The foamed-rubber tire has good wear resistance, is puncture-resistant, and has some "springiness" like a pneumatic tire for a smoother ride. Also, this tire mounts (interchangeably) on the same wheel as the pneumatic tire. Order P/N 5715-11 for the tire only or P/N 5715-3 for the tire and wheel assembly.

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After eleven years in business, Arlan and Brenda King and their sons, Jared and Jardon, reflect on the progress of their company, Paradise Environments Inc. in Sun City, Arizona:

THESE Kings RIDE A WALKER

"Our company began in 1988 with a handful of small residential accounts we purchased from another contractor. We enjoyed slow but steady growth. Mowing with our 21-inch walk-behind was by far the most time and energy consuming chore.

"The Walker has been the finest, most profitable investment we've made in our business."

Many Walker Mowers were used in our area but I felt we didn't have large enough accounts to justify the cost. As we grew, I realized how much time and energy a Walker could save us and increase our profits. We purchased a used

Walker in '94 and I was very pleasantly surprised to see how well the Walker performed in small, confined areas. I soon realized the Walker can be used virtually anywhere it can turn around. The Walker has been the finest, most profitable investment we've made in our business. We can't imagine operating without it."—Arlan King

Whether your business is large or small, we invite you to join the growing Walker Mower family.

For your Free video, call 1-800-828-8130, Dept. 027-16. (\$3.95 shipping charge. Visa/MC accepted.) Or send check or money order for \$3.95 payable to: Video Fulfillment Services, 027-16, P.O. Box 385070, Minneapolis, MN 55438. Allow 2-4 weeks delivery.

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