

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS TO COME

Mowing in Paradise

- San Juan's one-stop shop
- Mowing in tough conditions
- Long hours in Alaska
- It all adds up in Guam

WALKER TALK

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WALKER TALK is published by Cygnus Business Media
1233 Janesville Avenue, Fort Atkinson, WI 53538.
Phone (920) 563-6388. Printed in the U.S., copyright 2004
Canada Post International Publications Mail Product.
Sales Agreement No. 1248022

RETIREMENT

In all my 57 years, I do not ever remember my dad, Max Walker, or my grandpa, Wesley Walker, using the "R" word (retirement). Retirement was simply not part of their thinking and I am much the same. I know there are many folks who plan and dream of retirement. Our culture encourages it, and some companies and organizations force it. Yet the reality is that usefulness, accomplishment, production, experience, mentoring, learning and wisdom are all the positives of a person who stays engaged in living as much as they are able their entire life.




I heard a good definition of retirement the other day: "Take off the old tires, put on new tires and keep on rolling". That saying suggests that "reassignment" is the way to live rather than thinking of a life of leisure and recreation in later years. There are many great examples of people who were most

productive and made their greatest accomplishments in their later years. I always think of God calling Moses to lead the people out of Egypt when he was 80 years old, a reassignment after 40 years of watching sheep in the desert. Similarly, I think there are exciting reassignments for many people as they "mature" if they are open to staying active.

It is exciting to us here at Walker Manufacturing when we hear the stories from older customers who have a mowing business and they are using a Walker Mower. These reports confirm how the Walker Mower allows the older person, even with some physical limitations, to be just as productive in mowing as the able-bodied 20-year-old. What an opportunity some older folks (I am getting to that age myself) have created for themselves, doing work they enjoy, providing a great service, having their own business and making a good income. For them this mowing business "reassignment" is just right. And we are delighted to have the Walker Mower be part of the story.

Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President



Juan says that his ideal client is one who understands how a beautiful landscape can add value to a property.

San Juan's one-stop quality shop

When Juan Berriz's father Gabriel immigrated to Puerto Rico from Cuba in the early 1960s, the landscaping profession was in its infancy. In fact, Juan says many of the developers on the island attributed his dad's influence to the growth of the profession, more specifically in helping to meld together the separate disciplines of landscape design and installation. Juan now looks to carry on the tradition by strengthening the natural ties between landscape installation and maintenance.

Juan took over the landscaping portion of his father's landscape/design business five years ago. Today,

his company, Green Care, employs upwards of 60 people and offers full-service landscape management to commercial and high-end residential properties in and around San Juan. Among its customers are three resort hotels, a couple of large resort communities and several high-end residences.

"Our resort community and hotel customers are especially sensitive to the value of a well-maintained landscape," says Juan, "and they like the idea of having to write only one check to one supplier. Our ideal client is one who appreciates quality and understands how a beautiful landscape can grow the value of a property.

"Not many of our competitors can bring a full-service menu to clients and guarantee their work," he continues. "We can. And keeping properties looking nice is our ticket to continued growth and success." In addition to doing some small design work (Green Care still works with Juan's father on larger design projects) and providing installation and maintenance services, the company offers irrigation installation and maintenance, landscape lighting, along with interior landscape maintenance.

Juan, who graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in design, admits that providing a high level of service in

San Juan can be a challenge. First, there is the environment to consider. Yes, Puerto Rico is favored by a tropical climate where temperatures will vary only a few degrees year-round, and there is plenty of rain and sunshine to go around. Grass, palm trees, flowers, you name it, virtually anything and everything that is green grows — and grows fast. These ideal growing conditions, though, are compromised by excessive winds, the results of which are especially noticeable on properties near the shore, and all landscapes need to be vigilantly maintained to keep growth and the insect population under control.

Then there is competition. “We have five to 10 landscape contractors in the area who are well-established and respected,” says Juan. “Like other communities, we also have our share of emerging contractors who, because of their lack of experience, try to compete on price. Their influence

forces all of us to find ways to drive costs out of our operation without sacrificing quality and to spend a little more time educating customers on the value of quality landscaping.”

LOOKING FOR EFFICIENCIES

A quarter of Puerto Rico’s four million people live in and around San Juan. Traffic is heavy and congestion is the norm, especially during rains and, of course, rush hour. To avoid wasting time and money in traffic snarls, Green Care targets large properties where crew members can report directly to the job site, instead of driving to the office, to the site, to the office, and then back home. At two hotel properties, for example, three company employees work on-site five days a week, 52 weeks a year.

Juan looks for efficiencies in other areas, too, including his equipment. “We used to operate all Scag riders and mid-size walk-behind mowers until my supervisor Noel Catalan convinced me to try out a Walker Mower five years ago,” Juan recalls. “Noel had used them when he worked for a contractor in New Jersey. He told me they would be the perfect machines for our properties. I guess you could say we purchased our first Walker to keep him quiet; we purchased our second one because he was right.”

As Juan explains, there are few if any straight lines on his properties, which are both relatively small and heavily landscaped. “This is a small island only 30 miles wide and 100 miles long. Even our largest properties are small compared to

those in the states. Our two Walkers equipped with 20-hp Kohler engines save time maneuvering and trimming around trees and shrubs. Their 48-inch GHS decks easily handle tough Zoysia grass, which makes up nearly 90% of the turf around here.” Juan adds that the machines’ grass-handling capability ideally matches conditions, noting that the wide-bladed Zoysia grass builds up thatch in a hurry when clippings are left on the ground.

“Our resort community and hotel customers are especially sensitive to the value of a well-maintained landscape.”

With Green Care for more than eight years, Catalan points to a couple of other attractive Walker Mower features. “Unlike mowers that are susceptible to scalping, the Walker Mower deck follows the contour of the landscape, he explains. “We get so much rain in San Juan that lawns actually shift. The Walker Mower deck will adjust to these areas without scalping.”

The machines are durable, too, he emphasizes. “Our first Walker mowed literally five days a week, eight hours a day for two years straight. Just like Juan, I also appreciate the machine’s ability to handle clippings.”

For Juan, the cost of the Walkers and his other premium equipment is justified by their durability and performance. In addition to Walker Mowers, nine Green Care maintenance crews can be equipped with Scag walk-behind and Honda trim mowers, depending on the property, and they carry Echo and Stihl hand-held products.

Green Care’s two Walker Mowers easily handle the tough Zoysia grass.



Heavily landscaped properties require a mower that is maneuverable.

As important as his equipment is to delivering a quality product, Juan knows that equipment, like his company's reputation, is only as good as the people who do the work. Although he does not lay claim to innovative ways to motivate employees, he has developed a loyal cadre of workers, many of whom have been with his company 10 to 15 years.

"Motivating employees year-round can be a challenge," says Juan. "We don't do anything extravagant or out-of-the-ordinary in that area. Admittedly, we could be better at it. Still, I think that if you pay your employees a competitive wage, show them that you care about them, and

"We get so much rain in San Juan that lawns actually shift. The Walker Mower deck will adjust to these areas without scalping."

are accessible and keep the lines of communication open, they will respond positively."

When your goal is to continue to grow a business that provides a broad range of quality services, there is no alternative to having a loyal workforce, the right equipment and the right attitude. As Juan suggests, companies like his can compete on price alone. But then providing one-stop, quality service would be more rhetoric than reality. A better way is to target customers who appreciate quality work and deliver on their expectations. **WT**

Mowing in Paradise

Hawaiian contractor makes his own way in a pristine setting.



Bradley Carvalho and his son Clayson "Traka" say they like to work together, but are also happy to give others an opportunity.

It would be easy to talk about his energy, his confidence or the beautiful surroundings in which he works. But the real story of Bradley Carvalho of BJ Services in Kohala Coast, Hawaii, is where he came from and what drives him and his family to stay close to their roots. “I had no idea that I could even own my own business,” explains the third-generation Portuguese immigrant. “Mr. Harry Otsuji, an old friend of the family, told me that he thought I had what it took to make it as a business owner.” He says a little “katonk” (a local word meaning to push or aggressively encourage) from Mr. Otsuji was the catalyst that got him into the mowing business.

HUMBLE START

Rewind to Bradley’s younger years and you’ll find the meager beginnings of his journey on a sugar cane plantation in a small community on the northeastern coast of the big island. “All I ever knew was working on the plantation,” says Bradley. “I gained valuable experience in equipment and hard work that have both fit great in owning my own business.” He says the experience of doing “basically every job you could do on a plantation” at one time or another seasoned him for a future in business ownership. Even with all of the physical training and knowledge he gained, he says probably the greatest qualities he took from the plantation are strong core values and simply treating people with respect.

Bradley says his leap from the plantation in the mid-80s happened at the right time, since cane plantations are now all but extinct in his area. His move off the plantation came gradually, as he and a friend were doing some hauling and working security for a housing development, and the development association asked if he would be interested in some mowing. Bradley jumped at the opportunity. He and his wife Jocelyn bought a few push mowers and went to work — BJ (Bradley and Jocelyn) Services was in business.



David (“Kainoa” — meaning “ocean”) Maukele is one of the members of the “brotherhood” and works specifically on the mowing detail.

LEARNING ABOUT QUALITY AT A YOUNG AGE

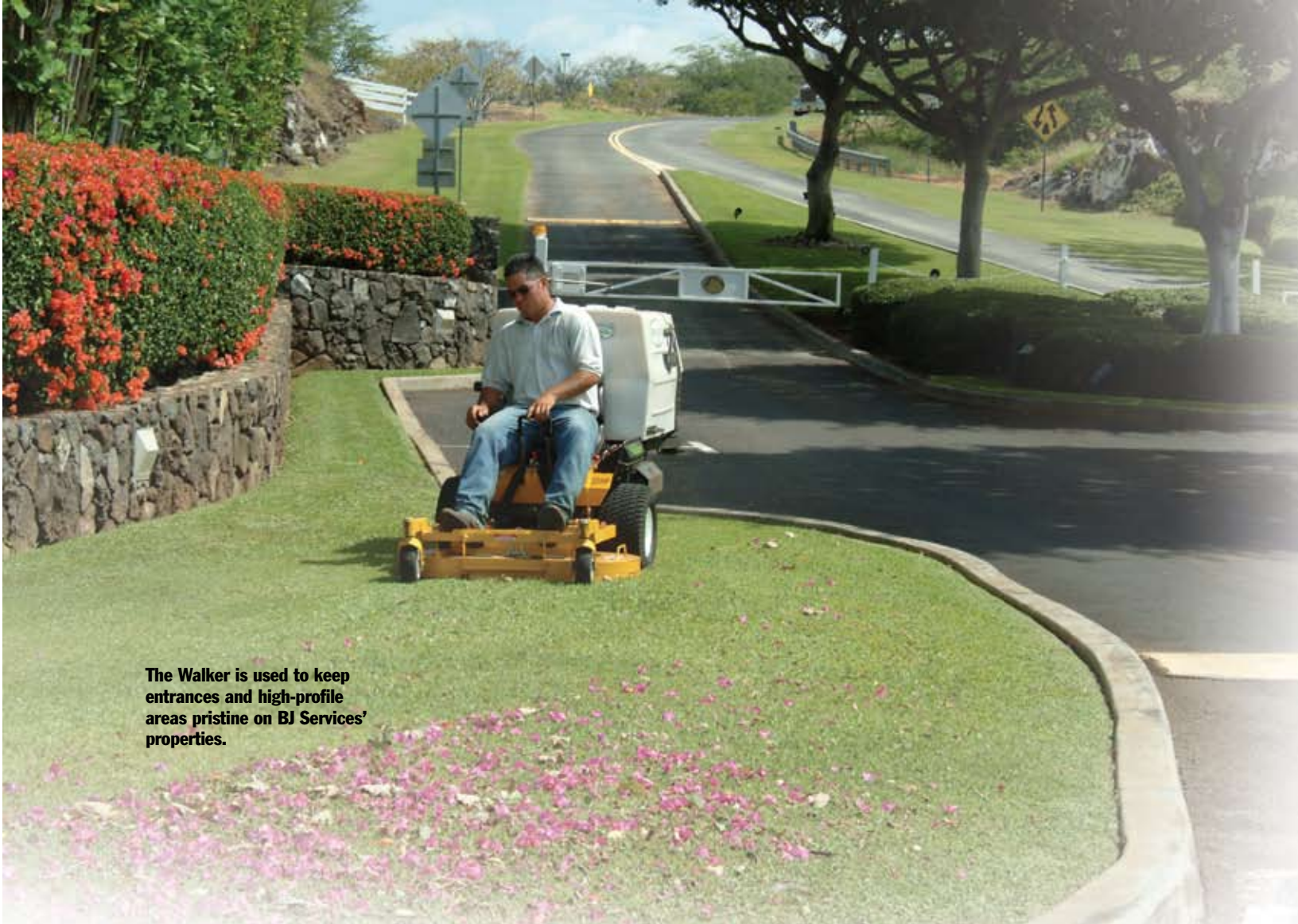
Bradley Carvalho says he never imagined that he would mow lawns for a living because of a childhood aversion to mowing. “I hated mowing yards,” he explains. “When I was a boy, I always had to mow my dad and grandfather’s yards and I would complain the whole time, but they always made me do a good job — that’s where I learned quality.”

Bradley says his mowing relationship with his grandfather came full circle a few years ago when his grandmother became ill and he went to mow the grave next to his grandfather’s for her possible burial. “I realized that I was still mowing my grandpa’s yard and I knew he was still watching me, so I mowed it the best I could and then I stood over his grave laughing out loud with my hands in the air saying, ‘Does it look good enough for you?’”

He says that although he jokes about his dislike for being forced to mow, he knows it was some of the best experience he gained as a young man. To this day, he still takes pride in keeping his grandfather’s grave (or yard as he likes to call it) looking good as a way to show respect for the quality he taught him. Closer to home, he notes that his three grandsons are going to be trained to mow the same way he was. “The only problem is that they will do it on a Walker and will probably always think that it is an easy job,” he chuckles.

BUILDING THEIR KINGDOM

Days were long and the mowing was hard at the time, but Bradley says he and Jocelyn were determined to make it work, because it was something they could call their own. He says maintaining a good image and upholding his family name was critical to the early and continued success of the business. “On the island, we have what we call the ‘coconut wireless,’ and news travels



The Walker is used to keep entrances and high-profile areas pristine on BJ Services' properties.

fast," he shares. "If you damage your name, you won't be in business long." Bradley credits his wife of 27 years with being a hard worker, never giving up and always having good common sense. "Nowadays, she does the books for our business," he explains, "but she is still as proud of the business as when we first started."

Things have changed a lot since those earlier days, and Bradley has gained valuable experience as a business owner, especially in the area of handling the "brotherhood" (his word for his employees). One such lesson is about getting too big and losing touch with employees. Bradley says the most valuable part of the day is early morning when everyone shows up and talks about their time away from work, because they all get to know each other better and it is a

way to keep up on everyone and their families. He says this was the setting where he discovered his business was getting out of control.

"We had 16 employees, and I realized we were too big because some of my guys did not feel like they could talk with me," he remembers. "I always felt that if they could not talk with me, then I had failed." With some natural attrition and patience over the next few years, BJ Services' employee list dwindled to seven, and Bradley says it has been the perfect number. He says this size of business also makes it easier for him to follow his practice of "whatever he gets the 'brotherhood' gets." One of the seven employees includes Bradley's son Clayson, whom he affectionately calls "Traka" (meaning Tracker).

Believing in and following your instincts about people is another trait Bradley says he has always tried to exercise, even when doubted or ridiculed. He shares the story of hiring a man who had fought addictions and needed a chance. Even though they had to give him a ride to work each day and bend over backwards for him on occasion, the man soon realized someone cared about him, and he became a valuable employee.

"I went as far as going to my credit union and taking out a loan to pay for his insurance because he had lost his license," Bradley recalls. "I'll never forget the look on the lady's face at the credit union when I told her what I was doing, and how she told me that I would never get the money back," he recalls with a grin. "To this day, she still shakes her head

whenever she sees me, because she can't believe that I would do that for an employee." Sadly, Bradley shares that his "project" employee is no longer with BJ Services, because he had to move to the mainland for more advanced treatments for a cancer he now has.

LIVING LIKE KINGS

"Nobody in their right mind likes work," Bradley says with a chuckle, "but the Walker makes it so much easier. On a good day of work, a guy gets totaled with other mowers, but not with the Walker." Bradley explains how they purchased a Walker in late 2002 to mow a polo field in the 4,000-acre community they maintain. They soon realized that it would be useful for irrigated roadways, parks and entrances.

"Nobody in their right mind likes work, but the Walker makes it so much easier."

It's at this point that Bradley's excitement for the Walker boils over. With his rich accent and a smile as inviting as a Hawaiian sunset, the 46-year-old begins to brag like a teenager with a new car. "My guys are like kings on the Walker," he says with arms and legs flailing. "I have always said 'don't kill the men.' Everything on the Walker just makes sense. When you are mowing you just have to say 'it's a beautiful day!'" he says as he assumes proper Walker

operating position, throws his head back and spins himself in a couple of circles on his office chair.

Bradley says he has never forgotten his roots. To be sure, he says he still uses his identification number from the plantation as a password on his computer and other areas. Even though the concept of business ownership was foreign to Bradley and his family in the beginning, treating people well and drawing energy from living a good life were not. The Carvalho family has proven that living the American dream and making your own paradise are alive and well, even in a remote spot in this small, distant state. **WT**

Clayson "Traka" is the Carvalho's oldest son and is one of the main Walker operators.





Mowing: It's not all a "bed of roses"

When asked about mowing in tough conditions, Kim Kellogg, co-owner with wife Char of Grasshopper Property Maintenance in Millersburg, Ohio, gives this reply: "There are no rainy days, there are no sunny days. There are only mowing days." Rain or shine, the crews and their mowers have to get the job done, he adds. "It's all about the equipment and the motivation of your crew. Whether catching or side-discharging the grass, the Walkers do a great job when the lawns are wet, high and hilly."

That's a great testimonial for a machine that is designed to mow in commercial applications even when Mother Nature, the terrain and mowing crews are not necessarily on the same page. Char Kellogg adds these thoughts about spring mowing, especially this year when the Midwest and East have received more than their share of rain.

"Despite the wet spring, we are not behind ... at least in our mowing. Some of the guys carry raincoats with them, while others don't mind getting wet. They are always ready to get back at it as soon as heavy rain lets up."

Char continues, "Real-time radar gives us real-time warning of what's approaching, and helps us manage crew placement and scheduling. It helps us decide if we call the guys off, bring them in late in the morning, send them home early, or have them sit in the trucks to wait out a storm if it is a heavy rain or there is thunder and lightning. The radar also helps us anticipate the rest of the week. If it looks like a wet one, we add extra people to the crews or add another crew."

Char hits the proverbial nail on the head when she says, "This isn't an industry for sissies." She gives the following example. "In early April of this year we mowed all day, then crews put the plows and salt spreaders on the trucks and we plowed snow all night. We have actually pushed snow with our Walker Mowers when occasionally we have been caught in a snowstorm while mowing."

Mowing in a snowstorm would be the extreme, and something most Walker users may never experience. Unless you mow in Perfect Town, USA, though, you have experienced and will experience mowing in tough conditions where the grass may be too wet, too high or too dry. There may be other occasions, too, when,

ideal mowing conditions are compromised by having to operate on slopes or near embankments.

Yet, as Char points out, this isn't an industry for the faint of heart. Instead, it's an industry in which mowing contractors need to be aware of mowing conditions and operate their machines to accommodate them. This is an axiom no matter what brand or type of mower you operate. The following are guidelines to help operators cope with difficult mowing conditions in a safe and productive manner.

WET, TALL OR DRY GRASS

Mowing contractors don't like to mow in wet grass, yet it is often necessary to do just that to stay on schedule and keep customers satisfied. When mowing in these conditions, operators may experience "clumping" with side-discharge decks or "clogging" with catcher or grass-handling decks. Both problems can be caused or magnified by cutting too low (restricting airflow under skirt of deck), mowing too fast (excess volume of clippings), and failing to maintain maximum engine revs, which reduces the ability of the blades and deck to either discharge or vacuum the grass.

Walker users can minimize GHS deck clogging by using an optional catcher exhaust screen with larger holes. To maintain maximum clog resistance, they should also review the clogging checklist in their Walker Owner's Manual.

Problems caused by wet mowing conditions do not end at the discharge chute. Wet turf is easily damaged, especially when making a zero- or tight-turn. Before making turns in these conditions, slow your ground speed and observe proper turning techniques.

Mowing dry grass or leaves creates a different set of challenges for operators. Here, it is less a question of mowing speed and technique, and more a question of awareness. For example, in dry conditions operators should frequently inspect for and clean out any dry material that has collected around engine parts. They should also avoid overfilling the grass catcher. Overfilling a catcher may cause excess dry material to contact hot engine parts. Because piles of dry grass and leaves can be combustible, avoid backing or driving the mower into them.

A rule of thumb to follow in wet, dry and normal mowing conditions is to empty the catcher completely at the end of the day. Storing either wet or dry material in a catcher is a hazard.

There are also times when mowing contractors will be asked to mow overgrown grass. Before attempting the job, walk the area looking for hidden hazards such as holes, debris and soft or unstable ground. Make the first cut with the mowing deck set at its highest cutting height. Then, mow again, lowering the deck.

HILLS, EMBANKMENTS AND WATER

Mowing operators need to be especially cautious when mowing slopes and hilly areas. Some hills are too steep for riding mowers and



Mowing dry grass or leaves creates a different set of challenges for operators.

some are even too steep for walk mowers. Use your best judgment and play it safe when deciding to use a rider or walk-behind mower or when to use a growth retardant to control grass growth.

When mowing steep areas with any riding mower, slow down and use care, especially when maneuvering, starting and stopping. In addition, avoid sharp turns or sudden changes in direction. (Note: The maximum recommended side slope operating angle for Walker Mowers is 20° or 33% grade; see your Walker Owner's Manual for an illustration.)

Always be on the lookout for holes, too, when mowing on slopes. Dropping a wheel into a hole can cause tipping and rollover.

Despite the fact that a Walker Mower can always be stopped in an emergency by simply pulling the Forward Speed Control to the Neutral-Park position, operators should know and practice emergency stop procedures. Understanding how to stop the mower is especially important when operating on slopes. For example, a broken transmission drive belt can cause the mower to freewheel down the hill until the Forward Speed Control is moved to the Neutral-Park

position. You can practice this emergency stopping procedure by removing the drive belt on a slope to simulate belt failure.

Caution must also be observed when mowing near an embankment or water. Before mowing, walk along banks to check ground stability, and avoid mowing in soft/unstable areas. Never mow close to the edge of an embankment, pond or other water. Instead, have a margin of safety of at least one machine length from the bank. Use a trimmer or walk-behind mower to trim out areas along a bank.

There are two additional important considerations when mowing near embankments and water. First, avoid backing down a slope toward potential hazards. Using this maneuver to dump grass clippings is especially dangerous. Then, when stopping near an embankment or water, always engage the parking brake.

No, mowing isn't all a bed of roses. But there are ways to safely and productively get the job done despite uncooperative weather and other difficult mowing conditions. Again, be aware of the conditions and operate your mower to accommodate them. **WT**



Short growing season ... long hours



The Bear team: (left to right) Preston McKay, Rufus Hearn III, Moses Perry, Matt Dwyer, Darrin "Bear" Edson, Jesse Harley Thompson, (left Walker) Ryan Lucke, (right Walker) Paul Dick.

The Alaskan growing season may be abbreviated, but is also very intense. Consider what happens when the sun is shining 22 out of 24 hours in mid-summer. “In August, our two Walkers mow eight hours a day five days a week, and sometimes six,” relates Darrin Edson. “Even then, we can hardly keep up with the new growth.”

Edson (friends call him Bear for short) is grounds supervisor for the University of Alaska Fairbanks. The 2,200-acre campus comes under his care. In addition to mowing 200 acres of turf weekly, Edson and his staff are responsible for just about everything that happens under the sun — from planting 50,000 annuals each spring and summer and edging three miles of sidewalk to stringing holiday lights in the fall and removing snow and ice during the long, cold winters.

“The weather is our biggest challenge,” says Bear. “Conditions can change here in a minute’s notice and winters, although less predictable than they used to be, are still very rugged. The campus can expect a couple weeks of minus 40° F weather and several months of 0° to minus 10° F conditions. Extreme winters can cause “winter kill,” the solution for which is hydro-seeding with perennial rye in the spring.”

In addition to being headquarters for the state’s university system, the Fairbanks’ campus is one of a couple of focal points in the city and a popular stop for tour buses. It is growing, too, with three new buildings under construction, and renovation seemingly at every turn this past summer.

To say Alaskans make the most of their summers is an understatement. Although Bear’s crew works diligently all year long, it is the summer that keeps them the busiest. The goal is to keep the campus looking its colorful, spiffy best for three months out of



Rufus and Bear team up for a little mowing action.

the year and particularly sharp for two weeks in September when students arrive for the fall semester. To get the job done, Bear has six full-time staffers, and a full complement of 25 to 30 student workers who join him during the summer months. The university also has a full-time horticulturist on board and supports its own greenhouse for growing annuals.

“The chancellor and president are interested in what we are doing and they have given us plenty of support to keep the campus looking good.”

“The administration puts a lot of effort into making the grounds look good for students and visitors,” says Bear, who was a landscape contractor before coming to the school seven years ago. “The chancellor and president are interested in what we are doing and they have given us plenty

of support to keep the campus looking good.”

Over the years, this support has translated into more full-time positions for Bear’s department and the purchase of equipment like the Walker Mower. “I knew about the Walker when I had my company,” Bear relates. “When I came here and saw all the grass that needed mowing, I lobbied for the machine.” The school purchased two 20-hp Walkers last year, equipped with 48-inch GHS decks. It also has a 62-inch, side-discharge deck for open-area mowing.

“One of the nice things about the machines is that you can get them anywhere on campus,” Bear adds. “Yet, I think their nicest feature is their accessibility for service and maintenance.” One thing leads to another, he points out. Maintainability means that machines are serviced in a timely manner, which means breakdowns are few and far between. In fact, he notes that his Walkers worked all last summer and this summer without a major breakdown. That is quite a testimonial considering their rigorous summer schedule.



TAKING TURNS

The grounds crew takes turns using the Walkers. Bear says he even gets an opportunity to jump on a mower once in a while. When he does, he leaves his electronic collar (cell phone) behind and just cuts grass. The summer part-time helpers also get their opportunity, but not before viewing Walker's "How to Mow" video and maneuvering through an obstacle course.

Other than the challenges created by a short growing season, maintaining a landscape in Alaska is similar to maintaining one in any other part of the country, with one or two notable exceptions. In the spring, Bear's mowing crew has to be aware of what the thawing frost leaves behind. "Rocks just seem to materialize out of thin air," Bear notes. "This past spring we broke our share of shear pins."

"One of the nice things about the machines is that you can get them anywhere on campus. Yet, I think their nicest feature is their accessibility for service and maintenance."

Thanks to an unusual weather pattern, it has also rained in Fairbanks during the last two winters, and any winter rain turns almost immediately into one-inch-thick ice that stays for months. For the past two winters, the grounds maintenance crew has had to spend an extraordinary amount of time applying salt and sand to give traction to 7,500 students and a large faculty body.

Bear's grounds department swells during the summer when student workers help with maintenance and color enhancement. Pictured is student worker Candice Smith with Moses Perry.

What are dark, cold winters like in Fairbanks with or without rain? "Not as bad as one would think," says Bear, but then again he has lived in the state his entire life. "You get used to the cold and it doesn't seem all that dark, thanks to the lights around campus and the snow cover." Still, he adds, the summer brings with it a party atmosphere and the desire to spend an inordinate amount of time outdoors. So bring on growing season and long hours that go with it. Nobody's complaining in Fairbanks.





BOB T'S

Tech Talk

Did you know?

I'm convinced more every day that we are becoming "victims of our technology." Let me clarify that with a couple of examples. Nearly all of us have some electronic appliances and gadgets in our homes. Did you figure out how they work on your own or give up? Our beloved vehicles are electronic/digital marvels. The engine, climate control (heating and air conditioning for us older folk), brakes, seats, entertainment system (what happened to radio and stereo?), and even traction control are all electronic wizardry. How many of us truly understand that stuff or bother to find out? And if any of it fails to work, we are lost in the abyss of digital confusion.

Not long ago a friend was installing some new software on his computer. I noticed the instructions laying off to the side with the extra large box that one CD came in. He seemed to be having some difficulties. I picked up the instructions and asked the unusual question: "What do the instructions say?" He looked at me with great sarcasm and replied: "Who reads that stuff?" My response was: "I do." He promptly came back with: "I suppose you read the manual that came with your car?" I answered, "Of course I did. Doesn't everybody?"

With utter amazement he just shook his head. This may sound funny. However, if I'm going to spend \$20,000 to \$30,000 on something, I want to know that I'm operating it properly and getting the most out of my investment. Should it be any different if it's a \$150 VCR or a \$10,000 Walker Mower? I would hope not. But from my 12 years of experience in technical support, I have concluded that Owner's Manuals, for the most part, go unused. Being male gives me some liberty to poke at the male ego a little. Guys, what's up with the idea that it's not macho to read a manual or ask directions? Really, we're not sissies if we do either — or even both. Trust me.

Let me run a few facts and tips by you concerning the Walker Mower that can make your life easier. "Did you know" most of these are in the Owner's Manual?

Hour meter. The digital hour meter has a built-in maintenance reminder. It tells you when to change the oil and when to lubricate. A detailed maintenance schedule write-up comes with every new machine.

Oil change and type of oil. The initial break-in oil in the engine should be changed after the first five to 10 hours of running. The oil and filter should then be changed every 100 hours (more frequently in dusty or dirty conditions). Always follow the engine manufacturer's recommendations on the type of oil to use.

Hydrostatic transmission oil. The oil level can be checked without removing the reservoir cap. Because the reservoir is translucent, placing a light next to it will reveal the oil level. Removal of the cap can result in contamination being introduced into the transmission, causing it to fail. Since early 1999 all hydros come from the factory with Mobil 1 15W50 synthetic oil in them.

Washing. Power washing will force water into places it shouldn't go, such as bearings, electrical plugs and components. Cleaning with compressed air is a much better alternative. When washing is required, only use a garden hose without a nozzle, and take care to keep water away from all electrical components.

Blade nut torque. They should be torqued to 60 ft-lbs. Over-torquing will result in ineffective blade shear bolts.

Tire air pressure. Drive tires: 15 psi. Rear tire(s): 20 psi. Deck caster tires: 20 psi. The pressures should be equal from side to side for level cutting.

Body pivot bolts. Oil the bolts every 25 hours and replace them every 500 hours or once a year. Over time they will wear and can break, allowing the body to drop down, resulting in damage to hoses and wiring.

Exhaust screen. It must be kept clean to allow airflow. Restricted airflow will cause grass clogging. We offer a screen with larger holes for use only in wet conditions.

Blower blades. If the tips of the blades are shiny, it indicates material is building up in the housing. If the gap between the tips of the blades and the housing is too great, the airflow is reduced, resulting in grass clogs.

Wheel bolt torque. The torque (90 ft-lb) should be checked every 100 hours. Loose wheel bolts can lead to a broken wheel or even a wheel coming off.

Blades. Correctly sharpened blades will give the best cut and look. Blades should always be balanced when sharpening.

Counterweight springs. The tension is adjustable and will affect the cut and operation. The weight on the caster wheels should be 15 to 25 pounds. Varying the tension will transfer weight between the deck and the drive wheels, affecting the slope-holding ability of the mower.

Transmission lockout. Both hydrostatic transmissions are equipped with levers that, when pulled up, allow the mower to "freewheel."

There is a wealth of information in the Owner's Manual. Go ahead, read it. I won't tell your buddies, competitors or wives how you gained so much knowledge. **WT**

It all adds up in Guam

You don't have to look very hard at Aaron Loerzel's truck to know he is up against some tough conditions running a mowing business on the South Pacific island and United States territory of Guam. "It was a brand new truck," he relates while pointing to the rusted pock marks that are plentifully scattered over the entire truck. "A typhoon came through here and bead-blasted the truck, and it didn't take long for the humidity to rust out the dents."

That was the typhoon that came through in 2003 and had winds measuring 236 mph. "At least that was what the gauge was registering when it broke," Loerzel adds. "We were out of electricity and fuel for almost two months because of that storm," he says while explaining that a fuel storage tank in the harbor was destroyed and burned, causing a major fuel shortage.

Throw in the fact that two to six typhoons pass through each year and destroy most of the tall trees and you have a formula for opportunity, according to Loerzel. He has certainly grabbed a hold of the opportunities by not running a typical mowing business, and has made a living by conforming to the needs of his customers. Loerzel likes to reach beyond dependability for his customers and offer additional services that may be hard to find.

"I bought a backhoe a few years ago," he explains. "Now, after a typhoon, my customers know that I have the ability to show up with my backhoe and help them clean their properties." Of course, after a typhoon, the backhoe makes him

quite popular with everyone, but he says he makes a careful effort to service his established customers first. He has also added roof sealing to his repertoire to help protect homes from the brutal tropical sun during the hot season. Even with all of his innovative ideas, Loerzel says the real formula for success on Guam is easy: "You just have to show up each week." He laughs while

explaining that many of the region's cutters have a tendency to mow a yard once and are never heard from again.

BY THE NUMBERS

How does a young man in his twenties gain an appreciation for good equipment on a remote island? Loerzel has a quick answer: "I have



Aaron Loerzel and his cousin Anthony Perez (seated) say the Walker is the only mower designed to tackle Guam's tough conditions and leave a high-quality cut.



Aaron and Anthony use the Stevens mechanical deck lift to help avoid coral rock that occasionally surfaces in lawns.



The Eliason family — Albert (right), Harumi and Ace — own Mowil Inc. and have been the distributor for Walker Mowers on Guam since the '80s. Albert calls customers like Aaron Loerzel “a real blessing.”

loved power equipment since I was two.” He says that the combination of watching his father (a doctor by profession) hobby farm while growing up, along with being fascinated by equipment, seemed to help direct some of his decisions. One of those decisions was to work during high school with Mowil Inc. (the Walker distributor on Guam). Loerzel credits Albert and Harumi Eliason with teaching him good business sense and allowing him to gain experience around equipment.

This experience was put on relative hold when Loerzel went to Seattle for college. But he says he always had an itch for equipment, so he knew his degree in finance would never get fully exercised. Interestingly enough, Loerzel does use his degree for the local H&R Block during the busy tax season, but he says it is not nearly as rewarding as getting out and mowing

lawns. “In accounting, I can have a stack of completed forms this thick at the end of the day,” he says while holding his index finger and thumb a couple inches apart. “But I feel like I can have a lot more to show in just half a day of mowing.”

DECISIONS THAT COUNT

Loerzel says that upon his return from college in '98, he still felt an urge to work outside, so his choice of mowing equipment was elementary. “Based on what I knew about the Walker from working at Mowil and the support I would receive from them,” Loerzel shares, “it was a pretty easy decision to go with the Walker.” He says the Walker’s combination of being versatile and rugged has served him well. “I feel sorry for mowers here; they take a beating,” he explains referring to the coral soil conditions and aggressive Zoysia grass.

Add in the Walker’s ability to vacuum the different types of leaves that find their way to the ground after a typhoon and Loerzel says it is the perfect machine for him. The leaves of the breadfruit tree (that typically measure 12-by-36 inches) and the skinny, evasive leaves of the Kafu (pronounced kah-foo) tree are no challenge for the Walker, according to Loerzel. He sums it up in one simple phrase: “There’s not another kind of mower on this island that will make a yard look like a Walker can.”

Loerzel says his future includes a few dreams, including an interest in opening a green-cycling site and ultimately getting into road construction — an offshoot of his love for equipment. With Aaron Loerzel, it’s easy to see whether he works on the books or in the yards, his knack for focusing on the positive and seizing opportunity will always keep him well-balanced. **WT**

MODEL S SALES INCREASING

After several years of averaging about 3% of total sales, the Walker Model MS has climbed to 7% in 2004 with a trend of increasing popularity. It appears that the introduction of the 13-hp engine in June 2002 and “value pricing” being offered in some markets by Walker distributors and dealers is making this model more attractive to customers. The Kawasaki engine with full pressure lubrication and an oversize remote air filter system is earning a good reputation for durability and strong performance. So this model, constructed much like the original 11-hp Walker Mower introduced in 1980, is getting another look-over by Walker shoppers in comparison to higher-hp Walkers.



FINAL PLANS FOR EXPO 2004 OBSTACLE COURSE

The Walker Precision Obstacle Course competition at EXPO 2004 in Louisville, Kentucky, is rapidly approaching. Walker operators are encouraged to attend the show and take a shot at being named the “best Walker operator in the world”.

The qualifying runs on the obstacle course will be on September 24 (Friday) and the semi-finals and finals will be held on Saturday. This competition has proven to be a great way to display operator skills and recognize the achievement of the best Walker operators at the national level.

Walker will provide awards to the top three competitors including an expense-paid vacation trip to Colorado for the winner. For show registration contact the show at 800-558-8767 or get on the Internet and visit www.expo.mow.org.

MAGAZINE READERS IDENTIFY TOP BRANDS

In a 2003 Brand Preference Study conducted by *Grounds Maintenance* magazine, Walker continues to rank among the top brand names in the zero turning radius mower category. This is the sixth survey since 1993 using the same methodology where magazine readers name the one brand they prefer (without prompting) when planning a purchase in various product categories. Walker had a strong showing in each of the previous studies, and now 14.9% of the respondents named Walker as their preferred brand. With 23 different brands mentioned, Walker was in the top five along with Toro, Exmark, Scag and Grasshopper.

After seeing the survey, Bob Walker, president of Walker Manufacturing, gave credit where due to the making of the brand. “We give credit to our suppliers and employees in helping us manufacture a quality product, while also giving credit to our marketers, distributors and dealers in providing excellent sales and service for the mower in the market. But most of all, we know our customers who have taken care of the equipment and used it to full potential have made our brand name.”



CALENDAR PHOTOS STILL NEEDED

Do you have a beautiful property that you would like featured in the Walker “Beautiful Places 2005” calendar? The calendar production is underway, and we are still in need of photo submissions. If you have questions about guidelines, visit www.walkermowers.com or call 970-221-5614. The deadline is September 24.

MODEL MB INTRODUCED

The Model MB brings a new, exciting tractor to the proven Walker Mower line. This simple, clean design uses the same principles as the original Walker Mower, including tilt-up body, zero-turn maneuverability, low center of gravity and operator comfort in an even more compact configuration. The tractor design is simplified and is more economical for non-catching applications by eliminating the provision for the built-in Grass Handling System (GHS) used on other Walker Mowers.

Two independent Hydro-Gear® transaxles are matched to Walker's unique control system using a forward speed control and two steering levers to make an agile, easy-to-operate tractor with ground speed up to 8 mph. The 18-hp Briggs Vanguard engine, in conjunction with a Warner electromagnetic clutch, provides efficient

delivery of power to the mowing deck. The Model MB uses Walker's gear-driven side-discharge and mulching decks up to 56 inches while maintaining the same deck tilt-up feature standard on all Walker decks.

Commercial and residential operators alike should find this unique machine to be a strong and efficient performer. Initial production of the MB is scheduled to start in September, and it will be on display at the International Lawn, Garden and Power EXPO in Louisville, Kentucky, on September 24 and 25.



EXTERNAL MUFFLER ON MODEL MS

A new muffler design is introduced for the Model MS. The muffler is mounted on the outside of the chassis frame with the benefit of reducing heat in the engine compartment in comparison to the engine-mounted muffler used on earlier units. Earlier units starting with S/N 95-20381 may be upgraded to the new muffler configuration by installing kit P/N 5013-9.



NEW HALOGEN LIGHTS

New high-intensity Halogen® lights are now included with optional light kits, P/N 5989 and 7989-1.



NEW OWNER'S PACKET INTRODUCED

A new owner's packet has been introduced and is set to be included with 2005 production mowers. The packet will include the standard items (tractor and engine manuals, warranty card, video, etc.) and a new brochure on the history of Walker and another brochure called: "What Makes Walker Different?" The new format should make it easy to keep owner's materials in order in a nice looking box.



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Walker Scrapbook



Old versus new — Gary Morris of Dixon, Illinois, traded his '82 Walker Mower (one of the first 150 Walkers produced) for a new '03 model.



Attorney Rober Wampler of Olive Branch, Mississippi, used his 1995 Walker to groom his 1.25 acres into a "yard of the month" by the local garden club.



Walker owner Woody Smith of Idaho Falls, Idaho, shows off his "two favorite toys". Smith bought his Walker Mower from Mr. Brent Bell (inset photo) of Bell Builders in Rexburg, Idaho — a faithful Walker dealer since 1988 who passed away on November 16, 2003.



The guys at Monaco Coach Corporation in Wakarusa, Indiana, had this custom air brushed sweat-shirt made for their supervisor, Steve Burkholder, a true Walker enthusiast (submitted by Gene Ostrom).



Rick Splittgerber of Fort Collins, Colorado, snapped this photo when visiting London's Westminster Abbey in November 2002.



Three-year-old Jake is the grandson of proud Walker owner Ken Watters of Genoa, Nevada. Ken says his Walker reduced his mowing time from 5 hours to 1-1/2 — not including the time to give Jake rides.



Walker operators (L to R) Jeff Turner, Linda Weeks, Dick Lamb and Jerry Weeks used their Walker Mowers to do the leaf cleanup at the city park of Milo, Iowa, in 2 hours and 35 minutes. These volunteers replaced 20 volunteers that usually took an entire day to clean the park.

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