

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS TO COME

This is my
livelihood

- Serving customers and country
- Still learning after 31 years
- Gardens bloom with history and color
- What kind of software do you use?



VOL. 29

WALKER TALK

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TRUTH IN TALK

Our readers have given us many encouraging comments that let us know *Walker Talk* is being read and the publication is working. Suggestions for improvement are also offered. One critique that has been mentioned several times concerns promoting safe operating practices; some of our customer profile stories show workers or operators not wearing "proper" protective clothing and devices. The idea is that *Walker Talk* should set the example of safe practice and require our story subjects to wear the appropriate gear for the photos, even if they don't wear it in actual practice.



While the point of promoting safety in the magazine is well made, if it is not "real" it would violate one of our guiding principles for the publication: *Walker Talk* will tell the truth. We make it a point to not "make a story happen" or make the story appear as we would like it to appear. We have tried our best to let the customers tell their stories – including showing their

Walker Mowers in "as is" condition at the "on-site" location and in actual working conditions.

In the interest of authenticity, our editorial policy is to develop customer profile stories only by an on-site visit, not a phone interview. Our editors have traveled almost 250,000 miles to gather the customer profiles. After the story is written, each customer is given the opportunity to review, make corrections and approve the story before printing. From my experience, many publications do not go to this extreme to get the story right.

What we've found with our on-site visits to customers has not always been ideal. Sometimes our machines are not as well-maintained or look as nice as we would like. But we have resisted all opportunities to "manipulate or stage" and have instructed our editors to tell the story as they find it and "as is", even including a competitive lawn mower when that is part of the story. We believe telling the truth keeps *Walker Talk* fresh and interesting with all the wonderful variety that is found in people. And after 29 issues, telling the truth has kept *Walker Talk* from being the typical stale promotional piece produced by a manufacturer trying to sell lawn mowers.

We believe telling the truth and walking in the truth is the foundation of all that is valuable, good and lasting in our lives. To the best of our ability, *Walker Talk* is being produced to that ideal.

Bob Walker
President

“It’s more than a mower; it’s my livelihood”

John Dorris is an individual who takes pride in what he does. His truck is immaculate, as are his two Walker Mowers, trailer and attendant equipment. This Georgia native is enthusiastic about his work, enjoys talking about his customers, and even though he’s on the high side of 50, doesn’t have an inkling of when he plans to retire. To the contrary, he wants to operate his lawn maintenance business as long as he is healthy and continues to enjoy his work.

One would never guess that this entrepreneur has been in the business for only 10 years. “That’s right,” says Dorris, referring to his late entry into the mowing market. “I was mowing yards for \$3 when I was 12 years old, but never ever dreamed I would be cutting grass 37 years later.”

The dream turned to reality when his job as regional manager for a major food corporation just up and evaporated one day – that, after he had spent more than 30 years in the industry. As he put it, his position was the casualty of an industry that was changing and consolidating. One day he had a good-paying job with benefits, and the next ... no job, no benefits.

“I was 50 years old at the time with a wife, two daughters and a 10-year-old son,” Dorris recalls. “I needed a job, so I put my Honda riding mower, push mower and pickup truck to work and started mowing for \$25 to \$35 a lawn. That was the summer of 1996, and at the time I thought I was in business.”

By the end of that first year something had to change. The new contractor was making a living, but barely, and his equipment wasn’t holding up. The next year, he purchased a Deere mid-size walk-behind mower.

Then, two years later, he purchased a Walker Mower.

“In 1999, my business went straight up,” Dorris relates. “It wasn’t

just because the Walker Mower was more efficient and maneuverable than the commercial walk-behind. It was that and more. Having the



After losing his job in 1996, John Dorris turned to mowing yards to support his family. He’s pictured here with wife Linda and son David.



Son David hasn't made a career decision yet, but taking over his father's business is still very much in the mix.

Walker, its quality cut and ability to pick up clippings, immediately helped me upgrade my business and take on better customers.

"Not only can I do more in a day with my Walker than I could do in a week with my old Honda rider and push mower, but I can charge twice as much, too," Dorris continues. "My minimum mowing charge is \$65 a lawn and my customers know they are getting real value for their dollar."

PLENTY OF WORK

Today, John W. Dorris Lawn Service, located in Alpharetta, Georgia, has 65 year-round customers (primarily high-end residences)



The Dorris Walker Mowers make quick work of leaves. John says, "I realized that if I could make money with one Walker Mower, I could make twice as much with a second one."

and another 35 who want their Bermuda grass properties scalped once a year or ask for a helping hand during fall cleanup. Dorris operates one crew that includes himself, a full-time employee and son, David, who works summers and semester breaks between going to school. His wife, Linda, isn't a crew member, but she's in charge of the financials and works by day at a nearby bank.

"Since buying our first Walker Mower, we have purchased seven others," says Dorris. "I bought two in 2002, one for me and one for David, and then followed by trading every two years since. Our Walker of choice is the 26-hp fuel-injected model with a 42-inch GHS deck. The engine is very fuel-efficient and the deck allows us to get through backyard gates.

"I would say 99% of our mowing is done with our Walker Mowers," Dorris goes on to say. "I use the Walker on every yard, large or small, the only exception being a terraced

backyard where we are forced to employ a 21-inch JD push mower. When it comes down to it, our Walker Mowers are more than mowers; they are our livelihood."

In an average day, Dorris and his crew knock out between 10 and 15 yards, depending on their location and proximity to home. Traffic around Alpharetta and other Atlanta suburbs can be very heavy, though. It's not unusual for Dorris, his crew and his dog, Copper, to spend three hours of windshield time a day.

Copper is the 12-year-old family boxer. He has been making the mowing rounds since the beginning, and only misses on days when the Georgia summers get too hot for him to sit in the cab. As for his Walkers, Dorris says it was an easy decision to buy a second one when David was old enough to work full time during the summer. "I realized that if I could make money with one Walker, I could make twice as much with a second one," he adds.

TENDER LOVING CARE

The Dorris family lives in a 1970s tri-level home. There are two storage sheds in the backyard; one accommodates mowing equipment and another houses a vintage 1975 Honda 750 motorcycle. The larger 12' x 24' shed has plenty of room to store two Walker Mowers and an array of Stihl handheld equipment, several old push mowers, 14 sets of Walker Mower blades, an air compressor, and three RedMax blowers.

"Next to my Walkers, this is my most valuable piece of equipment," says Dorris pointing to the compressor. "This little baby powers a grease gun, and I also use it to blow off my equipment at the end of every work day. I just can't say enough about how important it is for commercial operators like myself to keep equipment in top shape. I can do most of the routine service myself. When I can't, I either take my equipment to David Barrett Service Center here in town or to my Walker dealer, Master Mowers in Marietta."

Dorris says that since he puts only 300 hours a year on each of two Walker Mowers and trades them every two years, they rarely see the inside of a service facility. After two years, he simply sells them to local contractors, and then treks to Master Mowers



John says Linda was 100% behind his new career move, and she only winced a little at the price of a new Walker Mower.

to place another order. "It all comes down to the care," Dorris emphasizes. "I follow the service schedules and never abuse my equipment."

Next door, in the smaller shed, he glances down at his motorcycle. "This cycle has never seen a wrench, and it has the original paint," he says proudly. "Oh, I think I replaced the front brakes once, but that's the only time it has been worked on. Granted, I don't ride it nearly as much as I used to, but it's still fun. The truth is, I don't have much time to ride, and maybe I'm a bit more cautious than I used to be."

This contractor may be less adventuresome in some ways, but in others it's still full speed ahead. During summer months, he gets his crew out early to beat the heat, and mowing can last to the middle of December. There's even work in January when proper-

ties are cleaned in preparation for the new growing season. The only time John and Linda take a true vacation is around Christmas. In between, they sneak some time to enjoy their lake property 40 miles north of Alpharetta. Even then, says Linda, her husband doesn't really relax. Instead, he spends his time blowing leaves from a long, winding drive or otherwise doing odd jobs. Back home, the regional manager-turned-contractor doesn't fret about having enough work.

"At this point, I'm not taking on any new customers," says Dorris. "I could grow and put on another crew, but then I would lose some control over the quality of work. I don't want to do that. If David wants to join me full time after he graduates, then it will be a different story. He's getting a business degree and no doubt would harbor bigger plans for the business that I currently do. Right now, I make a decent living and am having fun doing it. What more could a person ask for?"

David doesn't tip his hand, only to say that he's proud of his dad and would find it very difficult to follow in his footsteps. His dad counters the compliment by saying that if his son joined the business, he wouldn't have to walk. All he would need to do is jump on his Walker — and mow. **WT**



Father and son get ready to tackle another yard. John says their record is 22 yards in a single day using two Walker Mowers.

Serving customers

By day, Staff Sergeant Bobby Beard readies equipment for the Alabama Army National Guard. By early evening, he changes uniforms and jumps on his Walker Mower to maintain his customers' yards. Beard, a 20-year veteran with the Alabama National Guard, has been doing this double-duty since 2000 when his unit in Montgomery went to a four-day week.

"With Mondays off and a total of 12 four-day weekends, I needed something to do," says Beard. "So I purchased a Snapper zero-turn mower, sent out a few flyers and started to mow. My wife thought it was just a passing fad. Six years later I'm still mowing and still enjoying it. With only 12 customers, I'm not getting rich, but I bring in enough revenue to go on vacations at the shore and support my main hobby, riding my Harley-Davidson."

Beard calls his mowing revenue "mad money," but for his customers, the service is anything but mad. Instead of spending their weekends mowing and otherwise maintaining their yards, they just write a check and let Beard do the rest.

"I purchased a 42-inch GHS Walker Mower my second year in business," Beard recalls. "My mowing friends told me that was the machine I needed, and they were right. It's maneuverable and does a great job of bagging grass clippings and leaves. Not long after I got the mower, I pulled up to a property to mow and a neighbor, a husband and wife team, was push mowing with two mowers. I finished three lawns and loaded my Walker back on the trailer




In five years, Bobby Beard has put 2,000 hours on his Walker Mower.

before they were finished. The next day, I received a call to do their yard, too."

CLOSE PROXIMITY

This contractor's routine is fairly straightforward. He goes off to

and country



work at 7 a.m. and returns home at 4 p.m. (now back on a five-day work week). Then, from 4:30 until dark he mows lawns with a helper who trims, edges and blows. He rarely, if ever, works Saturdays, and barring rain, it takes him only a couple of evenings to finish his entire route.

Beard says one of the secrets to his success is having his customers in close proximity to each other, and to his home. It takes him only a couple of minutes to get to their properties, and once there, he can mow several yards without loading and unloading his machine. "That means a lot," says Beard. "I would rather give customers a \$10 break per mow if there are several other yards to maintain in the area rather than having to load, unload and drive several miles to maintain a single yard or two at full price."

What is full price? Beard says it varies, but on average he wants to make \$1 per minute. "Time is money," he adds, "and if I can be efficient in getting to a property and mowing it, then that's more money I can bring home."

His Walker, he says, has helped him in several ways. In addition to being reliable and maneuverable, it bags the Bermuda grass without clogging. He simply dumps the clippings or leaves them in 65-gallon bags (which he gets from his Walker dealer) and deposits them on the curb. The city picks up the debris twice a week.

WET 'N WILD

Shortly after buying his Walker Mower, Beard joined forces with another part-timer to mow a total of 35 yards. His partner's Walker took a bit of a spill one day into a swimming pool. As Beard tells it, his partner was mowing near the pool when one of the drive wheels got extra traction on the cement walk and spun the machine around and into the water. It was submerged for two hours before they could get a tow truck to pull it out.

"Believe it or not," says Beard, "we replaced the spark plugs and the mower started right up. Of course, we took it to the dealer for a little preventive maintenance, but it only cost us a hundred bucks to get it rolling again, not counting the tow-truck fee."

Beard doesn't work with his partner anymore—but not because of the water episode. Some of the accounts were every-other-week mows and several required long windshield time to maintain. So he and his partner split up the accounts with Beard taking 12 weekly mow accounts that are virtually out his back door.

"Around here we can start mowing in February, and then mow twice a month in March and April," Beard relates. "From May to September it's every week, and then I back off to twice a month for October and November."

If it's a warm month of December, I'm likely to get a call to spruce up a property right before the holidays."

In five years, he has put 2,000 hours on his Walker and has no immediate plans to replace it. And he has no immediate plans to retire, from either the Guard or from mowing.

"I was going to stop mowing when I turned 50," he adds. "That would have been this March. But then I got to thinking about what I would do if I didn't mow." When asked what he would do if his Guard unit was called up to go to Iraq, Beard just shrugs his shoulders and says, "I would have to give up my accounts and hopefully pick them back up when I returned."

When it comes to serving his country and his customers, his country comes first. But he gets no arguments from his customers who appreciate the service they get while he's doing double-duty. **WT**



Mowing friends told Beard that he needed a Walker Mower to collect clippings and leaves, among other applications.

Beard has been a member of the Alabama National Guard for 20 years.



31 years

in business, and still learning and growing

The owner of Mac's Landscaping in Stoneham, Massachusetts, has been in business more than 30 years, yet he is still a student of the industry. Gerry McCarthy observes trends, stays in touch with new technology, and networks with friends and associates both inside and outside the green industry. His reward is a \$1 million-

plus, full-service landscape management company that employs 15 people during the busy season and nine all year long.

ENTREPRENEURIAL BUG

Walker Talk visited Mac's Landscaping in October. After getting his crews out the door on a bright fall morning, the affable owner reminisced a bit about his company.

"I'm probably like a lot of people in this business," McCarthy relates. "I went to school for

one thing but ended up doing something else for a living. Actually, I was studying to be a civil engineer and worked part time during the summer for a local landscape company. When the owner offered me a full-time job in 1975, I decided instead to take the big step and start my own company."

At first, McCarthy worked out of his home, maintaining primarily small residential accounts. A few years after getting married in 1978, he purchased a gas station and transformed it into a combination garden center and headquarters facility for his maintenance operation. He still works out of the same location.

"There were two turning points in my career," says McCarthy. "The first one was starting the garden center. It was something I always wanted to do, and we had several very good years in the business, until Home Depot and other large retailers came on the scene. I also learned the hard way that garden centers in this part of the country have only four good



Gerry with maintenance crew members Jay Shannon (left) and son Shawn.

selling months: April, May, June and December.”

McCarthy laughs and says, “Our second turning point was closing the garden center doors. We had some pretty lean years toward the end of our nine-year run, and I decided it was time to concentrate more on our landscaping operation.”

As part of a new focus, McCarthy joined the Associated Landscape Contractors of America in 1994 (now PLANET, the Professional Landcare Network) and put his nose to the proverbial grindstone. He began to soak up as much knowledge as he could about operating a successful full-service landscape company, and proceeded to develop efficiencies and systems to help him become more profitable.

His business responded as the renewed focus inspired a decade of slow, controlled growth. Today, Mac’s Landscaping generates 65 percent of its revenue from installing landscape and hardscape elements. Mowing and other maintenance work accounts for 30 percent of its yearly revenue, and removing snow brings in another 5 percent. The company has 75 maintenance customers, most of which are full-service accounts with spring and fall cleanup, trimming, pruning and mowing as part of the service offering they receive. Those who pay for the year’s service in advance receive a 5 percent discount – an incentive that helps cash flow.

Like most successful landscapers and mowing contractors, this owner lets his work do the talking for him. He puts a small company sign at the site of installation projects and uses enclosed trailers as traveling billboards for his company’s work. He also keeps an ear to the ground for any tool that will enhance his operation.

“Seven years ago, I started to

see more Walker Mowers on our competition’s trailers,” McCarthy recalls. “At the time, I thought the machine’s maneuverability would damage the turf. After observing them for a couple of years and talking with other contractors, I purchased one four years ago. Now, my maintenance crew operates two GHS Walker Mowers equipped with the high-lift system.”

McCarthy says he just can’t say enough about these machines. “Here in the Boston area, we have to catch grass clippings, and I don’t believe there’s a better grass-catching mower on the market than a Walker,” McCarthy says. “Then, after purchasing our first high-lift mower, we were able to eliminate one person from our crew. Before then, we used to dump clippings and leaves on a tarp and then muscle them onto our truck. That took two people and a lot of energy. Now, the Walker Mower operator simply backs up to the truck and automatically raises and dumps the hopper. Pretty slick, I would say. That third person, now gone, represented our profit.”

PLUGGED IN

When asked what he attributes his success to, the Mac’s Landscaping owner credits his people, his



Mac’s Landscaping’s Walker Mowers are efficient and they enhance the clean, manicured look with pronounced stripes.

equipment and his suppliers. Then, he just shrugs his shoulders and says, “I think more than anything else, successful owners in any business must have a passion for what they do. I enjoy selling and I enjoy people.”

That’s an understatement. At dinner, he introduced the *Walker Talk* editor to at least six tables of people he knew, including one with TV landscaper personality Roger Cook. “What can I say?” says McCarthy.

“I go way back in the community.” He is also involved in that community, being an active member of the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce, among other local organizations.

Early in his career, McCarthy also joined the Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company of Massachusetts. Known as the “Ancients”, it is the third oldest chartered military organization in the world, with a mission



Gerry McCarthy says being successful is all about enjoying what you do and working as a team.



Mac's Landscaping's dealer team (left to right): Paul Spinazola, owner/president Pro Equipment Service; Amanda Marshall, parts manager; Jay Spinazola, head technician; Joe Hildreth, parts manager; Gregg Boudreau, service technician; with Gerry McCarthy, Mac's Landscaping owner.

to support and preserve historic and patriotic traditions. Since joining the fraternal group, McCarthy says he has met a lot of successful people, and just being around them has helped his career.

Among other interests, McCarthy is a member of PLANET's Board of Directors, and just last fall was given a prestigious industry leadership award by a national trade magazine.

Growing a company and staying involved is demanding and time-consuming, McCarthy admits, noting that he couldn't do

both without the help of his wife, Chris, and sons, Keith and Shawn, both of whom work full time with their father.

"Keith works with our installation crews, and next year I plan to bring him into the office to learn more about selling," McCarthy points out. "Shawn works with our landscape manage-

ment crew and I think he will make an excellent operations manager." For their part, the sons are eager to take any challenge their dad throws at them. Family members are also willing to offer positive criticism when they feel it is needed.

"At times, I think dad does too much volunteering," says older son Keith. "I think the extra work can be distracting." Wife, Chris, agrees, noting that her husband is a philanthropist at heart who is always willing to donate more time than he can really afford. Shawn tries to steer clear of the friendly dinner discussion, but admits that having their mentor around more would be helpful, especially since he and his brother look to one day grow their father's legacy.

The family patriarch takes the criticism well. "I know there is a fine line between volunteering and too much volunteering," says McCarthy, "but staying involved with your community and industry

is imperative. Sometimes, I just have to be reminded about where that line is. I'm totally proud of my family and I wouldn't be a success without them."

He also credits his company's longevity to loyal employees, one of whom has been with him for 20 years, and his suppliers, including his dealer in nearby Woburn who introduced him to his first Walker Mower. McCarthy says, "One thing you learn in this business is that you cannot give your customers exemplary service without getting the same treatment from your suppliers. Pro Equipment gives us great service, and the dealer knows that I appreciate the service. This is a team effort, all the way."

As McCarthy points out, when individuals decide to go into business, they really aren't going it alone. To be successful, they have to network, develop relationships, and, of course, continue to learn and grow along the way. **WT**

The high-lift system saves a lot of time and energy, not to mention the expense of one crew member.



BOB T's TECH talk

Time is Money

As much as we (the manufacturer) would like to think our product never breaks, we must be realistic. I don't know of any company that could make the statement "our product will never fail". Even if a manufacturer did make such a claim, and let's suppose it were true, could anyone afford the product?

Maintenance, of course, is a huge factor in field break-downs. I've said it before, and I'll keep saying it: A good maintenance (I would prefer to call it Preventive

and repair it that evening or drop it off at the dealer. (4) Run over to your truck or trailer, open that well-stocked spare parts box and grab the needed part, wrap your hand around the handle of that organized tool box and let's get-r-fixed and get back to making money.

The first two options will be the most costly. Option number 3 may be less expensive, but very tiring. The fourth option will be the least expensive and take the least amount of time, provided that you're reasonably versed in

TOOLS

- Combination Wrench Set 3/8 - 15/16
- 3/8 Drive Socket Set with Extensions
- 3/8 Drive 15/16 Socket
- 3/8 Drive Torque Wrench 10-75 ft/lb
- 1/16 - 3/8 Hex Key Set (Allen Wrenches)
- 8" Needle Nose Pliers
- 7" Slip Joint Pliers
- 7" Diagonal Cut Pliers (Side Cutter)
- 12 - 16 ounce Ball-Peen Hammer
- 1/8 - 3/8 Pin Punch Set
- 2" - 3" Putty Knife
- Utility Knife
- W-D 40 or comparable
- A 2' Rod or Broom Stick for clearing plugs
- Hydraulic Jack - 1 Ton
- Digital V-O-M (Volt Ohm Meter)
- Portable Air Compressor or Air Tank

Maintenance) program that is followed religiously is an asset, not a liability. Given the fact that you do have a solid maintenance program, things will break, and it will invariably happen in the middle of a job, and it may be a relatively insignificant part. That's what I want to deal with here - those annoying failures that can, if not prepared for, cost a bundle.

What are your options when that happens? (1) Take the equipment back to your shop for repair by your mechanic or yourself. (2) Take the equipment to your local dealer for repair. (3) Finish the day with the walk-behinds

PARTS

- Blade Set
- Blade Shear Bolts and Nuts
- U-Joint Shear Pins w/Cotter Pins
- Complete Set of Belts
- Springs
 - Steering Lever
 - FSC
 - Jackshaft Idler
- Idler Pulley
 - Ground Drive
 - Jackshaft
 - Engine
 - PTO Drive
- Ignition Key
- Wheel Bolts or Nuts
- Safety Circuit Switches
 - PTO
 - Neutral
 - Seat
- Relay
- Air Filter
- Foam Pre-Filter (if required)
- Spark Plugs

the use of those shiny tools. I don't mean to offend anyone, but if you are a bit tool-challenged, just admit it and go with options 1-3.

If you are going to handle your own minor repairs, what do you need for tools and parts? The lists on this page are the basics, plus a few items for the more advanced repair engineers (average mechanics).

The investment involved is minimal compared to the cost of lost time, wages and the possibility of a lost account. The old adage "Time is Money" aptly applies here. Where do you want to spend your time and money? **WT**

What kind of software do you use?

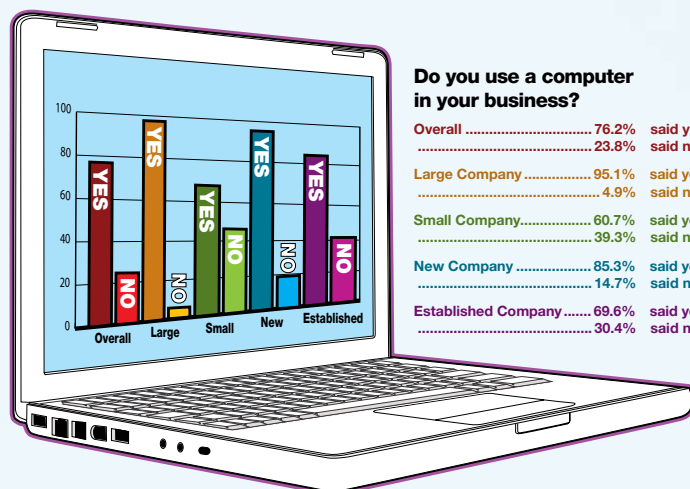
Twenty-five years ago, when Walker Mowers were first introduced to the marketplace, small computers and user-friendly applications software were just in their infancy. Only the most astute businesspeople were finding ways to incorporate this new technology into their operations. A quarter of a century later, small, powerful computers and ingenious software have impacted nearly every square inch of the business landscape. Slide rules are obsolete and ledger paper is nearly passé. Land-based phones are being replaced by small cell phones that talk, take digital photos and double as computers. They can even be used to keep their owners from getting lost.

In the Walker factory alone, computers have had a tremendous impact on product design, component and parts fabrication, along with the welding, painting and final assembly of mowers. This technology has revolutionized business all the way down the mowing chain, from the way dealers provide parts and service support, to the way commercial mowing contractors keep their customers' properties looking their best.

Still, not all businesses are created equal in size or in their knowledge of computers. Some small owner/operator mowing contractors, for example, are still keeping their books and scheduling accounts the old-fashioned way. Others are using computers to balance their check book, total monthly and year-end figures, mail out invoices, configure mowing routes, and even track maintenance schedules and hours on the job.

To find out just how computers are being used, Walker Manufacturing retained an independent research company to conduct a computer software survey. The primary objective of the survey was to find out what kind of software Walker Mower operators are using to manage specific business applications, including financial management, operations, sales and marketing, customer account management, and fleet and equipment management.

There was an important secondary objective, as well. Walker Manufacturing wanted users of its equipment to have some idea of where they reside on the technology curve compared to other Walker users from around the country. So take a moment to read the survey results and find out how your use of computers compares with other Walker users. You may be surprised to learn that if you still do business the old-fashioned way, you're not alone, or that



despite recent advances in specialized applications software for landscape and mowing contractors, some "tried and true" off-the-shelf software still gets the job done.

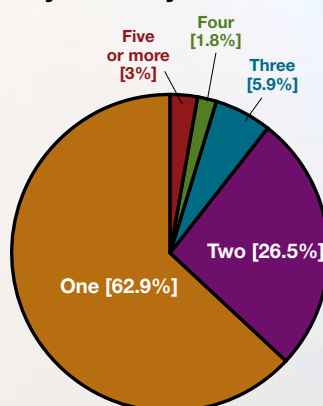
COMPUTER USAGE

If your annual sales are greater than \$100,000 or if you've been in business less than 10 years, you are more likely than your smaller, more veteran counterparts to use a computer, according to the survey results.

The survey received 231 responses from Walker users who are in the "contract mowing" business. Of those, approximately three out of four indicated that they use a computer in their businesses. Ninety-five percent of responding companies with annual sales greater than \$100,000 take advantage of computer technology compared to 60 percent of those with annual sales figure less than \$100,000. Eighty-five percent of new companies (in business 10 years or less) have a computer compared to 70 percent of established companies (in business more than 10 years).

Slightly more than 60 percent of the respondents

How many computers do you use in your business?



indicated they use only one computer in their operation compared to 26 percent who use two. Approximately 11 percent of the respondents use three or more computers. Only half (52.3 percent) of those contractors who use two or more computers indicated that their computers are networked.

Financial management, sales/marketing, customer/account management and operations management top the list of computer applications for respondents. Fewer contractors make use of computer technology for fleet and equipment management.

The top three applications software for the above business functions are as follows:

Financial management (payroll, invoicing, budgeting, accounts payable/receivables)

- Quickbooks/Quicken (63.5% of respondents)
- Excel (5.9%)
- MS Word (2.4%)
- Others with two or more mentions include Peachtree, MS Money, GroundsKeeper PRO

Operations (estimating, job costing, and routing)

- Quickbooks/Quicken (17.1% of respondents)
- Excel (10.6%)
- CLIP (3.5%)
- Others with two or more mentions include MS Word, GroundsKeeper Pro, MS Money, Q Express

Sales/marketing (creating flyers, newsletters and other promotional pieces)

- MS Word/PowerPoint/Publisher (31.2% of respondents)
- Quickbooks (3.5%)
- MS Works (2.4%)
- Others with two or more mentions include Paintshop Pro and Photoshop

Customer/Account management (maintaining customer data/service history)

- Quickbooks/Quicken (41.2% of respondents)
- Excel (8.8%)
- CLIP (4.7%)
- Others with two or more mentions include: GroundsKeeper Pro, MS Word, MS Works, MS Money, Peachtree, Q Express

OTHER RESULTS

As mentioned, only a few of the respondents indicated they used their computers to manage their equipment and fleets. In fact, less than 20 percent of them use computer software for either of these applications. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that they retain an outside company or individual to do their payroll, and slightly more than 25 percent plan to purchase computer software for their business within the next 12 months.

As a Walker user, what do these survey results tell you? For starters, if you don't use a computer in one fashion or another in your business, you're in the minority. If you use a computer, chances are you're using an off-the-shelf software (Quickbooks, Excel, etc.) to help run your business. For Walker users, who tend to be smaller operators (see sidebar), the more specialized landscape maintenance brands haven't caught on yet.

It's interesting to note, as well, that only 25 percent of respondents plan to purchase computer software within the next 12 months. If there is demand for new software and ways to use a computer, it appears to be latent at best, which implies that mowing contractors are either satisfied with the way they're currently running their businesses or are simply unaware of new software and other technology that will make their jobs easier and more productive.

If history tells us one thing, though, it's that technology is pervasive. The way all of us go to market with our products and services is constantly changing. Computers and their attendant technology will play an ever-increasing important role in years to come. **WT**

A typical Walker Mower contractor

Nearly all of the mowing contractors who responded to the survey indicated that they maintain both commercial and residential accounts. Only 31 contractors included municipal/institution accounts as part of their book of business.

According to survey results, an "average" contractor using Walker Mowers generates 31 percent of his or her sales with commercial accounts, 64 percent with residential accounts, and 5 percent with municipal/institution or other work. More than half (54.7 percent) of the respondents indicated that their total company sales last year were less than \$100,000. Another 24.7 percent generated sales between \$100,000 and \$250,000. Approximately 20 percent represented companies that grossed more than \$250,000 last year.

Although performing exterior maintenance services is their major focus, more than half of the mowing contractors also provide exterior installation and lawn care services. Typical or "average" Walker Mower contractors, however, generate nearly three-quarters of their sales revenue from exterior maintenance, and the remainder from exterior installation (12 percent), lawn care (9 percent) and other services, including leaf removal, firewood and snow removal (7 percent).

Survey respondents have been in business an average of 13.6 years. More than half of them have owned their Walker Mower(s) for five years or less. They average two full-time employees and two seasonal employees, although more than one-third of the respondents are owner/operators with one year-round employee, and 46 percent of the respondents indicated retaining one seasonal employee.



Overlooking Greasy Creek, the 1930s Norman-style farmhouse makes a cozy home and lends historical flavor to the garden setting.



Greengable Gardens blooms with history and color

The morning routine is nearly the same every day. Demetri Balint rises early to begin the day overseeing a commercial cut flower business. His wife Viesia Konar follows shortly thereafter to open the door to her flower shop. Sometime during their busy day, the couple will meet and discuss the operation of their public gardens, a 10-acre collection and display of unique plants and flowers.

This busy regimen occurs in Philomath, Oregon, in the heart of the Willamette Valley. Only a two-hour drive from Portland, Greengable Gardens has been the collaboration of

Demetri and Viesia since they purchased the property in the summer of 2002. Today, the gardens host upwards of 10,000 visitors annually, many of whom attend on-site weddings and other special events and holidays.

STORIED PAST

The history of Greengable Gardens dates back to 1930 when a local contractor purchased a large parcel of land on the outskirts of Philomath. He constructed a charming 20th century Norman-style farmhouse (now Demetri and Viesia's home) to resemble the style of home the contractor's wife remembered from her

childhood in Denmark. Electricity was generated by a dam and power plant located on Greasy Creek that now meanders through the gardens.

In 1945, logger George Shroyer and his wife Helen purchased the property. While her husband built a considerable fortune in the logging business, Helen followed her passion for gardening by collecting thousands of plant species.

Recounting the gardens' history, Demetri compares his wife's enthusiasm for flowers and plants to that of Helen's. George would come home for lunch and there would be a hot meal waiting from him, but no Helen. After several days of this, the logger's curiosity got the best of him. One day, he decided to come home for lunch a bit earlier than usual, through a back entrance. Low and behold, he bumped into Helen on her way out to the gardens. That was her passion, and it truly is Viesia's, as well.

Both Demetri and Viesia graduated from Oregon State University with degrees from the School of Agriculture. Demetri then spent 20 years as an agronomist, selling fertilizer and chemicals to area farmers. During that time, he also



It takes Demetri Balint two to three hours to mow the gardens. He mows every Thursday to prep the grounds for weekend visitors.

developed a hobby of growing and selling cut flowers. Viesia became a professional florist and owner of a flower shop in nearby Corvallis. The two met in 2000. Two years later they purchased 30 acres of the Shroyer estate, including the gardens.

"We were living comfortably at the time and didn't need to take on a new mortgage and start a new life," Demetri recalls. "Yet the gardens were spectacular, and continuing on with Helen's legacy seemed to fit in perfectly with our penchant for nature and for growing plants."

Over the last few years, the gardens have taken on the new owners' personalities. There is a new flower shop for Viesia and new greenhouses to accommodate Demetri's





The commercial cut flower farm grows 3 million tulips and daffodils yearly.

cut flower business (no longer a hobby). The display gardens have been expanded, too. Visitors can tour the gardens and cut flower commercial farm year-round, take flower arranging classes, and attend any of several festivals and special events held each year. They can also arrange to host their own private parties and gatherings.

LIVING A DREAM

"When you truly enjoy what you're doing, it never seems like work," says Demetri, noting that there is a lot of enjoyment to go around at Greengable Gardens. In his cut flower operation, he grows 3 million tulips and daffodils for shipment to retailers across the country. During the busy season, he employs up to 30 individuals who help with planting and growing bulbs and harvesting, packaging and sending off cut flowers.

Viesia spends her time running the flower shop and tending to the gardens. "I think the biggest challenge in the garden is weeding," she says with a



smile. "Don't get me wrong. I enjoy the gardens, but the weeding and pruning can become overwhelming at times."

She adds quickly, "Demetri helps, of course, and he is responsible for keeping the lawn area mowed and trimmed for guests."

She looks at her husband and says, "Tell the gentleman about how the

gardens were maintained before we arrived." He nods and then relates how the previous owners mowed the two to three acres of turf with a 20-inch walk-behind mower. "It took them up to 18 hours to mow the gardens. We cut the time more than in half with a

Kubota mower, but it was difficult getting the large machine up the small paths and around the trees. Furthermore, we bag all the clippings, and the Kubota just wasn't that well-suited for the task. Two years ago, I saw a

Walker Mower at a trade show and thought it would be ideal for our operation. It was small and maneuverable and it had a great grass-handling system."

Demetri purchased a 26-hp Walker Mower equipped with a 48-inch GHS deck. He added a wood chipper attachment to his order to help dispatch a constant onslaught of twigs and branches.

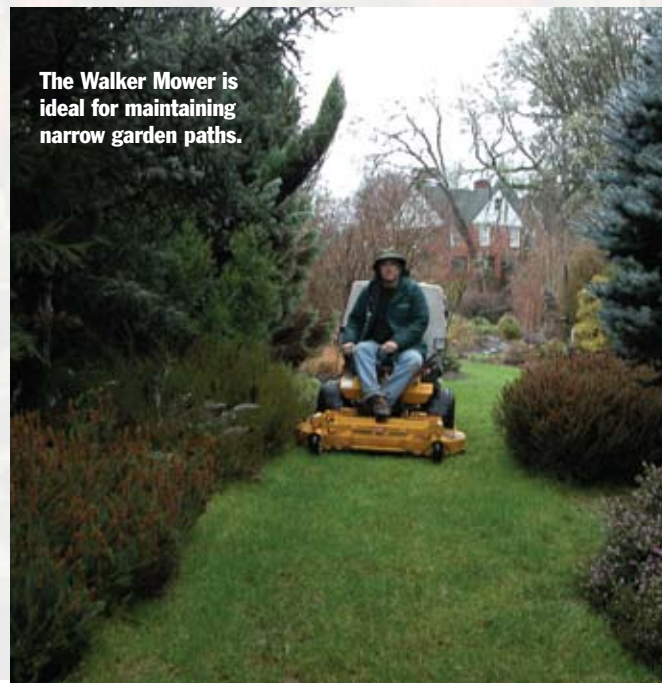
"We used to collect and burn the branches," he explains. "Now, we run 80 percent of them through the Walker chipper and spread the chips for mulch. We can take the chipper virtually any place in the gardens and two baskets in the hopper allow us to easily spread the chips."

As for the mower, he says it has made his life easy and less complex. What took the previous owner 18 hours and Demetri five hours to mow with his Kubota, now takes him two to three hours with his Walker. Clippings are dumped in a nearby compost pile, again for use in the gardens.

This is the gardens' second summer with the Walker. After two full seasons, the mower has logged 200 hours, mowing once a week during the growing season and once a month during the short winters.

"We usually mow on Thursdays to make sure the grounds are in perfect shape for weekend visitors and wedding parties," Demetri explains. "People like to see the nice patterned look that the Walker leaves behind. There's something about the vacuum action of the deck that lifts the grass blades and leaves the turf looking neat and clean."

Being an agronomist and being around farmers virtually his entire adult life, he says he also appreciates the Walker Mower quality. "The only problems I have had were self-inflicted. I hit a tree stump only after 20 hours of operation and bent the deck



The Walker Mower is ideal for maintaining narrow garden paths.

and destroyed a gear box. I've also knocked down a few irrigation pipes with the hopper. I had to get used to the way the hopper swings around when I make a sharp turn."

But the operator is very comfortable with his machine now, and looks forward to his time mowing the gardens. In fact, he and Viesia look forward to all the chores as they grow their growing business. Weddings and tours pay for the upkeep and expansion of the gardens, the flower



Viesia and Demetri share a penchant for nature and growing plants.

shop business is blooming, and the cut flower operation is continually expanding.

"When I first started with cut flowers, I sold them from a small flower stand," Demetri remembers. "Now we grow 16 acres of tulips. Our cut flower business is small compared to larger factory farms, but we are very busy. One of our goals is to continue to grow all three operations to be able to offer employees more benefits. We also want to continue the legacy of the property's previous owners and gradually add more display gardens and unique flowers for everyone to enjoy."

As he points out, the 30 acres they purchased four years ago could have been subdivided into two-acre parcels. Instead, they're preserving the past while building for the future. **WT**

Greengable Gardens is open for viewing year-round, daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. For a closer look at the beautiful gardens and a calendar of upcoming events, please visit www.greengable.com.



Demetri says the Walker chipper is a handy attachment that allows him to chip 80% of the gardens' branches. The hopper baskets allow him to easily spread the chips as mulch.



WALKER CHAMPION THREE-PEATS

Chris Ulrich of Sunrise Property Maintenance in Bristol, Georgia, again drove away with the title "Top Walker Driver" at the precision obstacle course competition held in Louisville, Kentucky, on October 7, 2006; he was also the winner of the 2002 and 2004 events. Ulrich's time of 40.49 bested Andy Toews of Bowerville, Georgia, in second place at 41.75, and Bryan Stoltzfus of Millersburg, Ohio, with 42.16. For the top finishers, Ulrich won a trip to Colorado, while Toews and Stoltzfus received a cash prize of \$500 and \$250, respectively.



From left: Bob Walker, Chris Ulrich, Andy Toews and Bryan Stoltzfus

Even with the increased competition from Europe and in a world championship setting with a crowd of several hundred watching the finals, Chris was cool, fast, smooth and steady as he guided the Walker through the course. He had waited until late on the previous day to make the qualifying run and laid down the best run of the day by a several-second margin, so the final run was a repeat performance on a more challenging course.

After winning, and being asked to make a comment to the crowd, the soft-spoken Ulrich responded with only two words of advice to the other participants: "Keep practicing." His words were not spoken in a boastful, arrogant style but from a quiet, shy young man who enjoys the competition.

Almost 150 participants from North America and Europe (38 from Europe) took part in the qualifying round on October 6 that trimmed down to a field of 75 for the semi-finals on October 7. Then the top 10 operators, eight Americans and two Canadians, ran the finals course on the 7th. The highest European finish was 17th; Mr. Koni Sigg of Rickenbach, Switzerland, who was the Swiss national champion after three competitions held within Switzerland, earned that distinction.

"There is real energy and excitement that is created in an event like this," explains Walker President Bob Walker. "Our customers from overseas have now seen what this is all about, and as a result, I would say this event will only get better in years to come."

Walker is announcing that the next world competition is to be held at the factory in conjunction with Family Reunion II (See "Family Reunion II Date Set" on this page).

FAMILY REUNION II DATE SET

Plans are now underway for the Walker Mowers Family Reunion II. Scheduled for Friday and Saturday, August 1 and 2, 2008, in Fort Collins, end-users, dealers, distributors, suppliers, and anyone who has ever had anything to do with Walker from around the world are invited to celebrate this weekend as we manufacture the 100,000th Walker Mower.

Participants can expect a fun-filled two days with something for family members of all ages, including the Walker World Driving Championship, factory tours, supplier booths and great entertainment. There will be giveaways of all kinds throughout the two days, including some Walker Mowers.

Mark your calendars now and plan to attend this celebration!



AUTOMATIC MATERIAL STORAGE SYSTEM INSTALLED AT WALKER FACTORY

An Amada Automatic Material Storage (AMS) system has been installed at the Walker factory to increase parts-making capacity. The system feeds blank 5 x 10-foot sheet metal to two Amada laser cutting machines and retrieves and stacks sheets after the cutting operation is finished. Automated operation provides unattended "lights out" nighttime operation, increasing production capacity from 3,500 to over 5,000 parts per day with the typical mix of large and small parts used to produce Walker Mowers.

FREE OVERSIZE WALKER GRAPHICS AVAILABLE

Do you have a place where you would like to display a Walker Mower graphic? What if you could have them at no charge? The new Walker Oversize Graphics program will do just that. Ideal for enclosed trailers, large walls and smooth surfaces of any kind, these large graphics will help show off your company, or just your enthusiasm for being a Walker owner.



Measuring 48" x 35", the full-color graphics apply easily and will brighten up any trailer, business



location or garage wall. They can be ordered through your local dealer, and the cost will be reimbursed when your dealer submits a photo to Walker's advertising co-op program showing the images in use.

For all available images and more details, check out Walker's website at www.walkermowers.com.

MODEL MB WITH MECHANICAL BLADE CLUTCH

The 2007 Model MB changed to a mechanical lever-actuated PTO blade clutch, replacing the electric clutch used on earlier units. The new configuration makes cutting blade engagement smoother, extending the life of drive belts and shear pins by reducing shock loads on the drive train experienced with "on-off"

action of the electric clutch. Other design changes prompted by the new clutch include mounting the clutch on the front of the engine, shifting the engine to the rear, shortening the PTO drive shaft and using a new engine muffler design. Also, the fuel tank is now mounted on the left side of the frame to accommodate the clutch lever.

GRAMMER SUSPENSION SEAT

A new Grammer suspension seat is being offered as an option on Model MC, MT23 and MT26, and as standard equipment on all models with water-cooled engines. This seat gives the ultimate in quality and a comfortable ride, including full-suspension action with dampening, all ergonomic adjustments, including lumbar sup-



port, easy adjustment for operator weight (100-375 lbs [45-170 kg]), and adjustable, foldable armrests.

Grammer seats are well-known and proven in use on high-end agricultural, industrial and turf equipment applications and will nicely fit the requirement for high-quality

seating on the Walker Mower. Order Kit #6103-24 to upgrade earlier units (does not fit the Model MS).

POWER, PERFORMANCE, STANDARD FEATURES INCREASED FOR 2007

For 2007, the Model MC has been upgraded from an 18- to 20-hp Kohler Command engine (same as previously used in MT), and the large 10.5-inch blower and 9.5-bushel catcher are included as standard equipment with the GHS model. The 6.7-bushel catcher, originally standard on the MC, is now a factory option.

A corresponding power increase was made for Model MT, increas-

ing from a 20- to 23-hp Kohler Command engine. Also, the 9.5-bushel catcher is standard, and the 7-bushel catcher is a factory option on all Model MTGHS and MDGHS units.

All models with water-cooled engines (MTL25, MTL31, MD) offer upgraded operator seating by installing a high-quality, fully adjustable Grammer suspension seat as standard equipment. Walker believes this seat is more suitable for these high-end models.

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2007 Beautiful Places Calendar Available



WIN \$1,000!!

Two \$500 runners-up also awarded

Walker Manufacturing Company's employees voted Kevin Kropf of High Mesa Landscape Maintenance in Montrose, Colorado, as this year's winner of \$1,000 for the 2007 Beautiful Places Calendar. Chris Sievers of North Nowra, NSW, Australia (see February), and Stuart Irons of Levin, New Zealand (see January), were chosen to receive \$500 each as the two runners-up in this year's contest.

Kevin Kropf is winner of this year's
\$1,000 prize



January \$500 winner



February \$500 winner



Enter now
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