

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS COME

Family mows together, grows together

- Train your customers to pay on time
- Prestigious property inspires contractor, too
- Maine contractor does “whatever it takes”
- It’s all about “passion” for Massachusetts teens



WALKER TALK

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The Benefits of an Independent Company



An intriguing question is: "How does Walker compete in an industry dominated by large corporations, as a David among Goliaths?" Part of the answer comes from being an independent company. Being independent allows us to make decisions that are best for our product and our customers, unencumbered by layers of corporate management urging compromise. At Walker we answer to no parent corporation. Walker faces none of the "quarterly earning pressure" of publicly traded corporations where shareholders demand profit each quarter, which virtually erases the possibility of long-term thinking.

What are the benefits of independence? First of all, our product will stay ahead and continue to advance and improve very quickly. We are able to accomplish in days what would take weeks and months in corporate structure. Our design and engineering team has the freedom to explore new ideas, be inventive and to make sure the best ideas are quickly brought into today's Walker Mower. Direct input from customers quickly feeds into the improvement process. There is no corporate bureaucracy to slow down progress.

Another benefit is that we are able to stay with the sound engineering principles with which our product originated, rather than chase the latest hot trend of a corporate marketing department. That determination has kept us focused on producing the "front-cut" style mower while much of the industry has chased the "mid-mount" style. There are sound design principles that were good 40 years ago when the "front-cut" zero-turn mower design first emerged, and they still offer a performance advantage today for many mowing applications.

Best of all, an independent company is better positioned to do right by customers; to treat our customers like we would like to be treated. While it is not impossible for the large corporation to treat customers right (there are many examples of good customer service by the corporation), it is harder for them to put good service into practice with layers of management several steps removed from delivering customer service. Walker is able to keep our promises and commitments to customers without compromise from corporate "higher-ups".

The offers have come across the years for Walker to merge into one of the large corporations "so we can overcome our limitations". We have always said "no" and we plan to continue saying "no" because we live and breathe the benefits of an independent company. **WT**

Bob Walker
President

FAMILY MOWS TOGETHER, GROWS TOGETHER

It's a picture perfect Colorado morning in Grand Junction. The blue sky and distant mountains provide the ideal backdrop for four Walker Mowers and a John Deere wide-area mower making their way across the green expanse.

The scene is a county park, one that Grand Mesa Landscape Maintenance has been mowing for two years. With 28 acres of turf that require mowing twice a week, the park is no "walk in the park." Add this project to 73 other commercial and residential properties, and it's easy to see why company owners Deb and Rick Wieker find little time to vacation during the long growing season.

The couple started mowing lawns in 1989 and today offers a maintenance regimen for customers that includes one or two aerations a year, five fertilizer applications, weekly mowing

and trimming, pruning and irrigation maintenance.

"Because we receive only seven inches of rain here annually, every property we maintain is irrigated," says Rick. "We start irrigation systems in late-March to mid-April and close them down in mid-October to early-November. In between, I'd guess we mow somewhere around 70 acres of turf a week—enough to keep us out of trouble. A few of the commercial accounts also have snow removal as part of their yearly contract."

The Wickers have a busy schedule, each spending upwards of 60 to 70 hours a week providing maintenance services. Rick does most of the pruning and trimming, and also maintains the equipment. Deb runs the mowing crews, does the billing and handles all the other financial chores. In addition to the lawn care business, Rick also

works part-time for FedEx.

The Wickers' business is going strong, but it wasn't always that way. In 1989 Rick had a full-time job and Deb was going to school to be a nurse, while also working full-time as the program director at a local television station. Since Grand Junction's economy had gone through a boom-bust cycle, Rick wanted to do something that provided a degree of security. With two young daughters, 2-year-old Jessica and 6-year-old Dawn, Deb wanted to be a stay-at-home mom. The answer: Buy a mower.

So the Wickers did. They started mowing lawns with a used 48-inch Exmark mid-size walk-behind and a used Craftsman 21-inch walk-behind inherited from Deb's dad. They maintained 10 to 15 properties in their first year. Deb obtained the work by walking many miles with "little ones"

Working together as a family, Jessica (shown here) and Dawn have developed a close relationship with their parents, along with a strong work ethic.



in tow, passing out flyers to prospects and asking for their business. Later that year, they replaced their Craftsman with a Honda 22-inch walk-behind. A couple of years later they added a John Deere 38-inch mid-size walk-behind mower for good measure, along with the first of many county parks.

The business grew gradually, with both Deb and Rick doing double time taking care of their growing family and working other jobs to keep money coming in. "It was tough going," remembers Deb. "Many times, we held our breath, hoping that a payment going to the bank cleared before outgoing checks were cashed. Yes, we work hard today, but it's an earned luxury not to worry about how much money we have in our checking account. We never believed in borrowing money to buy equipment, which means we never had a lot of money in the bank."

TURNING POINT

In 1996 Rick and Deb landed a 7-acre county park. They suddenly needed a mower that would handle a bigger job and still be useful as a detail mower on residential properties. "Rick had been

talking for a long time about a Walker Mower," Deb relates. "We purchased a 1994, 20-hp GHS from our local dealer, Delta Implement, along with a used 42-deck and new 54-inch deck. The total bill came to \$8,400. That was a lot of money for us back then, but it was the right move."

With two decks, the purchase allowed the Wiekers to maintain large and small properties. Furthermore, they

"We've even enlarged some of our customers' gates to get the Walker Mowers into the back yards."

were riding instead of walking for the first time in their business. The mower brought along other efficiencies, too.

"The GHS model was perfect for our residential properties," Rick explains. "The mower was maneuverable and left a nice cut, and the hopper could hold a lot more grass than those on the small walk-behind mowers. We've even enlarged some of our customers' gates

to get the Walker Mowers into the back yards. Truthfully, we wouldn't be mowing today without the Walkers."

Since 1996 Grand Mesa Landscape Maintenance has purchased five new Walker Mowers and four pre-owned Walkers. They've added a Walker Mower to their equipment inventory approximately every two years, trading one off when it reaches or nears the 2,500-hour mark. Today, four Walkers, including three GHS models, are equipped with 42-, 48-, 54- and 62-inch decks. Deb says she prefers the 26-hp models because of their fuel economy.

Grand Mesa was first in the area to purchase factory headlights for their Walker, and the company also owns a snow blade with implement attachment and one of the first Perfaerators sold in the Valley. Last year, Delta Implement delivered a 70-inch John Deere rider to help with maintaining the large county park. "We've mowed the park with two Walkers," Deb adds, "but the ground can be a bit rough in spots, and the Deere is faster." Says Rick, "We swear by the Walkers, but every machine has its place."

GROWING AS A FAMILY

After 18 years in the business, Rick and Deb have discovered ways to make life easier and the business more profitable. "This is not easy work," Deb emphasizes. "Six years ago, we had a custom trailer made to hold our four Walkers and a space to dump clippings. We simply pull up to the landfill and hydraulically dump the clippings. It's very easy to operate. Then, in late 2005, I compressed two discs in my neck just lifting the trailer tailgate. We have since added a tailgate-assist device."

The Walker Mowers have enhanced profitability—so has grouping property areas together. The Wiekers are also vigilant about maintaining equipment and leveraging the dynamics of running a family business.

Unlike many companies that have grown by adding employees, Grand Mesa has grown as a family. Jessica



Deb does most of the detail mowing and says she has yet to operate the Deere.



A custom-made trailer holds grass clippings and four Walker Mowers.

and Dawn were literally raised around the Walkers, first accompanying their parents to job sites in the early days, and then, after the purchase of the first Walker, jumping on the mowers to help them out after school, on the weekends and during the summers. Both have separate careers now, but they still help out when needed and have fond memories of working with their parents.

"It's hard to explain," says Dawn, who teaches Spanish at a charter school. "When you spend so much time working with your parents, you develop a special relationship with them. You really get to know them. I think that is something most children now lack." Jessica adds, "They get to know us, too. We know what everyone else is thinking, almost to the point of reading each other's minds."

Both daughters have also developed a strong work ethic, and they have some skills that others could only imagine. Jessica handles a Walker like it's second nature, and Dawn can back up a trailer almost blindfolded. "I worked for an outfitter for a couple of years," she recalls. "The first time my boss asked me to back up a trailer, he was skeptical. When I easily maneuvered it, he couldn't believe his eyes."

Hearing the discussion, Deb just



Mowing family:
Row 1 (l to r) Dawn Wieker, Ryan Dutch;
Row 2 (l to r) Jessica Wieker, Deb Wieker;
Row 3 (l to r) Joshua Pritchett, Rick Wieker

smiles, adding, "The main reason we started the business was to keep our children out of day care. We wanted to raise them as a family and spend as much time as we could around them. It wasn't easy. As they were growing up and getting involved in school activities, we found ourselves taking time off from work during the day to attend an event. Then, later in the evening, we would mow the parks with headlights on to see where we were going. But I would never trade the experience for anything."

The couple has reaped other side benefits. Both of their daughters' boy-

friends have been employed by Grand Mesa. Jessica's fiancé, Joshua, mows with them in between working a split shift for FedEx. Dawn's boyfriend, Ryan, was an employee until he recently took a job with Outward Bound.

Things are changing, Rick and Deb admit. "We've all enjoyed the business, but maybe it's time to back off a bit and stop putting in those long hours," says Deb. Rick notes that he wouldn't mind a four-day week, either, but right now it's full speed ahead. The children have grown up, but the business has grown, too. There are still plenty of lawns that need mowing. **WT**



Avoid Collection Woes

A strategy for dealing with late-paying customers

With a business to run and bills to pay, no one has the time to send out multiple invoices or otherwise communicate with late-paying customers. In the same breath, few owners can afford to simply “give away” services.

Green industry consultant Jeffrey Scott also co-owns a landscaping company in Connecticut. He has experienced plenty of late-payers over the years. Scott has two-fisted advice for owners in this predicament: 1) Try to avoid the dilemma by training customers to pay on time, and 2) Be systematic about collecting on overdue bills.

TRAIN YOUR CUSTOMERS TO PAY

Scott describes four customer types: the happy pay-on-time customers, the unhappy late-payers, customers in trouble and deadbeats. Of the four, only the last two will cause problems.

You can't do much about customers in trouble, other than stand in line with other bill collectors or ease their debt burden by allowing them to pay in smaller installments. Forget the last category, deadbeats, notes Scott. “Some people are just trouble from the very beginning.”

On the other hand, you can make unhappy customers happy again, as long as you can find out what's bothering them. In fact, their late payment is their way of sending you a signal that they are unhappy and want attention.

Having said that, however, Scott says you can train customers to pay on time. “First, set payment rules early on,” he explains. “Inform customers that you will stop working if they stop paying you. Be sure to give the message a positive spin: ‘To keep the work

flowing we just need you to keep the payments flowing on time.’ It's too easy to keep on mowing and maintaining late-payers' properties in the hope that they will eventually come through for you. In the meantime, they're getting their service for free and your profit margin is going south.

“After you set the rules, don't bend them,” Scott continues. “If customers stop paying, stop mowing, but give them a warning and a reminder of your rule: ‘As you may remember, for me to keep the work flowing you need to keep the payments flowing; I am going to have to stop work next week without payment.’ This way, your clients will actually respect you; they have jobs that require good business skills and they will respect yours.”

Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, and good customers can hit a bump in the road, Scott relates. Try to work with good customers, but continue to be vigilant about collecting payments from them. They need to stick to an agreed-upon revised payment schedule. One of the best ways to avoid the late-paying hassle is to encourage customers to pay by credit card. Setting up a credit card payment program has become easy and now only costs a couple points. This way customers are not using you as their bank when they want to buy services on credit.

WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS

Once in a while a customer or two will fail your training program. Even after the 35 years his family's business has been around, Scott says he and his brother still get burned every so often. But they're also better today at recognizing problem customers than they were a decade ago.

Scott offers a couple of tips for collecting past-due accounts. “Tacking on interest can help motivate customers, but we rarely collect the interest,” Scott emphasizes. What may be an equally effective strategy is what he terms “employing an escalation process.” First you speak in person, then you write a letter, then you stop services, then you have your controller/accountant/lawyer write a friendly, but stern, letter, and then you hand the account over to the collection agency.

You can shorten this process if you want, or mix around the order a bit, as long as you are consistent in your follow-through. “In my state you can put a mechanic's lien on your client's home, which usually motivates a client to resolve an issue,” Scott points out. “Check your state's rules regarding liens.”

The best way to deal with late-paying customers is to avoid the problem in the first place, Scott re-emphasizes. In this regard, it pays to train customers to pay on time. “Clients are like children,” Scott relates. “If you set down the rules up front and you are consistent in applying them, you will limit your problems and increase your fun.”

WT

Jeffrey Scott is co-owner of Glen Gate Pool & Property in Wilton, Connecticut. He speaks internationally on “Captivating your clients, building your brand and growing your business.” Got a marketing problem? E-mail him at jeff@jeffreyscott.biz.

Crystal Cathedral

Prestigious property inspires contractor, too

When you enter the Crystal Cathedral grounds in Garden Grove, California, the beautiful landscape setting isn't the first thing that catches your eye. The Cathedral itself, with more than 10,000 tempered silver-colored glass windows, together with a towering spire and prayer chapel, provide plenty of visual interest.

Serving as the home base for the international Crystal Cathedral Ministries founded by Dr. Robert H. Schuller, the 40-acre grounds also feature a family life center, welcoming

center, arboretum, memorial gardens and art gallery.

"The Cathedral campus is truly a work of art," says Mark Rogers, president of Rogers & Company Landscapes Inc. in nearby Orange, California. "This may be the only property in the country where you can find the work of three award-winning architects sitting side-by-side. The turf grass and other landscape elements simply provide the framework."

Rogers has been maintaining the prestigious property since 2001. Six, and sometimes seven, days a week, 52 weeks a year, his crew is on site mow-

ing, pruning, taking care of the many water features, maintaining the parking lots, and overall keeping the grounds in pristine condition. Tree care also falls under his service umbrella.

LEARNING THE ROPES

After graduating with a degree in Ornamental Horticulture from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona in 1996, Rogers spent four years learning the industry, working for large golf course and landscape maintenance companies. Looking back, he says that each experience was really a paid internship.

"Working as an Assistant Golf Course Superintendent for one of the largest golf course companies in the world at the time, I learned the technicalities of how to keep turf lush, green and healthy. Later, as a supervisor with a large landscape company, I learned that maintaining properties was as



The Rogers & Company crew mows upwards of 200,000 square feet of turf a week on Cathedral grounds.

much about operating a business as it was about operating equipment.

"From the time I was 12 and mowed my neighbors' yards, I developed an interest in the green industry and an appreciation for being my own boss," Rogers says. "From a very early age, I knew I wanted to run my own company some day."

With the support of his wife, Diana, her teaching salary and an excellent business mentor in his father, Larry, Rogers launched his business in 2000. He purchased a new 26-hp Walker with a 48-inch GHS deck and 42-inch mulching deck, a new Wright Stander, and a covey of brand new handheld equipment. He loaded the lineup into a new Wells Cargo trailer and started to look for work.

"The outfit looked great, and the business plan was solid," Rogers recalls, "but I didn't have any accounts yet." What the new owner did have, though, was an education, industry experience, and the ability to install and maintain irrigation systems, an important expertise in a water-challenged environment. He also liked to sell, and one account led to another. After a year in business, Rogers was given the opportunity to bid on maintaining the Crystal Cathedral campus.

In many ways, Rogers & Company and the Cathedral were a perfect fit. There were tons of turf to mow—upwards of 200,000 square feet a week—and the 50-year-old-property was equipped with tired irrigation systems in need of revitalization. The young company also had to operate within the parameters of the client's ever-changing landscape budget, a skill Rogers refined early on.

BASIC INGREDIENTS

Turf, water and business issues, all at one location. What more could Rogers ask for? He met the challenge head on, and immediately worked to build up the turf and initiate a program to upgrade the Cathedral's irrigation system. When the budget permitted, his crew members added color to the grounds. When



Lush green turf frames a walkway studded with inspirational Bible verses and one of many water features.

it didn't, they looked for ways to make the most of what was already on site, all the time ensuring that the expanse of turf was green and lush.

"My father was in the grocery business," Rogers relates. "He told me a secret about keeping his stores presentable: 'Keep the floors swept and clean, and a store will look great, even if everything else isn't perfect. Fail to keep the floors looking great, and a perfect store otherwise will pale in comparison.'"

"The same theory applies to almost any landscape," Rogers goes on to say. "Great trees, color, water features and other landscape elements will go unnoticed if the turf isn't well-maintained. Conversely, a well-maintained turf will complement and enhance its surroundings."

The point is well taken. Looking around the grounds, the healthy turf provides a dramatic background for the award-winning architecture, water features and statues of Job and Christ as the Good Shepherd. The turf also neatly frames walkways throughout

the grounds that are studded with marble plaques bearing short, inspirational Bible verses and the names of contributors.

Putting an exclamation point on how important turf care and maintenance is, Rogers accompanies the *Walker Talk* editor to the top of the Tower Chapel. "From this vantage, you can see where turf is starting to get stressed from lack of water," he points out. "You can't see the slight browning from ground level, but it's as plain as day here. I require my crew leader to come up here once a week to help identify areas that need more water."

Rogers looks out over the grounds. "Do you see the Italian Cypress trees that ring the parking lot?" he asks. "Dr. Schuller planted all 110 of them by hand. They used to be decorated with white lights for Christmas. For a couple of years, the lights were left in the trees all year long. When a contractor was asked to remove them, they were virtually ripped from the trees, taking the branches with them. One of our first jobs was to 'nip and tuck' the trees,



Mark Rogers with the Friday mow crew.



Pictured left to right: Mark Rogers with Walker dealer sales reps Horacio Rivera and William Leal.

tying the remaining bent branches back into shape. It worked.”

CAN-DO ATTITUDE

Rogers’ can-do attitude is what keeps his young business growing. “At the Cathedral, we have to be especially sensitive to funerals, weddings and other events that take place on a regular basis,” he notes. “You just have to work your schedule around them.”

Another challenge on the grounds is the soil. It’s all sand. “Turf and flowers can be lost in a day when one sprinkler head malfunctions,” Rogers points out. “We’re gradually updating the system, but there’s still work to be done, and

our crew has to be constantly on the lookout for problem areas.”

The can-do attitude, though, can’t be done alone. Rogers works closely with the facility manager to ensure that the grounds continue to meet the Cathedral’s high standards. Rogers & Company also relies on suppliers like Eberhard Equipment in Santa Ana to keep the crews up and running.

“Our dealer is quick to service our needs, and even has a rental fleet of four or five Walkers to help us out if one of our mowers goes down,” Rogers explains. “We also just purchased a new Walker walk-behind from the store. The unit will be ideal for mowing the slopes with our

extra 42-inch mulching deck.”

In addition to the new walk-behind and his 48-inch Walker Mower, Rogers’ three maintenance crews operate a 48-inch Scag and 48-inch Lesco mid-size mower, along with a Scag Cougar zero-turn. The Scag mid-size is great, Rogers says, but the Cougar doesn’t compare to his Walker in terms of maneuverability, cut and reliability—all of which are critical for keeping that important green framework looking its very best.

During the week, Rogers has a full-time crew working on the property. On mow day, the crew size may double or triple, depending on scheduled events at the Cathedral, which may alter the time allowed to operate the machinery. In the meantime, additional crews are out and about maintaining properties and doing installations, primarily for upscale office buildings, shopping centers and large estates.

“One rather unique service we provide is to present a 12-month budget to all our properties,” Rogers adds. “This gives property managers and other clients an opportunity to see where we think improvements can be made, and it gives us a bit of a head start working within their budgets.”

After being in business nearly seven years, Rogers hasn’t lost sight of his beginnings. In fact, his very first employee, Alfonso, still works for him. Rogers continues to appreciate and recognize the contribution all team members make to the company and his clients’ properties.

He also continues to sell his knowledge, equipment and experience, and encourages others to pursue the profession. Every year his company gives several scholarships to students in pursuit of a green industry career.

Every beginning, Rogers adds, has a starting point. “When you operate your own business, there are a lot of little beginnings that add up to a solid operation.” One great beginning was his relationship with the Crystal Cathedral, a fact that does not go unappreciated. His company works just as hard today maintaining the property as it did six years ago. **WT**

BOB T's TECH talk

The EFI Mystery Uncovered

Walker Manufacturing Company has been using Electronic Fuel Injection (EFI) engines since July 1998. We were one of the first manufacturers in the turf equipment industry to join forces with the Kohler Company to use an EFI engine in production. The intent of this article is to give some basic understanding of how the system works—and the advantages of it.

Basic fuel injection is not new. It's been used on diesel engines since 1920, and in the automotive industry since about 1955. Fuel injection with electronic control was introduced into the automotive industry in about 1967. The purpose of the EFI system is to manage the fuel and ignition systems to obtain maximum performance from the engine.

All gas engines require three basic conditions to run: 1) sufficient compression to produce power, 2) a metered amount of combustible gasoline, and 3) a mixture of air to allow the fuel to burn. The system on the Kohler engines is a port fuel injection, which means the fuel is injected into the intake manifold ahead of the intake valve. This allows precise control of the fuel/air mixture, which optimizes horsepower, torque and fuel economy, and lowers exhaust emissions.

The key components of the EFI system are: electric fuel pump; fuel injectors (one for each cylinder); a fuel pressure regulator; temperature, oxygen, speed and throttle position sensors; and an electronic control unit (ECU).

Electric Fuel Pump – Moves the fuel from the fuel tank to the engine

through the fuel hose, fuel filter and the fuel regulator.

Fuel Regulator – Maintains the fuel pressure at 39 psi and returns any excess fuel to the tank.

Injectors – At the engine, the fuel flows through a fuel rail to the injectors and into the intake manifold. The injectors meter the fuel and are controlled by the ECU.

Oil Temperature Sensor – Tells the ECU the engine operating temperature so the ECU can adjust the fuel requirements for a cold or warm engine.

Oxygen (O₂) Sensor – Located in the exhaust system and generates a voltage based upon comparing the oxygen content between the exhaust gas and ambient air. That signal is sent to the ECU.

Throttle Position Sensor (TPS) – Senses the position of the throttle plate and is located in the throttle body. The position of the throttle plate changes as the load on the engine changes. The signal it produces is sent to the ECU.

the engine. The idea is to produce the maximum amount of power and torque with the least amount of fuel consumption, which will result in lower exhaust emissions. Lower emissions are good for us and the environment.

Because the system is so efficient, the throttle response is fast. It will have very good starting in cold weather, not to mention lower maintenance. In addition, there is a built-in diagnostic system that constantly monitors the system and will alert the operator if a malfunction occurs.

Cost of the EFI system is the concern of many customers, so I've put together a chart (shown below) that will help you decide if the EFI is right for you. The chart compares the MTGHS26 (26HP-EFI) with the MTGHS (23HP-Carburated), both air-cooled engines, and will also compare the MTLGHS31 (31HP-EFI) with the MTLGHS25 (25HP-Carburated), both liquid-cooled:

	Fuel Usage	Fuel Cost/Year*	Diff/Year	Diff in Cost of Tractors
Air Cooled				
26 EFI	0.99 gal/hr	\$2,574.00		
23 Carb	1.35 gal/hr	\$3,510.00	\$936.00	\$1,145
Liquid Cooled				
31 EFI	0.98 gal/hr	\$2,548.00		
25 Carb	1.28 gal/hr	\$3,328.00	\$780.00	\$1,200
* Based on 800 hours per year and the cost of 87-octane fuel at \$3.25 per gallon.				

Electronic Control Unit (ECU) – Is basically a micro-processor that takes the information supplied from the sensors and processes it to properly and efficiently control the operation of

As you can see, the pay-off for the difference in cost of an EFI-equipped model is less than two years based on the fuel savings only. There should be no mystery now. **WT**



Rockport company has 16 Walkers

Maine contractor does “whatever it takes”

It's a hot morning in Rockport, Maine. The mowing crews anticipate the heat as they discuss the day's activity with Tom Farley. Tom is the vice president of Farley & Son Landscaping, and every Wednesday he meets with his six mowing crews.

The discussion this morning is wide-ranging. “When are the new diesel Walker Mowers coming in?” one crew leader asks. Another inquires about the type of deck adjustment on the new mowers, while another wants to know how the new machines will perform in wet grass. “They have a lot of torque,” Tom says. “So they should do very well in all conditions.”

He reminds his crew leaders to check the oil level in the hydros, but not to add any oil. “Yellow slip the

mower if it needs oil,” Tom notes. “Then leave it with a mechanic downstairs. And remember, when you drop off a machine for repairs, make sure to clean it up ahead of time. Our mechanics don't like to work on dirty, grass-filled machines.”

The meeting eventually adjourns after crews talk about special customer requests, new projects and new people. If the gathering sounds unusual, it is because Farley & Son is a bit unusual. Founded in 1974 by Tom's father, Dave, the company generates more than \$10 million in revenue annually—\$7 million in design/build and maintenance, and \$3 million from Hoboken Gardens, its nursery/garden center operation.

Having 16 Walker Mowers is rather unusual, too. The company purchased

Twice-weekly mowing keeps this baseball field in top playing shape.

its first Walker in 1995. Today, its equipment lineup includes one diesel (with three more on the way), three 26-hp models, and a boatload of 25-hp models, all equipped with 48-inch GHS decks.

“We're trying the diesels because they have more torque and longer running time than gas models,” Tom emphasizes. “We already get upwards of 2,500 hours on our gas models, but should be able to at least double that with the diesels.”

FAMILY BUSINESS

Tom joined the business full-time in the mid-1980s after receiving an Ag Engineering degree from the University of Maine. He has two

sisters who share an integral part of the business, Michelle Lemar-Heald and Gretchen Richards. Gretchen's husband, Sean, is also a supervisor for the company. Tom's mother, Carole, worked alongside Dave as the bookkeeper during the early years and also managed Hoboken Gardens until recently. Tom's wife, Lisa, is involved, too, now managing Hoboken. There are other family members, as well, which means that Farley & Son has more than one reason to grow and stay healthy.

After the meetings, the four Walker and two Toro push mower crews gather at a nearby ball diamond for a photo shoot and some mowing. Tom accompanies the group. He explains that the design/build and maintenance company has around 300 customers, with revenue split nearly evenly between design/build and maintenance. Included in the maintenance is snow removal. The company retains approximately 60 of its employees (nearly half, full-time) and an additional 20 or so part-time during the winter to operate the sizeable snow operation.

"Our business may look a bit unusual, but everything has a purpose," Tom relates. "We purchased the nursery business in 1988 to support our installation work. We built cabins up north because we had extra help here during the cold winter months. The excess labor also helped us earn the reputation of being able to complete larger design/build jobs in a shorter

time frame than most companies. The snow business allows us to keep key employees on year-round, not to mention the fact that our customers want that service."

The Farley & Son business model calls for translating design/build work into full-service maintenance accounts.

"We already get upwards of 2,500 hours on our gas models, but should be able to at least double that with the diesels."

Many of these accounts are the high-end residential type owned by vacationers who literally want everything on the exterior maintained. In a few instances, the company even responds to house alarms when owners are not present.

"We pride ourselves in delivering full service, whatever it takes," Tom emphasizes. A glance at the company's Daily Crew & Equipment list tells part of the story. Thirty-four crews specialize in everything from arbor care, masonry and carpentry to installation, earthwork and irrigation maintenance. A specialized crew can even install in-ground swimming pools if a customer so desires.

The list includes the six maintenance crews that mow upwards of 700

hours of turf a week. The four Walker crews come equipped with custom-built dump trailers that each hold and dump 30 yards of grass. Veteran mow crew supervisor Jamin Keith demonstrates how they work. He simply folds back an entire side of the trailer and actuates a motor to tip the trailer. The operation makes quick work of leaves and debris.

"We have another trailer on order for delivery this fall," adds Keith, who has been with Farley & Son for nine years. The Walker Mowers and trailers make a good mow team, he emphasizes. "The Walkers are all-around good machines. They produce great lines and they are stable on hills."

When asked what Tom meant this morning when he said that the Walker is the only rider that delivers a walk-mower cut, Keith replies, "The gearbox allows the deck blades to overlap, which means there is no strip of uncut grass between blades. The GHS also has tremendous suction which literally vacuums the turf. Our customers truly like the manicured look."

MONEY IN MAINTENANCE

Unlike some companies that claim mowing maintenance is more of a cash flow generator than profit maker, Farley & Son looks to be profitable in all its divisions. "The key in maintenance and other services is that you need to know your costs," says Tom. "Our business is a little complicated because of all the moving parts, but we have a full-time IT person on board who has developed several custom reports that help us track costs.

"We don't know precisely how profitable our mowing business is because we fold mowing into a full-service package for customers and budget it out over 12 equal payments for them," Tom continues. "Still, I can tell you how much it costs to operate our Walker Mowers. Figuring in fuel, maintenance and a reserve to purchase a new mower, our Walkers cost somewhere between \$9 and \$10 an hour to operate. That



Custom-built trailers haul and dump 30 yards of grass clippings.



Four Walker crews and two Toro crews log 700 mow hours a week.

number doesn't include labor or our general overhead. Add in those numbers and it's easy to see why some operators lose money in maintenance; they just don't know their costs."

Tom points to a couple of other reasons why there's money in maintenance. First, he empowers his employees to make decisions. His crew leaders, for example, help decide which mowers the company buys. Then, they also do most of their own scheduling, which is made easier by a host of new technologies, including work order reports, real-time GPS, and cell phones that all employees have.

"Our maintenance crews are efficient, operate the equipment they want to operate, and have taken ownership of their jobs," Tom emphasizes. "This all makes a difference. We assign Walker Mowers to operators, too, making them accountable for their operation and maintenance."

Tom glances at his cell phone (which, by the way, rings constantly) and then



Tom Farley says the key to profitability is knowing your costs.

his computer. He says categorically, "These tools have made my life easier and allow me to keep my finger on the business pulse."

And pulse there is. Crews are not the only ones working hard in the near record June heat wave. Receptionist Jessica Brewer, always smiling, juggles interviewing a new job candidate and entering company data around answering the phone. Michelle has her hands full, too, entering time cards, doing payroll and handling other human resource responsibilities. Gretchen,

who manages the maintenance division, had just left the office to visit a new account. Bethany Fields handles accounts receivables for both the landscape business and nursery division, along with customer correspondence, amongst many other duties within the office. Missing from the office today was Mike Ames, who co-manages the maintenance division with Gretchen and, until this year, managed the mow crews, but was unavailable for comments as he was reviewing a current site with a high-end commercial client.

"Right now, we're still working pretty hard because of the late spring," Tom adds. "Normally, we would be slowing down by the Fourth of July. This year, though, we lost about six weeks of cleanup time due to the late winter and have been playing catch up ever since."

Yet he takes it in stride. After 30 years, the company catchword for customers and employees alike is "Quality Matters," and Farley & Son will do "What it takes" to deliver. **WT**



Lori Miller has a story to tell you about her son, Mark. “When he was nine years old, he walked into the house one day and told me he saw a trailer down the road that he wanted us to buy for him. Well, to make a long story short, my husband, Glenn, and I purchased the trailer and gave it to Mark as a Christmas present. He wanted the

trailer to haul around our lawn mower because, even back then, mowing was his passion.”

It’s a passion that’s never waned. At the tender age of 13, Mark had another discussion with his parents. He told them that if could have a Walker Mower, he would never ask for anything again. A year later, for his birthday present, he simply wanted

Mark (left) and Mike have been mowing lawns together for three years.

“to demo a Walker Mower”. A week later, his parents agreed to allow their son, who had been mowing lawns after school and throughout the summer with long-time friend and business partner, Mike Mastrocola, to spend his savings on a new Walker Mower. He



purchased a spanking new 20-hp GHS Walker with a 48-inch deck later that summer.

For the next 2-1/2 years, Mark and Mike turned their passion into profits. Lori drove them around to accounts after work (and school) until they were old enough to get a driver's license. This past year, Mark purchased a used Dodge pick-up to trailer their Walker, two Echo backpack blowers and two Echo string trimmers. "The Dodge is only two-wheel drive," Mark



Mark wants to attend a school with a solid landscaping program.

laments. "If it were four-wheel drive, we would put a blade on it and plow snow in the winter."

As if the two friends don't have enough to do. Both are only 17 years old and have just completed their junior year of high school. During the school year, their 25 mowing accounts are as much as they can handle. Their complete customer list, however, totals 60 homeowners who have a variety of requests, from spring and summer cleanup to helping out with odd jobs around their hometown of Reading, Massachusetts.

"We have learned how to manage the cost of running a business, not to mention how to manage cash flow."

"I can't stand just standing around," says Mark, who plays football and indoor and outdoor track in his spare time. In fact, the day before the *Walker Talk* editor visited, he had just returned from football camp at Penn State. His friend, Mike, has a similar work ethic, although his plans for the future are slightly different. "Our landscaping business is the best job Mark and I could have right now," says Mike. "I eventually want to go to college and study business and Spanish."

Mark has different plans. His goal is to attend a school with a solid landscaping program, possibly intern with a couple of companies, and then continue on with his dream and start a landscape construction/maintenance company.

TEAMWORK

If there was any question about how long Mark and Mike have worked together, it was quickly dispelled when they pulled up to a job site. Mark jumps on the Walker at the first two homes and quickly dispatches the lawns. While he's mowing, Mike edges and trims, and then waits for his friend to finish before blowing the property clean. At the next stop, they switch responsibilities. Mike mows and

Mark performs the handheld duties.

The two are a little reticent about putting profit margins and revenue in print, but suffice it to say, they've learned a lot about owning and operating a business.

"The biggest thing I've learned is how to manage time and costs," Mark says. "You know, when we first started mowing, we leaned pretty heavily on my parents and never concerned ourselves too much with fuel costs, repair bills and so forth. Now we know how much it costs us to operate and how much money we have to bring in to make a decent profit."

Mike wants to major in business and Spanish.

Mike agrees, adding, "We have learned how to manage the cost of running a business, not to mention how to manage cash flow. Some customers prefer to be billed at the end of the month, while others like to receive an invoice immediately after each job."

Now that summer is here and school is out, the young entrepreneurs can mow most of their properties in two days, in part thanks to their Walker. The mower has only 370 hours on it, which means it has a lot of life left.

"I wouldn't mind having a high-lift attachment or possibly a snow blower," says Mark. Mike sees life a little differently, and says he and Mark can continue to lift tarps full of grass clippings



Mark would like a high-lift dump attachment, but his partner thinks they can still get by the old-fashioned way.

for the price of the high-lift. In the meantime, their two best supporters, Lori and Glenn, continue to be amazed by their work ethic and, yes, passion.

"They are good kids who work hard and stay out of trouble," says Lori. Their reputation to their customers is important to them. That pretty much says it all and reaffirms our decision to support them in any way we can.

"They are good kids who work hard and stay out of trouble. Their reputation to their customers is important to them."

Glenn has been very helpful along the way, and I know their dealer, Pro Equipment Service, gives them the same high level of service it gives all its customers."

But when it's all said and done, she says Mark and Mike have done it on their own and have been successful because they absolutely enjoy what they're doing. **WT**



WALKER FAMILY REUNION 2

On August 1-2, 2008, customers, suppliers, dealers, distributors and friends will converge on Fort Collins, Colorado, to help Walker celebrate the production of Walker Mower #100,000. Plans are underway for a few great days with the family. Plan now to bring your family and have a good time with us as we celebrate this momentous occasion.



- Drive the 100,000th Mower
- High-Quality Entertainment
- Collector's Edition Walker Mower
- Walker World Championship Obstacle Course
- Factory Tours
- Family Area
- Walker Timeline
- Meet Walker users and salespeople from all over the world at International Island
- Supplier Booths and Supplier Giveaway Program (including a few Walker Mowers)
- Great Food
- Sunday Morning Worship
- Many More Fun and Exciting Events

Find complete details, registration, and information on how to volunteer to help at www.walkermowers.com later this year.

GIE+EXPO SHOW

For the first time, the largest USA outdoor power equipment show (International Lawn, Garden and Power Equipment Exposition) and the national landscape contractors show (Green Industry Expo, GIE) are joining together in Louisville, Kentucky, on October 25-27, 2007. Many of the popular features from both shows, such as the outdoor equipment demonstration area and landscape contractor educational sessions, will be continued at the combined event.

Walker will be exhibiting for the 24th consecutive year at Louisville and is planning to premiere an exciting new model. Also, Walker is announcing that a World Driving Championship will not be held at the Louisville show this year; the next championship contest will be held in 2008 at the Family Reunion 2 event (see Family Reunion this page).

DISTRIBUTORS JOIN WALKER PROGRAM

Within the last 12 months, five new Walker Mower distributors have been appointed. In Illinois and Northwest Indiana, Trac Equipment in Canton, Illinois, purchased the program from longtime distributor Al Rod (ASL). Antilles Power Depot in Carolina, Puerto Rico, is covering the Caribbean Islands. There are three new distributors for Europe: Telsnig, Fuldata, Germany; Eric Hunter Ltd, Maidenhead, England; Fort s.r.l. Unipersonal, Sossano, Italy. Walker welcomes each of these companies to their distributorship family.

FIFTY YEARS AGO

FOWLER, KS – Walker Manufacturing traces its beginnings to 1957, the year Max Walker built the prototype Walker Executive Golf Car in the family farm shop. Max's background was farming and not golfing (he never played the game), but a salesman friend told him there would be a market for a gasoline-powered golf car. Max, along with Margaret, his wife, had dreamed of getting away from farming and starting a manufacturing company; the golf car became that opportunity.



It was a slow start, with just a handful of the golf cars built over the next few years using a few basic tools from the farm shop such as a hack saw, cutting torch and electric arc welder. However, Max's unique design, including a tilt-up body with a French-curved shape and a drive train powered by a Kohler engine, created market interest. Sales began to increase to the point that a 48' x 80' factory building was built in 1960-61 about 100 yards from the farm house. Approximately 1,000 golf cars were produced by 1963 when the project was sold to another company in Salina, Kansas.

To learn more about Walker Manufacturing history, there is a booklet available that's entitled, "The Story of Walker" (P/N 6895-51), DVD (P/N 6905-57), or the company timeline shown at www.walkermowers.com.

INTRODUCING NEWEST CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE



In early 2006, Bruce Tallman joined the Walker Manufacturing customer service and technical service team. A native

of Ohio with an associate degree from Nazarene Bible College in Colorado Springs, Colorado, Bruce has 26 years of work experience in industrial plant maintenance. His background in maintaining both mechanical and electric systems, and using troubleshooting skills to fix all kinds of plant machinery and equipment is proving very useful in providing service to Walker customers and dealers.

SEAT SPRING RECALL BULLETIN

Recall bulletin #07202 affecting S/N 93-13701 thru 07-90198 was issued April 2007, concerning replacement of the two springs used to activate the operator seat safety switch.

The original spring design was shown to have a tendency to break prematurely, which disables the safety system. Due to the importance of this system for safe operation and operator protection, an urgent recall has been issued by the Walker factory.

All owners of affected units are encouraged to have their machines updated free of charge by contacting their local dealer (contact the factory if there is difficulty finding your Walker Dealer).

CATCHER EXHAUST DEFLECTOR SEAL

A rubber deflector seal has been added to the 7.0/9.5 grass catcher on production units early this year. The seal solves the problem of the hinged flap on the catcher exhaust not fitting tightly on the grass catcher and allowing dust and debris to blow forward onto the operator. Kit P/N 7512-9 is a simple, inexpensive way to upgrade earlier units with the seal.



MODEL MTL RADIATOR FAN REVERSED

The mounting of the radiator fan on Model MTL25 and MTL31 has been changed in production (starting with Serial Number 07-89538). The fan has been moved to the outside of the radiator and the direction of cooling airflow is reversed, drawing air from inside the engine compartment and blowing to the outside. The "reverse" arrangement reduces engine compartment temperature for improved operation in high-ambient temperatures. No retrofit kit is available at this time for earlier units.



FOOTREST OPTION

An adjustable footrest is introduced as an option for operators with shorter legs. Fits on the frame of all 36-, 42- and 48-inch decks; order P/N 8662-10.



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Nice Night for a Walker Wedding

Luke and Kristin Reedy of New Orleans were married on November 18, 2006. Luke only had a couple of requests: get married during the slow season and have a Walker Mower on his groom cake. They are pictured with friends who are also in the lawn care business.

Right Hand Man >

Nathan Wuotila of Litchfield, Minnesota, is an aspiring young mower. He is pictured here in 2006 at six months old, but is now an eager two-year-old. His dad Duane says, "He is waiting for me when I get home and wants to ride the mower." Nathan's mom Wendy took the picture.



The Best Medicine

Mr. Glenn Gniffke of Cottonwood, Minnesota, has been battling cancer for a few years, but says his best medicines are his family and getting on his Walker Mower. Glenn, now retired, has been a long-time Walker distributor and dealer.

< Little Walker

Taggart C. Walker (no traceable relationship to Walker Mfg. owners), of Whitefish, Montana, loves to hang out on his dad's four Walker Mowers. At eight months old, his dad, Ben, (Owner of Grass Roots Lawn Service) says Taggart thinks aerating is "cool".



Delivered in Style

Walker dealers in the mid-Atlantic states have their mowers delivered in style. Owned and operated by long-time Walker distributor GHS Corporation (Denton, North Carolina), this 2006 Peterbilt gets some serious miles each week. The 26-foot box has a hydraulic "walking" floor for unloading pallets and can hold nine fully assembled Walker Mowers.



Handy Bed

Retired design professor Carl Hall has just over an acre to mow with his Model MB, but more important are the 300-plus bags of mulch and fertilizer he transports around his yard with a wooden bed he designed. He says he would be happy to discuss and share his design by contacting him at 1321 Kensington Blvd., Bowling Green, OH 43402.



A Growing Family

Coates Landscape Supply, Rexburg, Idaho (Walker Distributor for Idaho and Western Wyoming) has recently completed a 16,000-square-foot building to house its distribution business. The Coates family has been a Walker distributor since 1988.

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