

# WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS TO COME

## Commitment Equals Success in Oregon

- A Career Change at 60 in Alabama
- Colorado Contractor Just Can't Stop Growing
- The Bottom Line is Safety
- Can't Tell Customers "No" in Wyoming



VOL. **35**



# WALKER TALK

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## Not Lucky; Blessed

In 2010, it will be 30 years for Walker Manufacturing in the lawn mower business. My brother and I, our sisters, our parents and our families count it a real privilege to have lived this story from the start; what a ride it has been!



How have we done it? Most of our readers probably have already heard our story so I won't repeat it now, but I wanted to comment on the "good things" that I believe have brought us this far, along with what has given us a measure of success.

First, in 1977 we had a good product idea to design a compact zero-turn riding mower with a built-in grass collection system. That idea and continued refinement of the product have served our customers very well across all these years.

Second, there was good timing. In 1980, it was a great time to introduce a new ZTR mower to the market because all of the major outdoor power equipment manufacturers were "stuck" on steering wheel and foot pedal controls for their mowers, and it would be 10-15 years before they would offer a ZTR mower of their own.

Lastly, we were able to find good people to work with—both in the factory and outside—employees, suppliers, distributors and dealers who invested their time, talent (and for some, their treasure), and worked diligently to move the project along.

How did all these good things happen? That question reminds me of the time I saw Bob Hope, the renowned entertainer, in person at a program presented for the attendees of the International Lawn & Garden Power Equipment show in Louisville, Kentucky, in the mid-80s. After his monologue of humor, he struck a serious note, and in a moment of reflecting on his life and success, Mr. Hope summed it all up by saying, "I've been (expletive) lucky".

That explanation would not work for us. A couple of my Dad's favorite scriptures that he used to quote say it best: "The LORD has done great things for us, whereof we are glad", Psalm 126:3, and "I will lift up my eyes to the hills—where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the maker of heaven and earth", Psalm 121:1-2.

Indeed, we are blessed. **WT**

Bob Walker  
President



# Career Change at 60

**Yard Perfect's owner needed a mower that could collect clippings, be maneuverable and leave a manicured look.**

**W**hat would you do if you were six months from celebrating your 60th birthday and your boss walked into your office and said, "The company has been sold and you are not part of the sale"?

For Harry Stokes, owner of Yard Perfect Lawn Care and Landscaping, LLC in Hampton Coves, Alabama, the choice came down to pursuing one of his two favorite hobbies: finish carpentry or yard work. The latter won out because, in Stokes' words, "I've been a salesman my entire life, and I didn't want to complete one carpentry project only to try to sell another."

Stokes, a former vice president of operations for an electronic component

manufacturers' rep firm, remembers the day of his early retirement all too well. "My boss for 15 years and friend for 30 just walked into my office and said I was done; no vacation pay, no severance pay. I had a mortgage and other financial obligations, but didn't want to jump through all the 'Mickey Mouse' hoops recruiters make you jump through today. When asked what my long-range plans were at an interview, I would have been tempted to say, 'To still be living in 10 years!' So I decided to become an independent contractor and take care of my neighbors' yards with the same dedication and attention I give my own."

For the past six years, that's exactly what Stokes has been doing. It wasn't

easy going, though. Having been laid-off right after the first of the year, it was not the best time for him to start a lawn mowing business. Initially, Stokes pressure-washed homes, decks and drives—all the time promoting his new lawn care business on the side of his truck. He was also scrambling to equip his new business, purchasing a trailer, Toro zero-turn mower and Stihl handheld equipment to complement a used Dodge 1500 pickup.

"I later purchased a Toro mid-size walk-behind mower with Jungle Wheels (Jungle Jim's brand sulky) from my dealer, Hill's Outdoor Power in nearby Huntsville," Stokes recalls. "A few of my properties had small gates that I couldn't negotiate with the rider."



Harry with long-time employee Matt Lichtner.



As for starting out with a Walker, which Hill's also sells, Stokes says it was just too expensive for his startup operation. "I couldn't see spending that much money for a machine that I couldn't drive to Atlanta," he quips with a grin.

By the end of the first mowing season, Stokes realized that Atlanta wasn't that far away. Mulching the Bermuda/Fescue yards wasn't cutting it, because the results didn't line up with his company mission statement: "We treat your yard as if it were our own."

"During the summer months, you can almost hear the grass grow in north Alabama," Stokes relates. "In fact, on some properties, I would have to double or even triple-cut the grass. I needed

a mower that would collect the clippings, be maneuverable, and leave the manicured look my customers wanted, all with one pass. Since my dealer sold Walker, and nearly every reputable mowing company seemingly had a Walker on its trailer, the decision was an easy one."

#### **WILLING CUSTOMERS**

This affable southerner is testimony that it's never too late to follow a dream. Neighbors quickly flocked to Stokes' new vocation because they realized he

was true to his word—that he would make their lawns perfect—and the word spread. "One day I noticed that a lady in a Mercedes was following me to my next job," says Stokes. "When I stopped to unload my trailer, she pulled up and asked if I could make her yard look perfect. I told her I could certainly try, and she's still a customer to this day."

Getting and satisfying customers were not the biggest challenges for Stokes. No, he had to find a place to store and maintain his equipment, which he found at a nearby RV storage facility.

**"Having the right equipment for the application is critical. Buy quality equipment and quickly establish a relationship with people who can help you."**





**Handling clippings with bag and container works like a charm, but Harry says a Walker Hi-Dump would be a welcome change.**

He leases two bays and a couple of outside parking spaces, which is enough room to accommodate his growing equipment lineup that now includes two Walker Mowers. His first purchase was a 42-inch GHS model with hydraulic dump. The second one was a 48-inch deck powered by a 24-hp Kubota diesel. "I like the power and the mower's

ability to handle the heavy, wet grass," Stokes explains.

Among other initial challenges, Stokes lists three that quickly come to mind: finding and keeping employees, equipment maintenance and paperwork. He solved the first one with loyal employee Matt Lichtner, who has been working with him for five years. Hill's Outdoor Power, who Stokes says does a "bang up" job, takes care of his maintenance needs (except for blade sharpening and preventive care). For the third one, he's on his own.

Wife Barbara is a first-grade school teacher and doesn't have time to help with paperwork. "It's the life of an owner/operator," says Stokes. "This is

not easy. You work all day in the field and then spend hours at night wrestling with paperwork, getting invoices out, and so forth. I'm blessed, though—and I'm thankful for the opportunity to do this kind of work, even though it's not for the faint of heart."

### TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Looking back over his first six years in business, Stokes has a few thoughts about what he would have done differently, and what his advice would be to young start-up entrepreneurs.

"First, work out a business plan," Stokes says. "I didn't have one, so I struggled with cost issues and knowing how much to charge my customers. In fact, I'm still not totally comfortable with the business side of operating a small company." Although he's a graduate of the University of Alabama with a bachelor of science degree in business, Stokes says he had just been out of school too long to even remember some of those skills.

"Before buying mowing equipment and trailers, figure out what you want to do," Stokes goes on to say. "Having the right equipment for the application is critical. Also, buy quality equipment and quickly establish a relationship with

people who can help you." Here again, Stokes refers to his dealer as a true business partner, along with his banker, Scott Seeley, president of Bryant Bank. "You need help with equipment and help buying it," Stokes relates. "The two go hand-in-hand."

"Investigate state and local requirements for starting a business," Stokes adds. "Be legal. I have obtained all the necessary licenses to run my operation, except one. I can't seem to pass the test needed to get my chemical applicator's license. Until I do, I can't even spot spray to kill a few weeds."

"You need to continually look for efficiencies," Stokes concludes. One of the challenges Stokes overcame after purchasing his first Walker Mower was how to handle all the grass clippings. He has since devised a simple solution. Stokes slips a garbage bag over the outside of a 30-gallon plastic garbage container (the bottom of which has been cut out). He fills the container and just lifts it out of the bag. (See photo at left.)

"It's pretty slick," says Stokes, "but it can still be a lot of work. On one property last year, we collected 62 bags of clippings using this method." Prior to this, he would use a tarp to dump the clippings into his dump trailer and take it to the city landfill. One year Stokes took over 200,000 pounds, with 1,400 pounds coming out of one yard.

No wonder Stokes is caught eyeing that Walker Mower in Hill's showroom, the one with the Hi-Dump option. "This could be just the ticket for handling clippings," he exclaims. "It should nicely complement my hydraulic-dump trailer. Hmm, I better get my trailer over here and give it a try."

In the meantime, it's business as usual. Stokes jumps in his pickup and heads to another property, but not before adding a few more words of wisdom. "You know, I feel great. I enjoy what I'm doing and I'm having fun. There are worse ways to spend an early retirement." **WT**

# COMMITMENT Equals SUCCESS in Oregon

Cal Kearns was in the landscaping business for five years before he realized what it took to be a success. The owner of C&D Landscape Company in Dayton, Oregon, had to suffer through early growing pains and a bad economy before he “needed to turn his small company into a real business.”

“I decided that if I were to stay in landscaping, I had to be more professional, with uniforms and nice-looking vehicles,” Kearns recalls. “I also intuitively knew that I had to be more committed to the industry. I did so by joining and participating in our state’s landscaping association.” Kearns also started to take more educational courses to bolster his knowledge of the business side of landscaping. He even brought in a couple of business advisors.

The commitment paid off. C&D now does a robust business with three divisions: landscape installation, maintenance and Christmas Décor. Located in the Willamette Valley, right in the heart of Oregon’s wine country, the company has developed a loyal clientele comprised of vineyards, high-end residential properties, bed and breakfast hotels, restaurants and other commercial establishments.

“Our location has given us the opportunity to take advantage of the growing wine industry here,” Kearns relates. It wasn’t always this way, he quickly adds, noting that his first big property was a K-Mart store back in the mid-1980s. Before then it was tough sledding.

“I grew up on a turkey farm in Dayton and always dreamed of being a farmer,” Kearns tells. “In fact, my degree from Oregon State was in Agriculture Education. I taught for three years before eventually pursuing my dream by going to work for a farmer.”

Kearns says his dreams went up in smoke, literally, when an attempt to burn some brush with a gas accelerant backfired. Suffering second-degree burns on his face and hands, he took the accident as a sign that farming might not be for him.

Back to school Kearns went, teaching at an area high school. When the welding instructor asked him to help on an after school landscaping project, Kearns was bitten by the “green” bug. Soon he launched his own company.

“I built my trailer after school in the welding shop, and mimeographed flyers advertising a rototilling and lawn seeding service,” Kearns relates. “Shortly after becoming incorporated, I received a letter from the state indicating that I needed to get



The C&D family (L to R): Isaac (seated), Cal, Debbie and Josh.





Maintenance foreman Kathy Beyhan demonstrates how easily she handles grass clippings with the Walker GHS and the Clipper King.

a landscaping license. After taking a competency test, I received my license—and I was off and running in my new career.”

### POOR TIMING

“The late 1970s were not the best time to start a business,” says Kearns. “We were in a recession and I wasn’t doing much maintenance to improve cash flow. I struggled for a few years, and then sold all of my equipment in 1984, only to start all over again, this time with a renewed commitment.”

Kearns says the turning point was getting the new K-Mart store, followed by winning the bid to install and maintain a 25-acre sports complex, with soccer and baseball fields, in nearby McMinnville. When more homeowners started to call for maintenance services, he knew that he needed something more commercially oriented for mowing than his John Deere garden tractor. Kearns found it at an Oregon trade show.

“I saw a Walker Mower and immediately was taken by its front deck, collecting system and quality of cut,” Kearns says. “I found out later that it could also handle the wet grass we have here. One Walker Mower led to another, and today we operate nine gas-powered models with 42-inch GHS decks.

“Each of our nine maintenance crews has a Walker Mower and a 21-inch push mower,” Kearns continues. “Because of the wet conditions, we use a more aggressive tire tread on the Walkers, which means our employees are trained to be extra careful on turns.”

**The Willamette Valley vineyards have created a demand for both maintenance and enhancement services.**



Kearns has two sons who work with him in the business, Josh and Isaac. Josh is the company lead designer while Isaac heads up the maintenance division. "For handling properties with an excessive amount of clippings, we have a Clipper King trailer," says Isaac. "Area dairy farmers gladly take the clippings off our hands. For large-area mowing, one crew uses an Exmark rider. A few mid-size walk-behind mowers come in handy for more hilly areas.

"The Walker Mowers, though, are ideal for mowing our vineyard customers and high-end estates," Isaac continues. "In fact, during wine tasting

bed and breakfast hotels—the operators of which all want nicely manicured properties.

"You know, our maintenance division used to be the 'red-headed step child', but not anymore," Isaac muses. "The vineyards have created a demand for our maintenance service, and we've also added a sizeable enhancement operation."

Last year, C&D Landscape generated approximately \$3.3 million in sales, with installation and maintenance accounting for 60 percent and 38 percent of the total, respectively. The relatively new Christmas Décor

**"The late 1970s were not the best time to start a business ... I struggled for a few years, and then sold all of my equipment in 1984, only to start all over again, this time with a renewed commitment."**

season, crews mow our vineyard properties twice a week to keep them perfectly manicured."

Isaac, who is 29 years old, explains that the vineyards and estates have been great for business for better than a decade. The winery business brought with it the vineyard owners who've built beautiful estates. The vineyards have also created a vibrant tourist trade, with accompanying restaurants and beautiful

division accounted for the remainder. "Maintenance is broken down 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial," Kearns adds, noting that despite an anemic economy, it was up a "slight tick" in '09.

The company moved to a 4.5-acre site in Dayton two years ago. A new 50' x 140' shop was completed last fall. Plans call for a pot-in-pot nursery operation at the new location, along



**Cal Kearns says that if you take care of everyone, not just your biggest customers, it will come back to you.**

with a retail garden center. The latter will likely fall under the auspices of Kearns' wife, Debbie, and daughter Abby, who has a degree in interior design. Debbie is a career developer while Abby currently is on a mission in Peru. Two other siblings, Sarah and Caleb, live out of state. Even Sarah has a say in the landscaping operation; she produces the company's quarterly newsletter.

If there's a lesson to be learned after being in business 32 years, Kearns says it's finding something you love to do and committing yourself to it. He goes back to that word, "commitment."

"Commitment is more than doing quality work, having uniforms, running your business like a business and getting involved with the industry," Kearns emphasizes. "I believe that commitment also means getting involved with your community. We maintain a home for battered wives, are active members of the chamber of commerce, and support several children's charities. Our family has a real passion for children.

"No matter what business you're in, one has to maintain a perspective," Kearns adds. "For us, it's faith and family first, and then business. We have a succession plan in place. I would like to retire by age 62, and then maybe Debbie and I can go on a few more missions. I will stay involved with the company in some capacity, but as one can tell, Josh and Isaac already have a good handle on what's going on."

What's going on is that the family intends to stay committed and grow the business. One last thought from Kearns: "We've had steady, slow growth until the last year. If you take care of everyone, not just your biggest customers, it will come back to you. The smaller projects will get you through the tough times." **WT**



# 'We just can't stop growing'

**Y**our customer list includes 60 Homeowner Associations (HOAs) and 120 residential clients, and all told, you mow between 400 and 500 acres of grass a week. Not bad for being in business only 10 years. Isn't it about time you slow down?

The answer to that question is an unequivocal "NO" from Nate Caldwell and Shane McCoy, co-owners of Foothills Landscape Maintenance (FLM) in Windsor, Colorado. The long-time friends-turned-partners are all about growing, doing quality work, and giving opportunities to employees.

"Once you start growing, you can't stop," says Caldwell. "You have to be able to offer employees a chance for advancement if you expect to keep them."

The young, energetic company has plenty of room for growth and opportunity. It fields seven mow crews, three "roamer" crews for mulch and enhancement jobs, two spray crews, three sprinkler crews and two "native" mowing crews. Of the 40 employees, there are six certified landscape technicians on board and two licensed chemical applicators. The company gladly pays for educating employees through continuing education classes and seminars.

"We want to be a full-service company and take the responsibility off the shoulders of our property manager customers," Caldwell says. "You can't do this unless you have trained and educated employees. Shane and I continually remind our employees that they will be the only landscaper to visit

*But for this Colorado company, success is just as much about performing quality work and providing opportunities to employees.*



**Nate Caldwell (sitting) with (L to R) commercial account manager DJ Caldwell, partner Shane McCoy, and commercial account manager Scott Gablehouse.**



**RIGHT:** Included in FLM's Walker Mower lineup are five Super B's with 60-inch side-discharge decks for wide-area mowing.

**BOTTOM:** Shane (left) and Nate admit that inefficiencies became more pronounced as their business grew.



their properties all day. The way the properties look when they leave is their responsibility, totally.”

#### **WHATEVER IT TAKES**

The owners' story is a bit unusual. Both have degrees in fish and wildlife biology, and were working for a fish hatchery when they learned their jobs could be in jeopardy. Caldwell relates, “Shane and I were repairing a roof at the hatchery when we decided it was time to do something else. On a hunch, we rented an aerator. In one weekend we made \$1,000 aerating lawns.”

That was all the incentive the two friends needed. They made up some fliers and purchased a used trailer, along with what Caldwell describes as some

“cheap mowers.” Before spring 1999 came to a close, they had said goodbye to one career and hello to another by registering their company.

For the first three years, Caldwell and McCoy worked alone doing, as they explain, “anything it took to get the job done.” During that time, they had two important breaks. They met Walker Mower dealer, Dan's Small Engine in nearby Fort Collins, and were later introduced to a big client who gave them their first big account.

“Dan Dettman encouraged us to upgrade to commercial-quality equipment, so we bought a couple of Toro mid-size walk mowers before actually getting our first Walker, a used 1986 model with a 42-inch GHS deck for

\$3,000,” explains Caldwell. “We called her Betsy, and still use the mower to this day. In fact, we may have the mower bronzed when it finally quits running.”

Betsy set a good example. One Walker Mower led to another, and today FLM crews operate 13 Walker Mowers, including five Super B's with 60-inch side-discharge decks. Most of the mowers can be equipped with snowblades for the unpredictable and often harsh Colorado winters. The company also owns two Walker snowthrowers and three dethatcher attachments. In addition to the Walker Mowers, Caldwell says they use five Wright Standers, primarily for hilly terrain, and two John Deere tractors for rough mowing.





**Sisters Amanda McCoy (left) and Kristina Stoner keep the office running smoothly.**

The company's other big break came when they met a property developer who awarded them their first HOA. "It was a big learning curve for us, but a great learning experience," recalls McCoy. "When we didn't know how to do something, we hired it out, and learned by observing and paying close attention."

Caldwell and McCoy were excellent students. In addition to the initial service mainstays of aeration and mowing, FLM offers turf care, irrigation repair, tree care, landscape

renovation, bed care, annual flowers and mulching. The company has even rented sweepers to clean parking lots.

Natural-born communicators, the co-owners quickly discovered what it would take to be a success in the HOA market, getting themselves in front of the right people at the right time.

They started to regularly attend HOA board meetings, educating board members about what their company was doing to keep their properties in top shape. They would perform monthly property inspections and send

reports, with photos, back to the board.

With more HOA clients came a monthly newsletter to keep customers up to date. Now FLM has a Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/foothills.landscape](http://www.facebook.com/foothills.landscape)) to expedite communication between the company and its clients.

### **GROWING PAINS**

Caldwell and McCoy admit that aggressive growth can be challenging. "The bigger we get, the more pronounced our inefficiencies become," says McCoy. "Right now, we're focusing on being more efficient with our labor, which is our biggest expense. We've strived to reduce downtime at the shop and more accurately budget hours on projects, giving crew members goals to reach."

"We've also discovered that smaller crews are more efficient, taking ours down from four to three," adds Caldwell. "To minimize overtime, we mow five days a week, but rotate crews through four-day workweeks. Ideally, individual employees work only four days a week while our mowers work five days. Poor Betsy!"

The program is working. The company is growing organically by word of mouth, and the bottom line is healthy enough to afford the partners the ability to purchase a large parcel of land just outside of town. They've also just opened a branch location in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

The highly motivated team includes commercial account manager Scott Gablehouse (one of the company's CLTs), account manager DJ Caldwell, operations manager Aaron Towne, McCoy's wife Amanda (director of internal operations), and Amanda's sister, office manager Kristina Stoner.

"You can't assemble a talented staff unless you can provide growth opportunity," says Caldwell. "We've been fortunate. Despite the economy, we've been able to create career opportunities for our employees. For that reason alone, we just can't stop growing." **WT**



# The Bottom

*Make sure the following is part of your ongoing training for all of your employees, because even veterans need to be reminded about the do's and don'ts of operating in a safe manner.*

**W**e all know how important it is to make a profit. Without a consistent and healthy bottom line, any business will eventually dry up and die. But making a profit isn't the only top priority for Walker Mower users, or any mowing contractor for that matter.

Even more important than profit is being safe while making that profit. All the money in the world won't make up for a serious injury. The truth is, those contractors who operate in a safe manner and properly train their employees are likely to be among the most profitable business owners in the industry.

Having safety meetings and ongoing safety training is fundamental to keeping loss-time injuries and insurance costs to a minimum, reducing damage to equipment, and losing time on the job. Furthermore, clients don't want unsafe companies working for them, and good employees shy away from an unsafe work environment.

Our industry has plenty of room for improvement in this area as it has one of the highest OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) hazard rates in the United States. One of the biggest reasons for this is lack of training, as indicated by figures that show most injuries occur in the early spring and during the first 12 months

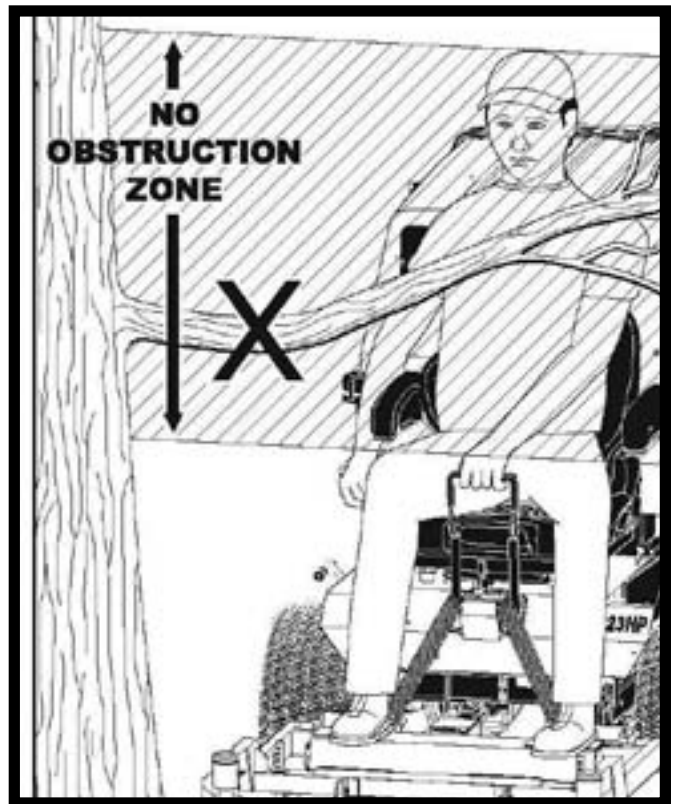
of employment, when new and inexperienced employees are operating equipment. With that said, it is imperative for operators of any brand of mowers to have proper training before taking the equipment into the field.

The following should be included as part of Walker Mower training for all of your employees, because even veterans need to be reminded about the do's and don'ts of operating in a safe manner.

## **CONTROLS**

Familiarize operators with controls, paying special attention to the operation of the Forward Speed Control (FSC) and steering levers on the Walker Mower. Make sure everyone understands that moving the FSC to the neutral position will stop the mower, and instruct operators to use only their left hand to operate steering levels. Using both hands will cause over-steering.

Point out the safety interlock systems and how they work. The mower will not start unless the FSC is in the neutral

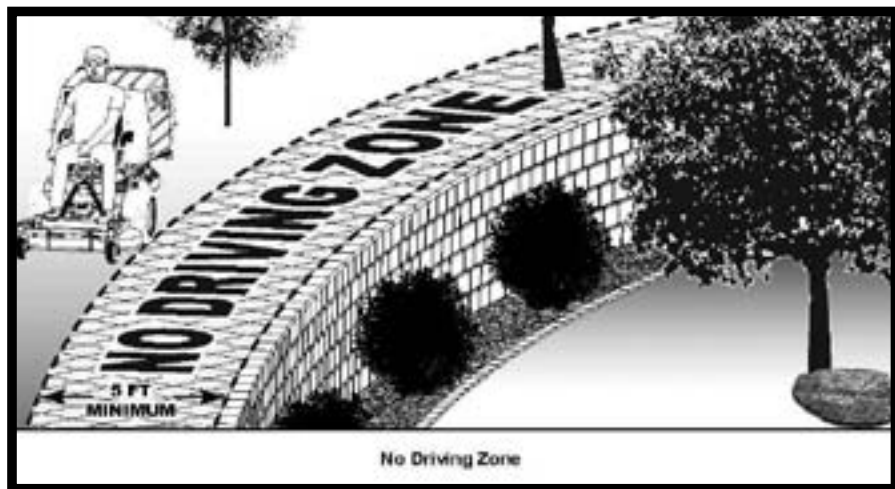


position and the PTO is disengaged. A seat safety switch kills the engine if the operator dismounts when the FSC is not in the neutral position or the PTO is engaged. Remind operators to always check to make sure the PTO has stopped rotating before dismounting the mower.

Instruct operators to give their mowers a "once-over" before going to the field, to make sure all safety devices are working correctly and shields are in place. Test the operation of the seat safety switch by lifting off of the seat with the mower blades engaged and making sure the engine stops. Operators should also be wearing eye and ear protection, along with substantial footwear. Loose-fitting clothing is not appropriate since it can catch on branches or impede the safe operation of the mower.



# Line is SAFETY



**Figures show that most injuries occur in the early spring and during the first 12 months of employment, when new and inexperienced employees are operating equipment.**

## **OPERATION**

Have your inexperienced operators practice in an open area away from buildings, fences and obstructions before actually mowing. Until familiar with all operating characteristics of the mower, they should maneuver with a slow engine speed and slow FSC setting. Impress upon them that for an emergency stop or in case of loss of control, simply pulling the FSC into the neutral-park position will quickly stop the mower.

Once employees become absolutely comfortable with the Walker Mower's operation, it's time to put the machine to good use. Before mowing, properties should be policed for objects that may be thrown by the blades. Furthermore, operators should become acquainted with steep hills, drop-offs and other potential hazards. Operators need to avoid mowing close to ponds, streams and retaining walls. These areas are more suitably mowed with a walk-behind mower or string-line trimmer.

The Walker Mower has a low center

of gravity and superior traction, thanks to the balance provided by its front-cut design. Both characteristics allow it to mow safely on relatively steep slopes. However, never operate on a hill or slope with an angle greater than 20 degrees or 33-percent grade. Make sure employees understand how the "degrees" and "percentages" translate into actual mowing conditions by pointing out safe and less-than-safe slopes. When mowing on any slope, being cautious, reducing travel speeds and avoiding sharp turns are requisites. Also remind operators that before dismounting from the mower on a slope, always engage the parking brake.

## **OTHER SAFETY REMINDERS**

If your Walker Mower is equipped with a side-discharge deck, the discharge chute needs to be in place at its lowest position and pointed away from sidewalks and streets. If using a GHS deck, the catcher door needs to be closed while mowing. Instruct new employees on how to unclog

material from the discharge chute on a GHS mower. They must never use their hands; a stick or other tool will get the job done. Make sure the PTO drive shaft has stopped moving before unclogging.


To help with your training, Walker Manufacturing offers a "How to Mow/How to Maintain" DVD presented in both English and Spanish. As always, the Operator's Manual is required reading before operating any new piece of equipment. Remember, too, that employees learn by observing. Operating equipment safely will set a good example for employees. Conversely, if you're ignoring safety issues, your employees likely will do the same.

Having a safe work environment begins at the top of any organization. Hold safety meetings, be a good instructor and make employees accountable for following safe operating procedures. It's good for them, and good for your bottom line. **WT**



# 'I'll fit you in'

*At 64 years of age, David Wright is still willing to do just about anything his customers ask.*

A group of five men, the Wright Way mowing team, are posed behind a white Walker GHS riding lawn mower. From left to right: Zach Case, John Hunt, Alec Miller, Scottie Walters, and David Wright (seated). They are outdoors in front of a house with a large evergreen tree.

The Wright Way mowing team (L to R): Zach Case, John Hunt, Alec Miller, Scottie Walters and David Wright (seated).

**D**avid Wright's business card speaks volumes. After the catchy name of his company, Wright Way Lawn Care, comes this teaser: "A first-class cut is measured by the yard."

The card also spells out service offerings and service intervals, highlighted by four images: a lawn mower, chain saw, rake and handyman's bag. Now, the latter would be unusual for most

any lawn maintenance contractor, but not for this 64-year-old entrepreneur. Wright says he will provide nearly any service for a customer. True to his word, his crews also do roof jobs (approximately 30 a year), install fences and other hardscape elements, hang gutters, repair siding, fix sprinkler systems ... and the list goes on. What his company lacks in expertise it will subcontract out.


"I guess one of my weaknesses is

that I can't say no," says Wright, who worked more than 20 years in heavy construction before starting his lawn care company in Casper, Wyoming. "No matter what I'm asked to do, I tell customers, 'I'll fit you in.'"

#### **FROM PIPE FITTING TO MOWING**

Wright's construction career took him all over the country. He spent most of his time supervising welding and





**David Wright says he can outwork most 16-year-olds. "It's not because I'm in better shape than they are," he says. "It's because I have a passion for what I do."**

"I moved to Casper in 1991," Wright recalls. "The first item on my agenda was getting a four-year degree, which I did by attending Casper College for two years and then spending another two at Colorado State University in Fort Collins."

For income, Wright started to provide a part-time handyman service. He then added lawn care after a mowing contractor who suffered a stroke asked him to maintain a few of his yards. "I told you I couldn't say no," Wright adds. "I didn't even have a mower, yet I made a deal with one of my customers, offering to mow his lawn for free if he would lend me his mower."

**"I believe that to be a success in this business you have to out-service your competition—and always stand behind your work. I'm also detail-oriented by nature, and commit to leaving every yard in better shape than I found it in originally."**

That was the inauspicious beginning for the Wright Way Lawn Care company. It wasn't the equipment (or lack thereof) that helped pave the way early on for Wright's second career. Instead, it was his passion for lawn care and providing a quality service.

"I believe that to be a success in this business you have to out-service your competition—and always stand

behind your work," Wright emphasizes. "I'm also detail-oriented by nature, and commit to leaving every yard in better shape than I found it in originally."

### **THE WALKER WAY, TOO**

Wright's first big project was the Rustic Ridge housing development. With 68 homes and lots of landscaping, he knew there had to be a better way to mow the property than trudging behind his Toro mid-size walk mower all day long.

Wright recalled seeing a Walker Mower while going to school in Fort Collins. He purchased his first one in 2002, a 26-hp model with a 48-inch GHS deck. With the nearest Walker dealer more than 100 miles away, he purchased a backup unit the next year. Today, Wright operates four Walker Mowers, three with 48-inch GHS decks, and his most recent purchase, a 31-hp unit with a 52-inch deck.

"I believe I'm the only contractor in Casper with a Walker Mower, and the first to use a zero-turn rider," Wright says proudly. "The Walker Mowers are truly unique up here. They turn heads, let me tell you."

The Walker Mowers also give Wright a competitive advantage. He relates the story when, during an HOA board meeting, one member stood up and said, "Finally, we have a profes-

sional doing our lawns. He has a Walker Mower."

Wright Way Lawn Care now has about 100 customers, including five HOAs. Wright's mowing crew takes upwards of six full days to complete its mowing rounds. During winter months, the same crew does snow removal with a truck plow and John Deere skid-steer loader. When the weather is decent,

pipe fitting crews that were working on power plants and factories. He was introduced to Casper while working on a soda ash plant. Later, when asked once again to relocate, Wright chose to return to Casper and launch a new career.





crew members will also install and repair fences.

“We have high winds here that wreak havoc with fences and roofs,” Wright notes. “If you’re willing to work, there’s plenty of work up here. I pride myself at my age to be able to outwork most 16-year-olds. It’s not because I’m in better shape than they are. It’s because I have a passion for what I do.”

This mowing/handyman contractor is not slowing down, either. He and his wife Judy, who is retired from the Air Force, recently purchased a three-acre property on the outskirts of town. The acreage houses a huge, recently constructed warehouse, ideal for setting up shop, with plenty of room for storing equipment and staging crews. It will be convenient for Judy, as well. As office manager, she does all the invoicing and scheduling, and the shop will only be a stone’s throw away from their home, also located on the property.



**With 68 homes and plenty of landscape, Wright knew there had to be a better way to mow his first housing development.**

Wright looks around the interior of his warehouse, pointing out locations for shelving—all the time in wonderment about all the room he now has for mowing equipment, trucks and trailers, and his handyman tools. “As

a handyman, I should be able to do anything,” he muses. “With this space, I can store absolutely everything I will ever need to get the job done.” He might add, the Wright Way, too. **WT**

# BOB T'S TECH talk

## ‘Fuel’

**F**uel—the lifeblood of any engine—comes with many names: gas, gasoline, petrol, diesel, propane, LP, and so on. For all practical purposes, I will deal with diesel and gasoline for now, since those are the primary fuels used in the majority of outdoor power equipment.

We can all agree that it appears that the quality of most fuels has deteriorated over the last few years. I don't know if it is because of changing refining processes or the required additives. What I do know is that, as a whole, fuels are “not what they used to be”.

Now, we need to make the best of it. I want to pass along some information that hopefully will help make life a bit less frustrating when it comes to handling and storing fuel for your lawn mowers, trimmers, generators, etc.

**Octane** – It is very important to use the fuel octane that the engine manufacturer recommends. Octane translates to the amount of power the fuel can produce. Under full load, an engine will knock or ping with a less-than-recommended octane fuel. Lower-rated fuel may be less costly, but you may easily pay the difference and more in added repairs.

**Blends** – The fuels we buy are formulated for seasons and regions. Areas that have varying ambient changes from season to season may notice very distinct performance changes in their fuels as the seasons change.

This is a result of “oxygenation”. Most states and some countries require fuels to be oxygenated to reduce pollution. Oxygenation is a process whereby a chemical containing oxygen is added to the fuel, which will result in most of the fuel being burned and less CO<sub>2</sub>.

Today, the most common additive is ethanol. Engines have been designed to handle up to 10% ethanol without any adverse affects. When the percentage is increased, running problems occur; prolonged use can result in damage to the engine.

It is very important that these fuels be used only in the seasons or climates that they were intended for. When it comes to diesel fuel, it is imperative that you not use summer fuel (#2 diesel) in the winter months. Summer diesel can “gel up” in extreme cold and stop flowing. Winter fuel (#1 diesel) is treated with kerosene so it will flow in cold temperatures. To prevent running problems, it would be best to drain or run out the seasonal fuels as the formulations change with the seasons.

**Storage** – Fuel has a shelf life. That life can vary a lot depending on how long it's been from the time it left the refinery until you purchase it. Unfortunately, it doesn't come with an expiration date. Shelf life can be extended by adding an appropriate (gasoline or diesel) fuel stabilizer.

You may try to store fuel for an extended period either in the tank on the equipment or in a storage tank (big or small). There are a few bits of information you should know in order to get favorable results.


If the equipment is being used on a daily or weekly basis, you're probably renewing the fuel regularly. On the other hand, if the equipment has a large tank and the running duration is for very short periods, the fuel does not get renewed as often. In that case, I would suggest putting small amounts in at a time, or keeping the tank filled to about 90% by adding fuel more often. If you choose the latter, run the fuel down as the season comes to an end.

You don't want to let equipment sit with fuel in it for more than a couple of months—and then expect it to start up normally, if at all. You can find a mix of comments here. Some will recommend adding some stabilizer and filling the tank for extended storage. This may be fine if you start the equipment periodically (every 2-4 weeks) and let it run for a few minutes.

The problem, for some of us, is that we get busy or forget to run it as we should. With all due respect to the companies that sell fuel stabilizers and make some impressive claims, they don't know how old the fuel is that you add their product to, and to be sure, these products are not going to restore old fuel to new condition.

From my repair shop experience, I can tell you that trying to clean up an engine that has “old fuel gunk” in the tank, fuel line, and carburetor or injectors can be a frustrating and costly job. So following are my personal recommendations.

**Homeowners and occasional users** – Purchase your fuel in small quantities (1 gallon at a time). Use a quality stabilizer with each purchase. When your season ends, run the equipment dry and dump any leftover fuel into your car or truck (if it's not more than a couple of months old). If it is older, find an authorized place of disposal. Do not store your equipment or storage container in an area that is exposed to sunlight, sharp temperature swings, or close to where there might be a spark or flame.

**Contractors and frequent users** – Purchase fuel in weekly quantities. I would still recommend using a stabilizer with each purchase. Be cautious of where you place the storage tank, especially if you have dramatic temperature swings from day to night, and the tank sits outside. Condensation (water) can form in the tank, causing obvious running problems. Install a fuel separator on the supply line to remove condensation. Be sure to switch fuel blends with the seasons. Run your equipment out of fuel at the end of the season. Follow the same storage procedures as the occasional users. 



## Win a Walker Mower at the New [walkermowers.com](http://walkermowers.com)



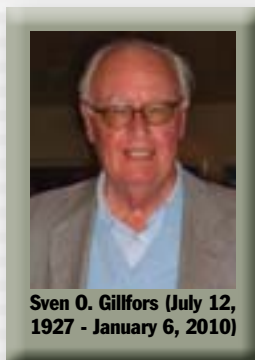
Throughout the month of March, visitors to the new [walkermowers.com](http://walkermowers.com) will be able to register each business day for a number of great Walker Ware prizes—there will be over a dozen winners each day. Contestants who have registered for the daily prizes are then eligible for the mower drawing on April 2.

The new [walkermowers.com](http://walkermowers.com) has been completely updated and offers improved features such as interactive product presentation, video, and a complete list of resources to help new and existing customers become and stay familiar with the product.

See [walkermowers.com](http://walkermowers.com) for contest details. **WT**

### OUR DEAR FRIEND DEPARTED

In January 2010, the Walker Mower family lost a dear friend and pioneer in the Walker Mower program: Sven O. Gillfors from Malmo, Sweden. Walker first met Mr. Gillfors at the Louisville Power Expo in 1985, and with him leading the way, the Walker Mower was introduced to the European market at the GAFA show in Cologne, Germany in 1986. Mr. Gillfors worked as Walker's factory representative in Europe until he retired in 1997.



**Sven O. Gillfors (July 12, 1927 - January 6, 2010)**

For those who knew Sven and worked with him, he is remembered as a true gentleman, kind and considerate in all business dealings, a man of his word, a man of integrity. But the best expression for the Walker Mower factory team is summed in the simple words, "he was our friend". **WT**

### WALKER SOCIAL NETWORKING KICKS OFF

Walker Mower enthusiasts can now become fans online of the Walker Mower. Follow Walker Mowers on Facebook.com/[walkermowers](http://walkermowers) and Twitter.com/[walkermowers](http://walkermowers) to see interesting events, fun contests and to meet other Walker fans from around the world. **WT**



### SHEFFIELD PROVIDES FINANCING FOR WALKER CUSTOMERS

Walker Manufacturing has teamed up with Sheffield Financial to offer retail financing options across the United States. Quarterly programs are available through participating dealers to help customers purchase equipment.

Financing may not be available in all areas; check with your local Walker Dealer for available offers. **WT**



## 2010 MODEL MB OFFERS TWO ENGINE OPTIONS

Introducing an exciting new version of the Model MB with two 18-hp engine options: Briggs & Stratton Vanguard (MBV) or Kohler Command (MBK). The engines are fitted in a new chassis design that features a spread rear axle and double tail wheels, offering improved traction and a smoother ride. Designed for commercial service, the drive train uses Hydro-Gear ZT3100 transaxles, belt tightener PTO clutch, zero backlash engine coupler, and the electric system uses a full-size battery. Model MBK also includes a quick-change PTO coupler as standard equipment. **WT**



## 2010 SUPER B IMPROVED

Several major design changes were made for the 2010 Super B (Model MBS) to improve performance, reliability and durability of this model. A belt tightener PTO clutch (like used on other Walker models) replaces the NORAM mechanical clutch. Two Hydro-Gear ZT3400 transaxles offer a combined 1,250-pound axle load rating and include an oil fill/vent on the top of the housing for easier oil change/air bleed; transaxle(s) also uses a larger oil reservoir and improved steering control dampener. The DSD60 deck for the Super B now has a manual belt tightener, replacing the automatic cam tightener which did not work consistently on earlier units. **WT**



## UPGRADE KITS FOR EARLIER MB AND MBS MODELS

Several design improvements for the MB/MBS models have been developed into upgrade kits for earlier models. These kits will be used in a "fix as fail" campaign to upgrade and repair units under warranty, but will also be available to upgrade older, out-of-warranty units (installed at the owner's discretion and expense). Check with your local Walker Dealer for pricing and making upgrades on your MB or MBS machine.

- Belt Tensioner Kit for DSD60 Deck, P/N 2724-10
- Belt Clutch Upgrade Kit for MBS, P/N 2410-11 ('07 models also require P/N 7910-10 for clutch installation)
- Transaxle Porting Kit for MBS, P/N 2024-10 ('07) or P/N 2025-9 ('08-'09)
- Electric Clutch Kit for MB, P/N 4410-10 **WT**

## TWO NEW MOWER DECKS AVAILABLE

The *DGHS48R Deck* is an alternate design, using reverse-rotation cutting blades like the DGHS52; offers smooth cutting in the blade overlap area of the deck and good clog resistance. The original DGHS48 deck will continue to be offered as the "standard deck" and the "R" will be an option for some customers and mowing applications looking for enhanced performance over the standard deck. The *DML48 Deck* offers a larger mulching deck; uses stacked blades like the smaller DML42B. **WT**

## 52" DECK HEIGHT ADJUSTER

Designed for the DGHS52 deck, a single-lever cutting height adjuster is now an available option. Provides on-the-go cutting height adjustment from the operator seat. **WT**



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