

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS TO COME

CAPE COD'S ULTIMATE Property Manager

- Doing the 'Walker Wave' in Florida
- Teenager is Dependable, Meticulous, Consistent
- Buying the Right Trailer for Your Operation
- Cemetery Maintenance Crew Tackles 39 Acres



VOL. 36

WALKER TALK

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Staying Enthused

I recently had the pleasure of seeing enthusiasm in action. Barbara and I and our family (all 16 of us) were eating at Fat Daddy's Smokehouse BBQ in Kihei, Hawaii. As the menus were handed out, the waitress, Maggi Rose, let us know the ribs "were the best you'll ever eat". Later I overheard her tell another couple who asked what's good on the menu, "It's all good". Then, when our order was taking a little while to come out from the kitchen, she brought out a couple of small bowls of chips for our eight grandkids to tide them over until the food arrived, and she told them, "Don't eat too much, because you are going to want to eat all of the wonderful brisket sandwiches that you ordered". She was right, it was a good meal, but her enthusiasm was what made it a wonderful experience and made us glad we chose to eat there.



As we were leaving the restaurant, I asked Maggi Rose how long she had worked there—1-1/2 years she said and 15 years as a waitress—long enough to know that her enthusiasm was not a beginner's glow and was time-tested. To me, this kind of enthusiasm is not so much a feeling, but an attitude. There are going to be hard days and problems "in the restaurant", but enthusiasm will stay with a person who believes in what they are doing and who they are working with. I got the idea that Maggi Rose is a person who would not work at a restaurant if she could not brag about the food being served.

Enthusiasm should be a lasting quality that is a part of long-term relationships and opportunities. My pastor (Jim Lynch, now retired) had a saying that rang true along this line: "If you want to stay married, stay enthused about your spouse". All of us who have been married a long time know that this enthusiasm is more than just a feeling. It is an attitude that stays with the ups and downs of living; knowing that regardless of the circumstances, you married the right person, this is your best opportunity, your best path.

Staying enthused is a great way to live, both in personal life and in your vocation or business life. Enthusiasm is the oil that keeps all the machinery of life moving along. I want our readers to know that I am enthused about being in the manufacturing business and being in an independent family-owned business. I am enthused about the Walker Mower, a product that helps our customers make beautiful places. I am enthused about the multiplied opportunities that have come from supplying over 100,000 Walker Mowers to customers around the world. And I am still enthused about Barbara, my lovely wife of 44 years (we celebrated our anniversary on the trip to Hawaii). **WT**

Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President

A photograph of three people standing on a lawn in front of a large, two-story house with light-colored siding and dark shutters. The house has a prominent front porch with white columns. The three people are standing side-by-side, smiling. The person on the left is a woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue polo shirt and light-colored shorts. The person in the center is a man with short brown hair, wearing a red polo shirt and khaki shorts. The person on the right is a man with a beard and glasses, wearing a dark blue long-sleeved shirt and khaki shorts. The title 'THE ULTIMATE Property Manager' is overlaid on the image in large, bold, orange and brown letters.

THE ULTIMATE Property Manager

E.J. Jaxtimer (center) with assistant director of landscaping Angela Cenzalli and director of landscaping Rob Kennedy.

E. J. Jaxtimer has long been associated with some of the most beautiful homes on Cape Cod. Over the last 30 years, the owner of E.J. Jaxtimer Builders, Inc. in Hyannis, Massachusetts, has designed, renovated and constructed hundreds of homes on this famous tourist and travel destination. Why, then, would one of his divisions be operating Walker Mowers and providing top-notch mowing and maintenance services on many of his properties?

“I had been designing and building homes for about 15 years when a customer of mine asked if I could maintain her landscape,” Jaxtimer explains. “It never occurred to me to offer landscape design, installation and maintenance services, but the idea made sense.”

Indeed it did. Already a stickler for detail and providing impeccable service, if Jaxtimer could pull it off, E.J. Jaxtimer Builders would be the only company on the Cape to provide a truly one-stop service—to design and build a home, and then provide nearly any interior and/or exterior service imaginable.

Seventeen years later, E.J. Jaxtimer’s landscape division is nearly as well known as its construction and millwork arms. Three landscape maintenance crews, an enhancement crew and a color/installation crew can be seen throughout the year in bright red trucks with enclosed trailers tending the properties designed and built by the company owner.

“The big push for the landscaping division occurs in late

“If (customers) want, we will respond to house alarms, and clean and ready their outdoor furniture, along with providing other services. I can even recall one occasion when we actually put a turkey in the oven.”

Left to right: assistant director of landscaping Angela Cenzalli, maintenance foreman Ricardo Dasilva, and director of landscaping Rob Kennedy.

spring,” explains company director of landscaping Rob Kennedy. He points to a property just mowed and maintained, ready to greet a homeowner returning to the Cape for the first time in several months. “Returning homeowners want their properties to look pristine, with a splash of color in neat beds and lawns neatly trimmed,” Kennedy emphasizes.

That’s where the Walker Mower comes in handy. When Kennedy came on board 10 years ago, he lobbied for the mower because it was ideal for the environment, with its bagging capability, quality of cut and maneuverability. Working equally well on big and small properties alike, he said that the mower’s trimming capability allowed him to reduce crew size from three to two employees.

“Walker Mower operators attack properties a little differently than those who use other brands,” Kennedy relates. “Our crews are trained to blow out the beds and do the string line trimming before they mow,” he explains. “The mower, then, just picks up the debris along with the grass clippings. The efficient collection system also cuts spring and fall cleanup time in half.”

SERVICE MENTALITY

The mowing and maintenance crews account for approximately 75 percent of the landscaping division’s revenue. The other 25 percent comes from the color and enhancement crews supervised by assistant director of landscaping Angela Cenzalli. All together, the company maintains 87 full-service accounts.

“Putting in a 60-hour week is normal for us this time of year,” says Cenzalli, who is president of the Cape Cod Landscaping Association.



The E.J. Jaxtimer maintenance team maintains 87 full-service accounts in and around Hyannis, Massachusetts.

“Just because E.J. (Jaxtimer) builds the homes doesn’t mean we automatically get the work. It’s very competitive on the Cape with upwards of 1,000 landscape contractors vying for work.

“We don’t advertise and we don’t get involved in price wars,” Cenzalli continues. “We rely on our reputation, quality standards, responsive-

ness and service mentality to get the message to prospective customers. If they want, we will respond to house alarms, and clean and ready their outdoor furniture, along with providing other services. I can even recall one occasion when we actually put a turkey in the oven. All customers have our cell phone numbers so they can reach us virtually any



When Rob Kennedy came on board 10 years ago, he lobbied for the Walker Mower's bagging capability, quality of cut and maneuverability.



time during the week. I think what makes us a bit different is that we all love what we do. I don't believe companies can provide the high level of service required here unless employees have a strong work ethic and love what they do."

The company owner sets the high standard. From his high school days, Jaxtimer wanted to be in the con-

struction business. These days, he still gets to the office before anyone else and is often the last one out the door in the evening. This Cape Cod native emphasizes that he doesn't have a secret formula for success, but instead has followed a couple of simple rules.

"I've always tried to surround myself with smart people," Jaxtimer says. "We all have our strengths and weaknesses, and finding people who can do something better than you is paramount to success. Under Rob's supervision, our landscaping division has grown from literally nothing into a \$1 million-plus operation, and Angela has taken our color operation to a different level."

Community service also takes a top priority. The company is very involved with the Special Olympics, helps spearhead fundraising efforts for cancer research, and has worked to bring a local clinic to the area.

"Yes, we're in business to make a profit," says Jaxtimer. "But there's



Assistant director of landscaping Angela Cenzalli, maintenance foreman Chris Collard, and director of landscaping Rob Kennedy: Working well on both big and small properties, the Walker Mower has allowed Kennedy to reduce crew sizes from three to two.

also the big picture to take into consideration. On the business side, while making a profit is imperative, you have to ensure that the customer is completely satisfied and that your work is top notch. On the community side, we hope that our involvement will benefit other people."

Kennedy and Cenzalli say that their employer's attitude extends to the workplace where he treats everyone like family. "Don't get me wrong, E.J. expects a lot from his employees," Kennedy adds quickly. "He's a perfectionist who wants nothing less from his people. But he also appreciates the effort." Cenzalli agrees, "Just as we want to develop long-term relationships with customers, E.J. wants to develop the same with his employees."

As they put it, you can't become the ultimate property manager without first becoming the ultimate business owner—one who empowers his people and instills pride and passion in what they do. **WT**



Doing the WALKER WAVE

"I first saw the wave at Fenway Park and knew it would be appropriate for a couple of my high-end properties. It takes a little longer to mow, but the homeowner enjoys the effect. Plus, it gives my company a point of difference."

– Elmer Groom

“When neighbors drive by this property, they kind of do a double take,” says Elmer Groom. It’s something this landscape contractor is proud of because drawing their attention is his handy work—what he calls the “Walker Wave.”

“I first saw the wave at Fenway Park and knew it would be appropriate for a couple of my high-end properties,” says the owner of Groom Gardens in Jacksonville, Florida. “It takes a little longer to mow the wave, but the homeowner enjoys the effect. Plus, it gives my company a point of difference.”

It’s a point of difference this mowing veteran, who says he’s been in the business so long that he “bleeds green,” doesn’t really need.

CATCHY PHRASE

“I tell customers that if it doesn’t look like a groomed garden, we didn’t do it,” says Groom with a smile. Yet

there’s more to this catchy phrase than meets the eye, since the owner’s roots go deep into landscape installation.

Born in Massachusetts and raised on Cape Cod, Groom received a degree in turf management from Stockbridge School of Agriculture and spent his early years at Highland Golf Links as a greenskeeper. He moved to Florida while in his mid-20s, working for a landscaping company before striking out on his own in 1988.

Groom’s properties, including the 20-acre headquarters facility for Pilot Pen company, are the recipient of his education and experience. Groom and his one employee, Jeff Dunlap, visit the property twice weekly and often make more calls if the client wishes. Five acres of turf to mow and two linear miles of stick edging would be enough to keep any crew busy. Add in 30 more homeowner properties and no wonder the owner has good things to say about the halogen headlights and low-profile tires

on his Walker Mower; the headlights allow him to work late hours whereas the tires allow him to tackle rolling terrain, even after mid-afternoon thunderstorms.

“This is my fifth Walker Mower,” Groom says proudly. “I purchased my first one 13 years ago, a year after taking on the Pilot Pen property. At the time, I was using a Grasshopper. I liked the mower, but using the steering levers all day long aggravated a pinched nerve in my neck. So I bought a Walker Mower, initially because it was easy to operate. Then I discovered that an air-ride seat helped alleviate back pain caused by a bulging disc. When I mentioned that to my chiropractor, he advised me to ‘keep on mowing’.”

Pain (or lack thereof) aside, Groom now calls the Walker the “Hoover” in his fleet because of its vacuuming capability, something required when collecting leaves in the fall with a 48-inch GHS deck. A side-discharge, 52-inch deck does



Groom starts mowing the wave early in the spring and builds it over the next few weeks.

most of the heavy lifting on properties during the summer growing season, and it also orchestrates the wave.

UNIQUE DESIGN

Groom credits the wave to the Fenway Park groundskeeper who, in turn, got the idea from his young daughter. “She was playing with crayons and told her dad that she had a new way for him to mow,” Groom relates. “After situating a few crayons in her little hand, she made a pass over the paper. Her father looked at the result and said to his wife, ‘I’m going to mow that design at Fenway.’ On special occasions, that’s just what he does.”

That’s what Groom does, as well, but on only two properties. “You have to be at the right property to make the wave work,” he points out. “It can look weird if you try to put the wave on a smaller, more rectangular lawn.”

After demonstrating on a lawn bordered by a long, winding drive,



Halogen headlights and high-profile tires lengthen the mowing day.

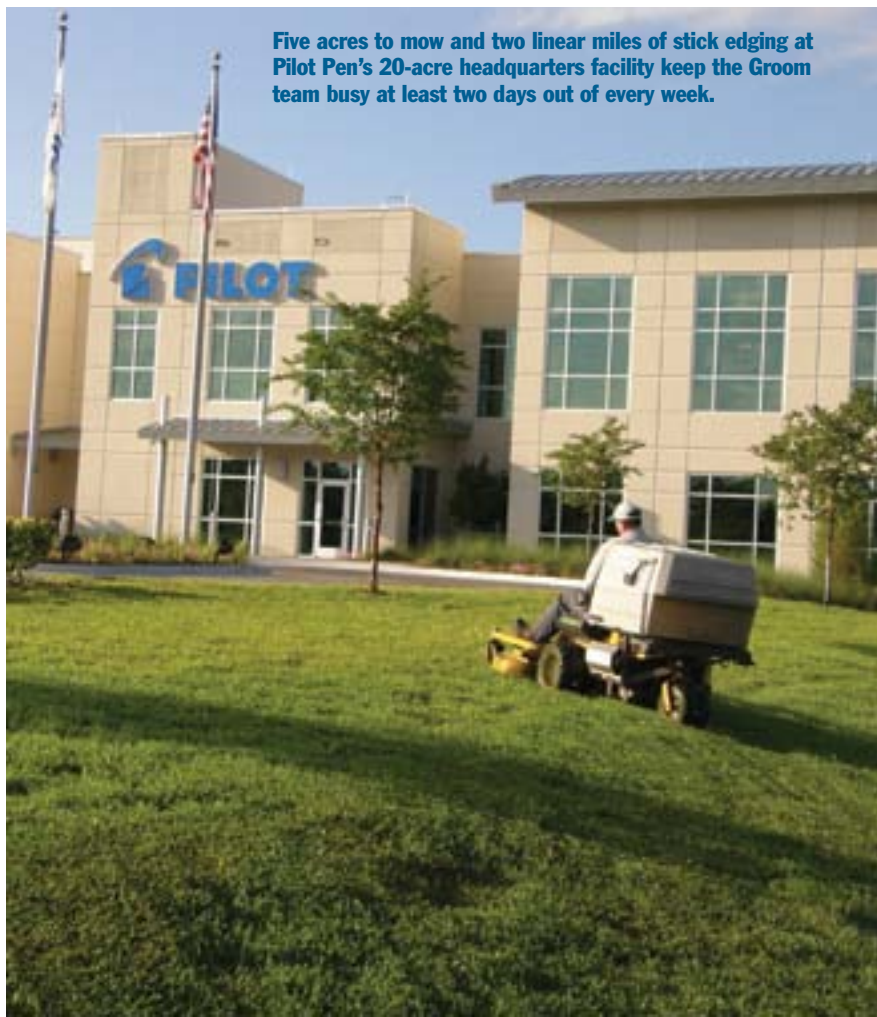
Groom explains that he starts mowing the wave early in the spring and builds on it over the next few weeks, adding in details about how he maneuvers the Walker to get the precise wave effect. “Try to keep the details out of the story,” he says. “Readers can figure it out over time if they wish, but no point in just giving

away a potential point of difference.”

Not to worry. His wave is safe here. What aren’t proprietary are a few of his other tricks of the trade. Among them, he keeps his operation small to be able to deliver the kind of personal care his customers want. “If they ask for something a little extra, it’s great to be in a position to deliver on their request,” says Groom.

Building business relationships is also key, he adds, especially for smaller operators. “I work with lawn care companies, arborists and irrigation specialists, and we all share the same level of trust with each other.” Because he wants customers to talk with a “live” voice when they call in, Groom retains an answering service that will text messages to him if he’s unavailable.

Other business tips? “The best way to say you’re sorry is to get it done the way the customer wanted it done in the first place,” Groom emphasizes. Regarding equipment, he notes that the Walker Mower does the work of an additional employee, not to mention the fact that no other mower on the market can do the wave the way a Walker can. **WT**



Five acres to mow and two linear miles of stick edging at Pilot Pen’s 20-acre headquarters facility keep the Groom team busy at least two days out of every week.

DMC is the **WINNING FORMULA** for this 17-year-old



Old before his time? Hardly. Mature? You bet! Jason Binder, owner of Jason's Lawn Care in Fleming Island, Florida, is only 17 years old, but already has been mowing lawns for six years. His truck and second-season Walker Mower, along with the rest of his equipment, are squeaky clean, and Jason approaches each of his 25 lawns with the same commitment to quality.

Jason with parents Scott and Susan



From start to finish, it takes Jason approximately 35 minutes to complete a property.

Jason pulls up to a property with his truck and trailer, edges and trims the yard, mows with his Walker Mower, and then blows debris off of the walk and drive. He dumps clippings into plastic bags that are left curbside for the city to pick up. The routing coordinates with pickup days.

From start to finish, the job takes approximately 35 minutes, for which customers pay an average of \$30. “I’m Dependable, Meticulous and Consistent,” says Jason, thinking about what makes his operation tick and the reason so many of his customers have stuck with him from the beginning when he was just a sixth-grader.

“I wanted to find a way to make some money,” Jason recalls. “So I asked our neighbors if I could mow their lawns.” When a few of them agreed, Jason’s father, Scott, purchased a Craftsman mower for his

son who paid him back in full with his new-found earnings. Two years later, while in the eighth grade, Jason upgraded to a used John Deere walk-behind mower. He then could be seen around the neighborhood after school towing the mower behind a golf cart.

“We thought the mower was too big for him,” Jason’s mother Susan relates. “He was so small and the mower was so big. “But Jason was determined, and he practiced on our lawn several times before actually using it.” The mower, which cost \$1,200, was Jason’s staple for three years until he upgraded last year to a new 20-hp Walker Mower Model C with a 42-inch GHS deck.

“My son had a hard time convincing me that it made sense to buy a mower that costs as much as a car,” says Scott. “He had the funds, though, and his mind was made up.”

“I first saw the mower at a landscaping website and was later directed to nearby dealer Florida-Georgia Distributor Company in Jacksonville from the Walker Manufacturing website,” Jason recalls. “I wanted a mower with a 42-inch deck that would collect clippings, and, frankly, I wanted to ride.”

The move paid off. Jason’s account total immediately jumped to 40 lawns, a number that forced his dad into evening service during the school year. This spring, Scott informed his son that he was on his own, so Jason pared back to a more manageable 25 lawns. “I could mow more accounts during the summer, but I like my free time,” says the young entrepreneur. “I work less hours and make more money than my friends who work at McDonald’s. You can’t beat it.”

When asked what advice he would give other young operators, Scott

says, “Don’t purchase more equipment than you need. Start small, and buy from a reputable dealer.”

“Conserve your cash, too,” Scott adds. “Jason likes his toys. He has a nice pickup, a boat, not to mention a full complement of equipment. Yet we’ve always encouraged him to put money away so he can one day buy a home. It’s very easy to overspend and get yourself into financial trouble.”

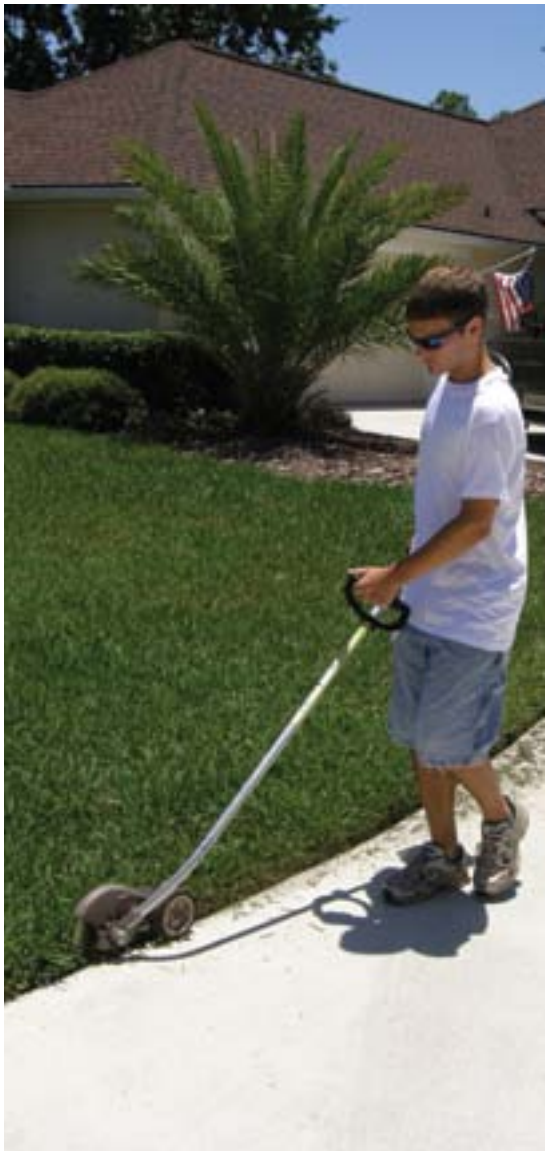
In addition to mentoring and helping out during crunch times, Scott, an Information Technology (IT) professional, developed a web-

site (jasonslawncares.com) for his son four years ago. “We thought the name was more personable than something like Fleming Island Lawn Care,” Scott explains. “Having a presence on the Internet is important these days and gives business owners, especially newer companies, additional credibility.”

The website and word-of-mouth could create growth issues, but the owner is committed to keeping his business small, at least for the time being. This summer, Jason starts work at 8 a.m. and ends by 1 p.m.,

well before the Florida heat and humidity take their toll. The schedule will get more hectic this fall when Jason is dual enrolled as a high school senior and college freshman.

“I want to get a degree in either business or engineering,” Jason remarks. “But owning and operating a lawn maintenance business for a career isn’t out of the question, either. I like what I’m doing and there’s a definite advantage to being your own boss.” **WT**



Jason purchased his Walker last year. He wanted a 42-inch deck that would collect clippings. Mowing days are now coordinated with city debris pickup days.



Aside from his mower, a mowing contractor's most important investment is his trailer. If you're in the market, here are some tips to make sure your investment is a wise one.

Unless you started mowing at the young age Jason Binder did (story pages 9-11), your next purchase right after your first mower was likely a means to carry it around. Walker user Gerry McCarthy, owner of Mac's Landscaping in Burlington, Massachusetts, did the next best thing 35 years ago when he started his business. "I *made* my first trailer," McCarthy recalls. "I purchased the running gear and built a make-shift frame on it."

That first hauler doesn't hold a candle to the spiffy, enclosed trailers he now uses, each with signage of a beautiful property his company maintains. "Enclosed trailers work best for us," McCarthy adds. "They are a rolling advertisement for our company, offer security for our equipment, and provide shelter for crew members when it rains."

Roger Krans, owner of Kransco Lawn Services in Lynn Haven, Florida, uses both enclosed and open trailers. "Open trailers are easier to get into tight spaces," he relates. "They're lighter to pull than enclosed trailers, less expensive, and you can load them with debris." Still, Krans says he prefers enclosed units. "Enclosed trailers keep equipment out of the sun (which is quite damaging in Florida), out of the rain and secure from theft." Like McCarthy's, his trailers also double as traveling billboards. "Plus, they make operators look more professional," Krans adds.

Kransco's open and enclosed trailers carry the same equipment, although the latter can carry more

Trailer LOGIC

Roger Krans prefers enclosed trailers because they keep equipment secure and out of the weather. His trailers also double as traveling billboards and make operators look more professional.



irrigation pipes, heads and connectors. Enclosed trailers feature the company's name and telephone number on all four sides, along with Walker emblems. Always safety-minded, Krans uses safety cones whenever he stops at a property, and crew members are trained to look before walking out from behind a trailer. "If we have to park on the road, we also have our flashers going the entire time we're on the property," Krans adds.

WIRED UP

"The top maintenance concern with all trailers is the lighting system," Krans points out. "Our trailers are used every day and lights can get damaged very easily. We check our lights, including turn signals, brake lights and parking lights, every morning before going into the field."

One way to minimize light issues is to ensure that wires running underneath the trailer are not exposed, says Wells Cargo regional sales manager Mark Bonek. "Ideally, wires should run through the main frame or otherwise be protected. They should also be continuous, without connectors that can cause 'electrical shorts'."

A common mistake when purchasing any trailer, Bonek adds, is buying one that is undersized without enough carrying capacity. "Before making a purchase, mark-off an area in your garage and see if your equipment fits."

Bonek offers a few additional purchasing tips. "The trailer tongue should be at least 48 inches long, preferably 60 inches to allow for tight turns. A full-width hinge on the ramp

door is important. If you're not loading on level ground, corner hinges may twist or flex. Make sure the enclosed trailer is well-ventilated, too.

"Look for solid engineering and construction," Bonek adds. He points out features such as using a heavy-duty tubular steel main frame and steel corner posts that extend to the bottom of the frame for maximum welding surface. An undercoated chassis will protect the trailer from corrosion, while all exposed steel frame surfaces should be primed and painted.

Bonek recommends a plywood flooring that measures at least 3/4 inches thick, Wolmanized® and pressure-treated to withstand moisture. "A quality trailer will help operators avoid downtime and reduce maintenance and service costs," Bonek emphasizes. "Quality construction and engineering details will extend the life of trailers just as they do for mowers."

THEFT PROTECTION

Both McCarthy and Krans mentioned that one key benefit of enclosed trailers is the theft protection they offer. Still, equipment can be at risk if doors are left unlocked or trailers unattended for long periods of time.

In its 2009 theft report, LoJack Corporation, manufacturer of a stolen vehicle recovery system, ranks the most popular construction equipment stolen, along with the states with the highest theft rates. Generators, air compressors and welders were the most popular items stolen, followed by backhoe and wheel loaders, skid-steer loaders, light utility vehicles and trailers, and forklifts/scissor lifts.

California, Florida, Texas, Arizona and Georgia were the states with the highest theft rates, according to LoJack's recovery data.

LoJack offers other tips for keeping equipment safe:

Label all equipment with unique identifying numbers.

Keep accurate inventory records. Include manufacturer, model, year and purchase date for each piece of equipment and record the serial number of each major component part.

Use immobilization devices such as wheel locks, fuel shut-offs or ignition locks, or install battery-disconnect switches.

Focus on physical site security. When possible, fence-in equipment and park it close together in a circle. Keep smaller pieces in the center, chained to larger equipment. Install on-site security cameras and motion sensors. Communicate with law enforcement, e.g., request more frequent patrols, especially in known high-theft areas.

LoJack has been manufacturing its radio-frequency recovery system since 1986. Once installed in an automobile or truck, the device integrates with law enforcement agencies to assist in the recovery of the vehicle. In 2009 alone, the company says it recovered nearly \$11 million in stolen construction equipment.

The device is especially appropriate for landscape contractors who work in high-crime areas, but all company owners can benefit from knowing how to protect their equipment from being stolen.

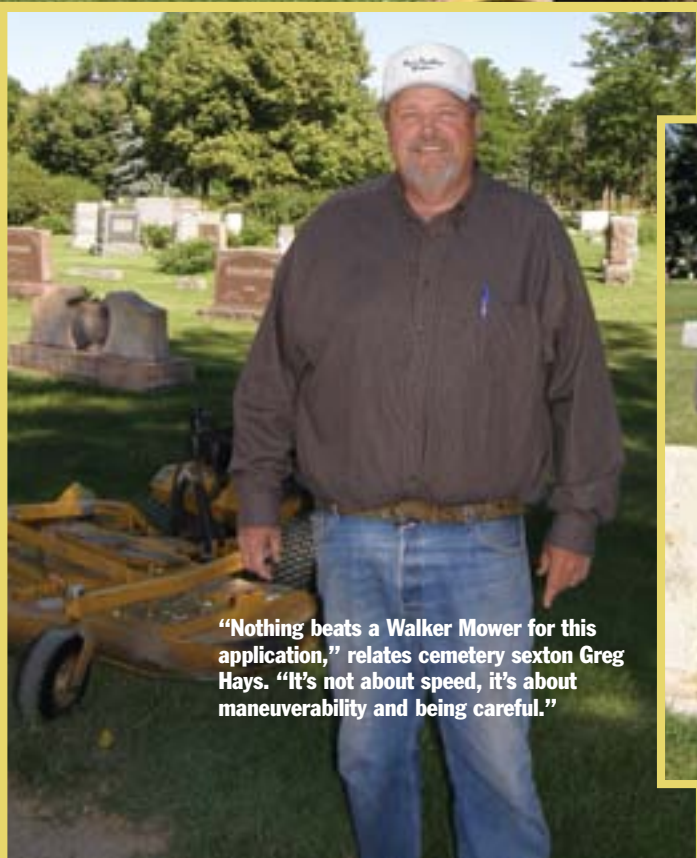
There's logic behind buying a trailer for your company. If you're starting out, a more affordable open trailer is likely the best alternative. Open trailers can double for hauling away debris. They also offer easy access to equipment—a plus for crew members, but a minus when operating in high-crime areas. Enclosed trailers are attractive on many fronts, including providing a safe haven for equipment.

Just like buying a mower, buying a trailer requires matching the trailer to the application, ensuring that it has enough capacity for the job at hand, and is built to take the day-to-day punishment that mowing contractors dish out. **WT**

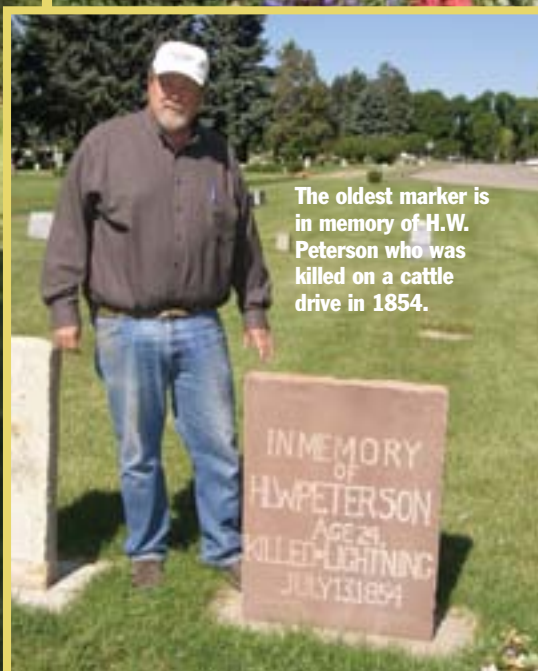
A common mistake when purchasing any trailer, says Wells Cargo regional sales manager Mark Bonek, is buying one that is undersized without enough carrying capacity.



Lending a Helping Hand



"Nothing beats a Walker Mower for this application," relates cemetery sexton Greg Hays. "It's not about speed, it's about maneuverability and being careful."



The oldest marker is in memory of H.W. Peterson who was killed on a cattle drive in 1854.



Mower operator Kurt Stacey makes a lot of left-hand turns in a day, but getting close to markers and plantings cuts down on trimming time.

Roughly 39 acres of turf and 17,000 upright markers create a monumental challenge this cemetery maintenance crew is more than happy to face week after week.

For Greg Hays, cemetery sexton at Loveland Burial Park/Lakeside Cemetery in Loveland, Colorado, having a mower that easily moves between markers saves more than time—it saves the city money.

“The city is responsible for the headstones, which can average between \$2,000 and \$3,500 apiece,” Hays explains. “If we chip one of the tablets with the mower deck, in all likelihood the monument will have to be replaced. With millions of dollars worth of markers here, we have to be very careful.”

The maintenance crew also has to be fast. The 47-acre cemetery features 39 acres of turf and 17,000 upright markers (along with personal plantings) to mow and trim around.

Hays began working at the 128-year-old cemetery in 1988 after operating a mowing company and later working two years for another cemetery. “The most rewarding part of this job is that you’re helping folks at what has to be the most difficult time of their lives,” Hays says. “They find solace knowing that you will be caring for their loved ones.”

Having compassion and understanding is only part of a rather extensive job description for this cemetery sexton. In a typical day, Hays and his staff will arrange and schedule burials, set up tents, sell grave sites, repair old sites, interact with monument companies, and monitor/repair the irrigation system. While the cemetery subcontracts-out tree care on the ash, maple, elm and blue spruce trees that inhabit the cemetery, it does handle weed control and other turf maintenance chores like mowing. Hays is also safety coordinator for the city’s parks department.

“When I came here 23 years ago, we were using old Marty J mowers—and they were old and worn out,” Hays explains. “In the process of looking for new equipment, I demoed a Walker Mower and instantly knew it was the perfect machine for the application.”

The cemetery initially purchased a couple of 16-hp, single-cylinder models before upgrading to 25-hp models later on, putting them on a four-year replacement schedule. Budget concerns was one reason the cemetery recently moved to diesel-powered Walker Model MDs.

Hays explains, "Fuel economy is important when you're trying to cut costs, as is equipment longevity. Diesel engines get better fuel economy than their gas counterparts and will also outlive them, allowing the cemetery to extend the replacement period from four to six years. Equally important, diesel mowers have a higher trade-in value."

"Not to say the gas models were a disappointment," Hays quickly adds. "Those early 16-hp mowers had more than 2,500 hours on them when we traded them in, and they were in great shape. Gas or diesel, the key is preventive maintenance. Every night we blow off the mowers, grease them and check belt tensions. Every 75 to 100 hours, the park district will pick up the mowers to change the oil and perform other services recommended by the manufacturer."

LEFT-HAND TURNS

Featuring 52- and 62-inch side-discharge decks, the Walker Mowers get a workout during the 26-week mowing season. It takes the crew 3-1/2 full days to mow.

"We get the deck as close to the markers as possible," says veteran mower operator Kurt Stacey. "With the side-discharge deck, that means we make a lot of left-hand turns. Getting close reduces our time spent string trimming. Still, one person trimming all day long can hardly do the entire cemetery in a week."

The trimming gets tedious, both Stacey and Hays admit, noting that in order to break up the monotony, the trimmer operator will log a few hours on a Walker Mower. Turning



Greg Hays with city environmental education coordinator Pam Unfred (left) and office support specialist Sonya Andringa.

left all day long can be tedious, as well, so Stacey will alternate mowing around the monuments with mowing the flat marker sections. The cemetery has a grand total of more than 19,000 grave sites.

"Nothing beats the Walker Mower for this application," Hays re-emphasizes. "I've demoed several mowers over the years, many of which dealers have touted for their speed. But I tell those dealers that it's not just about speed, it's about maneuverability and being careful."

While driving around the grounds, Hays points to the scene of one of the first burials after being hired. "I wouldn't have lasted very long if they were all like this," he recalls. "It was raining the day of the funeral, and before the cemetery service was over the rain turned to snow. Our truck, backhoe and virtually every piece of equipment we had got stuck. It was a day to forget."

Two elderly ladies pull up and inquire about the location of a couple of grave sites they just purchased. Hays points them in the right direction before crossing the main road with his Mule utility vehicle. "You know, I think we may be the only cemetery in the country to be split in two by a busy

highway," he points out. "This is the old section," Hays says while pulling up to a site relocated to the cemetery several years ago. The marker reads that the individual was the victim of a lighting strike while on a cattle drive in the 1850s.

Back in the office, Sonya Andringa, office support specialist, is finishing up the paperwork on two recently sold grave sites while Pam Unfred, the city's environmental education coordinator, is helping on a data entry project. She is transferring all of the documentation from hand-written records to a special software program that will allow visitors to easily find where loved ones and relatives are buried. In the near future, the cemetery will have a kiosk where visitors can key-in a name in order to get the grave location.

Hays admits that he never dreamed of being a cemetery sexton. "I went to school to be a teacher, and realized during my first day of student teaching that I wasn't cut out for the job. I enjoyed owning my own mowing business and I enjoy this job. I enjoy the challenges and interaction with people. Plus, it's gratifying to know that you're doing something to help people out in their time of need." **WT**

Spike's Story

If you have been reading Tech Talk over the years, you are well aware that I occasionally step outside the boundaries. This is one of those times. I've had this topic floating around in my brain for a few years now, and with a small dose of encouragement from Dean Walker, I have decided to give it a go. (Aussie for "do it".)

Have you ever given thought to what a blade of grass experiences throughout a mowing season? No? Well, I have, and would love to share the story of "Spike" with you.

Spike started out as a common grass seed, born into the bluegrass family in Kentucky. He was one small seed in an assortment of many siblings and cousins, most of whom he would not have the opportunity to become acquainted with. Spike was sold to an owner in Northern Colorado where he was planted in fertile soil near the Rocky Mountains. As he took root and began to grow, Spike became very fond of his new owners. The Walkers were caring and nurturing folks who furnished him with generous amounts of nutrients and water when the rain was insufficient. Between the Walkers and the warm Colorado sun, life was good. Spike grew strong and tall.

The month of May arrived and with it an eruption of beauty on the mountains that filled Spike's days with peace and contentment. But it wasn't to last. A rumbling in the distance suddenly interrupted Spike's happiness. The rumble grew louder and Spike squinted into the sun to see the source: A huge yellow contraption with a white box on the back was getting closer by the second!

As the contraption neared, Spike could see the operator perched on the seat with his long, slender legs stretched out in front of him. Spike could tell that even though this man was sitting, he was a tall man indeed. After looking at the man's face, Spike's fear and anxiety began to subside. The man was smiling, and Spike felt as if the man was looking directly at him.

The smile may have helped calm Spike, but the big, yellow machine was quite another story. This machine was now up close and personal. Spike could see the blades spinning so fast that they nearly disappeared, just like his bluegrass buddies around him.

Before he could think another thought, Spike's midsection was firmly hit; his upper body was quickly and painlessly severed and lifted up into a whirlwind. Spike's top portion was drawn through a large tube and channeled toward a spinning wheel where he strangely began to enjoy the wondrous ride. It was onward and upward through another tube that emptied into the large white box he had seen earlier. Spike's upper body landed softly in a pile of thousands of the upper portions of his friends, ultimately ending up in a heap near the railroad tracks where they would dry up and die.

We could end on this morbid note, but instead, let us return to the Walker yard where the lower, rooted portion of Spike remains. For it is here that the cycle will begin again with Spike receiving his owner's care, warm sunshine, and water from the sprinklers or rain that results in Spike growing once again—and the weekly visit of the big, yellow machine.

Spike's story is how I envision the life of a blade of grass and I hope you have enjoyed my attempt at putting it into words. I've certainly enjoyed sharing my Tech Talk ideas and musings with you through the years; however it is now time to put down my "pen" and allow someone else to pick it up. My good friend, Tech Support partner and cohort in crime, Bruce Tallman, has much to share with you in future articles. **WT**

Factory Mortgage Paid

On April 23, the Walker factory celebrated paying off the loan used to construct the last factory addition completed in 2002. There was a “mortgage burning” ceremony with Max, Bob and Dean Walker doing the honors. In speaking to factory employees at the occasion, Bob Walker made a couple of points about reaching this milestone in the company.

1) An accelerated eight-year payment schedule was used because Bob and Dean had told Max that he needed to live long enough to see the day the loan was paid off. At age 87, Max is an old-school-conservative when it comes to debt.

2) Having no debt on the property helps secure the financial independence of the company and helps maintain the future of Walker Manufacturing as a private, family-owned, independent company.

Dean, Max and Bob Walker watch the mortgage burn for the most recent addition of the Walker Factory.



Empty racks at the factory usually store finished machines.

BUSINESS RECOVERY UNDERWAY

After the business slowdown in 2009, from which Walker was not exempt, the company is seeing recovery in 2010. In early March, the factory began to see a surge of orders which quickly turned into a backlog of orders. Even increasing production in the short term as much as possible and working overtime was not enough to meet the demand—and was not enough to prevent equipment shortages for spring sales to customers. During the year, production was increased 20% over the original 2010 production plan set in September 2009. And yet, at the time of the plant vacation in July, the racks that hold finished machines were bare—no inventory.

Also in 2010, the sale of spare parts has set new record highs. There is an overall strong pattern of keeping older machines going, so a lot of parts are needed for the estimated 60,000 to 70,000 Walker Mowers that are still in active use.

With signs of increasing sales this fall, Walker is optimistic for continued sales improvement for 2011. The production plan for 2011 is calling for a 27% increase in factory output.

NEW TEST PROGRAM EARNS FACTORY CASH REBATE

Walker Research and Development department, in conjunction with Walker Customer Service, has established a new testing program that will provide real world experience on pre-production test units and will also offer a cash rebate to the customers doing the tests. Customers will purchase the equipment as new, use the equipment in a normal setting, and then use a web-based reporting system to answer questions and give feedback.

Upon completion of the program, which includes a targeted number of hours of use, customers will be reimbursed a percentage of their purchase price—for some tests, the rebate will be as high as 20-25%.

See your local Walker Dealer for more details on current programs and to see if you might qualify to participate.

Walker's *get out front* Giveaway Winner Announced



Chris (L) and Alyssa Vaughn are awarded a new Walker Mower by Gerry Molineaux (Lawn Equipment Enterprises, Waycross, Georgia, Walker Distributor) and Tom Oliver (Howard Brothers, North Atlanta, Georgia, Walker Dealer)

Mrs. Alyssa Vaughn of Lawrenceville, Georgia, was announced as the winner of Walker Manufacturing's *get out front* mower Giveaway on April 2. Mrs. Vaughn, along with her husband Chris, were surprised by Walker's area distributor representatives (Lawn Equipment Enterprises of Waycross, Georgia) and local dealer (Howard Brothers of North Atlanta). The Vaughns received a Walker Model MT Grass Handling System with a 48-inch deck.

The giveaway encompassed 30 days of registration, 106,728 entries and 290 prizes given away—including the tractor and deck. Prizes were given away each business day of March and were won by registrants from around the world.

The contest was a kickoff of the newly updated walkermowers.com. Learn more about the contest and see a video of the winner by clicking on the contest button at walkermowers.com.

WALKER PRODUCTS



1 NEW DRD52 SUPER B COMBO DECK

Introducing the DRD52, a brand new deck and a new combination mulch/rear discharge mowing configuration for the Super B. This deck is targeted for use in tighter mowing areas (where the DSD60 would not fit) and offers mulching with rear discharge for applications that do not want to side discharge.

The DRD52 is interchangeable with the DSD60 on the Super B tractor; both decks share the same mounting system, blade drive and cutting height adjustment mechanism.

Note: For sharp-eyed readers of *Walker Talk*, the prototype DRD52 is shown on the front cover of *Walker Talk* Vol. 34 during field test in Louisiana last summer.



2 60" SUPER B DECK IMPROVED

Starting with Serial Number D16-127061, the DSD60 deck features a redesigned housing and carrier frame to accommodate longer blades and to provide more blade overlap (1-1/2") for smoother cutting in the blade overlap area.

Other improvements include a manual adjusted belt tensioner, deck pin bushings made of more durable material, blade spindles with grease fittings and a larger molded rubber side-discharge shield.

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