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WALKER TALK

Young Blood

When business owners/leaders get into their 60s, it is normal to ask, "What is going to happen with the business?" Dean and I are at that age. We remember how, around 25 years ago, our parents gracefully handed us the business they had started from scratch. Like many family business owners, our parents dreamed that Walker Manufacturing would remain a family-owned and operated business for generations to come. The survival record of all kinds of businesses is about 30% per generation, so keeping the dream of a multigenerational family business alive is a big challenge.

Dean and I started planning for business succession over 10 years ago. We believe a company with leaders in their 60s and no young blood in leadership training is in trouble, for several reasons.

First, the new energy and ideas of young blood are needed to keep a company moving ahead. At the same time, training the young blood on the foundational principles and culture of the business takes time and must be started sooner rather than later. Finally, young blood is needed to protect investment by continuing to operate the business into the future, not only for the benefit of the owners, but for all of the others who are invested—suppliers, employees, distributors, dealers and end customers.

I am pleased to report that the next generation of leaders is beginning to assemble into Walker Manufacturing. Dean's two sons, Ryan and Ted, have been working here for a couple of years now and are demonstrating good leadership qualities, talent, passion and interest in the manufacturing business and the Walker Mower business opportunity. An outside consultant has been employed to develop and administer a structured leadership training program to expose Ryan and Ted to every facet of the business over the next three to five years. And since the company is not just the work of a few, it is exciting to see other third-generation leaders now working with the company, each using their energy, talents and passion to keep the company moving into the future in the areas of manufacturing operations, product engineering, marketing, sales, information technology and finance, to name a few.

To paraphrase business management consultant Peter Drucker, the final test of a good leader is how well he chooses his successor and whether he can step aside to let his successor take his place. Finally, a good leader will work and plan for his successor to be even more successful than he has been. Our Dad gave a great model of both of these ideas to Dean and me.

We would always be the kind of people who say "the Lord willing", but in our hearts and minds we are doing the work so that Walker Manufacturing will continue to be family-owned and family-managed, and the Walker Mower will continue into the next generation. **WT**

Bob Walker

Bob Walker, President



It's Not a 'Push, Push, Push World'

E.J. (left) wanted to be an airline pilot while Blake wanted to be a musician. Instead, they now operate a multi-million-dollar company.

Treating all customers like royalty has helped the Cox brothers turn a backup career in landscaping into a big, thriving business.

Baby Boomers may well remember an old "Twilight Zone" episode where an ad agency executive told a laid-back employee to be more aggressive; this was a "push, push, push world". Decades later, brothers E.J. and Blake Cox would disagree with the executive in more ways than one.

Before starting Above All Lawn Care in the Memphis suburb of Cordova, Tennessee, E.J. wanted to be an airline

pilot like his dad, while younger brother, Blake, wanted to be a musician. Instead, they now operate a million-dollar-plus, full-service landscape management company. What a difference 10 years make.

"Our dad flew for FedEx for more than 25 years and it was natural for me to think about being a pilot," recalls E.J. "9-11 changed my mind about that because I knew the airline industry would never be the same."

Blake, three years younger, had his mind set on playing drums for a band. He enjoyed playing gigs, and what better place to start a career as a musician than in Memphis. "It's a tough way to make a living," says Blake, referring to being a band member. "Sometimes, you might end the evening with a couple hundred dollars in your pocket. But more likely, it was much less than that, and often your receipts would be just enough to cover

“The only way to grow is to spend more time working on the business. I started to do more interacting with potential commercial customers, while Blake spent more of his time checking on the crews and properties.”

– E.J. Cox

your costs, maybe. In other words, my future wasn't looking all that bright.”

So 11 summers ago, the brothers started to bring home the bacon by cutting lawns with a couple of Honda push mowers. At the time, E.J. was a freshman at the University of Memphis and Blake was still in high school. They would tag team the mowing, depending on their class schedules. By the end of the first summer, they mowed 30 to 35 lawns a week and charged anywhere from \$20 to \$40 per lawn. The number

of lawns doubled by the end of the second year, and they totaled 100 by the end of their third year in business.

“We had created a niche,” relates Blake. “Our customers liked the fact that we mowed with push mowers instead of larger mid-size or zero-turn mowers. Unfortunately, as the business and our overhead grew, we simply couldn't make money with our mowers.”

Enter their first Walker Mower. “Other area landscape contractors were using Walker Mowers, and we thought they would be ideal for our residential properties,” says E.J. So the brothers went to their longtime dealer, Mid-South Small Engines in Memphis, to purchase

a new 28-hp EFI Walker Mower. The machine was equipped with a 42-inch GHS deck and the large hopper.

“It was just the right piece of equipment for our business, but the loan officer at the bank wouldn't approve the note,” E.J. recalls. “The bank president proved more open-minded, however, and we got our loan and mower.”

CUSTOMER SKEPTICISM

Convincing the bank president that they could pay back the loan was one obstacle to overcome. The other was convincing customers to give up the push mowers. The Cox brothers succeeded in relatively short order, converting 95 out of 100 to Walker Mowers and their quality of cut. The other five didn't want to change and still requested push mowers for their properties.

The brothers reported that the purchase paid dividends immediately. On average they mowed three lawns with their new mower in the time it

Painted trucks are in, magnetic signs are out. Still, E.J. says the old magnetic signs were a great business investment early on.



Above All's Walker Mowers maintain the company's 100 residential accounts.

would take them to mow one with a push mower or two. Twenty lawns a day became their new Walker Mower mantra while they employed a second truck and crew to satisfy their few recalcitrant customers.

The following year they nearly doubled productivity by purchasing a used Walker Mower with a small catcher and speed-up kit. "It was so fast that we were spending almost as much time dumping clippings as we were mowing," E.J. laughs.

But the die was cast. Within a couple of years, their Walker fleet grew to six mowers, all with larger catchers and 42-inch GHS decks. Customer numbers grew too, from 100 to 300.

NATURAL PROGRESSION

Six years into the business, Above All Lawncare was running three trucks, each with at least one Walker Mower and a Honda push mower. Then, the owners tested the commercial market, taking on an HOA and a small office. "One of our residential customers owned a small business," E.J. relates. "Just like that we started maintaining commercial properties."

Venturing into a new market inspired the brothers to take a second look at their business structure. "The only way to grow is to spend more time working on the business," E.J. emphasizes. "I started to do more interacting with potential commercial customers, while Blake spent more of his time checking on the crews and properties."

The owners also gave up their window washing and gutter cleaning service, something they offered early on to supplement cash flow. They also purchased two Scag zero-turn mowers from their dealer to use on the commercial accounts and any residential property over two acres. Notes Blake, "We continue to use our Walker Mowers on residential accounts. The cut is



second to none and the debris-handling system is great. Most of our commercial accounts neither require us to pick up grass clippings nor do they need the manicured look that our residential customers have come to expect."

Among other changes, they moved 100 of their 300 residential customers to 12-month, full-service maintenance contracts. Then, Blake mentored a couple of smaller maintenance companies to take over the remaining 200 accounts. Above All Lawncare didn't outright sell the accounts, but instead worked with the companies to ensure a seamless service transition. In fact, Blake still works closely with one of the owners.

The other major move was adding a design/build division by hiring Jason Dawkins, a landscape architect. Six years later, the division installs anything from small flower beds to large outdoor kitchens. It now represents 60 percent of the company's revenue stream. The commercial and residential maintenance divisions evenly split the other 40 percent.

BUSINESS-BUILDING TIPS

Above All's marketing program is far removed from the push, push, push advertising world of decades ago. "One of our best business investments early on was a magnetic sign," says E.J., modestly. "For our current customers, we send 'thank you' cards, seasonal letters, and

**"Make sure you treat every customer, large or small, the same way."
— Blake Cox**

spring/fall newsletters. For Christmas, we hand write notes and include a small holiday gift card.

"Our best advertising tool by far, though, is doing simply what we say we're going to do and showing up on time. It's one of the easiest things a business owner can do, yet it's often overlooked. Yes, you have to provide quality service, that's a given. But if you rely on word-of-mouth like we do, delivering on time and following through on a promise are critical to having success."

"Make sure you treat every customer, large or small, the same way," Blake adds. As he points out, it's the right thing to do. But it also makes perfect sense from a purely business perspective. After all, customers don't wear signs that say, "I'm a bank president or a property manager, or that I have an office that needs some landscaping." Above All's owners grew their business by proving to customers that they could deliver quality in a timely fashion. It was less about pushing and more about performance for these two entrepreneurs. **WT**

'I Love to Cut Grass'

Canadian contractor loves his green spaces, and his diverse customer base loves how he maintains them.

When you grow up working in a greenhouse, receive a diploma in horticulture, and then work as a golf course superintendent for 11 years, one thing is for sure—you love green spaces.

"I like to make stripes, smell the grass, and make my customers happy," says Rob Ouwendyk, owner of Five Points Lawn & Landscape in Jarvis, ON, Canada. "In simplest terms, I'm about cutting the lawn and making it look nice."

He's doing a lot of that on properties he maintains in and around this small community located 10 miles north of Lake Erie. His customer list includes widows who depend on his company to keep their yards tidy, large corporate clients, and a nice mix of higher-end residential accounts.

ENTREPRENEURIAL BUG

Ouwendyk admits that starting a company from scratch wasn't easy, especially with a young family to support. Laid off from the golf course, he worked in a factory for three months before his nephew, who owned a landscape construction company, called. "He offered me a job and I took it," says Ouwendyk. "The factory environment just didn't suit me."

Two years later, in 2005, he decided to start his own lawn maintenance company. With no customers or prospects, he went to a spring home show, distributed a few business cards, and walked away with \$400 in lawn-rolling jobs. That work ultimately generated another \$2,000 in different work and leads from neighbors. That first year, Ouwendyk's

"I'm all about striping and there's not a mower on the market that stripes better than a Walker Mower," says Rob Ouwendyk.

small company picked up some fence-building projects among other odd jobs. A few mowing accounts followed, and grew to 15 by year's end.

The number has since grown to 56 maintenance properties and 80 fertilizer and weed control customers. Ouwendyk does the mowing with three Walker Mowers: a 20-hp model that currently has 3,900 hours on it, a 16-hp MC and an 18-hp MC. He has several decks, as well, including two side-discharge decks and three GHS decks. A Toro stand-on mower is used on some of the hillier properties.



"I'm as big as I want to be," adds Ouwendyk. "In fact, I probably took on a few more accounts than I should have last year. I want to stay small mainly because I want to work on the properties with my crew members." He references his foremen, Matt Schweyer; Josh Miller; Andrew Hogeterp, who he calls Mr. Clean because he keeps the equipment looking sharp; and Nathan Slofstra, who is fond of saying, "Safety never takes a holiday."

"One serious injury can put a company my size out of business in a hurry, not to mention the pain and suffering

it would cause to the injured party," says Ouwendyk. "We are very serious about safety and conduct regular safety meetings and discuss 'near misses' with each other."

CONTAGIOUS ATTITUDE

The Five Points employees share the owner's love for mowing lawns. "It's another great day to be alive," remarks Schweyer when asked about his job. "I enjoy mowing and working with Rob and my fellow employees, and I enjoy the customers. Really, what more can one ask for?" The answer is that customers reciprocate, and they do, says Ouwendyk.

Ouwendyk puts one of his three Walker Mowers through its paces. The oldest one, shown here, has more than 3,900 hours on it.

"People appreciate what we do, and we go the extra mile.

"I'm all about striping and there's not a mower on the market that stripes better than a Walker Mower," Ouwendyk continues. "We will actually double-cut a lawn. My philosophy is, if one cut makes a lawn look nice, imagine what double-cutting can do. Customers absolutely love it. 'My lawn has never looked better' is a typical comment."

› continued



Mona and Rob with (from left) Noah, Evan, Courtney and Justin.

Of course, it's not all about mowing, despite the fact that Ouwendyk says he would be perfectly happy riding his Walker Mower all day long. His company offers a full service menu, from dethatching lawns and mulching gardens in the spring to picking up leaves in the fall. Working two years for his nephew's landscape construction company gave him the experience to do brick and paver work, and he does snow removal.

Cutting lawns, though, is his cup of tea, and Five Points does it day in and day out for an average of 26 weeks. One of its customers is 92-year-old Mrs. Addison, who had been mowing her lawn for 70 years. "She, too, must have enjoyed mowing lawns," notes Ouwendyk, "but is also very pleased with the job we do."

BIG ISN'T BETTER

The Five Points' owner confesses to having two pet peeves: a ringing telephone and book work. His wife, Mona, helps him address both issues. "I encourage Rob to stay small," she relates. "I think we can be just as profitable, and maybe even more profitable, than those who operate bigger companies. Rob also wants to continue to be in the field and work with the crew. You can't do that once you have several crews. He just has to learn to say 'no'."

Since he would prefer being on his mower all day, making out payroll and sending out invoices is not something this landscape contractor enjoys. Mona helps him there, too. She may not enjoy mowing like her husband does, but in her words, "Having your own business is several times better than working for someone else."

The couple has been married for 18 years. They have four children. Justin is the oldest at 15, followed by Courtney, 14; Noah, 10; and Evan, 8. Justin works on a crew, and Evan is chomping at the bit, counting the days when he, too, can mow. With his father's tutelage, he's already operated one of the Walker Mowers at home, and, like his father, has a keen eye for straight lines.

As Ouwendyk points out, growing a business in a small community where virtually everyone knows you is different from trying to compete in a larger city. "We're at the stage now where there's likely enough work in town here to keep us busy," he emphasizes. "Even cutting back, we would have enough work to do a little 'cherry picking' and focus on what I love to do most of all: cutting grass and making a property look nice." **WT**

No Stress ...

Just Work



it at bay. For the last 20 years, five days a week, he has driven 50 miles one way to service his customers. He mows, trims and mulches their properties in the summer and removes the snow from their drives and walks in the winter. All of Bud's customers live within a one-mile radius of each other, and 90 percent of them are nearly within driving distance of his two Walker Mowers.

"I know some contractors around here put more miles on their vehicles in a year than I do driving all the way to Wilmington and back every day," he relates. "Their accounts are spread out and, at most, I might move my truck two or three times in the course of the day."

LONG STORY SHORT

With his wife, Anne, who helps with weeding, planting and shoveling snow in the winter, and young daughters, Kimberly and Wendy, Bud lives on a subdivided family farm. Seventy acres in total accommodate two brothers, Dennis, a landscape contractor, and Dan,

Left: When not taking care of their home and two children, Anne helps Bud in the field with new plantings, weeding and shoveling snow.

Below: Steinhauer Services' snow arsenal includes two Walker Mowers, two snow attachments and a Honda snowblower.

Driving 50 miles to service customers is just part of doing business for Delaware contractor.

"I don't like stress," says Dwight "Bud" Steinhauer, owner of Steinhauer Services in Clayton, Delaware. "Hence, I've grown slowly by word of mouth, and most of my customers are my friends."

For someone who doesn't like stress, though, this mowing and maintenance contractor has a strange way of keeping





Lyndon puts a new snow blade through its paces. A foot control to angle the blade helps make fast work of the snow.

a builder, and his parents, retired dairy farmers.

Bud's 18 acres accommodate a beautiful home (which he and his brother Dan built), a work shop, and a burgeoning blueberry patch. The story, though, begins in Wilmington where another brother, Dave, operated an outdoor power equipment dealership.

"I worked for Dave as a mechanic for two years prior to starting my business in 1993," says Bud. "Dennis also worked in Wilmington at the time and had a few too many mowing accounts. I picked up a half dozen from him and started mowing lawns.

"My first mower was a new 48-inch Scag hydro (walk behind), one of the first hydros sold in the area. It worked well for a year or two until I acquired larger properties. Then I added a new Grasshopper zero-turn mower."

For the next few years, Bud was taking on large and small properties alike in and around Wilmington. "I was running nearly 20 miles a day and even had three apartment complexes to maintain," he recalls. "It was stressful. Fortunately, I landed a couple of properties in a relatively high-end neighborhood."

Bud notes that they weren't high, high-end properties like many of the DuPont estates in the area, but they were nice. The homes were in the \$500,000 to \$600,000 range, and each had small yards compared to the larger estates.

TRIMMING THE OUTER CIRCLE

Bud soon began to trim away the "outer circle" of properties. For every new "neighborhood" property, he gave up one where he had to drive several miles to maintain. On the day the *Walker Talk* editor visited, Bud and his nephew, Lyndon, were in a neighborhood development removing the aftereffects of an early snow.

"I probably work for 40-plus customers right around here," Bud pointed out, moving his hands in a half circle. "The



Bud fits the snowblower on his 12-foot open trailer. The snow blade was removed from the other Walker Mower to allow enough room.

snow is really not deep enough for the snowblower today, but I will use it on a couple of drives this afternoon while Lyndon operates the Walker Mower with the snow blade. We will be done by 9 or 10 this evening.”

When it really snows, the three of them—Lyndon, Bud and Anne—will work until midnight or later, and then make the long trek back home, hauling a trailer with two Walker Mowers powered by 31-hp and 25-hp liquid-cooled Kohler engines. The trailer also accommodates a Walker snowblower and blade attachment, along with a Honda track snowblower.

During the growing season, the same 12-foot open trailer will transport one of the two Walker Mowers, this time equipped with a 48-inch GHS deck. A Ford F-350 with 265,000 miles on it does the heavy road work. Bud mows Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. Monday and Tuesday are for extra work like mulching, fertilizing and planting small gardens. Saturdays are for catch up. Bud uses the GHS decks on all properties, and “ramps” the debris up his trailer and onto the truck.

SOMETHING TO DO WITH THE OPERATOR

Steinhauer Services’ first Walker Mower was a new 25-hp model that Bud purchased in 1997. A year later he acquired a used

20-hp unit. Both eventually logged more than 4,000 hours before he sold them.

“I purchased the Walker Mower for a couple of reasons,” Bud explains. “They’re small and maneuverable, making them ideal for my properties, and they deliver a great cut and vacuuming job. I’ve learned over the years that a great mower operator can do a decent job with an average out-front mower. With a Walker Mower, however, even an average operator can do a great mowing job. I like to say that the cut it delivers has something to do with the operator, but more to do with the mower.”

Bud laughs at his first impression of the Walker Mower. “I thought they were a bit jumpy, but instead I found their movements to be very precise thanks to the fingertip steering controls. You don’t have that kind of control with machines equipped with long levers, ones that you move back and forth with your arms. That motion can be very tiresome by the end of the day. My Walker Mowers are very easy to operate, and that’s important, especially during the summer when the temperature approaches 100° F.”

Being so far from the shop, it’s also important that his equipment is reliable. In fact, likely the most stressful part of Bud’s day is working so far from home. A travel kit equipped with a tool box, a

couple of idler pulleys, and a belt or two reduce the stress.

“Over the past 17 years with my Walker Mowers, I’ve been forced to drive back to my workshop only a handful of times. On three occasions, an engine was an issue. That’s not bad considering the number of hours my machines log.”

When asked if he plans to grow his business, Bud says categorically, NO. “I have 50 mowing accounts and another 10 snow accounts that don’t overlap. I enjoy my work and I enjoy my customers. I’m a bit unusual because 95 percent of my communication with them is face-to-face, right on the jobsite. This is a relationship business, though, and having a personal relationship with customers is important to me.” As Bud points out, bigger companies often lose that personal touch.

Driving that distance every day has to take its toll. “Not really,” Bud adds with a shrug. “I guess I’ve been doing it so long that I don’t know any better.”

Well maybe, but the truth is that Bud knows what it takes to keep customers happy—and that works no matter how far away customers are or what business you’re in. **WT**



All lawn mowing is NOT created equal

The Case For Quality Mowing

There are several ways and reasons to mow a lawn. At the very least, lawns can be mowed to control weeds or tame turfgrass in outlying areas. At the other end of the spectrum are lawns designed and maintained to look almost like golf greens. In between lie a variety of properties and mowing strategies that can be placed into one of two broadly defined categories: high-production mowing and quality mowing.

Both approaches have their place. High-production mowing is a perfectly acceptable way to maintain many properties. In fact, this approach represents the majority of landscape maintenance jobs today where property

owners value low cost over quality or the finished appearance of the mowing job.

In contrast, quality mowing focuses on delivering the best, most consistent finished look to a landscape. Here, property owners have made a significant investment in their lawns and landscapes and are committed to care for that investment.

THE RATIONALE

The word “speed” helps define the major difference between the two mowing approaches. High-production crews typically operate large riding mowers that can cover a lot of ground quickly. Getting the job done quickly takes top priority not only because cost is a con-

cern for property owners, but because competition for these jobs can be fierce.

A quality mowing job often favors smaller, more specialized operators trained and organized to deliver the “look” for higher-end properties. Their mowers are typically more compact and designed less for speed and more for delivering a quality cut. Profit margins for these jobs are usually higher, again because the property’s appearance takes precedence over cost, and there are fewer companies that are willing and able to deliver this level of service.

“I never had a customer compliment me on how quickly we mow their property,” says Bob Vickery, owner of The Planter’s Touch in Easley, South

Bob Vickery says: “I received more praise for my work in the first year as a landscape contractor than I did in all my years as a banker.”

Carolina (*Walker Talk* volume 27). “But I have received numerous compliments on how well their turf looks.”

Vickery, the owner of two Walker Mowers, has been maintaining lawns and landscapes for 15 years. “Most of my business has been obtained by word of mouth, and the quality of our work is probably the primary reason we are referred,” he adds. “We also regularly have people stop at a property we are maintaining and ask if we would consider maintaining their property. Again, the impetus is the way the property looks.”

Glenn Burnie, Maryland, landscape contractor Tim Towers, owner of Grass Masters, recently re-entered the mowing business after a four-year hiatus. “If I was going to get back into the business, I was going to blow my competition away with quality,” he emphasizes. “There is a place for quality in every market because someone is always willing to pay for it.”

Towers has 51 residential customers and collects clippings with his Walker Mower on all but one of them. Like Vickery, he says that delivering a quality cut is good for word-of-mouth referrals, and that he’s getting more money for his effort than when doing more high-production mowing earlier in his career. “For me, the most important aspect of ‘word of mouth’ is that I am awarded work from next-door neighbors,” Towers emphasizes. “Having multiple customers back to back means no travel time between properties. Hence, I burn less fuel and put fewer miles on my truck and have near 100 percent on-the-job time efficiency.”

IN PRAISE OF MOWING

Vickery became a landscape contractor after 21 years in the banking business. “I enjoy what I do,” he says. “I want my properties to look good because it’s a

Tim Towers has 51 residential customers and collects clippings with his Walker Mower on all but one of them.

reflection on me and my business.” He admits to enjoying the compliments and sharing them with employees to help encourage and inspire them to do even better work. Notes Vickery, “I received more praise for my work in the first year as a landscape contractor than I did in all my years as a banker.”

But praise doesn’t pay the freight. Both of these two professionals emphasize that a quality mowing job leads to more mowing jobs (often without spending a dime on marketing). Referrals and requests usually don’t arrive with a discounted price tag either.

“I’m sure price is a consideration for some of my customers, but they rarely bring it up,” Vickery relates. “Instead, they are more concerned with the finished product and having someone they can talk with who is knowledgeable and cares about their property. My customers appreciate that I am able to answer questions and provide solutions to their turf and landscape concerns.”

As Towers also points out, there is always someone in every market who wants a quality mowing job and is willing to pay for it. The question is: Will there be enough high-end properties

“There is a place for quality in every market because someone is always willing to pay for it.”

– Tim Towers, Grass Masters in Maryland

and office campuses to support a quality-driven business? If the answer is yes, then landscape contractors have a choice.

In fact, high-quality mowing vs. high-production mowing can be the best choice for many companies looking for a way to improve their business results. Yes, high-production mowing can mean that owners will handle a lot of money. Unfortunately, with competition high and prices low, it also can mean not keeping much of that money in their pockets.

Conversely, quality mowing often means handling less money, but keeping more of it. Delivering quality also reduces the cost associated with marketing a business. As one Florida Walker Mower user once said, “I tell people that when you walk on one of my yards, you are standing on my business card.” **WT**





The University of Puget Sound

Behind the Scenes at an Award-Winning Campus

For the 2,600 students who attend the University of Puget Sound in Tacoma, Washington, a beautiful, 94-acre campus is icing on their overall liberal arts education. Featuring ivy-covered walls on the older buildings, along with lush, green turf, the campus won a 2013 Green Star Award from the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS). The recognition is for excellence in ground maintenance at an urban university.

Award-winning campuses don't appear overnight. It takes a few seasons and sometimes several years for new land-

scaping elements to mature and maintenance practices to begin to take hold. The wait and effort are worth it, according to Grounds Manager Joe Kovolyan, who noted that the look of the campus is one of the top 10 reasons why prospective students apply to the school. It also might well have contributed to his decision two years ago to move his family all the way across country. At the time, he was the Grounds Manager at Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire.

"When I was hired, the school's administration charged me with improving the care and looks of the grounds,"

said Kovolyan. "The university, which dates back to 1888, was already nestled in a beautiful urban setting, but among their concerns they wanted my department to improve the quality of cut, do a more efficient job of handling yard debris, and find ways to reduce noise."

The PGMS award validates some of these recent improvements, but Kovolyan doesn't take much credit for the recognition. Instead, he says it goes to his dedicated staff, an administration that values a beautiful campus, and a few new additions to the university's grounds maintenance fleet.

A veteran grounds staff keeps the campus looking neat all year long. From left to right: Mark Jachimowicz, Andrew Lambert, Tim Putnam, Todd Bramble, Joe Kovolyan, Ed Cole, Barrett Tripp, Bill Boggs, Greg Pfeiffer and Jim Wells. Not shown is Mike Hammock.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Kovolyan, who also heads up the school's automotive, sports turf, tree care, and solid waste departments, worked with his 10-person grounds staff to come up with a plan. Part of it involved improving communications with individual academic departments so mowing and other maintenance practices didn't interfere with class time.



Even wet leaves are no match for these diesel-powered Walker Mowers. Notice how the crews mow together to get in and out of sites quickly.



"We mow and maintain the grounds around the academic buildings early in the morning before 9 a.m. and then move to the dorms," Kovolyan explains. "Maintenance crews typically work together so they can get in and out of specific locations as quickly as possible. Students don't want to hear mowers and leaf blowers operating all day long at all parts of the campus."

Universities don't always run by the clock, either, so Kovolyan is in constant contact with instructors and other personnel who may be scheduling special events.

SNOWLESS NEAR SEATTLE

Despite the fact that Tacoma and nearby Seattle get very little snow compared to New Hampshire's White Mountains, maintaining the 54 acres of turf on the campus is still a full-time job for the grounds staff and its seasonal student interns.

"I was very happy to leave the New England winters," adds Kovolyan with a smile. "But this part of the country has

High-lift dumps take the backache out of removing leaves and clippings.

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– Joe Kovolyan



Grounds Manager, Joe Kovolyan, left snowy New England two years ago to assume the grounds position at The University of Puget Sound.

other challenges. Because of the mild winters, we mow all 12 months, albeit the frequency is reduced from weekly to every three weeks in the heart of winter.

“The entire core campus is also irrigated, so grass doesn’t slow down in the hot, dry summer months. The area’s infamous wet falls saturate the soil and fallen leaves, creating challenging mowing and debris-handling conditions.”

Shortly after arriving in spring 2011, Kovolyan made two equipment moves. He purchased new Stihl backpack blowers to help alleviate noise issues. Two new diesel-powered Walker Mowers also helped in that area. “The engines were much quieter than those on the zero-turn gas mowers they replaced,” Kovolyan notes.

But that wasn’t the main reason he chose a different brand of mower. “I

used one (Walker) at the prep school and thought they would be ideal here. The GHS decks would do a great job picking up leaves and debris, even in wet conditions, and Walker Mowers are versatile. They can be equipped with a mulching deck for summer mowing, and a GHS deck for the rest of the year. We even purchased a couple of side-discharge decks for wide-area summer mowing, and a broom to sweep away an occasional snow off sidewalks.”

The grounds department currently operates three Walker Mowers, all MDD models with 20.9-hp diesel engines. In addition to having different sizes and types of decks at their disposal, each mower is also equipped with a high-lift dump and a deck height adjustment kit. The high-lift dump takes the backache out of removing leaves and clippings (the school recycled 800 tons of green waste at a local compost facility last year). The deck adjustment was said to be especially convenient when crews went from mow-

ing the grounds to trimming up sports fields that require a closer cut, and then returning again to mowing the grounds. A Toro “batwing” mower maintains the larger sports fields and recreational areas.

Crews allocate three and a half days to mow the entire campus, which leaves another day and a half to complete other maintenance chores, including installing three seasonal color changes a year; planting and pruning trees; and, yes, keeping the building ivy trimmed.

“We couldn’t do the job without the veteran staff here,” Kovolyan emphasizes. “A couple of employees have been with the school more than 20 years and several have 10 years under their belts. In addition, we employ 10 to 12 work study students during the summer and school year. They help us with special projects, including weeding and maintaining the color, and a few even get to operate the Walker Mowers.”

DOWN THE ROAD

The grounds department expects to have another Walker Mower in the near future. “They may not be as fast as zero-turn mowers with belly-mounted decks, but what we lose in speed we gain in quality of cut,” Kovolyan points out. “The front-mounted decks also dramatically reduce trimming time.”

Among other moves, he looks to streamline the university’s vehicle fleet, one that includes 16 passenger vans, 12 pickups and more than 20 utility vehicles. In addition to mowers, the grounds department operates edgers, renovators, trash trucks, a few tractors and aerial lifts, nine John Deere Gators and other utility vehicles, and a couple of golf carts.

At the moment, a new addition on the student union will require more landscaping elements. In the meantime, keeping up with the University’s Master Plan to provide an appealing outdoor space will keep the staff busy, not to mention living up to its reputation as stewards of a beautiful and award-winning campus. **WT**



More Value

In my short time with Walker Manufacturing, I have been privileged to meet many Walker owners/operators from around the world. These owners have ranged from commercial landscapers with many mowers in their fleets, to small landscapers with one or two machines, to facilities maintenance operators, and finally to many homeowners who have purchased a Walker Mower for their personal landscape needs. One occurrence that is becoming more commonplace with each of these types of owners is that they are holding onto their equipment longer. Owners are repairing and updating their current mower(s) to extend its life and get more value from their original purchase.

Often when I am at equipment shows or dealer open houses, customers will ask what has changed with the new models as compared to the their machine. "What can I do to update my mower?" and "Can I upgrade my mower to the new configuration?" are frequent questions. The interest in keeping an earlier machine and upgrading is seen in a trend of increasing service parts sales at Walker Manufacturing in the last several years.

With these questions in mind, there are a few thoughts I want to pass along.

Central to the Walker Mower quality cut and collection is the efficiency of the mower deck and the "GHS" Grass Handling System. Over time, wear and neglect will affect performance, but a little time and elbow grease can bring it back to near new condition. One of the

first things to inspect is the overall condition of the mower deck. Are all of the baffles in place and in good condition? Check to be sure the cap strips and edge stiffeners are in place. These items should be replaced if worn, damaged or missing. Replacing them will require some grinding and welding, and if you are not comfortable doing this work, I'm sure your dealer can assist you in this area.

Next, are the cutting blades in good condition? Sharpen and inspect the blades using the guidelines found in the Owner's Manual. A damaged or worn blade is a safety hazard and should be replaced immediately to maintain safe operation and top performance. Inspect the deck chute for holes, cracks or breaks, and replace if any are found. The GHS blower is central to the performance of the collection system. The metal of the blower housing and blower blades can wear when used in areas with sandy and abrasive soil. In 2012, a 1/4-inch-thick doubler was added to the outside of the 10.5-inch blower housing to increase wear capacity and life. As a side note, in 2013, a similar doubler was added to the 10-inch blower, which replaces the hardened 10-inch blower previously available. Another area of the blower that requires a close look is the impeller. The gap between the blade tips and the housing is critical to vacuum action; as the gap wears to more than 1/8 to 1/4 inch, the blower performance deteriorates significantly and the collection system will clog more easily. Replace a blower impeller with worn blade tips or

cracked or bent blades.

Finally, make a thorough inspection of the catcher box and Powerfil® assemblies. Is the delivery spout oscillating back and forth? Is the exhaust screen clean and in good condition? With the catcher box, a recent change to cast iron dump handles and backup plates has occurred. These plates add strength to the front and bottom corners of the box and can be used to upgrade earlier boxes where the corners may have cracked over time. For users with the 6.7-, 7.0- and 9.5-bushel catchers, a deflector seal kit can be installed under the exhaust deflector to prevent debris from blowing across the catcher onto the operator. For owners with the 10.0-bushel catcher, there is an upgrade from the steel dump flap (above the rear bumper) to a rubber dump flap; it reduces noise and increases durability.

There is not enough space to make this an exhaustive list of repairs and upgrades for your Walker; instead, this is a short list focusing on the mowing and grass-collection parts of the machine that can get you going towards keeping your Walker operating the way it was designed to.

Your local Walker dealer will be a great asset in helping you with upgrades and repairs since they have access to the most recent design changes and improvements as well as the regular replacement parts for your Walker. As with most equipment purchases, maintenance, upkeep and TLC are the keys to increased life and lasting value. **WT**

125,000th Walker Mower Produced

On Friday, October 18, 2013, Walker Manufacturing produced Walker Mower #125,000. The machine rolled off the line in the morning and was celebrated with lunch and a company photo of Walker's 155 employees.

"This represents the work of our people at the factory along with hundreds of people in our sales channel and thousands of customers who have made Walker Mowers a part of their livelihoods," shared Walker President Bob Walker. "We have not done this alone, and we are thankful

for the relationships that continue to be established and nurtured as we build the mower."



The company has celebrated milestones throughout their history including two Walker Mowers Family Reunions in 2000 for #50,000 and 2008 for #100,000 where thousands of customers, suppliers and dealers converged on the Walker factory in Fort Collins, Colorado, for two-day celebrations.

"We are a company that likes to celebrate accomplishments," says Walker. "Recognizing the people who make company progress is part of our company DNA."

UPDATED WALKER BRAND IN USE

Walker has recently released an update to their corporate brand. The newly released brand is the result of a 10-month development project that has included the Walker family, Walker marketing department, and a variety of company teams to implement the brand into the product.

"My Dad (Max Walker) designed all of our logos from the late 50s and into the 60s for the products we made," reflects Walker President Bob Walker. "And when it came to the lawn mower project in the early 80s, I went to work as a draftsman with the tools of the trade to design our first logo." The original logo served Walker well for a few years, but then a variety of updates were included in the brand image, and the identity of the product became confused.

"The challenge of the new brand update was to not make 'logo number nine,'" explains third-generation family member, Ryan Walker. "When we went into this project, we asked our marketing team to maintain the legacy look while giving us a logo that can be used on our product and in a variety of spaces that we may not have known 10 years ago. The new brand identifies with our existing customers while reaching out to younger lawn mower enthusiasts."

Updated product began to roll off the Walker line this past fall, and new marketing and dealer items have now become available to Walker distributors and dealers in the field. An update to walkermowers.com was also released in late 2013.

"When our marketing team introduced the logo to us, it just hit me right—they kept the legacy look of our design while introducing new aspects that will move the company forward for many years," recalls Bob. "My dad always said that your first impression was the right impression. I think he would have liked it."

See a video on the brand update at walkermowers.com/video/?vid=branding.



Previous Model	2014 Model	Rating Change
MBK18	MB19	+1
MBK23	MB23i	0
MBS27	MH25	-2
MBS29	MH27i	-2
MC20	MC19	-1
MT23	MT23	0
MT26	MT25i	-1
MT31	MT30i	-1

2014 MODEL NAMES AND NAMEPLATE HORSEPOWER CHANGED

Kohler engines used in several Walker Mower models will use a new horsepower rating system starting with 2014 units. The new rating guarantees measured horsepower to be within 5% of nameplate versus 15% under the previous standard. While the engine is exactly the same and the effective power output is the same as before, the nameplate horsepower may be adjusted up or down slightly on the new models. At the same time, the model names for Walker Mowers have been changed to use a two-letter identifier, plus horsepower, plus letter "i" to indicate an electronic fuel injection engine. See the accompanying chart for the changed designations.

MODEL MC REDESIGNED FOR 2014

Several major design changes are included with the new 2014 Model MC19.

A brand new 7.0 bushel grass catcher, patterned after the 10.0 catcher used on the Model MT/MD, offers the same benefits, such as dust deflector molded in the door, enclosed Powerfil® motor and tapered box design for easy dumping. The new catcher uses a gray-colored plastic with the new branding logo prominently displayed on the side (2014 models MD/MT also use the new gray-colored catcher).

To give easier access to the engine and drivetrain, the “tilt-open” tractor body is now “clamshell” style like the MT/MD, replacing the full-length body which was heavy to lift.

Finally, the engine air cleaner now uses the Enginaire VLR (very low restriction) remote-mounted unit, replacing the separate snorkel-mounted pre-cleaner and air cleaner used on earlier models, offering less restriction and a boost in power and efficiency.



48-INCH DOZER BLADE

A new 48-inch dozer blade attachment replaces the earlier 46-inch blade (DB6662) and incorporates two easy-to-operate design improvements. The manual lift handle has a thumb-operated lift-release button, and the blade-angle adjustment has a foot-operated trigger. Both features will speed the operation of the blade.

Fits all models except Super B (MH), and there is an optional power lift kit available. Order P/N A32.



MODEL MT EQUIPPED WITH DELPHI FUEL-INJECTION ENGINE

With the installation of a Kohler Command engine equipped with Delphi electronic fuel injection, the newly minted 2014 Model MT25i is the latest version of the previous Model MT26.



The engine is the same basic engine as before, but offers simplicity and reduced cost with the fuel-injection system packaged on the engine (no remote-mounted Engine Control Unit). Additionally, fuel-consumption tests have shown that roughly 10% less fuel is used by the Delphi-equipped engine in comparison to the MT26.

The MT25i should continue the pattern of being the most popular model in the Walker Mower lineup.



60-INCH ROTARY BROOM FOR SUPER B

Additional capacity is offered with a larger rotary broom for use on the Super B (MH). It has the same basic design as the 47-inch broom used on the other models as well as the Super B. The weight of this broom requires installing two tail weights (P/N 2647-10) on the Super B. An optional gauge wheel kit is also available (P/N I399). Order P/N H20.

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Photo Shoot, Florida, February 2014

