



WALKER TALK

RV OWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

Colorado
Contractor
Quintuples
Customer Base

P. 3

Walker Mowers Put to
Test at BYU-Idaho's
400-Acre Campus

P. 11

Maryland
Contractor's
Motto:

"No Better Job
At Any Price"

P. 8

From **ROLLER BLADES** to **WALKER MOWERS**

Quebec contractor got started when he was too
young to drive, and now runs a \$4.5 million operation.

P. 14

VOL.

44

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Jean-Sébastien Masterson
(standing) with Progon
president Philippe Provost.

3 Small Decisions, Big Differences

Colorado contractor quintuples customer base in six years.

6 Operator Training Takes Many Forms

Tips to help you implement training for diverse teams operating diverse equipment fleets.

8 Forward Thinking in Maryland

Tim Towers of Grass Masters operates by the motto: "No better job at any price."

11 Mowers Are Good Fit For Campus Culture

BYU-Idaho features a beautiful 400-acre campus, 69 of which are mowed weekly during the growing season.

14 From Roller Blades to Walker Mowers

Quebec contractor got started when he was too young to drive, and now runs a \$4.5 million operation.

17 Tech Talk

18 News & Products



WALKER TALK

The Walker Way

Across the last 55-plus years of being in the manufacturing business, we have developed business philosophies that have helped us make progress while keeping on track. I thought it would be interesting to give our readers a distilled list of some of these philosophies. We would quickly say that our ways are not the only ways or even the best ways in all cases; we would simply suggest that our ways fit us and who we are, and they are a collection of learning from our experiences.

In-source instead of out-source. We do as much of the manufacturing process in-house as possible. Doing the work ourselves allows us to quickly make product improvements and control product quality.

Do our own product design and development. Making our own designs and not "reverse engineering" other product designs gives the opportunity to offer products that have original thinking while offering unique features, benefits and value to the customer.

Do our own manufacturing. As a Colorado family in the manufacturing business, manufacturing is our passion. We do not want others to do the manufacturing for us, either off-shore or close to home.

Put our family name on the product and make the name stand for excellence. We have always believed that the name on the product should be the name of the people who stand behind the product. Building a good name and good reputation is a treasured part of being in a business that lasts a long time.

Maintain financial independence to keep control. It is only possible to keep promises made and protect the investments made if the manufacturer keeps financial control. We have worked conservatively and carefully to self-fund our business growth and to avoid indebtedness to outside investors and bankers.

Keep business personal and operate family-style. We want to know as many of our suppliers, distributors, dealers and end-customers as possible. That means answering phone calls, e-mails and letters, and welcoming factory visits as well as making visits around the world—wherever Walker Mowers are found.

Recognize God as the senior business partner of our company. We show gratitude for His help in developing the products and business opportunity we enjoy today, and operate the business with integrity befitting our Senior Partner.

While some of these ways are "high sounding" and may sound idealistic, I want to assure you that we are very much human, have made mistakes and failed from time-to-time. In fact, some of these ways were learned the "hard way" after failure. My dad always liked to say he went to the school of hard knocks. Today we are the beneficiaries of those earlier experiences and we keep learning. **WT**



Bob Walker

Bob Walker, President



Small Decisions, **BIG Differences**

Mowing and growing
together: Landen,
Barbara, Ben and
Andrew.

The right equipment has helped Colorado contractor more than quintuple his customer base over the past six years.

Ben Slafter says he has Walker Mowers because they have helped him grow and develop the residential market. In fact, while most business owners create a business model and then buy equipment to fill a need, it appears that the owner of Slafter Mowing in Berthoud, Colorado, did the opposite.

The first Walker Mower he purchased in 2000 doubled his mowing capacity from 25 to 50 yards. Three more—purchased in 2007, 2011 and 2013—helped him expand his customer envelope to 250, all residential properties,

and generate an annual sales volume of nearly \$350,000.

“From my perspective, Walker Mowers have developed and truly expanded the residential market for operators,” says Slafter. “They’re several times more efficient than push mowers, deliver a better cut, and they’re more versatile. We also use ours for dethatching in the spring, and the GHS decks are ideally suited for cleanups.” Four snow blades and two snowblower attachments allow Slafter to provide snow removal services to 60 of his customers.

LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP

“I hated it,” says Slafter, referring to his first mowing experience. He was 14 years old when one of his friends asked him to mow seven accounts while he went on a two-week family vacation. “I couldn’t get the equipment to run and nothing else went right either. My friend paid me \$200, but I told him I would never do that again.”

Never say never. “A year later, I partnered with the same friend after realizing he made more money in two hours of mowing than I could make working three days at a part-time job,”

Slafter adds. “I purchased a 21-inch Toro commercial push mower and a \$400 Husqvarna trimmer, and we mowed 14 accounts together that summer.

“One of the best business decisions I made early on was to buy quality equipment. Maybe it was the early bad experience with my friend’s equipment, I don’t know. But one thing is for sure: In this business you need quality, reliable equipment.”

Slafter continued to mow lawns through the remainder of high school and for a year and a half while attending nearby Colorado State University in Fort Collins. “I was still in high school when a friend’s grandfather, Hugh Doughty, who was 80 years old, asked me what the best mower on the market was,” Slafter recalls. “I told him it was a Walker Mower and he said, ‘That’s right! I’ve been doing some research myself.’ He did more than research. He had already located a dealer and machine for me and helped finance the mower.

“My company wouldn’t look like it does today without the Walker Mower or people like him, key employees like Michael Johnson and Spencer Kear, and



“My friend paid me \$200, but I told him I would never do that again,” Ben Slafter recalls.

our dealer, Mac Equipment in Loveland, among others who’ve helped us along the way,” Slafter continues. “I’ve also had a tremendous landlord who gave me an opportunity to purchase the property and building I had been leasing. In fact, I just closed on the property. The down

payment was steep, but God has blessed us in many ways. A customer even volunteered to help me out by paying me up front for a year’s worth of work.”

NEW PARTNER

During the early years, Slafter’s first employee was his sister, Tali. She worked for him for five years while attending high school and college. When she took a few weeks off in 2005, he hired Barbara, a visitor from Canada, to help out. A year later, Barbara and Slafter were married.

“I knew almost immediately that we were meant for each other,” says Slafter. “We had almost everything in common and loved working together.” Barbara worked alongside her husband mowing, trimming, answering the phone and doing the books until their first child, Landen, was born three and a half years ago followed by Andrew a year and a half later. She still works in the office part time, but helping in the field is left to employees.

Ben Slafter says his business would look different today without his Walker Mowers.



"I know it appears that business is going smoothly and everything is great," Barbara emphasizes. "Almost every story I read in trade magazines paints a pretty picture of a growing company. Well, it's hard work. You have employee issues, customer issues, money issues, and many nights questioning if we even know what we're doing. But we've put our hope and trust in the Lord, and we are pressing on. Because of this we are beginning to see the benefits outweighing the challenges."

For this couple, among the benefits is the satisfaction they get from working together to grow a business. Then there's the business model. "The big positive about the residential market is that you work for the people who hire you," says Slafter. "You can develop a relationship with them and get to know how they want their property maintained. In other words, they develop a comfort level with you, and some even become good friends. The commercial market is different. Property managers come and go and it's mostly all about the bottom line. If someone can do a job for 10 percent less than you, then you will likely lose the account."

Residential job security, however, comes at a high cost. It takes several properties and a lot of windshield time for Slafter to build up sales volume. Scheduling alone can create a headache. Just as an example, spring aerations can take hundreds of phone calls and multiple hours to schedule each crew's weekly route.

Properties are different, too. Creating video profiles of all properties that can be easily loaded onto a crew leader's mobile tablet has helped crews maintain consistency. The videos illustrate any unique property characteristics or property owner requests, i.e. what should and shouldn't be trimmed. The video library will be especially helpful for new crew members and relieve the owner of having to explain property nuances several times over.

"(Growing a company) is hard work. You have employee issues, customer issues, money issues, and many nights questioning if we even know what we're doing. But we've put our hope and trust in the Lord, and we are pressing on. Because of this we are beginning to see the benefits outweighing the challenges."

– Barbara Slafter



TENTATIVE GROWTH

Don't look for Slafter Mowing to become a mega company. Instead, finding that size where the owners can relax a bit and spend more time working on, and not in, their business would be ideal. They're working on it. As the business has grown and the office responsibilities have increased, the owners recently hired a full-time secretary, Pam Huster, to help run day-to-day operations in the office.

"I was even hesitant to start a second mow crew because I didn't know how to deal with employees and was afraid of losing contact with customers," Slafter admits. "But after three years of mowing with multiple crews and business

Mike Johnson, senior crew leader, gets ready to mow around a few obstacles, something that helps set the Walker Mower apart from competition.

growing over 30 percent per year, I haven't regretted the decision. And those employees we were so afraid to hire have become some of our best friends."

Are the above moves small decisions? Yes, in some ways they are, just as buying that first commercial-quality mower and string trimmer didn't seem all that significant to Slafter. But small decisions, especially when they are the right ones, add up and can make a big difference over time." **WT**



Operator Training Takes Many **FORMS**

Big company, small company, it makes no difference. The people who operate your equipment need to be properly trained prior to going into the field. How this is accomplished, however, varies from company to company and depends on several variables, not the least of which are company size, services offered, type of equipment, and relative experience of employees.

“Our training program has evolved over time,” explains Nathan Dirksen, construction manager for Dennis’ Seven Dees in Portland, OR. “How we train operators today differs considerably from how we trained them 10 years ago. We used to conduct group training sessions that included some classroom work, hands-on training, a skid-steer rodeo, and an obstacle course. Today, our foremen do the actual training.”

The 27-year company veteran gives two primary reasons for the change: company growth and foremen experience. “We have grown dramatically over the years. Today, we have 27 construction foremen. Add to that number their crews, and group training would be unwieldy.

Furthermore, foremen average 10 years with our company. They’ve been through the training and certainly understand how to safely operate equipment.”

Dirksen defines three levels of training, depending on the equipment. For small equipment such as chainsaws, tillers and sod cutters, foremen instruct employees how to operate each piece of equipment and then observe their operation. The equipment on which they’ve been trained is documented in a career development file.

Foremen also instruct the operation of larger equipment such as trenchers and track loaders. The training not only includes safe operation and basic maintenance like checking the oil level, but also involves the proper loading and unloading of the equipment. Forklift operation requires another level of training and certification that entails classroom and hands-on instruction, along with a written test.

“Employees carry a laminated card that indicates what equipment they’ve been certified to operate,” Dirksen says. “New cards are issued as they receive further training and certification.”

Sposato team members put new employees through an obstacle course.

MOWER TRAINING

Mowing and maintenance equipment training follows a different regimen, explains Joe Poulter, maintenance production supervisor. “Before the growing season, all new employees go through two days of training, one day of orientation and another day of actual on-site instruction.

“During orientation, we introduce new employees to the different types of equipment used on sites,” Poulter says. “Safe operation is always number one on all equipment, from riders all the way down to string trimmers. They learn the basics of how to operate the equipment, including what type of fuel is used in each. Before the day is over, employees get a chance to actually fire up the equipment.

“On the second day, we take everyone to a work site and break into groups where they receive hands-on instruction on both operation and technique. We show them what kind of lines we want on the turf and how to exit a lawn. Edging beds with a string trimmer is always a challenge for new employees. Efficient

operation of equipment is something they learn over time.”

Poulter noted that ideally there’s a third day of training when employees demonstrate the skills they’ve been taught. New employees who come on board mid-season are trained by their foremen.

Dirksen and Poulter mention a couple of other caveats to operator training. Employees who drive vehicles for Dennis’ Seven Dees go through a DMV background check. Anyone receiving a DUI isn’t allowed to drive for the company for at least three years after the infraction, and the Oregon Department of Transportation requires a medical exam every three years for employees who drive anything over 10,000 pounds or pull a trailer.

A few commercial clients take safety to an even different level, Dirksen and Poulter add. Before working on site, one client requires employees to attend a four-hour safety class. Once on site, it’s 100 percent gloves, eye protection and hard hat for everyone.

Dennis’ Seven Dees operates 20 maintenance crews. David Snodgrass, company president, Landscape Industry Certified, is a past president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and champion of the association’s STARS safe company program available to PLANET members and nonmembers alike.

Snodgrass says, “Mower training used to be primarily about operation, e.g. how to operate a mower, make straight lines with it, and enter and exit a property. The reality is, however, that with every piece of equipment there are safety aspects to be discussed. There’s no better time to talk about them than during training.

“If you believe, like I do, that most if not all accidents are avoidable, then it just makes sense to do everything you can to avoid them. For new employees, there’s no better place to start than with training.” **WT**

Operator training is ongoing when you have the number of mowing crews that Sposato and Dennis’ Seven Dees field.

Basic Training for Walker Users

When you operate 20 mowing crews, all equipped with Walker Mowers, training new hires on how to operate them should come naturally. It does for veteran foremen and supervisors at Sposato Landscape Company in Milton, Delaware. Tony Sposato, company owner and president, shares the following discussion points his trainers highlight.

Operating basics: starting, stopping, turning, backing up. New employees learn how to operate a mower, slowly back and forth at first, with the blades disengaged. They drive around obstacles, too, becoming accustomed to turning without bumping into objects with the catcher box.

Engaging blades and mowing. We teach new employees to engage blades at a lower rpm and to turn without making divots by keeping the drive wheels moving. Knowing how to back up onto trailers to dump clippings into our trucks is an important skill for our operators. Foremen often intercede here until an employee feels comfortable performing the task.

Filled catcher boxes. We impress upon operators to stop mowing when they hear the beeping that indicates catcher boxes are full of grass. Ignoring the sound will likely lead to a plugged chute, which they are also trained to unplug.

Mechanical overview. New employees receive a primer on how to grease the mower, change the blades, and blow off the machine at day’s end with either a backpack blower or air compressor. They likely won’t be required to grease or change blades (which we do at the end of every day), but foremen cannot do everything all the time.

Special conditions. We also conduct weekly training sessions designed to accommodate unusual mowing conditions. Exceptionally rainy periods, for example, may call for special care when turning to avoid divots or being especially aware of poor footing on hills. Extremely dry, dusty conditions put an exclamation point on keeping the engine compartment clean.

Sposato’s team trains new employees a week prior to the start of the mowing season. Like Dennis’ Seven Dees, maintenance equipment operators are taken to a site and instructed how to operate several different pieces of equipment. Sposato says, “This training time is huge for new employees, but it’s something we cannot offer to those who are hired during mid-season. Instead, they receive more personalized training from their foremen and supervisors.”





Forward Thinking in Maryland

Tim Towers of Grass Masters operates by the motto: “No Better Job at Any Price.”

Tim Towers loves mowing grass and cannot see himself in a job where he just waits for quitting time. Instead, he claims to be unhappy when the last lawn of the day is wrapped up.

The owner of Grass Masters in Pasadena, Maryland, has plenty to keep him happy these days. He maintains 51 properties around Baltimore/Washington International Airport, including a couple of nearby estates. Towers proudly admits to being a bit different from competitors who promote that they will beat anyone’s price. “After all,” Towers emphasizes, “they have it

backwards. My motto is, ‘No Better Job at Any Price.’”

Sixteen homeowners on one street alone have bought into this man’s way of thinking, and they weren’t swayed by an exceptional marketing campaign either. In fact, Towers stopped using his single advertising tool (door hangers) two years ago. Neighbors see what he can do and ask him, “Can you mow my lawn, as well?”

Until recently, Towers’ answer has been a resounding “Yes!” But there’s a limit to how much one person can do in a day. After mowing lawns on and off since he was 13 years old, what this operator

The tilt-up deck made a tough job easier during an especially rainy spring.

loves to do in the summer will now likely support him year-round without adding more accounts. “I’ve driven trucks during the winter for years,” Towers relates. “This winter, I won’t have to. But I still may want to work a couple of days a week while I wait for spring.”

RESTART

Towers started seriously mowing lawns after high school, but gave his accounts to kid brother, Josh, in favor of pursuing a different career path for a couple of years. “I was making minimum wage training as a truck driver,” he recalls. “At one point, I was literally down to my last four dollars when a former customer called and asked if I could mow his lawn. Having my old mower and string trimmer, I agreed. I purchased 1-1/2 gallons of gas, mowed his lawn, and eventually mowed a couple of other ones on his street.”

The following year, in the spring of 2011, Josh decided to be a plumber and returned most of his accounts to his brother. Again, Towers was doing something he enjoyed. Still, the jury was out. He had been entertaining the thought of becoming a plumber like his uncle and brother, or even driving truck full time. Both would eventually pay well, but he thought mowing could be just as lucrative, not to mention, of course, he wouldn't be watching the clock either.

With the help of door hangers and word of mouth, accounts grew to 25. To minimize steps and save time, he purchased a 32-inch Hustler mid-size mower with a dual-wheel sulky to complement his John Deere walk mower.

"I liked the Hustler, but it didn't collect grass clippings, and most of my customers wanted the clippings bagged," Towers notes. "So I visited my dealer to see about getting a riding mower that could bag.

When small gates become an obstacle, Towers employs a 30-inch Toro walk-behind.

We debated the merits of this mower and that mower until he finally became frustrated with me and simply said, 'The best-cutting mower is a Walker Mower.' He told me that even though he didn't sell them. I was impressed."

EXTREME MOWING

Towers recalls seeing a Walker Mower years ago when he was still in school and mowing lawns on the side. "It didn't look like any mower I had ever seen before. In fact, I thought it was a fertilizer applicator." After being prompted by his dealer, he visited the Walker Manufacturing website and found the model he wanted, a 26-hp MT with a 48-inch GHS deck. He purchased a used one with 209 hours.

"There's nothing else on the market like it," Towers relates. "The steering is precise, and even with a 48-inch deck the mower is so maneuverable. Like advertised, the deck floats, and the way it tilts up is a lifesaver, especially in tough mowing conditions."



"I'm fussy about my lawn and Tim takes really good care of it," says 88-year-old Mildred Woutten, one of Grass Masters' weekly customers.



It didn't take long for him to demonstrate the last feature. His first stop was at a bi-weekly mowing account. Since it had been raining for the last two weeks, the grass was very high and wet. The conditions were daunting, or as Towers puts it, "probably the worst I've ever seen." He mowed it while collecting a half dozen bags of wet, soggy grass, and stopped twice to clear the underside of the deck. "Imagine doing this with a mid-mount," he remarks.

Grass Masters also has weekly and casual customers. Bi-weekly customers receive a bill at the first of each month for two mowings. Others get billed at month's end.

"Since it doesn't usually rain like this and summers are dry, bi-weekly mowing works well around here," says Towers. "The frequency makes mowing affordable for my older customers, and frankly, I don't enjoy mowing a lawn that doesn't need mowing."

"You know, it's not just high-end residential and estate customers who appreciate a lawn with beautiful lines and a manicured look. Others will, as well."

Still, many customers want their lawns mowed every week, no matter what. Mildred Woutten, 88, is one of them. Towers first mowed her lawn when her husband became ill four years ago, and continued mowing it after he passed away.

"I'm fussy about my lawn and Tim takes real good care of it," says Mrs. Woutten. "He's very accommodating and always in a good mood." She reciprocates by fixing him lunch. Another customer down the street follows up with a high-energy dessert, a giant candy bar. Special treats aside, it's a good gig to have, and the majority of the properties can be mowed without even moving the truck and trailer.

Towers explains that lawns in the neighborhood measure approximately 85 feet wide and 200 feet deep. Most will accommodate his Walker Mower. For those with small gates that can't, he employs a 30-inch Toro walk-behind. "The Walker Mower does such a good job picking up leaves that for



Dear Walker Manufacturing,
I am delighted to share my experience with you about Tim Towers and his business, Grass Masters.

He has been cutting my lawn since last Autumn. I hired him because his work product was, quite simply put, superior.

I had never seen a mower like that and asked some questions. He was extremely knowledgeable about the machinery and took great pride in describing the capability it had.

My lawn has never looked more beautiful!

Thank you for creating such an amazing product.

Mary Beth Raven in Baltimore, Maryland

some properties it pays for me to remove the deck, drive the tractor through the gate, and then reattach it," he relates. "Of course, it's not practical to do this for mowing, and the Toro does a good job, too."

In addition to mowing, Grass Masters edges and trims properties along with providing seasonal maintenance services, including aeration and seeding. Towers points to the narrow edge that lines the sidewalk. "I trim close to the sidewalk so the edge doesn't keep expanding," he remarks. "You know, it's not just high-end residential and estate customers who appreciate a lawn with beautiful lines and a manicured look. Others will, as well." **WT**

Sixteen homeowners on one street have bought into Towers' motto, "No Better Job at Any Price."

BYU-Idaho

Mowers Are Good Fit For Campus Culture



Travel 80 miles southwest of West Yellowstone and you'll drive smack into Idaho's Snake River Valley. This area, known for its agriculture, is also home to the state's largest private university, BYU-Idaho, located in Rexburg. The school, affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has an enrollment of approximately 15,000 students and offers more than a dozen associate degrees and nearly 80 bachelor degrees.

Care of the beautiful 400-acre campus is the responsibility of Grounds Operation Director Jeffrey Wynn. "The school has 90 acres under irrigation, 69 of which are mowed weekly during the growing season," says Wynn, a graduate of BYU-Idaho's landscape management program. "We're in high desert here, so irrigation is a requisite." So, too, is keeping the campus in top shape.

"The Church is very particular about how the campus looks," Wynn explains. "Our 15 full-time grounds staff and 60 to 80 students who work part-time with us are very conscientious. They do a tremendous job with all aspects of maintenance. We also have a full-time arborist on staff who keeps the trees pruned and looking their best."

Wynn's staff stepped to the plate last year when a medical issue kept him sidelined for six weeks. "I don't think they missed me at all," he says with a laugh. "It just shows how dedicated they are."

LIVELY CAMPUS

This spring, the full grounds department spent a couple of days installing nearly 900 flats of annual color and countless 4-inch container plants, just in time to be in full bloom for summer graduation. The school is on three 14-week semesters, each ending with a graduation ceremony.

Getting the grounds in top shape for graduation poses an ongoing challenge for Wynn and his crew, but there are

Approximately 80 percent of the mowing on campus is done with Walker Mowers.



others. He explains, “One of the biggest challenges we face is repairing turf that was damaged by salt. We use a lot of salt during the winter to keep students upright, and because of that the turf naturally gets damaged. Concrete walks also suffer thanks to the salt and temperatures that routinely fall below 0° F.”

Working around major construction projects poses another obstacle. Over the last 15 years, several new buildings have been constructed, including an impressive BYU-Idaho Center that seats 15,000 people and features 10 basketball courts. More recently, the central quad was reno-

vated to accommodate an outdoor amphitheater. The school also has a new agriculture building, and additional student housing is currently under construction.

TURF TALK

Mowing and trimming keeps Wynn’s staff hopping throughout the spring and summer growing season. Approximately 80 percent of the mowing is done by 12 Walker Mowers, a fleet that includes four model B’s used primarily on hilly areas, along with eight MT’s with GHS decks. The school purchased its first Walker Mower in 2006. “What sold us

A Model B mows around a recently constructed quad amphitheater.

on the mower was the finished cut,” says Wynn. “Again, keeping the campus looking nice is a high priority for the school and the Church.”

Not to say getting the first mower on campus was an easy sell for Walker Mower distributor and local dealer, Coates Landscape Supply. “We demonstrated the mower two, maybe three times at the school,” relates Dan Coates, sales manager. “The big obstacle for them was lever steering. The grounds staff was comfortable using mowers with

“The Church is very particular about how the campus looks. Our 15 full-time grounds staff and 60 to 80 students who work part-time with us are very conscientious. They do a tremendous job with all aspects of maintenance.”

– Jeffrey Wynn



Dan Coates, Coates Landscape Supply sales manager, with Jeffrey Wynn.

steering wheels and reluctant to make the transition. It’s interesting. The students who mow probably had the easiest time adapting to the change. They had accrued less time with the steering-wheel mowers, and maybe all the texting gives them sharper hand-eye coordination.”

Either way, the machines made their way to the campus and are now used on

nearly every inch of turf—aside from small areas that still require walk-behind mowing and large expanses that call for wide-area mowers. “I don’t do any mowing,” admits Wynn. “I spend most of my day making sure people have what they need and dealing with any issues that arise.” Depending on the time of year, he also does a lot of interacting with

the greenhouse staff on campus.

Wynn notes the Walker Mowers are equipped with dethatching attachments for spring cleanup and make quick work of leaves in the fall. They are not used for snow, however, a task better left to tractors with brooms and trucks with plows. “We have a neat system for snow removal,” he adds. “Crews windrow the snow, which is then blown into trucks and hauled off campus.”

Thanks to the school’s Capital Needs Analysis program, Walker Mowers are on a five-year lifecycle. In fact, a couple of the newest ones had only accumulated 50-plus hours by early June. A full season of weekly mowing ahead, with crews starting at 6 a.m. and working until 3 p.m., promises to substantially add to that figure.

Wynn emphasizes that the mowers play an important role in keeping the campus looking nice, but are only part of the story. The school’s culture, working in combination with dedicated employees, is catalyst for a job well done. It’s a formula that works for BYU-Idaho and can work for any Walker Mower user. **WT**

Jeffrey Wynn with Cameron St. Amant, a junior at BYU-Idaho. Between 60 and 80 students work part-time for the grounds department.





From Roller Blades to Walker Mowers

"Never say no" team members get the job done (l to r): Philippe Provost, Luc Benoit, David Crevier, Daniel Cuffling and Jean Sébastien Masterson.

Quebec contractor got started when he was too young to drive, and now runs a \$4.5 million operation.

How do you transport your mower when you're too young to have a driver's license? Most kids rely on their parents or older siblings to get them to the job sites. This didn't work for Philippe Provost, president of Progazon

in St. Lambert, Quebec, Canada. He had a better idea: roller blades.

With work shoes secured to his mower, Provost would glide from customer to customer. Little did he dream that one day his summer job would blossom into a \$4.5 million operation,

and that one set of roller blades would transform into a fleet of 38 trucks.

He didn't do it alone, however. Most of his nine company branches or franchises, all located within a short drive of Montreal, are operated by friends. They worked for him early on,

after the roller blades became dated, and later joined with him after he purchased Progazon in 2006.

“I started this business with friends and it was built on what we are as owners,” says Provost. “From the beginning our philosophy was do it right and we will have fun growing the company. There’s no question our success is attributed to our employees, most of whom I’ve known for 15 to 20 years. We work together and many of us vacation together. It’s a true family-like environment.”

STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

That first year in business, Progazon generated \$500,000 in sales, primarily mowing residential accounts with 21-inch walk-behind mowers. They provided other services, too, including snow removal, renovating and installing landscapes, and doing just about anything else a customer wanted done. The latter hasn’t changed, notes the director of Progazon’s

St. Lambert’s maintenance franchise.

“If it’s something that involves the outside of a property, we will find a way to get it done,” relates Jean-Sébastien Masterson, another lifelong Provost friend. “We never say ‘no’. If we cannot do it, we have relationships with contractors who can.

“Sixty percent of our accounts are residences, but we also work with city governments, train stations and retail outlets. Part of the reason we’re successful is that the directors all have different strengths that complement one another. For example, Philippe is great with numbers and I’m more into sales. Then, we have directors who are great at production and so forth.”

“We have to work with our profit margins,” Provost admits. “This is a tough business. The Walker Mowers have helped, though. We purchased our first one in 2006 and found that the mower could replace a crew member.

Now we have seven of them, five with GHS decks, and one Super B and Model B each with mulching decks. We also have a 74-inch side-discharge deck.”

Progazon still has its initial Walker Mower, now with more than 3,000 hours on it. The company also operates with Toro 30-inch mowers for tight spaces and two John Deere ZTraks for mowing parks. Its trucks are all Ford.

Masterson adds, “As you can see, we are very loyal to our suppliers. If the product is good and we get good service, we’re not going to shop around for a better deal. That’s something we expect from our customers, too. Every so often, we lose an account to a competitor, but almost always the customer comes back. Most understand that providing good service and delivering a quality product comes at a cost.”

Luc Benoit puts some finishing touches on a property with the company’s original Walker Mower.





BUILDING A BUSINESS

Just as trucks replaced roller blades for Provost, email has replaced door hangers as the preferred way to market his company's services, and the list is long. Progazon has standard pricing for property clean-ups, mowing, aeration and removing snow. Providing horticulture services, trimming bushes and hedges and maintaining flower beds is priced out on an hourly basis. Restrictions on weed control products means that customers have to learn to live with weeds.

"Mowing alone accounts for approximately 25 percent of our annual sales," Provost explains. "Maintenance, including mowing and snow removal, represents 60 percent of our sales volume. Landscape installation makes up the remainder." Provost notes that long Montreal winters help to keep associates employed all year, which is good for the company and the employees.

For marketing, the company relies on word-of-mouth and email. "Collecting emails is important," Provost emphasizes. "We probably have 4,000 email addresses for snow customers and another 2,000 to 3,000 for mowing and maintenance customers. We send a complete list of our services to everyone, many of whom may want a service they didn't know we offered."

Customers sign up for yearly contracts and are offered a discount for paying up front for the season, which is important for generating revenue during spring startup. Currently, the company has 100 employees.

How big is big enough for Provost and his friends? He shrugs his shoulders. "We don't know, but our business model dictates that each branch or franchise can handle approximately \$1 million in annual sales." They haven't reached that level yet. When they do, maybe they can entertain the thought of adding more franchises and Walker Mowers. **WT**

Friends at work: Jean-Sébastien Masterson (standing) with Progazon president Philippe Provost.



Keeping Your Walker Adjusted

Some items on your Walker Mower may require adjustment from time-to-time due to normal use. In this article, I will discuss some of the various items that should be checked on a regular basis for proper adjustment on the Walker.

1 Tractor creep, as it is referred to, occurs when you pull your Forward Speed Control (FSC) to the Neutral-Park position and your tractor does not come to a complete stop. If your tractor is doing this, have it checked by your dealer as soon as possible.

2 Straight ground tracking is another adjustment that may require attention. Set the FSC at several different speeds on a level, flat surface. Following a straight line, observe if the tractor stays straight. If it moves considerably in a short distance or requires continuous steering lever inputs to stay straight, it will require an adjustment.

3 The Walker Safety System is designed to allow engine starting only when the FSC is in the Neutral-Park position and the Blade Clutch Lever is disengaged. If at any time your engine starts or attempts to start, and either or both controls are in the "engaged" position, this could be potentially dangerous and requires immediate attention.

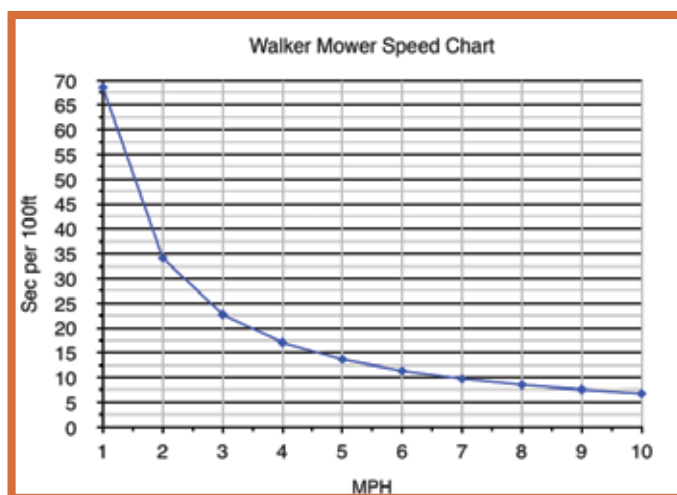
4 Along the same line is the operator presence safety function, which is designed to shut down the tractor if

at any time the operator comes out of the seat with the Blade Clutch Lever engaged (blades turning) or the tractor is moving forward.

5 Over time, your tractor can lose top speed for various reasons. In most cases your dealer can correct this and you can regain the speed you have lost. Our tractors vary in top speed from 5 mph to 10 mph. By marking off a distance of 100 feet and using the chart shown on this page, you can determine the top speed of your tractor. Check your operator's manual for the correct speed of your model.

6 The FSC friction lock allows the steering levers to be pulled back and the FSC to stay in place providing a cruise control function. If the steering levers are pulled back and the FSC moves with them, more friction is required. On the other hand, adjustment to reduce friction is needed if the FSC requires excess force to move it.

7 If your catcher box is under- or over-filling, this is the function of the GHS full signal alarm. The vane on the Grass-Pak® switch should be adjusted from 4 to 4.5 inches below



the exhaust screen to provide the proper amount of grass fill in your catcher.

8 Occasionally you will want to check your blade brake stopping time on the mowing deck. When the engine RPM is at full throttle and the Blade Clutch Lever is disengaged, the cutting blades should come to a stop within 5 seconds. If not, have the blade brake function checked and adjusted by your dealer.

I have not presented these items in a particular order of importance—they are all important. Our hope is that you will not only be a safer Walker Mower operator, but just maybe we have answered some questions that you have about your tractor's operation. **WT**

Milestones Celebrated

Two production milestones were reached in the first half of 2014. The 150,000th mower deck was produced in January and the 4,000th Hi-Dump was produced in May. On both occasions a lunchtime ceremony was held in the factory to mark the achievement. The Walker factory enjoys celebrating at different points of production.

At the time of producing the 150,000th mower deck, the tractor production was at approximately 126,000, which illustrates that quite a few Walker Mower

owners purchase more than one of the interchangeable mower decks for each tractor sold.

The Hi-Dump has proven to be one of the most popular options for the Walker Mower, and is particularly appreciated by commercial owner-operators who work by themselves and need a power lift to dump the grass clippings out of the catcher.



MONTHLY E-NEWS SIGN UP

In May, Walker started releasing a monthly E-newsletter for subscribers to learn more about new products and promotions, enthusiastic customers and happenings at the factory. Released the first Tuesday of each month, the newsletter is a great way to stay in touch with Walker. Go to walkermowers.com and hover over the top of the page to have the subscription form drop down.



NEXT-GENERATION MS14 IN PRODUCTION

Walker Manufacturing proudly introduces a completely new version of the Model S with a lighter-weight, simplified design, offering a high-performance GHS tractor at a lower price point.

Major power train components include a single-cylinder 14-hp Subaru engine with a five-year commercial warranty, Hydro-Gear® 3100 transaxles (6.5-mph ground speed), and a PTO/GHS blower on a common drive shaft (patent pending design).

The MS14 also features a tilt-open forward body (like Models MT/MD) and a new 7.0-bushel grass catcher patterned after the 10.0 catcher used on the MT/MD. All Walker 36" and 42" mower decks will work with this tractor.



SALES SCHOOL GRADUATES 250



The factory “out front Advantage” two-day sales training school will have been completed by 250 people during 2013 and 2014. Walker distributor and dealer sales representatives who complete the training are recognized as a “Certified Walker Mower Sales Representative”.

A total of 14 classes will have been held by August. Representatives have attended from Latvia to Australia to Alaska to Barbados and many points in between.

Follow-up reports show the training is working. Walker Mower sales are increasing at dealerships where the

salespeople have received factory sales training. Also, attendees have given strong affirmation on the quality of the training; some of the attendees say they have attended other sales training events across the years and the Walker school is the “best ever” even compared to training offered by some of the bigger manufacturers in the outdoor power equipment industry.

Training will continue for years to come. Sign-ups will soon be made for the 2015 classes.

NEW DISTRIBUTORS JOIN WALKER PROGRAM

During 2014, three new distributors have come into the Walker marketing program. One distributor is taking over an existing market area and two are opening brand new areas.

Maskinhandler Indkobsringen (MI Company), Vejle, Denmark, is now handling the Denmark territory after the original distributor, Hansen & Kølsholm Company, was closed.

Corea Snow Remover Corp, Seoul, Korea, and **Vetrarsol, Kopavogur, Iceland**, are introducing Walker to their markets.

Walker Manufacturing welcomes these new distributors onboard. Walker is now represented by 47 distributors worldwide.

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We're Seeing Stripes!

Our awesome Facebook fans have been posting some great Walker striping pics to our page lately. Here are a few of our favorites. See more at facebook.com/walkermowers

 **WALKER**



Travis Whitehouse
Chelmsford, MA



Michael Smyth
Kelowna, British Columbia



Nathan Barrett
Wolfeboro, NH



Luke Hawkins
Marshfield, MA