

WALKER TALK



SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

The Rocket Science of Property Maintenance

TOM AND LORI COUTURE
OF PINE RIDGE
PROPERTY SERVICES
IN NAPLES, FLORIDA

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WALKER TALK

Our Customers' Stories



I have always enjoyed true stories more than fiction. You just cannot make up some of the real journeys that people go on in their lives. Now we know that a lawnmower is probably not the highlight of most people's life, but for some, the Walker Mower has played an interesting part in their story.

Since we do not know the stories that are told to our competitors about their lawnmowers, we may be exaggerating to say that we have more than our share of great customers and great stories that are told to us about our customers' use of the Walker Mower. To be honest and fair, we should also disclose that not everything we hear is “great”; there are disappointments and poor experiences with our equipment from time to time. But the positive greatly outweighs the negative.

It is very exciting and energizing to hear that our mower is helping create opportunities for some people and improving the quality of life for others. Energy is needed to keep going in the manufacturing business, and that is where a lot of our energy comes from: customer stories of the impact of the mower on their lives. These stories keep us focused on building the very best machine possible for our customers.

Across the years, *Walker Talk* and nowadays social media, have been a way to share customer stories for the enjoyment, encouragement and energizing of our readers. It is exciting to read about young people starting businesses, elderly people making extra income, middle-aged entrepreneurs having a business of their own, dual-careers advancing, women in business, award-winning private gardeners, small companies and big companies, all sharing the use of the little yellow machine. We have been careful to not make the machine the main part of the story; it is not the machine, it is what the machine does that makes the difference in the story. Wow, with 135,000 machines sold and stories to go with them, this is an exciting business.

It seems to be very human to want to hear the story of others and then tell your own story. Sharing your story is a great way to encourage and energize others. For that purpose, these days, I give quite a few factory tours and speak at business meetings as a way to tell our story. I would encourage you, our reader, to tell your story whenever you have an opportunity. If you have a Walker Mower story you would like to share with us, please visit “WalkerTalk.com”. **WT**

Bob Walker

Bob Walker, President

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It's Not Rocket Science, but It's a Science Anyway

Tom and Lori Couture started mowing lawns in a rather unusual way. After selling their 27-year-old commercial printing company, they purchased 40 mowing accounts on Craigslist. That was five years ago. Now, Pine Ridge Property Services in Naples, Florida maintains only a handful of those original properties. Yet its sales have grown, as has the owners' knowledge of what it takes to be successful in the industry.

FEET FIRST

Before getting into the lawn maintenance business, the Coutures didn't know much about landscaping other than what they had done for themselves. Both enjoy cooking, so the idea of starting a bakery or even operating a food truck sounded attractive at first. But these types of ventures are often short-lived, not to mention the fact that they needed something that would generate immediate cash flow.

"We knew you didn't have to be a rocket scientist to mow, and the entry fee was relatively low, maybe \$50,000 or less to get fully equipped," Tom remarks. So they purchased the mowing accounts for approximately five times their monthly billing, worked with the seller and his equipment for a month, and jumped in feet first. They found a pickup truck for \$11,000, ordered an enclosed trailer, and purchased a Walker Mower Model MB.

For two years, the couple mowed and retained most of those original accounts. "Several homeowners, many of whom were 'snowbirds', only wanted us to mow and blow," Lori recalls. "But as we became more knowledgeable, we wanted



Since purchasing 40 accounts on Craigslist, Tom and Lori Couture have grown Pine Ridge Property Services into a full-service landscape maintenance company.

to do more to make the properties look nicer.

"Today, we have 19 customers, only four of whom were obtained on Craigslist," Lori continues. "I essentially fired the other 36 because what we do now is so much different than what we

were doing even three years ago."

What they do nowadays, as the company name implies, is actually maintain properties. In addition to providing standard maintenance services, they prune trees and bushes, add seasonal color, maintain irrigation systems, and install



The Coutures share lawn maintenance tasks, although on most days Lori does the mowing and Tom the weeding and edging.



hardscape features like paved walks and patios, among other services.

“Lawn maintenance is only part of the total landscape picture, but it is a big part,” Lori emphasizes. “Even the best, most well-maintained landscapes won’t look good if the lawn doesn’t look its best, as well. That’s one reason why we selected a Walker Mower; it leaves a great cut.”

“Lori also liked the way it steered,” adds Tom, “and the machine is a real time and money saver. Early on I couldn’t understand, and I still don’t understand, why so many trailers around here transport a large zero-turn mower and a mid-size mower. Sure, the zero-turn is for the front yard and the mid-size for the back since it can go through small gates. But the Walker Mower, with its 42-inch deck, can do the work for both in less time, save the cost of an additional machine, and leave the lawn looking nice.”

HOT TOPIC

Pine Ridge Property Services has never advertised or otherwise promoted its services. In most cases, new accounts came from neighbors who admired Tom’s and Lori’s work or arrived from word of mouth. “It seems that lawn maintenance is a hot topic at country clubs and other gathering spots in Naples,” relates Tom. “If someone likes the work you’re doing, you will get a good reference.”

Other than the service itself, one big difference between “mow and blow” and providing full service is customer expectation. Lori explains: “Some customers don’t care how much it costs. They just want us to make their property look perfect. Others can be more hands-on. One of our current customers, for example, prefers a more native look and will only allow us to do minimal trimming.”

Lori laughs thinking about another customer who mowed his own lawn. “He wanted us to do everything on the

property except mow because he enjoyed doing it. But on one occasion he couldn’t mow, so we did with our Walker Mower. We’ve been mowing his lawn ever since!

“Tom and I wouldn’t be doing what we’re doing without our Walker Mower,” Lori continues. “It is our alpha and omega. It not only does most of our mowing, but we push leaves with the deck and have even used it as a tractor to drag around downed limbs. Being able to trim so close with the out front deck frees up our time to either provide additional enhancement services or work on a different account entirely.”

The Coutures also have a mulching deck for their mower and a 25-gallon sprayer attachment that Tom says comes in very handy for dealing with a white fly epidemic on ficus trees. “A GHS model would be very useful, too, handling oak leaves that fall twice a year,” he adds.

But the latter machine will likely have to wait its turn behind a new model MB

that has only 13 hours on it. Tom notes that the old one is resting comfortably in the hospital waiting for some deck repairs. Five years of taking a year-round beating in Florida can be debilitating for any machine.

NOT FOR EVERYONE

Tom and Lori have developed a good business. They are their own bosses, just as they were in the printing business, and long, grueling hours are not the norm. A typical work week finds them in “the field” about 30 hours, with the rest of the time spent maintaining equipment, billing and performing other business-related chores.

“It was difficult at first and we struggled.”

– Tom Couture

On site, they share lawn maintenance duties. Lori does most of the mowing while Tom does the trimming and edging. They both enjoy designing and installing flower beds, shaping trees and creating hardscape elements.

To say they are naturally pretty handy is an understatement. They designed and constructed the beautiful home where they’ve lived for more than 20 years and raised two daughters and a son. Both are hard workers and relish being outside, so a second career in landscaping was right up their alley.

“I wouldn’t advise other people to get in the industry the way we did,” admits Tom. “It was difficult at first and we struggled.” Lori agrees, adding, “More than a few customers questioned why we purchased their accounts without talking with them first. One, who had never seen us because he lives in Florida only part time, was very argumentative. We won him over though, pointing out that our vehicle, equipment, and overall appearance were very professional, not to mention we left his property looking



Tom and Lori wouldn’t advise other people to get into the industry the way they did.

neat and clean.”

But things have changed. Customers like him are long gone, and Pine Ridge Property Maintenance has developed a reputation for being a top-notch full-service provider. On the home front, Tom and Lori are looking to downsize by selling their property and moving into a smaller house. The “kids” have all left home, with one daughter in D.C.; another, the oldest, married and living nearby; and a son in graduate school.

Tom and Lori say they can deal with a much smaller house, but still require a good-size lot to store their vehicle, trailer and equipment lineup, which has grown over the years. In the meantime, it’s business as usual. No, the Coutures are not building rockets. But they are building a second career in an industry where knowing how to relate to people and maintaining landscapes is a science in itself. **WT**



It Pays to Have a Goal

When Anderson Goldmon started mowing lawns full-time in 2000, he had one goal in mind. The prison job he left was paying \$35,000 annually and he was bringing home \$28,000 mowing lawns part-time. Within the next year, he wanted to make as much money mowing lawns as he had been making in his job. His goal, then, was a modest \$7,000 increase in sales.

The owner of Goldmon Lawn Care in Little Rock, Arkansas, beat his goal and then some. In fact, by the end of the following year, mowing revenue approached the \$100,000 mark. “In October 2000, I purchased my first Walker Mower, and that machine was largely responsible for my jump in productivity,” Goldmon remarks. “I thought, if I can make \$100,000 with one Walker

“It pays to surround yourself with good people.” Left to right, sitting: Martin Perez, crew leader Myron McFee, supervisor Matt McFee, Anthony Boykins, Kevin Farr, Domingo Asig. Standing: owner/operator Anderson W. Goldmon, son-in-law Brandon T. Gilliam, wife Renee Goldmon. Not pictured: Luis Villatoro, daughter Kennedy Goldmon and office manager/daughter Andrea Goldmon-Gilliam.

Mower, imagine what I could make with two, three, four, five, or even six.”

Today he has six, but discovered that the \$100,000-to-one formula would only apply if he operated all six machines himself. Still, this owner is doing very well with two crews, seven employees and a mix of residential, HOA and commercial properties.

AG ROOTS

Goldmon, along with 10 siblings, was raised on a family farm in Pine Bluff, about an hour's drive south of Little Rock. “I enjoyed farming but wasn't very successful at it,” he recalls. “From 1978 to 1985, I ran the farm with one of

my brothers. Unfortunately, our tenure cut through the recession and we just couldn't make a go of it. Even though we ultimately failed, I learned a hard lesson about how important it is to be business savvy and watch your money.”

To this day, fear of failure drives Goldmon. Failure is something he says, he never wants to experience again.

Goldmon's path to lawn maintenance led next to a position as a farm supervisor at a prison in Grady, AR, near Pine Bluff. It was a big farm, which operated with the help of 200 inmates, 25 of whom worked for Goldmon. In 1995, he took a new position at a prison near Little Rock in Benton, AR, where he worked security

for a work release program.

Having a 4 p.m. to midnight shift caused Goldmon to “twiddle his thumbs” during the day looking for something else to do. He took a few day jobs, including selling knives and working for a couple of landscape companies, but eventually settled on mowing and maintaining yards around his neighborhood. “At one point, I had 10 accounts and decided mowing lawns had potential,” says Goldmon. “So I started keeping records and discovered I could probably make as much mowing as I did working for the prison.”

In January 2000, he pulled the plug on the prison job, set his dollar goal, and launched a new career.

LEARNING CURVE

Goldmon worked with walk-behind mowers until that fall when Little Rock dealer, Cleve Addie, sold him a 26-hp EFI Walker Mower. “Company President, Craig Addie, is a straight shooter and encouraged me to buy the mower,” remarks Goldmon. “But I was already partially convinced it was the machine I wanted because I saw the way it striped lawns, plus its design reminded me of a cotton picker.”

Having never operated a Walker Mower, the purchase was a bit foreign to the new owner. “After seven days, I was ready to take it back,” he admits. “I just couldn’t get the hang of running it, but I suffered through and soon became comfortable with its operation.” And how! “That original machine has 7,000 hours on it,” Goldmon notes. “I’ve replaced the engine once, but the pumps are original.”

In 2002, he purchased his second Walker Mower, another 26-hp EFI. At the same time, he started to manage growth and maximize what he had.

Part of what he had was developing a mix of properties and providing full service. In fact, when not mowing, Goldmon still does the annual color and applies fertilizer and weed control. “Gardening is my pastime, so I truly enjoy installing spring and fall color

“If you don’t want a nice finished look, then this machine isn’t for you.”

– Anderson Goldmon

and creating interesting designs. It’s just something that helps set us apart,” he adds.

In addition to his initial residential accounts, Goldmon soon picked up some HOAs and they immediately became his biggest customers. In 2002, his local bank in Pine Bluff opened a branch in Little Rock and the two, the customer and the lawn care company, began growing together.

“The bank was my first real commercial account. When I obtained the business, the bank manager told me that he wanted his bank’s landscape to

look better than the bank’s across the street. That wasn’t a problem until I got that account, as well,” laughs Goldmon. Talk about an incentive to make every mowing job look better!

COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGES

“When I compete for a job against larger companies, I always tell the property owner that I personally will be on their property every week. Bigger companies can’t say that,” says Goldmon.

His six Walker Mowers, all 26-hp EFI models with GHS decks, are thought to provide another advantage. He explains,



Crew leader Myron McFee on one of six 26-hp EFI Walker Mowers.



A.W. Goldmon Lawn Care recently took on the owner's church account. The annual color in the background is Anderson's handiwork.



"When I compete for a job against larger companies, I always tell the property owner that I personally will be on their property every week. Bigger companies can't say that," says Anderson Goldmon.

"It's their finished cut that stands out. No, a Walker Mower isn't for everyone. If you don't want a nice finished look, then this machine isn't for you.

"Sure, there are more rugged machines on the market, but I don't need mine to be tough. There are faster mowers, too, but I don't need mine to be fast. In fact, I don't want my employees operating mowers wide open, unless they're going down the street to dump some clippings."

His hard-working employees comprise another competitive advantage. "If you want employees to grow with you, then you have to take them out of their comfort zone," he emphasizes. "I also tell them to work just as if the homeowner or property owner is watching them through a window."

SUCCESS SECRETS

Fear of failure may be a great motivator for Goldmon, but another, even more significant secret to success, he explains, is surrounding himself with good people. "I have a saying: 'Occasionally, a good person may do something bad, but rarely will a bad person ever do anything good.' If you surround yourself with good people, good things will happen."

Among good things, his company has been a finalist twice, in 2006 and 2012, for Best of the Best of Central Arkansas in the Landscape Company category. He recognizes his employees and customers, dealer, Cleve Addie, and Renee, his wife of two years, and office manager/daughter, Adrea Goldmon-Gilliam, as partners in this success.

As this Walker owner has demonstrated, it pays to have a goal. But even more important is surrounding yourself with good people to help you reach that goal. **WT**

People and places define Ontario campgrounds

Above the Tension Life

Pull into Country Gardens RV Park in Petersburg, Ontario, Canada, and something dramatic happens. You cross over into a tension-free zone; at least that's what many guests tell Peter Bingeman who, with his family, owns and operates this "home away from home." In fact, they own two campgrounds, a long stone's throw from one another, Landings and Country Gardens.

Located a few miles from Kitchener with a population well over 200,000, the campgrounds are less than a 15-minute drive from two large universities and several small colleges, and Toronto is little more than an hour away.

Its close proximity is especially convenient for seasonal campers who may spend the weekend or even all week at the campgrounds. Their stay can be highlighted by a stop to nearby St. Jacobs, said to be one of Ontario's favorite rural destinations. Visitors can shop and eat, learn about the Mennonite story, or even visit the Maple Syrup Museum of Ontario.

But it's not location that defines Landings and Country Gardens; it's the people and the place. "I've always enjoyed providing an environment where guests can relax," says Peter, who has 40 years in the industry and is past president of both the Ontario Campground Association and the National Campground Association. "There's a sense of freedom and safety here, and a mix of all different cultures and ages."

The family purchased Landings four years ago, and they've owned Country Gardens since 1999. Both sites offer an array of activities, including swimming, paddle boating and fishing. A walk-



Campground owners Peter and Jan Bingeman with son Alan and daughter Laura.

ing tour will uncover a horseshoe pit and miniature golf course at Country Gardens, along with a favorite amenity for youngsters, a koi pond.

Daughter, Laura Dietrich, who manages Landings, mentioned that her

mother, Jan, raises koi fish and maintains the pond filled with about 100 colorful inhabitants, the oldest approaching 18 years old. A quarter, she demonstrates, will net observers a handful of fish food and front seats to a feeding frenzy. "Each



Campers can take advantage of swimming and boating amenities at Country Gardens or simply enjoy the tranquil setting.



Operator John Heimpel tidies up a cut 'n' charge site at Landings.

campground also has a snack bar, recreation hall and, at Country Gardens," she adds, "we're also constructing a new pavilion just in time for Canada Day celebrations."

BEHIND THE CURTAIN

Landings sports 125 seasonal campsites and three that can accommodate overnight camping. Country Gardens has space for 225 seasonal sites and 27 overnights.

"We provide full service for our guests," Laura points out. "We prepare sites, locate trailers, and construct porches and patios. For those interested in upgrading their units, we sell three different types of RVs with models for viewing across from the Country Gardens office."

Driving around, she points out several different sites, including one leased by a camper who has been a seasonal guest at Landings for 50 years. Laura waves

to her brother, Alan, who was busy preparing a new site. The siblings recently bought into the business, one that keeps 19 employees and the four family members busy all season long.

"It takes a lot of work to stay on top of everything that goes on around here," Laura emphasizes. Her father agrees. "It's a big challenge just maintaining the properties, not to mention providing upgrades like the pavilion that our seasonal guests appreciate. Last week we finished treating the last of 140 ash trees for the Emerald Ash Borer. Our staff is constantly cleaning up the grounds, trimming back the landscape, and, in the fall, removing leaves. You can only imagine how many leaves we move."

TURF TALK

There's plenty of grass to mow, as well, approximately nine acres of turf at each campground. That includes common areas at both and 33 cut 'n' charge sites at Country Gardens and 18 at Landings. Guests have the option to maintain their sites, but they are required to keep them looking neat.

The campgrounds own two Walker Mowers, one for each site. Peter purchased the first one in 2007, a diesel with a 48-inch GHS deck. He brought the second one on board, an EFI gas model with a 52-inch GHS deck, two years ago. Both were purchased from



Lunchtime break: Employees enjoy Jan's cooking and some camaraderie before heading back to work.

Connect Equipment in Kitchener, two miles down the road.

"Walker Mowers are a perfect fit here," says Peter. "The machine's maneuverability and out-front deck design are ideal for mowing around obstacles, and we have to collect clippings. You can't side-discharge with trailers and families so close by." He mentions that the clippings end up as compost in Jan's garden, her second passion next to raising koi fish.

Operator John Heimpel puts the machines through their paces, spending two days a week at Landings and the other three at Country Gardens. He checks his routing slip to ensure he catches all his cut 'n' charge accounts for the day.

"This is the schedule through fall leaf cleanup," Heimpel explains. "At the end of the growing season, we don't pick up all the leaves with the Walker Mowers, but instead use a dump truck and 10-inch vacuum to pick up most of

them. The mowers come in for the final cleanup around the sites."

December, then, ushers in a quiet time, although the owners don't go dormant like the grass does. Additional upgrades, tree work and wood splitting are all on the winter agenda. So, too, is getting their equipment ready for spring. In addition to its Walker Mowers, the campgrounds have a mini-excavator, two loaders, a wood chipper and splitter, a pump for emptying the ponds and swimming pools, a couple of utility vehicles and a garden tractor, which is used to mow the road sides between the two sites.

Not to say the owners don't have time in the offseason to find their own form of tension relief. They share a cottage four hours north where snow and snowmobile trails abound. Jan also encourages a trip or two to anyplace south, and she's not talking about a two-hour drive to Buffalo. **WT**



Taking the bait: A quarter's worth of fish food nets a feeding frenzy.

How to meet the labor challenge with **retirees**

Back in 2008, *Walker Talk* volume 33 ran a story on Ralph Anderson, the owner of Anderson Lawn Care in Wyand, Illinois. The title of the story was “Age is No Barrier for This Mowing Contractor”, and it still isn’t. Anderson is 83 years old and going strong.

The story focused on how Anderson, who was 76 years old at the time, grew his business, but it also highlighted the fact that several of his employees were retirees. In the article, he remarked, “I also rely heavily on retired farmers and area shift workers. Both have great work ethic. The farmers especially are very familiar with equipment.”

He recently told the *Walker Talk* editor that the retired farmers have been replaced by a retired truck driver, a city retiree, and a Vietnam vet who has retired from working for Caterpillar.



Ralph Anderson in Walker Talk 33. The retired farmers he employed in 2008 have been replaced by a retired trucker, city employee and Caterpillar worker.

Anderson also has younger workers who can do the tough manual labor, something his older workers cannot do. But ride a Walker Mower? Why not? Or provide routine maintenance, replace belts and sharpen blades? Sure, if they have the expertise.

ALTERNATIVE SOLUTIONS

If you’re not looking for solutions to a labor issue, then you’re likely not in the lawn maintenance business. Labor is not only your biggest business expense, it’s also something you cannot do without. The big challenge is there simply are not enough people who want to work mowing and maintaining landscapes, in part, because it can be labor-intensive and in part, because construction and similar jobs pay more.

That scenario changed somewhat during the Great Recession, but an uptick in building and other construction has since added to a labor shortage. The industry has tried to supplement with guest workers, but the H-2B program has become progressively difficult and expensive to use, not to mention the fact the yearly visa quotas (66,000) hardly put a dent in the service industry’s labor needs.

Bob Vickery of The Planter’s Touch in Easley, South Carolina, (*Walker Talk* 27) had a retired neighbor help him when he first began his business. “I found him to be an excellent worker who always had a great attitude,” said Vickery, who has also used many high school and home-schooled students whose schedule usually allows them to work several days a week.

“Working with the students requires more patience than I have some days. But they can be good workers and hiring them has allowed me to mentor many young people over the years,” he added. His former employees now number a state representative, a medical doctor, a Ph.D. in engineering, and two who own their own landscape companies.

Vickery became acquainted with some of these students through his church. Others were recruited via a home-school network. He has also been involved with a local rescue mission and has considered employing some graduates of its rehabilitation program.

“The downside of employing students is they usually leave after a few years and you have to train someone else again. But this cycle is worth our time and effort since we turn down maintenance jobs regularly because we don’t have enough help,” said Vickery.

Other lawn maintenance contractors have used temporary employment agencies with varying degrees of success; others

still have experimented with job sharing outside the industry.

WHAT ABOUT USING RETIREES?

According to AARP, nearly two-thirds of older workers today see themselves working in retirement, either out of choice or necessity. The *New York Times* recently reported (June 15, 2015) that in the late 1990s, only one in five Americans in their late-60s needed a job. Now, that number has almost reached one in three.

The labor supply is there and as AARP CEO Ann Jenkins (writing in the June 2015 AARP Bulletin) pointed out, so are many of the sought-after traits employees are looking for. Among them, are “experience and engagement, maturity and professionalism, a strong work ethic, loyalty, reliability, knowledge and understanding, and the ability to serve as mentors.”

“With these traits,” she added, “they are in a prime position to help close the labor shortage U.S. employers face.” The question is whether or not lawn maintenance contractors truly count themselves to be among these employers. After all, the days are long and sometimes very hot, and the work can be very tiring.

The answer is “yes”, depending on the job and the work environment. Anderson’s retirees, for example, operate Walker Mowers and he allows them a degree of flexibility that other employees may not have, in terms of days and hours worked. “I think many retirees relish the feeling of being productive and recognized for what they do,” he noted. “Having a job gives them a feeling of worthiness.”

Lawn maintenance is not all manual labor and one needs not to be 20 years old and in great condition to be productive. In addition to less physically demanding jobs such as operating a mower or driving a truck, companies, depending on their size, may need account managers, salespeople, administrative help, and so forth.

In fact, in a recent study conducted by the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), 40 percent of landscape companies surveyed indicated

According to AARP, nearly two-thirds of older workers today see themselves working in retirement, either out of choice or necessity.

they plan to hire managers next year. The study also found that nationwide, there are 60,000 management jobs available in the industry. Finding manual laborers, then, is not the industry’s only challenge.

RECRUITING RETIREES

How does one find and recruit retirees? Certainly, church groups, Lions Clubs, and veterans associations are viable resources. Posting jobs on any of several search engines and your company website can be effective, too, especially if positions are written to attract retirement-age individuals, e.g., flexible hours, flexible schedules, and so forth.

AARP offers several resources, as well, that reach a more targeted audience. They include:

Job Postings. The AARP website features a job search engine at jobs.aarp.org powered by Indeed.

Employer Resource Center. Tools and resources for employers and employees at aarp.org/work/employers.

The AARP Workforce Assessment Tool. This free, confidential tool can help you assess your current and future workforce needs. Complete the Assessment Tool survey and receive a report, which provides recommendations on how to develop the policies and practices that appeal to older workers, by visiting aarpworkforceassessment.org.

Recruiting and hiring retired workers will not by itself solve the labor challenges this and other service industries face. But given the right position, the right environment and the right incentives, these workers can step in for younger workers who may lack the knowledge, experience and even the work ethic to succeed. **WT**



Retired employees can offer dependable labor for mowing businesses of any size.

Handling Clippings the **EASY WAY**

When Ray Amundson purchased his first Walker Mower in 2006, it came with a high-lift dump. Four years later, he replaced that one with two more, each with that important selling point for him.

"I injured my left bicep in a parachute accident while in the Army and I couldn't lift bags full of clippings," the owner of Ray's Lawn Service in

Moorhead, Minnesota, explains. "The high-lift was the ideal solution for me."

When used in combination with a custom-made trailer, this operator never has to lift a bag again, nor does he even touch a blade of grass in the summer or a leaf in the fall. "You cannot find a more efficient way to handle debris," he remarks.

Amundson recently retired from the Air National Guard after spending 25

years in the military, four in the regular Army, four in the Army National Guard and 17 in the Air National Guard in Fargo, North Dakota. He started mowing lawns part-time in 2004 and incorporated two years later.

"That first year I mowed six lawns, and the next year 12, all small residential properties. In 2006, I added a fairly large apartment complex and needed something bigger and faster than a walk mower to get the job done. That's when I purchased my first Walker Mower from Out Front Power Equipment in Fargo," says Amundson.

Since that purchase, his company has grown several times over. It now maintains roughly 100 accounts, two-thirds of which are in Fargo and the rest across the state line in Moorhead. Calling himself a mow and trim operator, Amundson works either by himself or with his son, Brady, who is 16 years old.

"I can mow two lawns an hour when working alone or with Brady I can do three lawns," he explains. "Most of my accounts are small residential properties whose owners are on a fixed income. They need to save money, so I'm very flexible. When grass slows in the summer, some may want their lawns mowed once every two weeks, or sometimes a son or daughter will come home to mow. That's fine with me; it's not all about how much money I can make."



Ray with son Brady. Working together, the two can mow and trim three lawns an hour.

BEING EFFICIENT

Still, time is money. Handling debris efficiently allows him to be flexible with customers. He points to his son who has just filled the dump box and is heading to the trailer. “Brady can lift the box while traveling and have it ready to dump when he gets to the trailer. Then he lowers it, again all while traveling back to the property. It just takes no time at all to dump the clippings and continue mowing.”

Two recycling locations, one in Fargo and the other in Moorhead, compost the clippings and leaves free of charge. Key to the operation is the 18-foot trailer designed to carry two 26-hp EFI mowers with 48-inch GHS decks and a walk mower. Its custom-made frame takes advantage of all 102 inches in width allowed by the Department of Transportation. The box is positioned over the axles for better balance and to take some of the pressure off the tongue.

Amundson's Ford F-350 has a similar box setup in its bed. Both operate with single-action hydraulic cylinders. “I found the truck in Washington and took a train ride to get it,” he relates. “It's not four-wheel drive and a few of my friends wonder why it's not a diesel, either. I just prefer gas, and as far as the four-wheel drive goes, I put the truck up in the winter. Snow removal is not a big part of my operation. I only have 40 accounts where I blow snow off the drives and walks.”

PERFECT FIT

The two Walker Mowers have logged a total of 3,200 hours between them. In addition to the high-lift feature, this owner likes the way the front deck mows and maneuvers around his smaller properties. “The tilt-up deck makes it easy to replace blades, too,” adds Brady. “We install sharp blades every morning and replace them maybe halfway through the day. You can really tell the difference in cut.”

Halfway through the day is about 6-1/2 hours' worth of mowing. “One of my biggest overhead costs is fuel, and



The out front deck minimizes trimming, but Brady also likes its tilt-up feature for changing blades.

when we get on the road we want to stay there and not travel back and forth between our shop and accounts,” notes Amundson. “With this approach we can mow all our properties in three long days.”

This day, father is trimming and son is mowing. Brady is handling the Walker Mower like a pro, which is no surprise

since he first sat on one when he was 10 years old. “I like to mow close around trees and other obstacles to cut down on dad’s trimming,” says Brady. “But if I’m mowing and doing the trimming, too, I’ll mow even closer,” he adds with a smile. Dad just looks at him and laughs.

When not mowing, the duo spends the other two weekdays and Saturdays

working on a new shop and home. The shop is 3,600 square feet and the second-story living quarters is 2,200 square feet. They’ve done much of the work themselves, including laying the concrete floor, framing the building and installing the wiring. Relatives have helped by sharing some of their building knowledge and experience and, says Amundson, viewing YouTube videos also comes in handy.

“They need help, and four hours of my time is not much to give up for them.”

– Ray Amundson

EASY DOES IT

Ray’s Lawn Service is not your typical Walker Mower story, but yet it is. Not all operators want to provide full service, nor do they want to grow and become hugely successful. Amundson’s near-term goal is to continue to grow the business maybe 10 percent a year, split it with Brady when he turns 18, and retire at age 60, 16 years from now.

In the meantime, the company subs out the work or services it doesn’t provide, e.g., large side-discharge mowing jobs, fertilizer application, tree trimming and so forth. When asked about hobbies, Amundson laughs and says there’s not much time for that and, furthermore, he doesn’t want to do anything extreme like parachuting. As he puts it, “I’m self-employed and can’t risk getting injured.”

This fall, his company will be one of many in the area volunteering for the United Way Day of Caring. “Most of my customers are older women who have lost their husbands,” says Amundson. “They need help, and four hours of my time is not much to give up for them.”

It’s all part of being flexible, working with people, and understanding that there’s plenty more to life than just making money. **WT**



With the high-lift and custom-made boxes, Ray says you cannot find a more efficient way to handle clippings and leaves.



On Purpose Design Provides Better Belt and Pulley Maintenance

Recently I have been thinking about the discipline of On Purpose Design and what it means from a technical service and maintenance perspective. The On Purpose Design of the Walker Mower has been consistent over the years, providing accessibility, maintainability and long-term reliability for our customers.

A great example of how On Purpose Design aids in the service and maintenance of your Walker Mower is in belt and pulley maintenance. This important aspect of machine maintenance is sometimes overlooked and often underestimated. By using a serpentine design, the belt and pulley systems on the Walker Mower have the advantage of necessary belt wrap or pulley contact for maximum power transfer combined with accessibility. You may have noticed that all Walker belt drive systems intentionally avoid wrapping belts around pulleys and shafts, which allows belt removal and replacement to be performed without a toolbox full of tools.

A MORE DETAILED LOOK AT BELTS AND PULLEYS

Let us look at belt and pulley maintenance in a little more detail. Belts and pulleys are sized and matched for proper belt-to-pulley contact and adequate power transmission. Belts and pulleys are produced in various sizes and styles, which is why it is important to use genuine Walker replacement belts and pulleys

(refer to your parts manual for correct part numbers). Belts vary not only in length but also in width, depth, angle and their numbers of “V’s”. Also note that each pulley is designed to match belt dimensions. A properly matched belt and pulley will be one where the sides, or the “V” of the belt, are in full contact with the upper section of the groove on the pulley. If the belt

A key clue for belt and/or pulley wear is rubbed-off paint and/or a shiny spot on the bottom of the “V” groove of the pulley.

is running in the bottom of the pulley, it is either the result of a worn or mismatched belt, or a worn pulley groove which will, in turn, result in a loss of power transfer right where it is needed. A key clue for belt and/or pulley wear is rubbed-off paint and/or a shiny spot on the bottom of the “V” groove of the pulley.

Another visual clue of a worn pulley is a glazed or shiny belt. This occurs because the slipping belt generates heat and melts the surface material of the belt. There may also be occasions when the load applied to the belt exceeds its designed load capacity, which will result in belt slippage. A shiny area on a belt or pulley will be evident if this is occurring. If left unattended, the slippage and the heat it causes will cause the belt to crack and eventually break, leaving you in a “machine down” situation.

We all are aware that a squealing belt is a very audible signal of belt slippage, but

not all belt slippage will reveal itself with a squeal. Visible inspection can help you identify a slipping belt, but how does a slipping belt affect performance?

First, if you notice a loss of speed from your Walker, or what appears to be erratic steering, you may have engine drive belt slippage (from the engine to the jackshaft). It could be that the ground drive belt is glazed and slipping, or that pulley wear is preventing maximum RPM at the transmission’s input. Check the idler pulley spring tensioner on either drive; they might require attention.

Second, if you notice a drop in blower performance, check the blower drive belt and pulleys.

Finally, take a good look at the PTO belt and deck drive belt (if applicable) and the pulleys.

Something else to consider, if you operate your mower in sandy conditions, is that sand can embed itself in your belts and accelerate wear of the pulley groove.

How long should a drive belt last? From our experience and design expectation, 500 hours would be considered normal. If the belt is being replaced more often than that, check the pulley alignment and pulley wear as described above.

Why not take some time and do a comprehensive inspection of your belt and pulley systems? Look for the signs of pulley and belt wear, and catch those worn pulleys or glazed and cracked belts before they let you down. By doing this you can maximize your investment and limit your downtime. **WT**

2016 Calendar Contest Offers \$2,000 Cash

The 2016 Beautiful Places calendar will be assembled using photos submitted by customers of the beautiful places being maintained with a Walker Mower. Cash prizes are being offered for the top four photos selected to be in the calendar.

Winning submissions will be chosen by online voting and votes from the Walker factory team.

To submit a photo, the process is simple. See the calendar contest button at walkermowers.com. With the cameras in

today's smartphones, anyone can snap an award-winning photo of a beautiful place with the Walker Mower in action. Photos may be submitted through the end of August (2015) and the winners will be announced in October.



WALKERTALK.COM

After printing 46 issues of *Walker Talk* magazine, and with more to come, an electronic version of *Walker Talk* is now available. Walkertalk.com will continue to feature stories of Walker Mower customers, but will have the added benefit of video clips to add interest to the written account. With the ease of electronic language translation, there will be the new ability to feature stories collected from international Walker users.

LARGER REAR DISCHARGE DECK FOR MODEL MH

The new DR64 rear discharge deck is a scaled-up version of the DR52 for applications with larger spaces and needing high-production mowing. The combination of mulch action and rear discharge of clippings of this deck gives a nice spreading of clippings and finished appearance. The design of the deck footrest offers individual foot pads and six easily adjustable positions. The deck footrest is mounted on the carrier frame for extra security.



GHS BLOWER PATENT GRANTED

In May (2015), U.S. patent #9,032,701 was granted to Dean Walker and Walker Manufacturing, covering the design of the GHS blower system developed for the Model MS14.

This unique design simplifies and compacts the drive train by powering the blower and the mower deck with a common drive shaft. The resulting benefits to the MS14 are reduced cost while maintaining strong performance of the GHS blower and compact size of the tractor.

REVERSE-ROTATION 42" GHS DECK AVAILABLE

Walker is introducing the DC42R deck with reverse-rotation cutting blades which offers smooth cutting in the blade overlap area and good clog resistance. With the addition of the 42" deck using the reverse-rotation blade design, all four of the Walker GHS decks sizes from 36" to 52" are now available in the reverse-rotation configuration. The standard-rotation GHS decks continue to be available in the 42" and 48" deck sizes for operators who prefer the original deck design.

NEW PRODUCTION LINE FOR FACTORY

A new production line has been installed at the factory to assemble all of the non-collection models, MB and MH, plus the MS14. This move consolidated two production lines used previously into one line with increased output capacity for all of these models. The design of racking and storage bins along the production line optimizes the flow of component parts into assembly; enhanced lighting was added to boost workplace comfort and efficiency.

TWO RECALL BULLETINS ISSUED

(1) Recall Bulletin #15243, issued February 2015, affecting all Model MB S/N 11-113438 thru 14-128728, replacing transmission cooling fans. Compliance with this bulletin is strongly recommended due to possible derailment of the transmission drive belt and unexpected free-wheeling and loss of ground drive and steering.

(2) Recall Bulletin #15247, issued May 2015, affecting Model MS14 S/N 14-127922 thru 15-133902, adding belt guide to PTO drive belt. Compliance with this bulletin is strongly recommended to give complete disengagement of the PTO drive belt and to improve braking action of PTO blade drive with the blade clutch disengagement.

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

60" DOZER BLADE

A new version of the 60" dozer blade (H16) has been designed by Walker and will be manufactured by Walker, replacing an earlier unit manufactured by RAD. The new design has a reinforced blade for increased durability and a simple foot-actuated blade angle adjustment to speed operation. A replaceable four-position steel blade wear edge offers extended wear capacity. Mounts on MH tractor with H-19 implement hitch and on MD/MT with the H10 implement hitch.



UTILITY BED KIT FOR MODEL MS14NC

An optional kit installs a utility bed on the Model MS14nc tractor for increased versatility. The bed is hinged on the back for dumping and uses a gas spring to hold the bed in the "up" position. This is a simple bolt-on kit that is dealer or customer-installed. Order Kit P/N 5650-10.



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Walker 2016 Beautiful Places Calendar Contest

The Walker 2016 Beautiful Places Calendar will be published in late 2015 and feature 13 photos of Walker customers in action all over the world. Winning submissions will be chosen by online voting and votes from the Walker team.

Participation is simple. Take a horizontal (landscape) photograph of a beautiful location where the Walker Mower is in action. Make sure to focus on the beautiful location, so the Walker is only a portion of the shot and not the primary feature. Submissions will be taken until August 28th, 2015 and winners will be announced in October 2015.

Submit your entry and find out more at
walkermowers.com/calendar

