

WALKER TALK

ONE LAWN LEADS TO 400 OTHERS IN SALT LAKE CITY

From left: Trevor Wright,
Kevin Nielson, Jeff Wright
(seated), Preston Wright
and John Bench.

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TURBULENT TIMES

These times we are living in are turbulent and unprecedented. I often relate experiences in my life to the lessons learned as an airplane pilot; I have been flying little airplanes for over 50 years. In that span of time, I know what it is like to encounter turbulence in an airplane—the kind of turbulence that makes the pilot hang on for dear life.

The first point about turbulence is that it comes from outside forces that are beyond the control of the pilot. Outside wind currents upset the stable, smooth ride of the airplane. Likewise, much of the turbulence we are encountering in our lives right now is coming from forces beyond our control. When turbulence happens while flying an airplane (or something else interrupts a smooth flight), the pilot is taught that the first priority is “fly the airplane”. With turbulence in our lives, and in spite of the external forces encountered, we need to keep our families together, stay in business, and keep moving ahead.

A second lesson for the pilot is that fighting turbulence can cause “pilot induced oscillations” (PIO). That is, the pilot can make turbulence worse by overreacting, over-controlling, and jerking the controls. Most airplanes are designed to return to stable flight without a lot of control input from the pilot. Living in these turbulent times is best handled with a steady hand.

Many of today's airplanes have an autopilot that can fly the airplane very nicely and help the pilot when needed. There have been quite a few airplane crashes where the pilot tried to “hand fly” the airplane in turbulence and lost control; he or she should have switched on the autopilot—the autopilot would have prevented loss of control of the airplane and brought the pilot safely to the ground.

An American WWII pilot, Robert L. Scott, Jr., wrote the popular book titled *God Is My Co-Pilot*—I would say God is my autopilot. When we are in a bad spot with turbulence in our life, and we need help, we can turn the controls over to God, our autopilot, and ask him to pilot us through. Psalm 46: 1-3 is a favorite reference for times of turbulence: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.”

A final point is that flying in turbulence is only temporary. I know what it is like to get bounced around for awhile before reaching smooth air. There is smooth air ahead and a smooth ride in the airplane, and we can look forward to better days ahead when we can live without all the turbulence and live in peace.

Sincerely,
Bob Walker, Chairman



THERE'S JUST NO STOPPING THE LADY ON THE LAWN MOWER

LaVon "Dolly" Roll has been operating Walker Mowers around her 80-acre property for nearly 30 years.

Don't let the rainbow pastel sneakers fool you. "I'm just an old farm girl," says LaVon "Dolly" Roll. "I used to drive tractors, ride horses, and even helped raise a couple of baby foxes when I was a kid. I have always loved being outdoors and around animals."

Dolly has also had a love for target shooting. She got to be pretty good at it too. At the age of 75, she took a class to obtain a concealed carry gun permit. "The instructor was pretty impressed," says Kim Ruffalo, the older of Dolly's two daughters. "The instructor told Mom, 'You don't have to shoot the same hole every single time, you know.'"

Dolly has also become quite the lawn



mower operator over the years, something she still does on a regular basis today.

"It's really amazing," says Jon Roll, Dolly's son. Now at age 86, Dolly no longer does many of the things she so passionately and brilliantly did when she was younger. But once she is comfortably seated on her Walker Mower, you can see her eyes light up.

"This mower is what gives Mom a lot of purpose now," Jon says. "Sometimes I wonder if the whole mowing experience takes her back to her tractor days on the farm," adds Keri Hinshaw, Dolly's younger daughter.

Even when she was in her younger years working on the farm, Dolly spent nearly as much time on a mower as she did a tractor. In fact, if you look closely, you can see Dolly on her Walker Mower in an aerial photo taken of the property many years ago. "Mom became known as the 'lady on the lawn mower' around here," Keri points out.



An aerial photographer snapped this shot of Dolly's property many years ago. As luck would have it, Dolly was out on her Walker Mower at the time (red circle). But it wasn't really luck. Dolly spent a lot of time on her Walker, earning her the nickname "lady on the lawn mower" around town.

EARLY ADOPTER OF ZERO-TURN MOWING

Dolly and her late husband, Donald, were elementary school teachers in their hometown of Mayville, Wisconsin. They also cash-crop farmed on the side. As Dolly affectionately recalls, Donald loved planting things—from corn and soybeans to a variety of trees including maple, spruce and arborvitae. That meant Dolly had to take care of the lion's share of the mowing around the property and its many trees.

Dolly mowed with classic-style tractors for many years. Then, in the early 1990s, Donald heard about this new craze that was catching on: zero-turn mowing. He did some checking around and happened upon a dealer roughly 100 miles away in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. Jerry's Small Engine Supply Co. carried a brand called Walker, something most people around Mayville had never heard of. "Dad got a demo mower and tried it out for a while," Kim recalls. "He'd also tested another brand from a dealer closer by. He decided he wanted a Walker."

Today there are three Walker Mowers in Dolly's machine shed: two grass-catching units with 42- and 48-inch decks, and a

side-discharging unit with a 60-inch deck. Dolly's preferred machine is the 48-inch Commemorative Edition grass-catching mower with the Walker Power Dump.

"I remember how leery I was at first when Donald bought the Walker," Dolly recalls. "Back then, a zero-turn was so different with so many new things to know. But I soon found out that it was actually much easier, especially with all the trees on our property. You don't have to worry about a steering wheel, which is so nice. It was just so easy to drive, even when turning around or backing up. Driving the Walker is still very easy for me today."

After undergoing both back and hip surgery over the past decade, the hardest part about running the mower for Dolly these days is getting on and off. Jon has rigged up a couple of solutions. Out in the shed, Dolly pulls up to the back of an ATV so she can use the ATV rack as a handrail. Up by the house, Jon has installed a more conventional handrail right on the brick siding.

"I do have to be careful, which is why I just love the automatic dumping (Walker Power Dump)," Dolly relates. "I just pull up around the side of the barn and dump my

grass or leaves in a big pile. I never have to get off the mower. I've gotten pretty good about how I pull the lever and start lifting the box while I'm still backing up to the pile; that way I don't have to sit there and wait as long. Every fall after the crops are off, Jon takes the tractor over to the pile to scoop up the leaves and grass clippings and spread them out over the field. This stuff makes really good fertilizer."

NOBODY MOWS QUITE LIKE DOLLY

Years ago, when Dolly returned from the hospital after recovering from back surgery, she climbed onto her 2008 Commemorative Edition Walker Mower. Her kids took a photo of her captioned, "She's Back!" Not only was Dolly back, she was back where she belonged. Even though her husband was one of the first in the area to purchase a Walker Mower, Dolly was the one who racked up most of the operating hours.

"I did most of the mowing around here," Dolly says. "Donald used to give me pointers about my overlapping and such. Yeah, he's standing in the shed giving me advice while I'm the one on the mower. I remember one time we took the mower in for service.



Dolly loves the automatic Walker Power Dump on her 48-inch grass-catching Walker. "I could never get on and off the mower over and over to keep emptying the catcher box these days," she says.

When we went back to pick it up, Donald drove it around in the parking lot a bit, telling the dealer it handled just great. I'm thinking, 'Hey, I'm standing right here, and I'm the one who does all of the mowing at home.'

Dolly smiles brightly after telling that story. It's not that she was ever upset. She just takes tremendous pride in her passion, which for many years has been mowing the lawn and cleaning up leaves.

"I've told Mom so many times that I should mow certain parts of the property with the 60-inch discharge mower because I could get it done so much faster," Jon says. "Mom looks at me like I'm crazy. 'But Jon,' Mom says, 'it looks so much nicer when I catch the clippings and haul them away.'" And that's the end of that discussion.

Jon does handle some of the mowing on the property. There's a waterway in the field he mows a few times a year with the 60-inch mower. But other than that, it's pretty much all Dolly, just as it has been for nearly 30 years. There's just no stopping the lady on the lawn mower. ☺

Dolly smiles brightly after telling that story. It's not that she was ever upset. She just takes tremendous pride in her passion, which for many years has been mowing the lawn and cleaning up leaves.



From left: Daughter Keri Hinshaw, Dolly Roll, son Jon Roll and daughter Kim Ruffalo.



SCAN ME

See Dolly's smile and hear her story by watching this video.

SHARING in the SPOILS



For someone who survived both cancer and the housing crash in 2008, it's pretty remarkable to hear Sean Bishop say the last two years have been his hardest as a business owner. As uncertain as things were in 2008, nothing compares to right now. Sean never knows when or if he can get equipment and parts, materials and supplies, and most importantly, employees to operate his growing business.

"The last couple of years have felt like we're in a war," says Sean, owner of Ground Effects Landscaping in Carver, Massachusetts. "Every day feels like we're going into battle just to function."

Sean hits the battlefield with 35 employees who install plants and hardscaping, fertilize and mow lawns, take care of trees and shrubs, clean up leaves and push snow. Ground Effects also operates a retail business where it sells pavers, mulch and other landscaping supplies to homeowners and other landscape contractors.

"Honestly, we could use 50 employees right now, but we just can't find them," Sean relates. "We are actually more fortunate than a lot of my competitors. We at least have a baseline employment level of key people



From left: John Alves, maintenance manager, who has been with Ground Effects for five years; company owner, Sean Bishop; and Luke Hawkins, maintenance operations manager and salesperson, who has been with the company for 19 years.

who've been with us a while and are outstanding. But the labor market is extremely challenging. At the same time, demand has been at a level I have never seen. At one point

last spring, we had a three-month backlog just for appointments. By August, we were booking construction work into this year. Our six maintenance crews have been fully tapped, too."

Sean is very contemplative about business, reflecting on Wall Street Journal articles he has read and lessons his grandfather once taught him. Sean ponders the current state of supply and demand in the landscaping industry.

"I think there is a tremendous opportunity for this industry right now," Sean says. "We have to change the way we think as business owners. The most valuable asset you have is the people who work in your company. I don't care how many customers you have or trucks you own. If you don't have employees with the right skills and work ethic, the rest doesn't matter. The landscaping industry is now competing against every other industry for workers. Around here, kids bagging groceries are making \$15 an hour. Do you really think you'll find someone to bust their butt in landscaping for \$15 an hour? It's not going to happen."

As Sean points out, if companies like Ground Effects Landscaping are going to survive and thrive, owner mindset must

on the SOUTH SHORE



LEFT: Ground Effects Landscaping's mower fleet includes a dozen Walkers, nine of which are shown here. Each unit has a GHS system, 48-inch deck and 23-hp Kohler engine.

RIGHT: Ground Effects Landscaping has been running Walker Mowers for 18 years.



change from “wanting to be the lowest bidder” to “paying employees a good wage and charging prices accordingly.”

“I realize there are limits to that,” Sean adds. “As an owner, I’m the monkey in the middle who has to take care of my employees and then try to pass it along to the customer. Most of our customers appreciate the fact that I have good employees who come back year after year. I’ve had customers tell me my employees know their homes better than they do. There is value to that.”

“I NEVER HAD A PROBLEM WITH WORK”

Sean Bishop was the typical neighborhood kid who mowed lawns and shoveled snow to make a few bucks.

“My dad told me at a young age that his job was to provide a house for me to live in, food on the table, clothes for me to wear, and to make sure I got an education,” Sean tells.

“Dad also told me that if I wanted money for something like a new bike, I should get a job. So I did. I never had a problem with work.”

That childhood lesson of being rewarded for hard work has always stuck with Sean. It’s a big reason why he reveres “the workforce” as much as he does.

At the age of 15, Sean started to develop an interest in construction. He told his high school guidance counselor that a career in landscape architecture sounded interesting. The counselor didn’t know much about that profession, however, so he directed Sean to a landscape architect who worked at a local nursery. Sean met with the gentleman and ended up with a job in the nursery for the summer.

“I made \$6.50 an hour and worked 60 hours a week sometimes,” Sean recalls. “My friends were lucky to find jobs that gave them 10 hours a week. I had a pocketful of money and thought I was Rockefeller.”

More importantly, Sean enjoyed what he was doing to earn that money. He primarily served as gopher around the nursery, but occasionally helped out the nursery’s landscaping crew on different jobsites. It soon became clear to Sean that he not only wanted a career where he could design landscapes, but also build and maintain them.

After earning his bachelor’s degree in landscape architecture and urban horticulture from the University of Rhode Island, Sean started his landscaping company in 1995. He was a one-man band for the first few years until the business started to grow. Ground Effects Landscaping now employs roughly three dozen and has become a leading landscape services provider on the South Shore of Massachusetts.

IT’S THE LITTLE THINGS THAT GO A LONG WAY

Sean’s education and work ethic put him



The Walker Mowers collect grass clippings all season long. Bagging is a necessity due to the lush turf Ground Effects lawn care technicians nurture. They've begun using a unique bluegrass that grows significantly deeper roots. In combination with a nutrient-rich compost topdressing, Sean Bishop says "It's like putting grass on steroids."

in a natural position to succeed as a landscape contractor. But it was lessons from his grandfather that gave Sean a unique advantage.

"My grandfather was also an entrepreneur," Sean tells. "He told me to make sure I took some business classes in college because mastering a craft and running a business are two different things. My grandfather also taught me about the importance of engaging employees and sharing success with them. I've always tried to remember that."

Company culture plays an influential role in recruiting and retaining employees, especially when there are fewer to recruit and retain. Ground Effects Landscaping has been putting the foundational blocks in place for several years. The company offers a premium wage, health and dental insurance, paid vacation and other core benefits. In addition, Sean says all of those "little things" a company does to make employees feel appreciated can make a difference.

"We try to thank our employees every day for the work they did," Sean says. "We also bring everyone back to the shop early once in a while and throw some burgers and dogs on the grill. We have ice cream Wednesdays and our office staff makes sure the fridge is always full of popsicles. As an employer, I am trying to do more of these things because I think they matter."

For Sean Bishop, what matters most is helping to elevate the perception of a career in the landscaping industry. He is heavily involved with both the Cape Cod Landscape Association and National Association of Landscape Professionals, working on various committees to help advance workforce development initiatives in the industry.

"I remember attending a meeting of Cape Cod landscape company owners and builders," Sean tells. "I asked everyone in attendance, 'How many of us pay our employees a wage that would allow them to live right here on the Cape?' Not too many hands went up, yet we want our people to have the skills, experience and professionalism to work in a high-end market like Cape Cod. It just doesn't make sense."

To some landscape company owners, paying a premium wage doesn't make financial sense. To Sean Bishop, it makes 100% common sense. Investing in employees is as important as investing in good equipment. The two go hand-in-hand.

"I'm a big believer in buying equipment that reduces wear and tear on bodies," Sean says. "We've been using Walker Mowers for 18 years now. I was hesitant to buy one at first because of the price, but now we don't run anything else, aside from a stand-on

mower we use to cut an open field where cut quality isn't as important. The Walkers are so efficient and easy to operate. The cut quality is unmatched. For the high-end residential properties and condo complexes we maintain, I can't imagine making my guys use anything else. We bag grass all season and vacuum up leaves in the early fall before having to switch to a vacuum truck.

"What I like most about Walker is all of those little things they've done over the years to continue making their machines better," Sean continues. "Things like increasing the catcher box capacity and making the screen easier to keep clean. You can never stop making a great product even better."

After 26 years in business, Sean Bishop recently reached an important milestone. He and his wife, Leanne, purchased the property the company had been renting for the past few years. Owning his company's facility had always been a dream of Sean's. Now it is a dream come true, and something of which Sean is very proud.

"I want my employees to feel proud too, because this building is just as much theirs," Sean says. "There is no way we could have done this on our own." ☺



SCAN ME

Watch this video to see how Sean shares the spoils and builds his company's culture.

SECOND GENERATION

Stepping Up to the Plate

Andrew and Matt Mendenhall loved baseball growing up. They got to be pretty good at it too. Andrew ended up playing center field at Oregon State University while Matt played first base at Washington State University. The brothers knocked it out of the park in the classroom too. Andrew snagged a business degree while Matt scooped up a degree in landscape architecture.

When Andrew and Matt were first developing their passion for baseball as kids, their father, Randy, was building what would become one of the largest landscaping companies in the country. Founded in 1994, Heritage Professional Landscaping in Kennewick, Washington, now generates annual sales in excess of \$13 million.

That's a lot of money, on par with the kind of lucrative baseball contract Andrew had always dreamed of landing. But when it became clear that a career in the Major Leagues probably wasn't going to happen, Andrew looked to his backup plan. "I always knew that if baseball didn't work out, I would join the family business," Andrew says.

That's exactly what Andrew did about eight years ago. Younger brother, Matt, followed suit a few years later. With their baseball-playing days behind them, the Mendenhall brothers are now focused on helping manage the mammoth company their father has built.

"We're always looking to do more and grow," says Andrew, maintenance production manager. "When I first started working here after college, I was a bit shocked by how



Andrew (left) and Matt (right) Mendenhall.

much was going on. My business degree really helped with things like sales, contracts and the financial side. But I had a lot to learn about landscape maintenance and all of the details involved. I was surprised by how much work goes into developing efficient routes, maintaining equipment and making sure crews have everything they need. Those are things you don't think about a mowing company having to do until you're the one who has to do it."

Matt, who works in the company as a landscape designer, estimator and project manager, appreciates the fact that he can see a project through from start to finish.

"Working closely with a customer and seeing them walk away happy is my ultimate goal," Matt says. "A lot of times when a project is completed, I turn it over to my brother and the maintenance department. That's one of the perks of doing business with us."

DAD MOVES THE FAMILY TO START A FAMILY BUSINESS

Randy Mendenhall also earned a degree in landscape architecture from Washington State University. He worked for a company in the Seattle area before deciding he wanted something different. Randy had heard that the Tri-Cities area in eastern Washington



Mow crews bag grass 90% of the time. Most commercial customers value the way their properties look and are willing to pay the modest premium.

was on the verge of booming in the early 1990s. So he packed up his wife, two young sons and their belongings and headed east.

Initially, Randy leveraged his education in landscape architecture and focused exclusively on landscape design/build. Andrew was barely old enough to ride a bike, but remembers the little fenced-in yard where Dad kept his equipment. As Andrew and Matt grew, so did their father's business. By the time the brothers reached high school, that little fenced-in yard wasn't good enough anymore. Heritage Professional Landscaping relocated to its current facility about 15 years ago.

The company also started expanding more aggressively into other services, especially landscape maintenance. "The maintenance business was almost like an afterthought, but it grew like crazy," Andrew tells.

BUILD-AND-MAINTAIN IS THE NAME OF THE GAME

Maintenance is by no means an afterthought today. In fact, the maintenance department at Heritage Professional Landscaping generates roughly the same amount of sales as the landscape construction department. It's a healthy mix that is

self-sustaining.

"Our construction department is always giving us leads for new maintenance accounts," Andrew says. "At the same time, our maintenance department is always keeping a construction crew busy doing small projects on our maintenance jobs. We work together quite a bit."

The majority of the maintenance accounts are commercial. It's a combination of apartment complexes, HOAs, retail outlets and restaurant chains. "We have the manpower and equipment to handle the larger jobs," Andrew says. "We do have some residential clients, but we prefer the larger commercial accounts that are renewed annually."

Of course, the client has to be happy for the account to be renewed. Workmanship is the differentiator that sets Heritage Professional Landscaping apart. That's why mowing crews bag grass 90% of the time. Workmanship is also why crews have come to rely on their Walker Mowers after experimenting with another bagging mower for several years.

While most commercial customers are willing to pay the modest premium to have their freshly cut lawns left looking clean, Andrew says some commercial customers

are content with having clippings left on the lawn. In those rare instances, the mowing crew just switches out its deck.

"The only times we don't bag grass are when the properties are just so large that we couldn't get them serviced in a single day," Andrew points out. "So we keep a couple of mulching decks in the shop. A crew can just swap out their deck on a day they won't be bagging. We like doing it this way rather than trading entire mowers back and forth between crews."

With a company the size of Heritage Professional Landscaping, consistency, trackability and accountability are crucial. The company dispatches 27 maintenance crews from its main location in Kennewick. Eight crews operate 85 miles away from the Yakima branch that has been open for 10 years. The Spokane branch, 140 miles away, open for eight years, has six mowing crews. That's 41 mowing crews total, each of which has two employees.

The Walker Mowers, each with a 48-inch deck and GHS system, are used almost everywhere, aside from those really small patches of turf where a push mower works just fine. But even when using a push mower, the operator bags the grass. All of those clippings, including what the Walker gobbles up, are loaded by hand into a garbage can and then up into the truck bed.

Every night when the mowing crews return to their respective shops, all of that grass is transferred from the truck beds into garbage dumpsters. That's a lot of grass, and the dumpsters fill up quickly. Fortunately, Andrew has a cost-effective and environmentally friendly way to get rid of it. "We have a local company that needs all of that grass," Andrew says. "They come and take it every day. They turn it into compost to sell to area farmers."

EVEN HUGE COMPANIES HAVE GROWING PAINS

In addition to its 41 maintenance crews, Heritage Professional Landscaping has eight landscape construction crews, six irrigation technicians and two lawn care spray technicians. Just like everyone else, the company has felt the effects of a challenging labor market.



ABOVE: Samuel DeLeon is one of the company's many loyal employees. Samuel is also loyal to the Walker Mower. "I even bought one of these to mow my own lawn ... I just love it," he says.
LEFT: Heritage Professional Landscaping sees revenue split evenly between landscape construction and maintenance.



There have been some new hires who didn't work out. A few managers have come and gone. Andrew even had to hire a new salesperson last year.

"All in all, the changes have been positive," Andrew points out. "That said, we did have a different kind of growing year in 2021. We had to hire more people with no experience than ever, so we had to do a lot more training. By the end of last year, we were in a really good place. As challenging as things have

been, we also have a lot of guys who started here with my dad when they were 18 or 20 years old, and now they are in their 40s. That kind of consistency and experience makes a big difference."

Andrew and Matt Mendenhall have benefited greatly from their dad's experience, especially nowadays as they are taking on more responsibility. Randy is still quite active in the company, spending much of his time overseeing the larger construction projects. But Randy has come to a point in his career where he likes to take some time off here and there.

"We don't talk about it a lot and don't necessarily have a firm plan in place, but the thought is that Matt and I will take over the company one day," Andrew says. "We've just been working our way up. When I first started working here, I was on a mow crew

for two or three years. Then every few years I'd do something different, from sales to irrigation. I've just tried to work my way up and learn all aspects of the company."

Matt concurs, adding that there is no better way to learn than from great mentors on the job. Naturally, one of those mentors has been his father. "Our dad has always reminded us to treat every landscape we work on like it was our own," Matt relates.

"Another thing Dad has taught us is that it's about the employees," Andrew adds. "Building relationships with employees and making sure they feel appreciated is so important. Without them, we wouldn't be able to do what we do and be as successful as we are." ☺



SCAN ME

Hear how Andrew and Matt stepped up to the plate in this video.

ONE LAWN LEADS TO 400 OTHERS IN SALT LAKE CITY

Jeff Wright spent the first half of his career mowing lawns out of necessity. For the last 20 years, his motivations have been pride and pleasure.

"I still enjoy mowing after nearly 40 years," says Jeff, owner of Lawn Care the Wright Way in Salt Lake City, Utah. "Once a week I meet all of my guys at this large commercial property to help get some of the common areas mowed. Even though I have plenty of other things to do, it's really hard to give up mowing."

Some of those "other things" include fertilizing and repairing sprinkler systems. In the winter, Jeff plows snow. In his spare time year-round, he takes care of business tasks such as bidding, invoicing and customer service.

"Being a smaller company is what gives us an advantage," Jeff says. "Good communication with customers is the key, particularly in residential, but also in commercial. Even on this PUD (planned urban development) we're servicing today, many of the homeowners look forward to seeing us every week."

"I'm very personable and get very friendly with customers," Jeff continues. "In a way, that can sometimes be a bad thing. To me this business is about dollars and cents, not hundreds and thousands of dollars on a job. Every minute counts. It's really not the best idea to sit around talking. But when you have a personal

relationship with customers, it can be tricky. What people like most about us is that they don't have to talk to an HR person or someone else in the office. Customers can talk directly to the owner, and that's me."

That competitive advantage is what helped Lawn Care the Wright Way out-duel a massive national service provider to win back a large commercial account. "We had serviced this big PUD for about eight years," Jeff says. "Then some board members

FREEZER BURNOUT

Jeff has lived in the Salt Lake City area his entire life. He first started mowing lawns as a kid in the early 1980s. "I was still too young to drive so I just used my customers' equipment," Jeff recalls. "At that time, mowing was just a way for me to make a little money."

After high school, Jeff got a full-time job at a food manufacturer. Before long his second son was on the way, which is why Jeff continued mowing lawns on the side to make as much money as possible. "For 14 years I worked in a freezer all day and mowed lawns in the hot sun all afternoon," Jeff tells. "It worked out great because my shift ended at 1 p.m., giving me plenty of time to get a lot of lawns mowed before the sun went down."

In 2001 Jeff came to the realization that mowing could be his primary source of income. He decided to quit his full-time job and begin marketing his mowing business more aggressively.

"I had things built up to around 65 or 70 accounts," Jeff recalls. "I had also taken over some lawns I'd been mowing with a buddy of mine. He went off to college and just didn't have

time anymore. From there I ended up buying out a couple of other small mowing companies. Then I started advertising on my trailers. One lawn just led to another."

Some 20 years later, Lawn Care the Wright Way mows roughly 400 residential



From left: Trevor Wright, Kevin Nielson, Jeff Wright (seated), Preston Wright and John Bench.

changed and the new board decided to go with this national landscape maintenance company. After a year, the board called me up and said they wanted us back. That was a few years ago and I'm hopeful we'll continue to service this property for many years to come."



Getting into backyards through tight gates was an issue with some of the other bagging mowers Jeff Wright used, but not the Walker. Pictured is Jeff's son Trevor.

lawns along with a few commercial properties. Jeff is open to taking on even more business, but it has to be a good fit.

"When I was working by myself, I didn't care about the window time (driving between properties)," Jeff says. "Now that I have two other crews in addition to myself, I have to watch it. When we add new accounts, they

are usually in a neighborhood we're already servicing. The customer also has to be willing to let us schedule them in when we can. You can't mow everybody on Thursday or Friday. Most people are flexible so it usually works out fine."

Lawn Care the Wright Way employs four full-timers: Jeff's sons, Trevor and Preston,

along with Kevin Nielson and John Bench. Jeff says he is lucky to have a good group that has been together for five years now. Jeff's neighbor, Jeremy Christiansen, helps out part-time as needed, particularly during snow season.

THE WRIGHT WAY TO DELIVER LAWN CARE

Jeff's company's name is obviously a play on his last name. "This is what I called my company even before I started doing it full time," Jeff says. Word plays aside, Jeff does have a clear vision of what it means to provide lawn care the Wright Way.

"Our goal is to be as reliable as the sun coming up," Jeff says. "If we are ever running behind by an hour or so, it's not unusual for a concerned customer to call and see if everything is OK."

The Wright Way to provide lawn care



Crews have found that dumping onto a tarp is the most efficient way to get clippings and leaves off of a lawn and into a truck bed.

“I saw other people using the Walkers and thought they looked pretty cool.”

is also about fixing problems. “I always tell my guys that they shouldn’t get upset or talk back if a customer ever comes out to complain,” Jeff says. “Just listen and let the customer know what you can do to make it right. Let them know we understand how they’re the ones paying the bills and we’re there to please them.”

On that note, Jeff has become proficient at repairing broken sprinkler heads. Let’s face it, mowers sometimes run into them. When that happens, Jeff wants to make it right as soon as possible. After years of hiring subcontractors to do the repairs, Jeff decided to learn how to do them himself. “All of our trucks are set up to do basic irrigation repairs on the spot,” Jeff says. “I’ve also found that sprinkler work can be good money, so I’ve begun marketing it more heavily as one of the services we offer.”

Jeff has also gotten heavily into fertilization after years of using subcontractors. “One day I just thought to myself, ‘Boy, I really shouldn’t be giving out referrals on the properties I’m mowing.’ Now I only hire a subcontractor if they only provide that one particular service. Then I don’t have to worry about them trying to underbid me on mowing,” Jeff explains.

In addition to mowing and fertilizing,

Lawn Care the Wright Way includes aerating and dethatching. “We use our Walkers for those services too, because the attachments work great,” Jeff says.

Jeff first started using Walker Mowers a few years after going full-time in the mowing business. Prior to that, he had primarily been using intermediate walk-behind mowers. He also dabbled with a mid-mount zero-turn. “The zero-turn was all right, but I couldn’t get through a gate with a bagging system attached,” Jeff recalls. “I saw other people using the Walkers and thought they looked pretty cool.”

After visiting his local dealer, Al’s the Chainsaw King, in Murray, Utah, Jeff was sold. Since his initial Walker Mower purchase in 2004, Jeff has purchased 15 more. Today he owns 10, a mix of GHS-equipped tractors and Model B’s with mulching decks. “I really like the 48-inch deck, but a 42-inch really comes in handy when having to get through tighter gates,” Jeff says.

Whether bagging or mulching, Jeff says he has saved countless manhours by using Walkers. Maneuverability is the main reason why. “Sometimes a customer will say to me, ‘Jeff, I couldn’t believe it. Your guys were in and out of here in five minutes.’ I’ll reply, ‘You mean it took them that long?’ I’m joking,

of course, but the efficiency really has been impressive to me, my employees and even my customers.”

Jeff has taken a keen liking to his Model B’s with mulching decks. “They’re fast and provide an amazing cut,” he says. Still, crews continue to bag a lot of grass, especially in the spring when growth is faster. Bagging picks up again in the fall when leaves start dropping.

“We’ve started dumping onto tarps,” Jeff points out. “We’ve found that to be the most efficient method. Two guys can easily pick up a tarp and drop it into a truck bed. We haul our clippings to a friend’s property where he uses them to feed his cattle. Several area landscape companies do the same thing. I’ll hate to see the day when he sells his property and we have to haul to the waste site. We take some of our grass there now, but I’d much rather give it to my friend.”

Whatever happens, Jeff Wright will roll with the punches. That’s what he has done for the past 30-plus years. He still loves what he’s doing and his business is still growing—two natural byproducts of doing Lawn Care the Wright Way. ☺



SCAN ME

Watch this video to see more of how Jeff went from one lawn to 400 others.



“The soil is very sandy here on Cape Cod, and leaving the grass clippings on the lawn really improves that soil,”

Tommy Birch, Birch Landscaping

Photo courtesy of Birch Landscaping
in Harwich, Massachusetts

MULCHING MAKES ITS MARK

There is no mistaking the benefits of grass collection, especially when serving clientele who value an immaculate appearance above all else. But with collection comes extra effort and, in some instances, extra cost. Wouldn't it be nice

to achieve that same clean appearance without having to collect?

With the right mower operated the right way, a growing number of contractors are finding that mulching makes a lot of sense.

“Our mulching mowers are the primary machines we use for residential accounts,”

says Chris Buisson of Extreme Grounds Management in Merritt Island, Florida. “We use them year-round. Even on thick grass like St. Augustine, our Walkers do an amazing job.”

Buisson has been using Walker Mowers throughout his 36-year career. Today he has

11 in service. Three side-discharge units are reserved for farms and other wide-open properties. A 48-inch GHS is used sparingly to vacuum up the magnolia leaves that fall in winter and are difficult to mulch. The majority of Buisson's fleet, however, is comprised of mulching mowers. In fact, each of Buisson's core maintenance crews is equipped with both a 48- and 52-inch mulching mower.

Like Buisson, Matt Lee of Ground Support in Canton, Georgia, selectively uses his GHS mower to vacuum up heavier amounts of leaves. "Other than that, we have strictly become a mulching company," Lee says.

Tommy Birch of Birch Landscaping in Harwich, Massachusetts, grew up operating a Walker Mower. "My dad bought his first Walker 15 years ago, and I learned how to drive it when I was 12," Birch tells. That was a GHS model. Last year, Birch took his first stab at mulching.

"The soil is very sandy here on Cape Cod, and leaving the grass clippings on the lawn really improves that soil," Birch says. "We noticed that irrigated properties didn't need as much water, and we also worked to regulate the fertilizer on a couple of properties. Mulching is just really beneficial to the health of the lawn, which is exactly

what we pride ourselves on."

Since last year was a testing year, Birch selectively used his new B27i mower with a 48-inch mulching deck. "We typically mulched one week and bagged the next," he relates. "But some of our properties were mulched all the time. At the end of the sea-

"With mulching, you have to be out there weekly during the growing season..."

Matt Lee, Ground Support

son, those were the best-looking lawns we had. I wish we would have mulched more."

Heading into this season, Birch definitely plans on mulching more. He is adding a second mulching mower to his fleet by converting an existing GHS machine.

"When it's dry out, the Walker mulching deck turns clippings into nothing," Birch says. "It gets pretty humid here and the grass holds a lot of moisture, but mulching still works great. The only time mulching won't work for us is after a rain. But then again, who wants to mow at all after it rains? That's not what we do since we are focused on quality."

KEYS TO MAGNIFICENT MULCHING

Like Birch, Caleb James of Fine Lines Wichita in Wichita, Kansas, has been mowing with a Walker B27i equipped with a 48-inch mulching deck.

"I like how the deck shreds up the grass and leaves it on the lawn," James says. "I also like the fact that any fertilizer that was recently put down also stays on the lawn. All of that decomposes and the lawn ends up feeding itself. Our lawns definitely stay greener throughout the year because we mulch."

For Lee, increased productivity has been the primary benefit of mulching. In addition to his 42-inch GHS mower, Lee owns three Model B's with 48-inch mulching decks.

"Operating bigger tractors with bigger decks is how we've really started to see the productivity improvements," Lee says. "The 48 is a good fit for the properties we service, which are 1/4- to 1-acre lots. When I was still working by myself and switched from a Model T (GHS) to a Model B (mulching), I was able to grow from 45 accounts to 65. That's how much more efficient mulching made me."

Lee has also been surprised by how well the Walker mulches at a lower height. He likes to keep bermudagrass in the 2- to 2.5-inch range.



Photo courtesy of Ground Support in Canton, Georgia

"With mulching, you have to be out there weekly during the growing season," Lee explains. "When the temperature starts to crank up, bermudagrass becomes a different animal for a month or two. The secret is taking off that quarter-inch on a weekly mow so you don't have to worry about having to clean up or double-cut. We structure our contracts so we are able to mow weekly during the heavy-growth season."

Buisson sets up his contracts to allow for effective mulching, as well.

"When I work with HOAs and commercial properties, I put it in the contract that we will be using mulching mowers," Buisson says. "We also specify that we will not leave any visible clippings. I have never had a customer complain. My employees are trained to look things over and blow any clippings away or even mow over them a second time if necessary. But this happens very rarely, maybe once during the rainy season."

Up in Kansas, James says he rarely has to double-cut. But even if he does, it's not the end of the world. "Then we provide a diamond pattern that looks really nice," James points out.

To avoid having to double-cut too often, James agrees with Lee that you can't let a lawn get out of hand.

"There are maybe two weeks a year when my top customers might have to get bagged," James says. "The rest of the time, mulching works great. I spray Pam cooking oil on the deck to keep grass from building up. Also, having sharp blades is absolutely crucial. I sharpen my blades every other day."

If mulch clippings ever begin showing up on one of his lawns, Buisson says it is a signal that it's time to change the blades. As Buisson points out, the art of mulching is part engineering and part operation.

"The Walker tractors have plenty of torque and horsepower to do a great job," Buisson says. "The rest is up to us. We sharpen or change blades every Monday morning. We also train our employees to check tire pressure every day."

"There is something to be said for Walker and their mulch decks," Lee adds. "I've put different mulch kits on different mowers and it is just not the same. I feel like the Walker mulch deck was made for us and what we're trying to do." ☺

"Our mulching mowers are the primary machines we use for residential accounts,"

**Chris Buisson,
Extreme Grounds**

ANOTHER REASON TO LEAVE IT TO MULCHING

Lawn maintenance professionals are finding that a good mulching mower not only provides an advantage when cutting grass, but also cleaning up leaves.

"Even though we use our 48-inch GHS mower to vacuum up magnolia leaves in the winter, we still use mulching mowers on the other leaves we have around here," Chris Buisson in Florida points out. "My employees love the fact that they don't have to rake or load leaves onto the trailer."

Over in Georgia, Matt Lee still uses his Model T GHS when leaf cover is really thick. Most of the time, however, he mulches leaves.

"Sometimes we have to make a couple of passes across a lawn, but we would have to with our GHS mower, as well," Lee says. "The big difference is not having to haul leaves away. In past years, I've hauled 2 tons of leaves to the landfill. I didn't haul anything last year."

Up in Kansas, Caleb James uses his mulching mower during leaf season, too. "My customers never even questioned what I was doing because, when I'd left the property, the leaves were gone," James says. "You'll never see me wrestling around with loading leaves onto a trailer anymore."



Photo courtesy of Extreme Grounds Management in Merritt Island, Florida

WALKER NEWS & PRODUCTS

MC23i UTILIZES NEXT-GEN DESIGN CONCEPTS

The new Model MC23i incorporates design concepts developed for the Model R, Model B and Model S to offer a faster, lighter, quieter and simplified GHS machine. Includes a 23 HP Kohler EFI engine, Hydro-Gear transaxles, Ogura electric PTO clutch, and larger 13.25" Thru-Shaft GHS blower (larger than 10.5" blower used on legacy models). Available with either 7.0 or 10.0 grass catcher options and compatible with 42" or larger collection decks. Shipments projected to start mid-year 2022.



60-INCH SIDE DISCHARGE DECK INTRODUCED

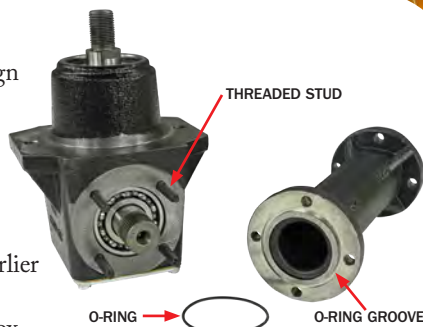
A new 60-inch, side discharge deck with belt-driven blades replaces the earlier DS52/DS62 deck with a simplified and improved design. The new design eliminates a power transfer gearbox and a telescoping PTO driveshaft and adds an integrated deck cutting height adjuster similar to that used on the Model H decks. Fits on Models B, C, D, and T.

MS18 REDESIGNED

The MS18 has been redesigned in several areas for improved performance, durability and serviceability. The engine drive belt is changed to a single B-groove belt and uses a new belt routing with better belt wrap. An electric PTO clutch replaces the mechanical belt-tightener clutch used on earlier models. And the GHS blower is now a two-piece housing assembly with a thicker scroll and structural back plate for improved serviceability.

MOWER DECK GEARBOX DRIVE IMPROVED

For the mower deck gearbox drive assembly, a production design change is being phased in, using threaded studs and o-ring seals to increase security of the assembly and reduce the possibility of oil leaks. The new parts will retrofit on almost all earlier gear-driven decks as an upgrade improvement. Also, a new gearbox assembly cover design completely encloses the gearbox assembly and mounts directly on the deck housing to reduce noise and vibration and to keep the gearbox area cleaner.



FIVE STAR DEALERS



2021 FIVE-STAR DEALERS NAMED

Five-star dealers are a group of top-tier dealers that were nominated by their distributor and then chosen by the Walker factory team for recognition as the best of the best Walker Dealers around the world. This is a “life-time achievement” award and is only given once; since 2016, thirty dealers have received this recognition. For 2021 the Five-star dealers were:

- G & G Equipment, Will Giefer, Frederick, Colorado
- Price Small Engines, Inc., Steve and Karen Price, Opelika, Alabama
- Blueline Equipment, Gregg Marrs, Pasco, Washington
- Union Farm Equipment, Ken and Debby Keiran, Union, Maine
- Amarillo Outdoor Power Equipment Co., Mark and Valerie Huber, Amarillo, Texas

See all Five Star Dealer recognition videos at walker.com/dealerlocator



TOP 50 DEALERS VISITED BY FACTORY TEAM

In a planned gesture of support, appreciation and relationship building, the Walker factory team made in-person, face-to-face visits to all of the Top 50 dealers in the USA as measured by registered machine sales in 2020. These visits included travel to 26 states and 20,952 flight miles in the company airplane. Distributor representatives for each of the dealers joined the Walker team on these visits. Due to travel restrictions, the factory team was not able to visit several Top 50 dealers in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and those visits will happen at a later date. The Top 50 visits confirmed the high level of dealer commitment to the Walker program and to taking care of Walker owners with energy and enthusiasm.



HIGH-CAPACITY LASER CUTTING SYSTEM INSTALLED

A new, fully-automated Bystronic laser cutting system was installed in the Walker factory mid-year 2021, significantly increasing the production capacity for cutting parts from metal sheets. The cutting system includes two 10kW power output, fiber optic lasers integrated with automated material storage, material handling, and a robotic picking system.

Cutting capacity is twice as much as the old 2004 three-laser-system it replaced, and material storage has three times more capacity (stores 140,000 pounds of steel sheets).

See the new laser system in action here:



THREE RECALL BULLETINS ISSUED

(1) Recall Bulletin #20268, issued March 2020, affecting DS61 Decks, S/N 186954 thru 190915, remove a spacer washer from blade spindle(s). Compliance with this bulletin is strongly recommended due to cutting blades being positioned too low in the deck housing causing a potential thrown object hazard.

(2) Recall Bulletin #20269, issued March 2020, affecting DS42-R and DS48-R Decks, S/N 186257 thru 189834, add step/guard. Compliance with this bulletin is strongly recommended due to adding a guard for increased operator safety.

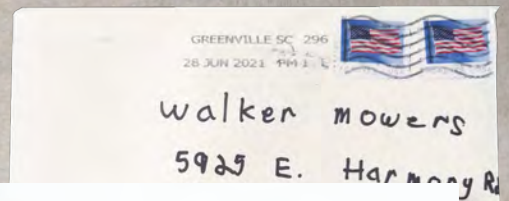
(3) Recall Bulletin #21276, issued January 2021, affecting Model MB27i, S/N 19-160038 thru 21-167663 and Model MR21, S/N 19-158429 thru 21-167352, modify operator seat safety switch electrical connector to restore proper switch function. Compliance with this bulletin is strongly recommended due to the possibility of preventing function of the operator's presence safety switch and the safety hazard associated with the safety system not working as designed.

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 local dealer).

A Letter From a Young Walker Mowers Fan

Floyd Gibbs is 9 years old and is from Greer, South Carolina. He's a Walker Mower fan and wrote to tell us about it. He also shared photos of a Walker Mower he made out of Lego® blocks.

Thanks for sharing with us Floyd!



From
Floyd

I am 9 years old and I am fascinated by walker mowers and ~~wish~~ I had a model or something. I made a walker mower out of legos I have some pictures I would like to show you.

