

WALKER

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In photo: Katie, Kyle, and Frank Bieda of Carol's Calling in Westfield, Indiana



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Relationship-Based Company

When we describe our company, we often refer to ourselves as relationship-based in our approach to business. We see relationships with people as an advantage over the sterile, transactional approach of buying and selling typically used in business. While larger corporate-sized companies have many advantages and tremendous resources, a balancing point is that smaller companies like us are more easily able to build relationships and have the advantage of being more personal in our dealings. So we pursue personal relationships in all sides of our business, and we especially treasure long-term relationships.

Relationships with our suppliers are a starting point. Even though we make our machines “under our roof”, we also purchase a lot of materials and components from suppliers. Supplier relationships are like life—you stick together in both good times and bad times. The Covid times and supply chain disruptions of a few years ago clearly illustrated the need to ask our suppliers to help us in a bad time and the benefit of calling upon our relationship with them.

Relationships with a little over 200 factory employees are a strong point in working together for a long time. We operate our factory on a “level manufacturing” schedule so that our employees have full-time, steady, dependable jobs. As a result, we have an average length of employment in the company of 10 years.

Next is our relationship with the delivery channel of our product to the market. We are connected to a network of 42 distributors worldwide and 1,200 sales and service dealers. We know many of our sales and service team members personally, having worked with a good number of them 25-35 years. Now, we have sons and daughters who have taken over family businesses whose parents first signed up to be a Walker Dealer years ago. We have traveled around the world to visit many of our dealers at their places of business and many of the dealers have visited the factory—relationships are built this way.

Finally, there is the end-customer; we count it a real privilege to have contact with and to meet many of the people who purchase our mowers and put them to work. Sometimes we are contacted by customers who need help, and we always see these contacts as an opportunity to try to improve the customer’s experience with our equipment and to have a relationship with them.

As I read the Bible, it turns out the actions of God are all about having a personal relationship with us. Jesus announced, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (Revelation 3:20 NIV). It seems perfectly fitting to me that we seek relationships in business following the example of our Creator with us.

Sincerely,
Bob Walker, Chairman





Nick Satkovich mows his spacious lawn in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, with his Model T27i Walker Mower.

Web Developer Writes His Own Lawn Care Code

Nick Satkovich is quite particular about how he mows his lawn, and both his neighbors and their landscapers have taken notice. Nick Satkovich started growing a passion for developing websites as a teenager more than 20 years ago. It wasn't long after that when he began gaining interest in another passion.

"I worked for a local landscaping company in college here in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania," Nick tells. "That was my first experience with a Walker Mower, let alone any zero-turn riding mower."

That experience left quite an impression. More than 15 years later, Nick found himself mowing the spacious lawn of his new home with a mid-mount, zero-turn mower. It was nothing like he recalled from his college days operating a Walker.

"It gave a pretty decent cut, so I'm not going to knock it," Nick says. "But I was getting a lot of ruts because weight was an issue."

Bagging grass and leaves was another issue. Nick says he tried setting up his mid-mount to function like a Walker.

He added a bagging attachment to the side-discharge chute, but it was nowhere near what he remembered from college.

"After using that mower a couple of seasons, I went ahead and purchased a Walker Model T27i in May 2022," Nick says. "It has been fantastic ever since. I immediately noticed our lawn looking a hundred times better. It was the striping factor, obviously. But we also stopped seeing ruts. The Walker isn't as heavy on the lawn because the weight is more spread out. I also like the controls because your arms don't



Once Nick puts his hearing protection on and sits down on his Walker, it's relaxation time.

to finish his lawn. He wouldn't skimp on one single minute, either. Mowing brings Nick a ton of enjoyment.

"I just love being out here on the lawn," Nick says. "And when I get done, when everything is edged and blown down, it's just a lot of satisfaction. I clean my Walker every time I mow, too. I pressure wash it and wipe it all down so everything is pristine for the next mow. It's just fun for me."

Nick's neighbors have noticed how pristine his lawn looks, as have the lawn care contractors who service other properties in the area.

"I'm actually one of the few people in my neighborhood who cuts their own lawn," Nick points out. "There have actually been a couple of times

have to be upright, so you're more relaxed. That's important because mowing is my relaxing time."

A Designer's Eye

Nick Satkovich actually went to college for criminal justice. His uncle was in law enforcement and Nick wanted to follow in his footsteps. Just a few years after graduating, however, Nick decided to take a shot at another passion, developing websites.

"I've always liked building websites ever since I was in high school," Nick says. "It wasn't a great time to start a business, but in 2008 I decided to start a digital marketing agency, Peer Pressure Creative. Things have worked out better than I could have expected."

Nick didn't have a lawn to mow while he was establishing his marketing business. It's probably just as well because he was working a lot of hours. As busy as he was, Nick couldn't help but notice the work quality of the contractor mowing for his townhouse HOA. "It didn't look like the lawns I used to help mow with a Walker back in college," Nick says.

Nick is one of those people who is a bit fussy about the appearance of his lawn, not to mention his equipment.

"I'm a little obsessive," Nick says.

"But also, as a web designer, I see some things maybe with a different eye. I look for things like symmetry. That's why I really like mowing with a crosshatch pattern, especially with the way the Walker stripes."

"I'm a little obsessive, but also, as a web designer, I see some things maybe with a different eye. I look for things like symmetry. That's why I really like mowing with a crosshatch pattern, especially with the way the Walker stripes."

To that end, Nick double-cuts his lawn every time he mows. His wife, Allison, thinks it's a little over the top and a waste of time. To Nick, it's time well spent.

"I cut one direction, then crosshatch in the other direction," Nick says, adding that it takes him 2-1/2 hours

when lawn contractors came over and wanted to see my mower and ask me questions. I'm always more than happy to talk to them."

A Developer Needs His Tools

Along with his Walker Model T27i,



The stripes on Nick's front lawn have prompted some of his neighbors' lawn contractors to stop in and ask what he mows with.



Nick Satkovich and a few pieces from his personal Walker fleet.

so, the first couple of years got off to somewhat of a slow start.”

Good things come to those who wait, though. In mid-2023, Nick started receiving some inventory. He immediately began working his contacts in law enforcement to start drumming up business for these unique amphibious off-road machines.

“It’s kind of interesting,” Nick says. “The control levers in the Sherp are a lot like the controls on a Walker Mower. It feels very familiar.”

The question now is which set of controls Nick will be sitting at most often. It’s going to be difficult to resist the urge to spend time driving around in a vehicle as exciting as a Sherp. Not much will get in the way of his Walker time, though.

Nick has invested in two decks.

“I use my 52-inch collection deck in the spring and fall, and switch to a 52-inch mulching deck during the summer months,” Nick points out. He has also invested in the Power Dump option, along with several implements including a dethatcher, rotary broom, boom sprayer, and spreader. When you’re as serious about lawn care as Nick Satkovich, mowing is just one of the many tasks that needs to be done throughout the year.

Nick has another activity that is commanding more of his attention nowadays. He became a dealer for Sherp amphibious off-road vehicles a few years ago. After a bumpy start that no one could have predicted, things are poised to start taking off.

“Like I said before, I’m not the best at picking the best time to start a new business,” Nick says. “I became a Sherp dealer in late 2019 after inquiring about buying one myself. When I found out the two closest dealers were several hours away,

I asked about what it would take to become a dealer myself. The investment and other requirements weren’t as difficult as I thought they might be, so I decided to do it. COVID hit shortly after. Then when things started to straighten out there, the war in Ukraine started in early 2022. These Sherps happen to be built in Ukraine,

“When the weather is on my side, mowing allows me to get a little quiet time,” Nick says. “I put on my hearing protection and just focus on doing one of the things I love: mowing.”

See Nick’s story in this video on walkertalk.com



Nick is enamored with unique equipment, including his Walker Mower and Sherp ATV pictured here. The controls in the Sherp are very similar to that of a Walker.





Above: Kyle Bieda mows the property of a family going through a challenging time.

Right: Katie, Kyle, and Frank Bieda of Carol's Calling in Westfield, Indiana



Helping the Hurting by Mowing Their Lawns

Carol's Calling in Westfield, Indiana, all started in 2019 after the Bieda family had gone through a few very trying years. Carol Bieda passed away after a several-year battle with cancer. During that same timeframe, Kyle and Katie Bieda, Carol's son and daughter-in-law, had an infant son who was undergoing treatment for leukemia.

"To get through it all, we needed a support system around us," Kyle

relates. "We needed a lot of help for many years. That's where I got the idea for Carol's Calling."

Carol's Calling is a 501c3 non-profit that provides lawn services to people going through a challenging time that makes it difficult to keep up with all of life's routine tasks.

"Kyle and Katie actually presented the idea to me on my birthday in January 2020," says Frank Bieda, Kyle's father.

"The whole concept is a memorial to my wife."

The original plan was to offer lawn care, laundry and meals. Kyle would handle the lawn care. Frank loves to cook and would handle the meals. Katie would take care of the laundry. Ultimately, the Biedas decided to focus on just lawn care.

"We realized that this idea could actually grow some legs," Kyle says.



Kyle and Katie Bieda store their decks, mower and trailer in their garage, right next to their kids' bikes and other toys.

"Dad is retired, but I still work. Katie is a busy stay-at-home mom with our three young kids. We had to be realistic with our expectation."

"Plus, lawn care is something Kyle really enjoys doing," Katie adds. "Even before Carol's Calling came about, Kyle was always eager to help neighbors with their lawn mowing."

Prelude to a Passion

Kyle's career as an IT professional keeps him glued to a computer screen in an office. That's why he likes to find hobbies that take him outside. Back in high school, one of the part-time jobs Kyle had was in lawn care. "I knew from experience that I really enjoyed that type of work," Kyle says.

The only problem was that mowing his own lawn wouldn't fully scratch Kyle's itch to get outside. He either needed a much bigger lawn, or more lawns. Then he got an idea while listening to a sermon in church. The pastor was talking about helping orphans. Kyle thought about a widow he knew who had two young children. Katie's dad borrowed a riding mower for Kyle so he could start mowing this widow's lawn.

Before long, Kyle thought of a second family he could help. That young couple just had a baby. Kyle recognized that their increasingly hectic life was preventing them from mowing their lawn as often as they

should. Then another customer came along when the husband injured his back, and the wife was struggling to run their mower.

"The next thing you know, I was helping take care of nine lawns," Kyle says. "It all started organically right around our house. Then we started talking and realized we could do this for a lot of people who live outside of our neighborhood. That's when we started the process of making it an official non-profit that we would actually promote."

Over the past few years, Carol's Calling has mowed lawns as far as an hour away. Most of their "customers" come by way of referral. All of their income comes by way of donations, all of which is allocated to paying off their equipment and other operating costs. Carol's Calling has a nice website, CarolsCalling.org, where people can request service or

"In the fall time, I could envision having to rake and bag leaves for six hours on some properties. Then I started to think about shoveling snow in the winter. I was looking at a mower that could do all of those things."

nominate others. "Social media has also been big, especially Next Door," Kyle says. "We also get a lot of word of mouth through church groups."

Most of Carol's Calling's customers aren't regular customers; they just need a mow or two to get through

a difficult period. But the Biedas do have one regular customer who is very special to them.

"She's a single woman who is a foster mom to teenage mothers," Katie tells. "So she has multiple teenage girls and their daughters in her home."

"She works as a nurse at the children's hospital where our son received his treatment for leukemia," Kyle adds. "That's where we got to know her and realized she needed support, too."

It Doesn't Take Much to Make a Huge Impact

Shortly after making Carol's Calling official in January 2020, Kyle started researching equipment. He stumbled upon some YouTube videos showing the Walker Mower. Kyle immediately recognized the benefits of the machine's versatility and productivity. He went straight from YouTube to Walker's online dealer locator.

"We met with Marc Wray from Wray's Walkers in April 2020," Kyle recalls. "Marc and another gentleman brought a trailer with several mowers for us to demo," Frank adds.

When Kyle and Frank learned more about the Walker's capabilities, they knew it was what they needed.

"In the fall time, I could envision having to rake and bag leaves for six hours on some properties," Kyle says. "Then I started to think about shoveling snow in the winter. I was looking at a mower that could do all of those things. If we bought a Walker,

we could make the most amount of impact with the least amount of equipment.”

Their first purchase was a Model C. The grass-catching capability was a key factor in that selection.

“We knew we’d be mowing a lot of lawns that probably hadn’t been mowed in a while,” Kyle says. Discharging wouldn’t be a good option with grass that long. Plus, Kyle and Frank didn’t want to just go onto properties to knock the grass down. Part of their mission to “help the hurting” was to bring a little joy to a person’s life by making their lawn look like a professional had mowed it.

“We’re representing the Gospel, and we want these lawns to look their best,” Frank says.

Building a Legacy, One Lawn at a Time

With a couple of seasons now under their belts, Kyle and Frank have settled into a pretty good rhythm. Kyle handles the mowing, while Frank tackles the trimming and edging.

“I’m in the middle of a three-year apprenticeship with the trimmer before I get to start learning the Walker,” Frank says with a grin.

“I ask you all the time if you’d like to try it,” Kyle is quick to chime in.

“But getting you out of the seat of the Walker isn’t easy,” Frank replies with an even bigger smile.



Frank Bieda takes care of all the string trimming and edging.

That sounds like a pretty credible statement coming from Frank. Kyle has accumulated roughly 100 hours of seat time on his Walker over the past few years. He runs it like a professional who racks up 100 hours a month, though. You can see how much Kyle enjoys it when he zips around trees and smoothly makes his zero-turns at the end of long passes. Kyle now runs a Model T27i after trading in their original Model C in early 2023. “After being asked to mow some larger properties, we realized we needed more power and a bigger catcher,” Kyle says.

While Kyle is out mowing lawns, Katie is home taking care of their two sons, Micah (leukemia survivor) and Levi, and their youngest child and daughter, Julia. “Katie has really become the marketing director of Carol’s Calling, too,” Kyle says. “She helps with the social media, and also sends out brochures and thank you cards when we mow lawns and receive donations.”

“I have one other really important job,” Katie is quick to add. Kyle parks the trailer and mower in their garage.

It’s a tight fit. Kyle backs the trailer up to the garage door. Once it’s all lined up, he disconnects from the truck. Katie then helps Kyle push the trailer into position in the garage. “My giant muscles really help out here,” Katie sarcastically says while striking a double-bicep pose.

In addition to their new Walker Model T and nine-foot trailer, Carol’s Calling owns a 2008 pickup truck, along with some Stihl handheld equipment. The equipment fleet also includes a 48-inch Walker collection deck, 42-inch mulching deck, and 52-inch side-discharge deck. “Now we’re looking at getting the implement hitch, and either a snowblower or blade,” Kyle says.

Kyle’s even bigger dream is to one day get a second Walker, a Model B, so he and Frank can each mow while Micah and Levi take over the trimming and edging. At 9 and 10, they’re still a little young and small to run most of the equipment. “They will tag along to jobsites once in a while and use the blower,” Katie points out. “It’s great, because we want this to be a real legacy of going out and serving people.”

The legacy is already well underway, and is definitely worthy of having Carol’s name on it.

The Model T just barely fits on their nine-foot trailer. Kyle lays a 2x4 down so he knows just when to stop so as not to hit the rail.

See the Bieda’s story in this video on walkertalk.com



The Builder Becomes the Owner

Russell Alvey needed a job in a hurry. He had just moved back home to southern Indiana after determining a career with his uncle's construction business in Florida wasn't for him. When Russell saw a help wanted ad from a local lawn maintenance company, he quickly applied. Mowing lawns could be an enjoyable way to make some money that summer. But Russell never imagined that this temporary job would become a lifelong career.

"I was 21 years old when I first came to work for Glenn and Carol Smith," Russell says. "I figured I might as well mow grass until I figured out what I wanted to do in life. But almost 30 years later, I'm still here mowing grass."

Russell has been doing a lot more than mowing grass over the past three decades. In fact, Glenn attributes much of the company's success to Russell's ability to build relationships in the commercial market. Now Arrowhead Custom Lawn Care in Evansville, Indiana, is Russell's company. He and Glenn started discussing the idea of Russell taking over about five years ago. Those talks turned serious in 2021.

"Glenn started teaching me about the business side of things," Russell says. "There's a lot to learn that I'd never thought about. Thankfully, Glenn is still just a phone call away."



Right:
Russell Alvey,
owner of
Arrowhead
Custom Lawn
Care in Evansville,
Indiana

Russell has been the company owner for a little over a year now. From an operations standpoint, his goal is to make sure productivity and quality are maintained. "I think we've developed a pretty good system as far as getting things done," Russell says. "I don't know that there's much that needs to change. I just want things to keep rolling like they have been."

You Can't Teach Work Ethic

Glenn Smith started mowing lawns in the late-1980s while attending college. He decided to keep the business going after earning his accounting degree. Arrowhead Custom Lawn Care was officially incorporated in January 1991.

The business buzzed along for the next several years, thanks in large part to Glenn's very patient and supportive wife, Carol. Then, just as the company was closing in on that pivotal five-year mark, Glenn made a management decision that would change the trajectory of his company. Glenn hired Russell Alvey in August 1995. He was immediately impressed with Russell's work ethic.

"Right away Russell told me he'd work anytime I needed him," Glenn recalls. "Then we ended up with a major drought and weren't doing much mowing. I needed a new roof on my house and wanted to build a barn. Russell offered to help me with that to stay working and making money. I knew having a guy like that who really wanted to work was valuable. I needed to do what I could to keep him."

A big part of keeping Russell was providing opportunity. Glenn saw an opportunity to grow the company in 1999, and Russell could play an influential role in achieving that growth.

"We picked up our first two commercial accounts, and it didn't

take long to realize it's what we should be focusing on," Glenn says. "We could service two properties a day and make money while the truck was parked. In residential, we ran around servicing sometimes 30 lawns a day. That's a lot of windshield time and a lot of administrative time dealing with so many customers. When I got into this business, my goal was to mow as much grass as possible. But soon I realized the goal should be making as much money as possible. For us, that would be in the commercial market."



Russell Alvey (right) with Glenn and Carol Smith

Commercial maintenance led to another opportunity. A prominent client asked Glenn if he could install and service irrigation systems. Glenn decided he would oversee the new irrigation division with help from another longtime employee, Josh Gish. Russell would oversee the maintenance division. Russell's job was to ensure that Arrowhead's trademark attention to detail was maintained. He was also tasked with business development.

"I went out actively looking for business those first couple of seasons," Russell recalls. "I was knocking on doors and handing out brochures. That's how we landed one


huge account we still have today, a property management company with several commercial and multi-family properties. Once we had that account, we became more known and started adding other commercial properties."

Over the next several years, Arrowhead Custom Lawn Care grew from just a few employees to more than a dozen. Today the company employs roughly 15 year-round, with as many as 22 during peak season.

Three Decades of Grooming

Arrowhead Custom Lawn Care was already using Walker Mowers when Russell joined the company in 1995. However, Glenn was a little skeptical at first. A self-professed numbers guy, Glenn was initially put off by the price of a Walker. But then he started crunching the numbers from both a financial and productivity standpoint.

"I'd always liked how I could put different decks on the same tractor," Glenn says. "So really, for a little more money, we could have a bagging mower and a side-discharge mower with just a single machine. That



Arrowhead Custom Lawn Care has been using Walker Mowers since 1991. The company has 10 machines today.

made a lot of sense from a numbers standpoint.”

Russell shares the same attitude. The only difference is that he opts for a bagging/mulching combination. As Glenn relates, the Walker mulching decks have come a long way since he first started running Walkers 32 years ago.

“It is such a versatile machine, and it’s what I call a grooming machine,” Russell adds. Whether bagging or mulching, Russell says Arrowhead

“When our maintenance crew would be finishing up a property, Russell always spent those last 15 minutes inside talking with the client,” Glenn says. It wasn’t just about making sure the client was satisfied with the work being done. It was about building relationships on a personal level. “Russell knew about their kids and the vacation they just went on,” Glenn says.

Russell also knew how to lead by example, something he learned firsthand from working alongside

am today, which has allowed me to also become a business owner. Now she’s helping run the company so we can take it even further. I’ve been amazed by how quickly she learned the business and how to run the office side of things. We’re very excited about the future.”

Glenn and Carol Smith are excited, too.

“Once my body started telling me it was time to go, Carol and I talked about how important it was to make sure Russell could reap some of the

“I’d always liked how I could put different decks on the same tractor. So really, for a little more money, we could have a bagging mower and a side-discharge mower with just a single machine. That made a lot of sense from a numbers standpoint.”

crews use the Walkers in all those high-visibility areas their commercial clients want to look pristine, like the front yards of industrial complexes and at retail properties.

Arrowhead Custom Lawn Care currently owns 10 Walker Mowers. Each of three maintenance crews has two Model T’s on its trailer. Another Model T is set up with a sprayer attachment. Three more Model T’s are reserved as backup units. A 48-inch deck has become standard. “We run collection decks in the spring, mulching decks in the summer, and collection decks again in the fall to pick up leaves,” Russell says.

Creating value in the commercial market requires more than a beautifully groomed lawn, though. Glenn points to Russell’s initiative as a big reason for Arrowhead’s success.

Glenn for so many years. If a customer ever called saying the crew forgot to blow off a sidewalk, Russell made sure it got handled right away—even if it meant driving to the property to do it himself.

Nowadays, as owner of the company, Russell is counting on a few key employees to help keep an eye on things in the field. He’s also counting on his wife, Lyndsey, to help with some of the management-related tasks he’s still getting his arms around.

“Lyndsey and I have been together for 17 years,” Russell says. “If not for her, I would not be where I am today. Just like Carol did for Glenn, Lyndsey was a stay-at-home mom. She took care of the kids and our house so I could work all those late nights. Lyndsey always pushed me to be the person I

rewards he’d helped build,” Glenn says. “I’d talked with two other landscape companies about buying me out. But the more I looked into them, I didn’t feel good about it. The level of quality Russell has helped us maintain is something Carol and I are very proud of. We wanted to make sure Russell didn’t think all of his efforts were made in vain. Selling the company to Russell was the only thing that made sense.”

Now, carrying on Glenn and Carol’s legacy is the only thing that makes sense to Russell Alvey.

See Russell’s story in this video on walkertalk.com





Tim Morville, owner/operator of Accent Grounds Maintenance in Warrensburg, Illinois, mows with this Walker Model T23.

69 and Nowhere Near Retirement

In the 37 years he has been mowing lawns for a living, Tim Morville has purchased around 20 Walker Mowers. He has also suffered two debilitating injuries on two separate occasions, each of which put him out of commission for an entire mowing season. Fortunately, he could count on his employees, family, and friends to step in and help keep his accounts serviced while he recovered.

Nowadays, at the age of 69, Tim is counting on his orthopedic surgeon to help him get through his 38th mowing season—and hopefully a

few more after that. A bum knee has been making it difficult for this solo operator to carry out essential tasks like trimming and edging. The thought of retiring has entered Tim's mind, but has never stuck around for long.

"I'm having way too much fun to retire," says Tim, owner/operator of Accent Grounds Maintenance in Warrensburg, Illinois. "Once I get this knee replaced, I should be ready to go, come mowing season. I'd better be ready, I have no choice!"

On the day *Walker Talk* visited in early November 2023, Tim was already preparing for his big comeback. A stationary bike was parked right in the middle of the living room. Tim was eager to tackle rehab with the same vigor he'd been tackling lawn care for so many years.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Tim's surgery on December 7, 2023 went according to plan, and rehab was right on schedule a couple of weeks later. "It does hurt a little, but I'm a trooper," Tim said, adding that he's confident he'll be back on his mower this spring.



"I wanted to buy his truck, a Ford Courier. Eventually he sold it to me. Then a light bulb went on. What if I had bigger equipment? What if I had more lawns? Could this turn into an actual job? I went along for a few years before I started getting really serious in 1991."

To go with his new/used pickup truck and trailer, Tim graduated to a riding lawn tractor. His account base began



A Professional Painter Whose True Passion was Plants

Prior to starting his lawn mowing business, Tim Morville was in a painters union. Unfortunately, he found himself unemployed during the mid-1980s. To help fill his free time, Tim often went to the library. "I really got into reading books about horticulture and landscaping," Tim says.

Feeling more inspired than he had in years, Tim began offering to mow lawns. Using a push mower and his grandfather's Buick, he started off with five customers. "I remember chasing another contractor around that entire first summer," Tim recalls.

to expand considerably over the next few years.

"By the mid-1990s, I was up to around 85 accounts, a mix of residential and commercial," Tim recalls, adding that he was even forced to take on a few employees during this time period. "Forced" might sound like a strong word, but the truth is, Tim says he's a bit of a loner and prefers to work alone.

"I think it's really important to have goals," Tim adds. "Once my business got going in the mid-90s, I had a goal of having some kind of large, institutional account. I was lucky enough that, after quite a bit of hustling, I was able to secure the grounds maintenance contract for the hospital in nearby Decatur, Illinois. Along with the main

hospital, they had numerous satellite buildings along with several vacant lots. It was a huge account. I was lucky enough to keep that account for a good eight years."

Efficiency is Everything to a One-Man Band

Tim got his first Walker Mower in 1995 when he began servicing the hospital account. He'd seen a couple of other contractors using Walkers. One contractor who was cleaning up leaves really captured Tim's attention.

"I remember standing there watching in amazement," Tim says. "That Walker Mower was just mowing over everything and not leaving a single thing behind. I knew it was just what I needed to take care of this big hospital account with all of those trees on their properties."

Tim bought a Model T with the Grass Handling System™. He followed that investment with the purchase of a side-discharge model the following season. Tim continues to use both styles of mowers today. His current Walker fleet consists of a Model T23 with a 48-inch collection deck, along with three Model B's with side-discharge decks (one 48" and two 56"). Tim's newest Model B's are 27i's. He has become a big fan of the EFI engine due to the fuel efficiency. "One of my largest accounts is a 3.5-acre property where I used to burn a whole tank of gas," Tim says. "With the EFI engine, I still have a quarter tank left."

Tim does more side-discharging than collecting these days. For starters, he no longer services the massive hospital account, nor takes on any big leaf-clearing jobs in general. The other factor ties to Tim's satisfaction with the finished look a side-discharge deck provides—even after making a couple of passes through a layer of leaves.

Of course, some customers still ask Tim to pick up their leaves. Other properties have so many trees that bagging is the most efficient option. That's OK with Tim. "I live out in the country," he says. "I can dump my grass and leaves on my burning pile, or sometimes I'll put them on my garden. A garden loves that."

Gardening and landscaping are two of Tim's hobbies. He doesn't offer those services in his business, though. He is purely focused on lawn maintenance, and has been since day one. "If you have a talent for that, along with the motivation, I'm proof that you can do just fine offering general lawn care," Tim says.

Down, But Never Out

In only his second year in business, Tim Morville's lawn mowing gig was hardly doing "just fine". Central Illinois suffered a severe drought in 1988. With no grass to mow, Tim temporarily took up painting houses again. While walking on a shake shingle roof one July afternoon, he stumbled and fell to the ground, breaking both arms and a leg. It took him five months to recover. Fortunately, his dad, uncle and a family friend stepped in to help mow when mowing needed to be done.

Tim was also knocked out of commission in July 2017. While driving home from a day of mowing, a vehicle pulled out in front of him. He swerved and left the road, totaling his



Having been a landscaper for over 37 years, Tim is now mowing his 38th mowing season and hopes for many more with no intention of retiring.

truck and trailer. Tim fractured three vertebrae in his back, taking him off the mower for the rest of the season.

"I was lucky for a lot of reasons," Tim says. "A guy who'd often helped me out on a part-time basis knew a lot of people. They got together and basically worked full-time for me the rest of that season. Fortunately,

mowing lawns the following spring, and as he has always preferred, he was doing it all on his own.

Tim Morville doesn't maintain the account base he did back in his heyday. But he's still mowing more than 40 properties, which is beyond impressive for a 69-year-old with a beat-up back and bum knee.

"I've been very blessed. Everything you see here—my house, my trucks and equipment—it is all paid for. What I'm doing now is just gravy. But I continue doing it because I love it; it's that simple."

they all knew how to run the Walker Mowers. I was even luckier in that my insurance company paid for those employees. It's very important to have good insurance."

The luckiest thing of all was that Tim bounced back quickly. He was back to

It's quite fascinating, really. In this day and age, a lot of people are traumatized by the prospect of not being able to retire at the age of 65. But at 69, Tim Morville's biggest fear is not being able to mow for at least another five years.

"I've been very blessed," Tim relates. "Everything you see here—my house, my trucks and equipment—it is all paid for. What I'm doing now is just gravy. But I continue doing it because I love it; it's that simple."



**See Tim's story
in this video on
walkertalk.com**





Walker Talk Editorial

Inflation Adaptation

How six successful landscape contractors have been battling to keep pace with rising costs.

After the first few months of COVID-era hysteria subsided, a landscape contractor's biggest challenge was finding enough equipment, parts, and materials to keep up with even stronger demand. But sooner or later, the byproduct of that supply/demand imbalance was bound to set in.

By the spring of 2021, inflation was starting to creep into the 4% range. By the spring of 2022, inflation had doubled to over 8%. At this point, the typical landscape contractor was not only dealing with persistent supply chain and labor challenges, but also rising costs, an eroding profit margin, and stressed-out customers who were

wrestling with the same inflation-induced anxieties they were.



Sean Bishop,
Ground Effects
Landscaping
Carver, MA

"Looking over the past few years, the word 'rollercoaster' doesn't even do it justice," says Sean Bishop, owner of Ground Effects Landscaping in Carver, Massachusetts, whom *Walker Talk* visited in August 2021. "We went from worrying about going out of business, to worrying about keeping our employees safe, to worrying about keeping up with an exploding workload."

Now the worry is whether or not two years of price increases will ever reach a ceiling. Fortunately, Sean points out, business is still strong. Yes, profit margins have shrunk to some degree, but Sean isn't seeing signs of any kind of market crash. For Sean, along with five other recent *Walker Talk* profiles we touched base with, the road ahead is just going to require the same hard work and discipline that has gotten them through thus far.

Labor-pain Management

Labor has always been a challenge in the industry. Today it has entered a new stratosphere. Like many other employers, Ground Effects

Landscaping has increased its pay.

"We've had to give raises just to help employees keep up with their own cost-of-living increases," Sean says. "In our area, you can make \$18 an hour making coffee at Dunkin' Donuts. How are you going to get someone to do landscaping in the heat for that, especially when jobs are as plentiful as they have been? Our starting wage is \$20-plus. And I understand it. I don't always like it, but I understand it. You have to adapt to the times you're living in."



Val Silva,
Silva's
Landscaping
Exeter, CA

Out in Exeter, California, Silva's Landscaping has had to deal with numerous personnel changes. That has encouraged the Silvas to really scrutinize the way they do things. "We've developed some better systems," says Val Silva, whom *Walker Talk* visited in September 2020. "We also decided that if we wanted to hire quality employees, we were going to have to pay for that quality."

Val says many landscape companies in their area of central California pay close to minimum wage. The Silvas decided to go a few bucks an hour above that. "This helps our employees maintain a livable wage," Val says. "Also, it has given us some leverage to tell our employees that we expect a higher level of quality and efficiency, too. We've been really happy with the results."



Fran Meister,
Fran's Mowing &
Snow Removal
West Liberty, OH

Over in West Liberty, Ohio, Fran Meister of Fran's Mowing & Snow

Removal has increased wages over the past two years. "The people who are willing to show up for work these days need to be paid top-notch," says Fran, whom *Walker Talk* visited in May 2021. "We're also trying to find creative ways to get people a little extra money, like buying some fuel for their personal vehicles once in a while."

Budgets are still budgets, though. Fran has become a bit of a stickler when it comes to overtime. More careful scheduling has helped a lot. "If we're in a certain area, we try to make sure we're taking care of several properties in that same area all on the same day, which includes the spraying services we provide," Fran says.

Some company owners are finding themselves doing tasks they typically don't do, all in an effort to plug labor gaps and maintain production.



Jeff Wright,
Lawn Care the
Wright Way
Salt Lake City, UT

For example, Jeff Wright of Lawn Care the Wright Way in Salt Lake City, Utah, has been out on one of his three two-man mowing crews quite a bit lately. Only a few other employees are proficient at operating a Walker Mower. When one misses work one day, Jeff has to fill the void. That can be frustrating because it puts him behind on the fertilizing and spraying he normally handles, but there's always a silver lining.

"Keeping up has taken some longer hours, but that's OK," says Jeff, whom *Walker Talk* visited in October 2021. "As an owner, I should really be focused on the business side. But I love hauling a trailer around and working in the field more than anything, so it has actually been kind of nice."



Jeff Nichols,
Nick's
Lawn Care
Brodnax, VA

Another Jeff, Jeff Nichols of Nick's Lawn Care in Brodnax, Virginia, has also had to help fill labor voids. Back in 2019, Nick's Lawn Care had seven employees. Today they have three.

"The thing is, we're trying to do the same amount of work," says Jeff, whom *Walker Talk* visited in 2018. "We're pretty much working six days a week, which isn't a problem unless it rains. The problem is that we can't find anybody who wants to work. I never thought I'd have to pay \$20 an hour for somebody to run a weed eater. But if you want to stay in business, you either have to go up, or go out."

The Price of Skyrocketing Costs

All six of the company owners we talked to have increased their pricing in some manner over the past couple of years. For some, pricing is up across the board—particularly with landscape installations and fertilizing due to material cost increases. Most have also had to nudge up their lawn maintenance pricing. Fortunately, nobody interviewed for this story has reported any meaningful loss of customers. As Sean relates, any reasonable person has come to understand that things cost more these days.

"We haven't received any pushback so far," Val concurs. "It's really a matter of training our customers that prices may go up, and why. It helps to have it in writing right upfront in the contract."

In fact, one of Val's key commercial

accounts actually requested contract language regarding annual price increases of up to 5%. Why? This account has a grueling process for vetting its vendors because it desires a high level of service. Making sure its vendors are charging enough to maintain a high level of service is in the customer's best interest.

In Virginia, Jeff Nichols has seen the same level of understanding from his commercial accounts. "The property managers are really tuned into what the market is doing," Jeff says. Thus, raising prices hasn't been an issue, as long as the increases are in line with what the market is doing.

Some customers do have their breaking point, though. In Ohio, Fran hasn't seen any customers pull back on their maintenance services. In lawn care, however, some have reduced the number of fertilizer/spray applications from five to three.

Over in Utah, Jeff Wright has lost a few smaller residential customers who've opted to have the neighbor down the street mow their lawn. Those instances have been pretty rare, though. "I've been lucky because I have some really good, loyal customers on both the commercial and residential sides," he says.

Out of loyalty to those customers, Jeff has resisted the urge to hike prices too much. "I'm not in this to make a ton of money," Jeff relates. "I'd rather

make a little bit of money and keep a customer than make a ton and risk losing them."

Fuel surcharges have been an effective tactic. "We've done it across the board with both our residential and commercial accounts," Jeff says. "We don't do it to put more money in my pocket. It's just to cover our extra cost, and customers understand that. The nice thing is that I can remove that surcharge when gas prices go back down. That works for me and it works for my customers."



Tom O'Brien,
Oxford Lawn
Services
Wildwood, FL

Tom O'Brien, owner of Oxford Lawn Services in Wildwood, Florida, raised his mowing prices modestly last year. Most of his customers are residential retirees, so it wasn't an issue. "They've already made their money and are willing to pay for a good service," says Tom, whom *Walker Talk* visited in April 2021.

Tom's bigger challenge has tied back to labor. The frustrations associated with recruiting, retaining and motivating workers today is more than he cares to deal with at this stage in his career. So Tom has decided to sell the mowing segment of his business to an employee. But that doesn't mean Tom is leaving

the landscaping arena, and it doesn't mean he has spent his last days operating a Walker Mower.

Tom and his wife, Tracie, are now focusing on another division of Oxford Lawn Services. "Lawn rehab" includes dethatching, aerating and topdressing. Tom has purchased some specialized machinery like walk-behind aerators and topdressing machines. But he has also hung onto a couple of the Walker Mowers from the mowing operation he sold off.

"Part of our lawn rehab program involves a step called shortcutting," Tom explains. "We cut our zoysia grass really short in the offseason so it grows back nice and green the following spring. Our Walker Model T's are instrumental in cutting and collecting that grass. Then we use the Walker Dethatcher attachment. We really like what the Walker does."

Tom and Tracie also like how their lawn rehab business hits a different part of the market that isn't quite as competitive or price-sensitive. It has helped them stay in the lawn care business, stay on their Walker Mowers, and stay positive and profitable. For many landscape company owners, that hasn't been easy over the past few years. But many have persevered by staying true to themselves, their customers, and their commitment to quality.



Equipment that helps crews save time and burn less fuel can help put valuable dollars back to the bottom line. The Walker Model B27i delivers a high-end finished look when mulching, while the fuel-injected engine can help reduce fuel consumption by as much as 25%.



Walker Product Updates and Company News

MC23i Has Power Dump Option

Power Dump for the GHS grass catcher is now an available option for Model C23i for both the 7.0 and 10.0 catchers. It can be ordered factory installed or may be dealer installed using Kit P/N A49 (7.0) or A52 (10.0). The design of the Power Dump lift mechanism is similar to the one developed for the MS18 several years ago.



A43 Dozer Blade and H22 Hitch Fit Model C23i

The new A43 blade mount design is compatible with C23i and all other models except Model(s) R and H. Footrests are now stationary with the tractor and that makes easier manual blade lifting (since the weight of the operator's legs are not being lifted). This blade also has the added articulation feature allowing +/-5 degrees of lateral movement of the blade to better follow ground contour.

With a similar design to the A43, the H22 Hitch will mount on the C23i and gives the opportunity to use the four implements with the quick-change hitch system (Dozer Blade, Snowblower, Rotary Broom, Debris Blower). Note: When using heavier front-mounted attachments or implements (Snowblower and Rotary Broom), it is recommended to place a counterweight in the grass catcher.



Model MC23i LED Headlight Kit

An optional light kit installs LED headlights on the C23i. Order Kit P/N 5989-19.



Improved Performance for Blade Drive Belt (Model MR21)

The tensioning of the blade drive belt for the Model R 42" and 48" decks has been improved by positioning the belt tightener idler pulley on the RH side of the deck. The new design helps maintain smooth belt operation, especially when clutching or de-clutching the mower cutting blades and will reduce belt wear and increase belt life. To upgrade earlier units, use Kit P/N 1703-2 for the DS42-R Deck or P/N 1701-17 for the DS48-R Deck.

New Instrument Panel Box for MD/MT

The MD/MT Instrument Panel Box has a new mold and gives a new look with the Walker logo on the side panel in raised letters.



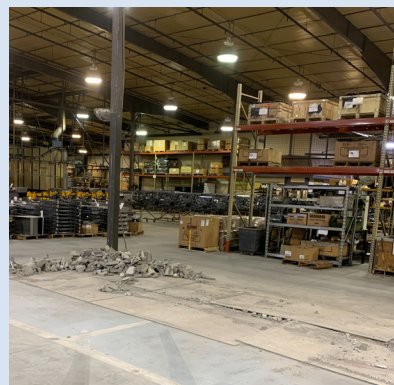
Top Ten Walker Dealers Recognized

The top ten dealers for 2023 were tracked by the number of new machine registered sales made from September 1, 2022 through August 31, 2023:

- 1 Aubin Equipment, East Dennis, MA USA
- 2 Power Equipment Plus II, Southhampton, NY USA
- 3 Chad Little, Brunswick, ME USA
- 4 Smith's Lawnmower Sales & Service, Inc., Caldwell, ID USA
- 5 Stephen Roy Power Equipment, North Smithfield, RI USA
- 6 MAC Equipment, Loveland, CO USA
- 7 Price Small Engines, LLC, Opelika, AL USA
- 8 Master Mower, LLC, Marietta, GA USA
- 9 Wilkinson Supply, Ogden, UT USA
- 10 FM Abbott Power Equipment, Inc., East Waterboro, ME USA

Factory Remodel to Increase Production

Starting in December 2023, floorspace for the factory "B-line" assembly line is being increased by tearing down four offices occupying space on the factory floor at the beginning of the assembly line. This is the assembly line for Models B, H, S18, C23i and R; the assembly line will be lengthened to add workstations and increase daily output. To cover for the displaced offices, another part of the remodel project is to construct a new 3,200 square foot, second story office complex above the lunchroom/meeting room on the east side of the building. This addition will add 14 office workspaces. The Walker factory anticipates and is planning to increase factory production, especially providing capacity to produce more of the new models recently introduced, the R21 and C23i.



Two Recall Bulletins Issued

Recall Bulletin #23297, issued June 2023, affecting Model MH S/N 20-164354 thru 23-183042, check performance of RH transmission for weakness and replace as needed to restore proper handling and steering response. Immediate compliance with this bulletin is strongly recommended due to the safety hazard of potential loss of drive when maneuvering in certain situations.

Recall Bulletin #23298, issued June 2023, affecting Tractor Models C19, C19i, D21d, and T with DS60-3 deck installed, starting with S/N 22-204136 and on, an interference issue has been identified that could result in loss of control when operating in certain situations. These decks are to be taken out of service and returned to the Walker dealer for a full refund of the original purchase price of

the deck. Immediate compliance with this bulletin is strongly recommended due to the safety hazard of potential loss of control when operating in certain situations. All owners of affected units in these two bulletins are encouraged to contact their local Walker dealer to comply with the bulletins free of charge.

Walker Recognized as Manufacturer of the Year

In May 2023, Walker Manufacturing was recognized as the Industrial & Equipment Manufacturer of the Year at the eighth annual Colorado Manufacturing Awards. Finalists and winners in 2023 were selected for operational excellence including manufacturing prowess, product and market success, workforce engagement, and community support.





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