

**WALKER**

# TALK

SERVING LAWN  
MAINTENANCE  
PROFESSIONALS

*Down Under*

One-Man  
Band

STAYING AHEAD OF THE POWER CURVE  
WORKING SMARTER AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE  
CANBERRA'S CROWN JEWEL  
DAYDREAM TURNS TO REALITY

**SPECIAL  
ISSUE**



# WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

## Down Under

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## HOW FAR WE'VE COME

In the beginning, we had no idea the Walker would take us to Australia and New Zealand. It has been my privilege to visit both countries with my wife, Barbara, four times since 1988. We value the opportunity to be personally acquainted with our distributors, dealers and many customers. Our visits have shown us many good things that are the same and different in the United States and "Down Under."

A common story is that "Yanks" and Europeans have used the Australasian markets to "dump" products that

were not successful or being discontinued in the home markets. The Walker Mower experience is the opposite. The mower was first successfully introduced in North American markets, then we began shipping overseas. We have had the good fortune of finding two importers with some background in manufacturing. Our product design has benefited from a "Down Under"



Bob Walker (right) visits with customer Max Findlay during Field Day at Albert Park in Melbourne, August 1997.

engineering partnership with our importers.

Amazing progress has been made in the market since the first mower was sent to Wagga Wagga, N.S.W. in 1984. Last year the Australasian market took a 7.9% share of our total production, and 49% of the export market outside of North America.

When we started *Walker Talk* six years ago, we began talking about sending our editor, Rod Dickens, "Down Under" to do some stories. He was keen to go. Our talk became reality when Rod and his wife, Ann, spent two weeks in January visiting Walker customers in New Zealand and Australia. In all, they met with 20 contractors, councils, governmental bodies and homeowners. Nineteen stories are the result; being printed in this special edition and in *Walker Talk* Volume 12.

After returning, Rod observed, "We've seen some tough mowing conditions in the States, but Australia/New Zealand dishes up some incredible challenges for Walkers." On the balance, he concluded that Walker operators "Down Under" don't differ all that much from their peers in the States. They work hard and appreciate the value of a quality end product. As one Australian contractor pointed out, "The practice of landscaping is essentially the same all over the world." We hope you enjoy this special edition.

*Bob Walker*

Bob Walker  
President



# One-man band in Wagga

## hits the high notes

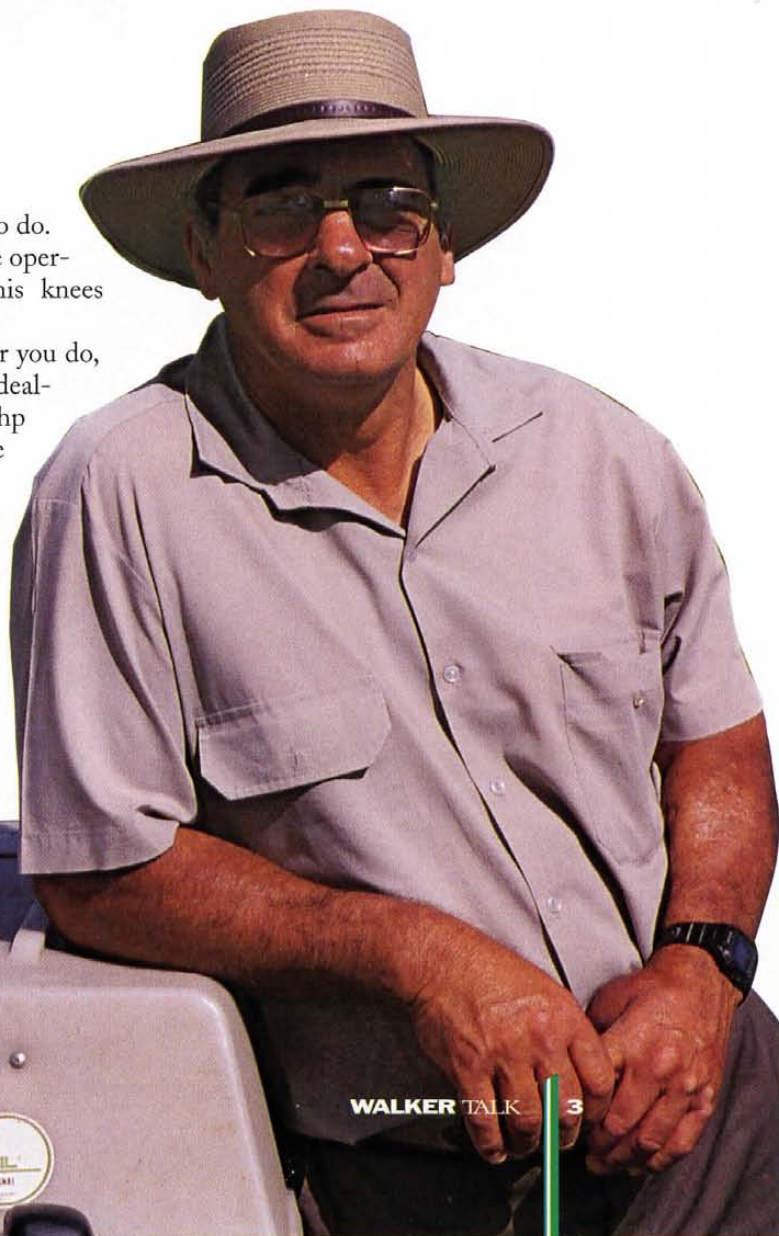


**W**hen Kevin Little retired, he needed something to do. So he purchased a mowing run. For five years he operated a push mower, until, as he explains, his knees gave out.

"I asked a dealer about a riding mower and he said, 'Whatever you do, don't buy a Walker.' So I immediately drove over to the Walker dealer." Today, Little's Mowing Service in Wagga operates a 21.5-hp diesel Walker, with both a grass-handling and side-discharge deck. With his setup, Little mows approximately 16 hectares a week. Most of his properties are commercial in nature. On average, he mows eight hours a day five days a week.

Little claims the Walker has helped his business become more competitive. There was no comparison, he points out, between the time it took him to mow with his first 16-hp diesel Walker and his push mowing method. And his current, larger

**A retired farmer, Kevin Little appreciates products that last. He says Walkers are built to last. And "with routine service, they will last a long time."**





Walker cuts what used to be an hour job with his 16-hp unit down to 40 minutes. A Stevens edger has jumped into the competitive fray by knocking down his edging time on one job from two hours to 15 minutes.

To be sure, time is money for Little. With his Walker he can mow fast. But as this owner-operator who refers to himself as a “one-man band” points out, speed isn’t everything.

“Being a farmer, I have learned to appreciate products that last. The Walkers are certainly built to last. And with routine service, they will last a long time.”

#### LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

For a mowing service, the mower is everything. There’s no time for downtime, and your reputation is riding almost exclusively on how the mower cuts. When Little first purchased his Walker, he was one of the few operators in Wagga to have one.

### **“You don’t have a bloody chance in town without a Walker.”**

It was a point of difference between him and the competition. Now, he points out, there are several in town, which levels the playing field.

The irony is this: When he was the only one operating a Walker, it was a competitive advantage. Now, as he puts it, “You don’t have a bloody chance in town without a Walker.”

Little still does well, competing with other Walker operators. He charges enough for his service. And by the look of his deep, dark tan, it’s apparent he spends at least eight hours a day mowing down the lawns if not the competition. **WT**



Little’s Mowing Service operates a 21.5-hp diesel Walker with both a grass-handling and side-discharge deck. The setup tackles approximately 16 hectares of grass a week.



When Kevin Little purchased his first Walker, he was one of the only operators in Wagga to have one. Now, there are several in town.



A photograph of two men, Mike Christou and Evan Christou, on a Walker Mower. Mike is standing on the left, wearing a blue short-sleeved shirt and dark shorts, holding a black cap. Evan is sitting on the mower on the right, wearing a blue short-sleeved shirt and dark shorts. They are both smiling. The background shows a body of water, a wooden dock, and several houses with orange roofs under a clear blue sky.

**“Where have  
you been all of  
our lives?”**

**Mike Christou (standing) and his brother Evan have been operating Walkers for more than nine years now. They attribute their focus, if not their success, on the mower's ability to pick up grass and maneuver.**

**T**hat's the question Mike and Evan Christou ask of their Walker Mower everyday. And a strange question it is since they've been operating Walkers for more than nine years now. Still, the Christous attribute their focus, if not their success, on these compact machines, as well as their ability to pick up grass and maneuver.

Owners of SA Garden Service in Adelaide, the Christous, with father Peter, have been in the grounds maintenance business for 25 years. The company specializes in maintaining retirement villages, to the tune of approximately 39 such properties in and around Adelaide. Five full-time employees and as-needed

“casuals” also work to maintain an additional five nursing homes.

“We needed something to pick up grass,” Mike remembers, talking about their first Walker. “We also needed a machine that wasn't too big

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**“The key to our 16-hp  
Walker is its versatility.”**

and noisy.” As he explains, retirement villages are especially concerned about the use of noisy machinery.


The Walker was a perfect fit. In fact, the acquisition of the rider allowed the company to pick up

more work, and allowed the family to focus almost entirely on the retirement village market.

Not that the company cornered the market. But with the Walker, Mike explains, crews were able to cut their mowing time by more than half. They could literally pick up and mow another account in the time it was taking them just to mow one. A typical account, he adds, has between 20 and 40 homes, with a combination of open space and postage stamp areas to mow.

“The key to our 16-hp Walker is its versatility,” Mike adds. “Yes, it's a bit pricy, but only if you don't have the work. We do, thanks in large part to the mower.” **WT**





# If you're in the business, this is the place to mow

**O**n a map of the North Island of New Zealand, the area is called the Bay of Plenty. And no wonder. The beaches are long and beautiful, and the area is booming. For contractors like George and Pat Adams, Tauranga, opportunities abound.

"This has to be the fastest growing area in New Zealand," tells George, a retired pastor and now owner of Cornerstone Landscape. "We have a great climate along with a good economic environment. In fact, the communities here seem to generate their own economy from the tourist industry, as well as from the construction of new homes and retirement communities."

It's a work environment the Adams have only recently enjoyed. After retiring from his church duties four years ago, George asked his brother Paul, a property developer, if he needed someone to mow the sections and boulevards of his new properties and subdivisions. That was the beginning.

"Pat and I started the business together using push mowers," tells George. When customers needed grass-handling capability, the Adams naturally looked to riding mowers. A Walker ad caught their eyes. Now the mowers are catching their grass and then some.

Attachment does 10 kilometers of edging at Greenwood Park Village.



Cornerstone bought its first Walker 2.5 years ago — a 16-hp, diesel-powered unit. They bought a second one shortly thereafter. With the help of the two mowers, Cornerstone has expanded from sections and berms to maintaining 10 housing estates, a retirement village, eight to 10 large residential properties, and a similar number of smaller ones. In addition to mowing, the company also offers design and landscaping services, all with the help of three full-time employees and three part-time or casual employees.

### SUCCESS STORY

According to George, the Walker Mowers are a large part of his company's success. As he puts it, they are

**"I've always felt that if you mowed a lawn and didn't do the edging, the lawn wasn't done."**

not only very productive, but also set a high standard. The mowers, or more specifically the job they do, actually bring in work.

When *Walker Talk* visited Cornerstone, crews were maintaining Greenwood Park Village, a huge retirement complex comprised of 185 homes. It takes two mowers two days to mow the property, and another day to edge it. A Walker Mower equipped with a Stevens edger attachment does the edging, all 10 kilometers of it. It edges in one pass and then collects the edged turf in another.

"I've always felt that if you mowed a lawn and didn't do the edging, the lawn wasn't done," relates George. Not to say it works in reverse, that an

edged lawn need not be mowed. But in the Bay of Plenty, with grass growing nearly as fast as it is mowed, that's an interesting thought. In reality, though, the upscale properties in the area require attention to detail in all maintenance corners. About Greenwood Park Village, George says, "This property has zero tolerance for mistakes. There's no question the equipment we use here gives us an advantage over competition."

But equipment tells only part of the story. Employees and suppliers tell the rest. Cornerstone employees are well-paid, to the tune of upwards of \$15 an hour. It may seem like a lot, but George says paying a decent wage is not only the right thing to do, it also ensures they will look after

your best interest, too.

Cornerstone's dealer, Mower & Chainsaw Centre operated by Greg McLarnon, has played no small role either. As George explains, the company keeps his equipment running and understands his machines are more than equipment — they are his living. In fact, the support and sales team are the primary reason George first became attracted to Walkers.

After four years now, Cornerstone's owners say they are at a crossroads. They can either commit to take on more properties and overhead or stay where they are. In the Bay of Plenty, one would guess that expansion may be the road to take. **WT**



**Cornerstone crews mow this Bay of Plenty retirement village in two days time. Says owner George Adams, "This property has zero tolerance for mistakes. There's no question the equipment we use here gives us an advantage over competition."**



# Staying ahead of the power curve in *South Australia*

**P**rivatization is in full swing in Australia with councils preparing for the day when all properties will go out for bid. But preparation is a two-way street, and more than a few contractors have their own plans in place. Leon Whitehead, owner of SA Parks & Gardens in Beverley, South Australia, is one such contractor.

In the lawn maintenance business for more than 20 years, Whitehead's company offers a full range of main-

tenance services primarily to councils and public housing properties in and around Adelaide.

"We're in a transition period now," tells Whitehead. "With more council properties coming up for bid, we're in a position to grow with them. My philosophy has always been to raise the level of service contractors such as myself offer. We think we're ahead of the power curve and can really make hay when more councils privatize."

One way the company can "make hay" is in mowing, something that wasn't always a high priority on its program of maintenance services. As Whitehead explains, it was only recently that the company started to put more emphasis on its mowing service. Part and parcel with this new priority was the purchase of two new Walker Mowers last year, each with high-lift systems.

"We went with the Walkers to match the mower to the job," he relates. "With so many community properties, we needed something that would get in and get out." He says the company also needed a machine that could tackle the tough Kikuya grass which, when it gets wet, becomes spongy and is easily damaged. The Walkers can pick up the grass and maneuver on the turf without causing harm, he adds.

Whitehead emphasizes the words "pick up." Because of a new Water Resources Act, grass clippings can no



**SA Parks and Gardens offers a full range of maintenance services to councils and public housing properties in and around Adelaide.**



longer be dumped on the street. Mowing crews either have to put them immediately into trucks or mulch them. As a testimonial to its preparedness, SA Parks & Gardens does both.

Equipped with high-lift systems and grass-handling decks, the Walkers can easily and quickly dump the clippings into a nearby truck. Or with a mulching deck, they simply make the clippings disappear. As Whitehead points out, it's really up

to the customer to decide what to do with the clippings. His crews just do the work in the best way possible.

"As I said before, my philosophy has been to raise the level of service that my company provides, and raise the level of our customers' expectations," Whitehead emphasizes. "That's the main reason we purchased the Walker in the first place."

Crews put somewhere around 25 hours a week on their Walkers. Those hours are bound to increase as the

company goes after new properties that come out for bid. One of those new properties was Government House which the company now maintains. Whitehead calls the new acquisition a "feather in his cap." But more appropriately, it's an indication of what preparedness and having the right philosophy can accomplish.

**WT**



**"My philosophy has always been to raise the level of service that contractors such as myself offer."**

SA Parks & Gardens' Walkers are equipped to either pick up clippings and dump them into a nearby truck, or make them disappear with a mulching deck.







# Working smarter at GOVERNMENT HOUSE

**T**imes have changed at the home of the governor-general in Canberra. It wasn't that long ago when walks were swept by hand, when hedges were clipped manually, and when push mowers roamed the vast lawn areas. But those days are gone.

Staff reductions, along with an overall effort by the government to reduce the taxpayers' burden while continuing to maintain high standards has put power in the lawn and gardening exercise. A Walker Mower and two outfront Kubotas are just a couple of examples.

"We're working smarter, using the right methods and using the right equipment," tells gardening supervisor Pat Garratt. With Government House for 12 years, Garratt was instrumental in the decision to purchase a gas-powered Walker in 1987, and to make follow-up purchases of



The home of the governor-general in Canberra sits on 52 hectares right in the heart of the city. Nearly 1/4 of this hectareage is irrigated turf that requires weekly mowing from August through May.



With Government House for 12 years, gardening supervisor Pat Garratt knows what it takes to keep the property looking like a showcase every day of the week.

Government House purchased a gas-powered Walker in 1987 and has followed up with two diesel models since then. The mower is used in confined spaces or, as shown here, where picking up clippings is mandatory.

Walker Mower is responsible for approximately 42,000 square feet of this territory.

"The Walker is used in confined spaces where we require a higher standard of mowing," relates Garratt. Since picking up the grass is mandatory in these areas, the machine's grass-handling capability comes in handy, he adds, noting that the clippings are used to make compost for on-site gardens.

And there are plenty of gardens and other beautiful vistas on the property, the facilities of which are also used to entertain and house foreign dignitaries.

Garratt and his staff of eight have a rigorous work schedule that keeps the place looking like a showcase every day of the week. But even then a surprise visit or unplanned event can put pressure on the staff to go the extra mile.



"All of our equipment has to be reliable," emphasizes Garratt, listing off a broad array of tools from the mowers, front-end loaders, and compact tractors to spraying equipment, ATVs and handheld trimmers. "We have a replacement policy in place, and know when we buy a piece of equipment when it will be traded to ensure it delivers top reliability during its stay here."

As far as the Walker is concerned, Garratt puts a different spin on the adage, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." As he puts it, "The Walker is performing well and it doesn't break down, so why change?" **WT**

replacement machines (both diesels) since then.

Government House encompasses approximately 52 hectares of land right in the heart of Canberra. Nearly 25% of this land is irrigated turf and requires weekly mowing from August through May. The



# Landscape and Gardens gives Parliament House native appeal

If Canberra is the garden spot of Australia, then Parliament House is garden central. With approximately 130,000 shrubs, 14,000 individual plants and 4,500 trees growing on site, the complex is truly a botanical wonder for legislators and visitors.

Unusual in design and breathtaking in scope, the landscaping elements of this 32-plus-hectare complex literally surround and cover Parliament House with native and exotic plant life. More than 2/3 of the site is devoted to the landscaping, including formal and semi-formal gardens and turf area. The remainder is comprised of buildings, roads and other infrastructure.

Maintenance is the responsibility of 22 groundspeople and one manager. Nine staffers endeavor to keep the turf looking lush and green; 13 oversee the plants, shrubs and other landscaping elements.

**Four Walker Diesels help maintain 9.6 hectares of turf at Parliament House in Canberra. The mowers were brought in after the new Parliament House was completed in 1988. They see duty on top of the roof, around the walks and tight areas, and in the courtyards.**

## GROWING GRASS

Of the more than 9.6 hectares of turf at Parliament House, the lion's share is grown on the roof, on four grass ramps that rise dramatically from Parliament drive to the top of the structure. The ramps, which meet under the main flagpole, offer a place for visitors to picnic and enjoy the environs. They also provide traffic ways to adjoining gardens, walkways and recreational areas.

Wide-area mowers are employed to maintain the ramps, and four diesel Walkers see duty on top of the roof, around the walks and tight areas, and in the courtyards.

The Walkers were originally brought in right after the new Parliament House was completed in 1988. They have maintained their

position in large part because of their maneuverability, and their ability to catch grass clippings, notes gardening supervisor Paul Janssens. A Stevens edger attachment adds to their versatility.

As Janssens relates, the mowers are out in force Monday, Wednesday and Friday, starting at 7:00 a.m. and returning at 2:00 p.m. The turf, comprised primarily of tall fescue and Kentucky blue grass, is mowed often to give it a consistent, manicured look, a look that is enhanced by the use of 7,000 computer-operated sprinklers. Since Canberra receives only 24 inches of rain each year, supplemental water is a requisite.

Regular soil and water testing, an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program, and the use of biological,

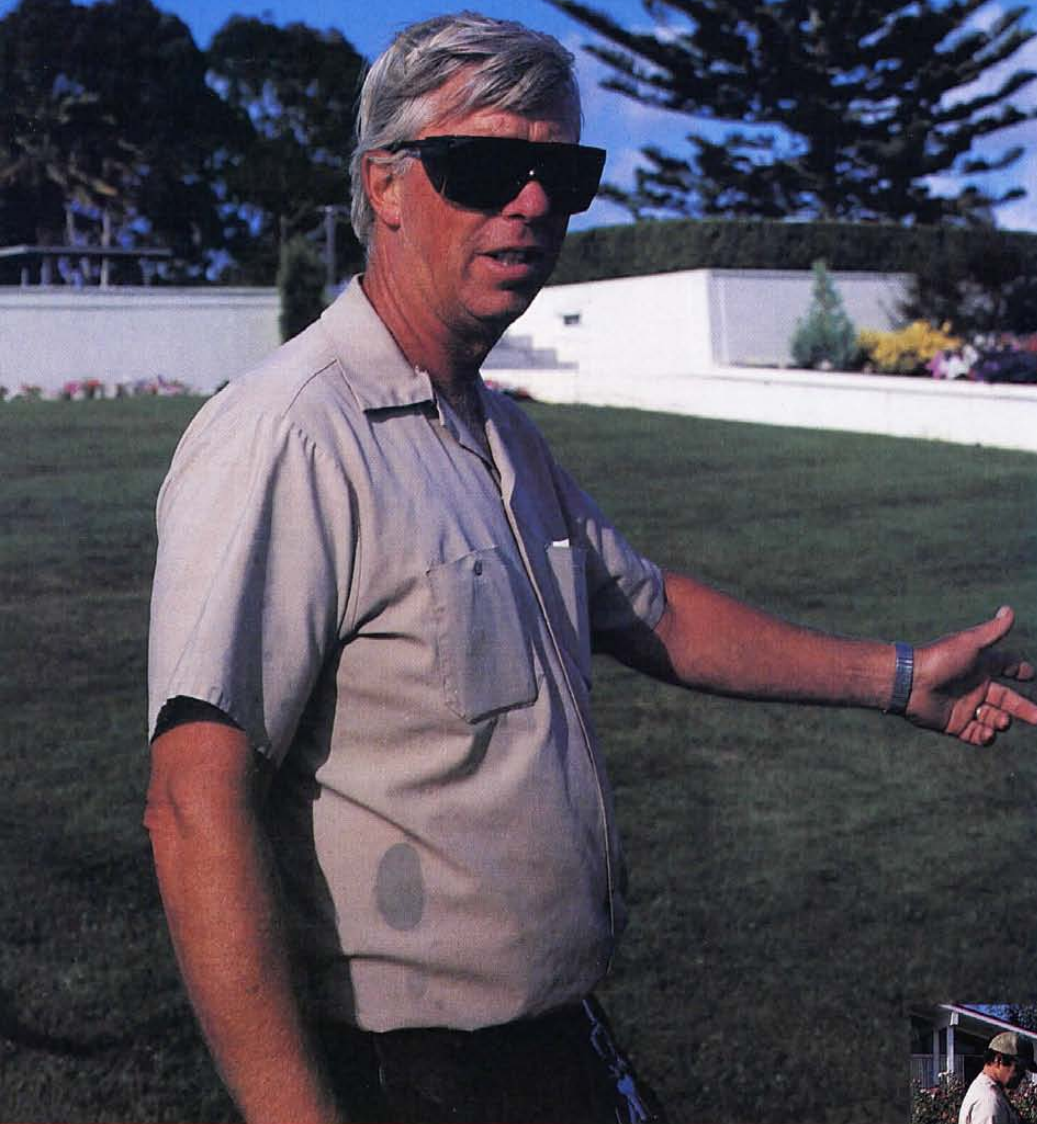
cultural, and mechanical controls in combination with a slow-release fertilizer program, work to keep the Parliament House landscape in top shape.

Designers of Parliament House intended to make the landscape elements a combination of native landscape appeal and "simple, uniform and functional" design. After only 10 years in existence, it seems the well-intended design has made its mark on Canberra and throughout Australia. **WT**





# Walker grooms Hamilton LDS Church



If you're looking for Colin Paikinson, chances are you'll find him on a Walker. That's where he spends the better part of his time in the spring and summer at the Church of Latter-day Saints in Hamilton, New Zealand.

Paikinson keeps the church grounds looking picture perfect with a four-day mowing rotation. The regimen leaves the grass unusually high for this island country — three inches. And when combined with irrigation,

Colin Paikinson mows between 1.2 and 1.6 hectares of grass at the Church of Latter-day Saints in Hamilton, New Zealand. A four-day mowing rotation and plenty of water keep the grass looking lush and trim.

it helps keep the grass rich in both texture and color, even during the hot, dry summers.

Paikinson figures he mows somewhere between 1.2 and 1.6 hectares at the church with the 16-hp Walker, equipped with either a 42-inch grass-handling or 54-inch side-discharge deck. When collected, the clippings are recycled on any of several flower gardens.

The Walker was purchased in 1991 and has logged 2,000 hours. Not all of its time was spent mowing, however. As Paikinson relates, Kiwi ingenuity is the watchword at the church, too. The Walker is used for odd jobs and often is employed to pull a trailer.

"If we can find a way to do something without using manual labor, we'll do it," he admits. No, the grounds crew isn't lazy, it's just determined to make the most of its resources. If the spectacular grounds are any indication, they've been very successful.

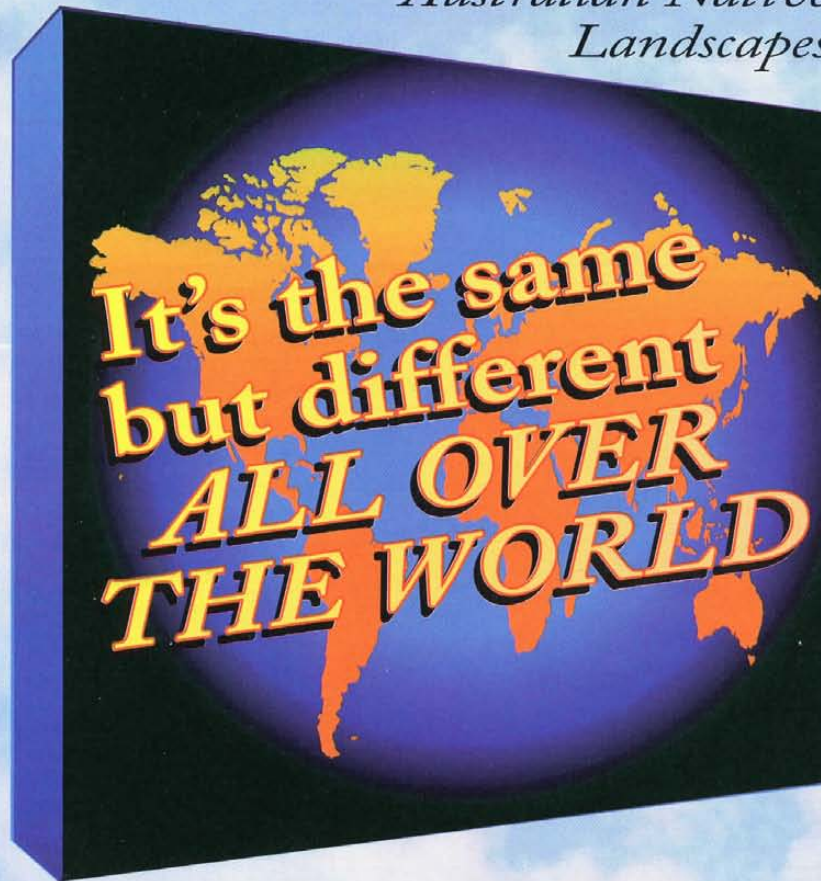
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Groundskeeper Paikinson attributes the lush green turf to high mowing and irrigation.



## Australian Native Landscapes



**A**sk Max Thomas, president of Australian Native Landscapes (ANL), Lysterfield, Victoria, how maintenance practices in Australia compare to those in the United States. His response would be, "The landscape industry doesn't change around the world." He ought to

know. As president of the Landscape Association of Australia, he's traveled the globe talking with contractors. When he says landscaping doesn't change he really means the way business is conducted — how properties are bid, how businesses are run and how profits are made — is the same no matter where one hangs his or her shingle. As he puts it, "I

can bid on maintaining a shopping center in the United States just as easily as I can bid on one in Melbourne, and come very close to getting it right."

With 28 years of landscaping experience in Australia, Thomas has gotten it right more than once. His company currently does approximately \$3.5 million in turnover, primarily around Melbourne and pri-

**"We're not the cheapest company around and we don't operate cheap equipment. But that's part of being professional."**

marily in commercial properties, especially shopping centers.

To date, his crews can be seen at any one of 15 such centers, along with BMW Australia among other high-profile accounts.

Interestingly enough, maintenance represents only 1/3 of his company revenue.





# Painting with broad strokes in New Zealand and Australia



**I**t's a long road from being a painting contractor to offering a full line of property maintenance services. For Programmed Maintenance Services in Mount Waverley, Victoria, Australia, the path took more than 40 years.

The company that began offering painting maintenance programs in 1951 now provides a comprehensive

range of services from the painting, design, manufacture and installation of illuminated signs to energy management, grounds planning and maintenance, and even industrial plumbing.

Today, Programmed Maintenance Services has 31 branch locations throughout Australia and New Zealand, and employs more than 700 personnel. The company has in the order of 4,000 customers who rely on one or more of its services. Grounds maintenance is one of its newer ser-

vices, being brought on board five years ago, explains managing director Max Findlay. The 80 people who work in that division already bring in approximately \$3 million in revenue, and there's more opportunity for growth in the future.

The theory behind the company's success is straightforward: Offer a customer a maintenance program, develop a long-term relationship (say possibly five or six years), then grow your business with that customer.

## MAINTENANCE PUSH

According to Findlay, the company's maintenance program is just now hitting its stride. In fact, the volume of grounds maintenance work doubled in 1997 alone.

In Australia, the crews operate 20 diesel Walkers equipped primarily with 42-inch mulching decks or 62-inch side-discharge decks. The diesels were the mowers of choice because of their ability to tackle the tough mowing conditions, including the dust and dirt. Findlay adds that using the mulching decks and attachments such as the Stevens edger adds to crew productivity.

The name of the game is productivity, he continues. In one property in Melbourne, for example, using the Stevens edger cut six hours off an



Managing director Max Findlay and operations manager Greg Smith discuss maintenance strategies at a Melbourne property.



edging job. In a retirement village in Adelaide, one mowing crew is accountable for 10 kilometers of edging. That's a lot of work for a pedestrian edger, tells Adelaide branch manager David Forwood.

In the Adelaide branch, Programmed Maintenance Services crews had put more than 400 hours on their three Walker Mowers in less than nine months. Forwood estimates that, at most, they have experienced only a 2% downtime ratio. Not bad considering the amount of grass they mow, approximately 80 hectares of irrigated turf every fortnight. Like other branch locations, the crews in Adelaide mulch the grass to save time and add nutrients back into the soil.

"The Walker Mowers give us versatility and flexibility with their decks and edger attachment," Forwood adds. "They help keep pro-

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**Programmed Maintenance Services has 31 branch locations throughout Australia and New Zealand, and employs more than 700 personnel.**

ductivity and quality levels high, which is the key in this business."

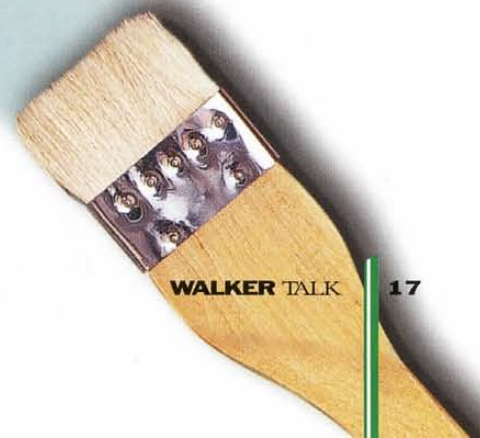
Although grounds maintenance represents only a fraction of Programmed Maintenance Services' business, as Findlay explains, all pieces of the property maintenance puzzle are equal.

How one service crew does reflects on the entire company. In other words, while mowing may have little or nothing to do with painting or energy management, a

good mowing job can sure enhance the looks of a building in more ways than one. **WT**



**In Adelaide, Programmed Maintenance Services crews put more than 400 hours on their three Walkers in less than nine months. In the process, they experienced only a 2% downtime ratio.**





# Geography is right for gas and grass in *Taranaki*

**T**here's no other way to describe it. Mower operator Murray Fabish has a great job. While tending grounds at Methanex New Zealand in Motunui, Taranaki, he is only a stone's throw from the country's rugged west coastline and the Tasman Sea. And on a clear day, he has a perfect view

of Mt. Egmont, one of New Zealand's truly magnificent sites. He can enjoy both views while mowing, spraying, trimming plants, and overall helping to maintain the large facility.

Methanex New Zealand is not your ordinary facility, either. In fact, it's the only plant in the world where natural gas can be converted into either distilled methanol or unleaded petroleum.

Fabish works with two other people to maintain the grounds at the 80-hectare facility. The grounds crew is employed by SERCO, an international facilities management company that provides a variety of services for Methanex, including catering, security and building maintenance services.

SERCO manager Richard Hamel is in charge of the ground crew and other service providers. As he explains, Methanex contracted out non-core activities two years ago. SERCO won the bid and now employs 52 people to provide a myriad of services that would normally take 14 contracting companies to fill.

**SERCO employee Murray Fabish says one of the biggest challenges of mowing the Motunui Methanex facility is the unpredictable weather.**





The company originally interviewed more than 200 people to fill job openings, including those in grounds maintenance. Before being hired by SERCO, Fabish had worked nine years at an area nursery. His knowledge of plant life comes in handy at the Motunui facility.

### PRODUCING GAS, GROWING GRASS

The Motunui Methanex plant is one of the world's largest. The facility converts natural gas into crude methanol at the rate of 5,000 tons per day. In its crude form, the methanol either can be distilled to be used in a wide range of products from resins and insecticides to fuel extenders, or converted into petrol. The plant is capable of producing two million tons of distilled methanol or 750,000 tons of unleaded petrol per year. That's a lot of gas.

While the plant is busy making methanol, the climate, dictated by nearby Mt. Egmont, is producing grass. To be sure, there's a saying in New Zealand that the country grows grass as good as any place on earth, and that the province of Taranaki grows grass better than any place in New Zealand.

SERCO employs a diesel-powered Walker with a 62-inch side-discharge and 48-inch grass-handling deck to keep the grass in check,

**New Zealand grows grass as good as any place on earth, and the province of Taranaki grows grass better than any place in New Zealand.**



the clippings. They're also easy to maneuver, so they're easy to use by anyone on our staff."

Not surprisingly, Fabish says the biggest challenge facing operators is the unpredictable weather. Grass is often wet, which puts an even greater demand on the mower, especially when operating on hillsides. Special turf tires provide excellent traction on the hills, he adds.

Maintaining the grounds at a methanol plant provides another challenge. Mowing crews need a permit before mowing inside the plant, and some areas need to be "sniffed" prior to operating equipment.

When *Walker Talk* visited Methanex, SERCO was seven months into a three-year contract and on plan, according to Hamel. In the big picture, the Motunui facility represents only a fraction of the company's work. Worldwide, SERCO employs approximately 14,000 people in 34 countries. But like anything else, a company's success — no matter how big or small — depends on taking care of details. In grounds maintenance at Methanex, those details are left to the Walkers and the people who operate them. **WT**

**SERCO manager Richard Hamel and mower operator Murray Fabish. The SERCO staff at the Motunui Methanex plant provides a myriad of services, including grounds maintenance where three people work to maintain the 80-hectare facility.**

mowing both inside and outside the plant area. Fabish and another employee maintain the grounds every 10 days, taking four days to complete the task. There are approximately 8 hectares to mow, including high-profile areas around the information center and roadside.

"The machines do a brilliant job," tells Fabish. "They do a great job at dispersing grass with the side-discharge deck, and at picking up



## Versatile mowers, consistency give new business a lift

**N**eil Bauer and his father Richard have been mowing lawns only two years now, but already they have a healthy list of customers in and around Canberra. The secret to their success is consistency, explains Neil, who says their company, Bauer Property Services, Tuggeranong, "will do the job exactly the same way every time."

**"We will do the job exactly the same way every time."**

That philosophy, combined with learning to bid jobs so the company turns a profit, has earned the Bauers the reputation as a "no nonsense team" that will come in and deliver. And deliver they do to private and public schools, smaller commercial properties such as Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants, an airport and six radar sites, a hospice, and at least 25 residential properties.

The company's most recent acquisition is the U.S. Embassy in Canberra. The 4.8-hectare complex features 3.2 hectares of lawn, which the Bauers mow with two Walkers. The grounds are both irrigated and fertilized, producing a healthy crop of grass that has an incredible growth rate, Neil says. The Walkers come in handy, he adds, because they can be used in areas where the crews previously used a push mower, where they need grass-catching ability and where wide-area mowing is a requisite, not to mention being able to cut through the high, wet grass.



Neil Bauer (left) with U.S. Embassy head gardener Mark Hynes: The Embassy's 3.2 hectares of lawn include wide-open spaces, steep hills and irrigated turf.

Giving a tour of the grounds, head gardener Mark Hynes points out some particularly challenging areas where wide-open spaces, steep hills, and irrigated turf would give any mowing crew a challenge. Enhanced by beautiful gardens, shrubs and trees, the property also provides plenty of work for Hynes and his full-time crew. And, as he points out, there's so much grass that his crews sometimes do "touch up" mowings in between visits from Bauer's crew.

Two years isn't a lifetime of mowing. Yet, Bauer Property Services already seems well established. In addition to mowing, the company offers pest control, fertilizing and pressure washing. Richard does some consulting with property managers on the side, too, a holdover from his previous job.

As son Neil points out, the business is tough and very competitive. But it holds a bright future, especially for contractors with the right equipment, and the knowledge and desire to do a consistent job time and again. **WT**

## Is three enough for this homeowner?

**W**ho would think that of the couple hundred Walker Mowers operating in the Sydney area, a homeowner would have three of them? Meet Eddie Long, a semi-retired home builder and businessman, and unusually adroit property owner.

Long doesn't find it too unusual that he has a 16-hp Walker for his summer property, and two Walkers (a 20- and 25-hp model) for his 2 hectares of land in Dural, just north of Sydney where his home and business are located.



# Daydream turns to reality for this contractor

**D**avid Cole's accounting office provided a great place to watch municipal workers mow the lawns in Te Kuiti. He watched and dreamed, thinking that someday he too would enjoy the fresh air and exercise associated with operating a mower. His day came when the city put the grounds maintenance out to tender.

Unfortunately, Cole had neither mowing experience or equipment to bring to the bid table. But that didn't stop him. With the help of Walker salesperson Dave Southcombe, he developed a costing scenario for the job that included estimated mowing hours and the cost of operating his equipment (yet to be purchased), including repair costs. Cole's bid package was accepted, and today he mows Te Kuiti — the shearing capital of the world — with two Walker Mowers and a tractor.

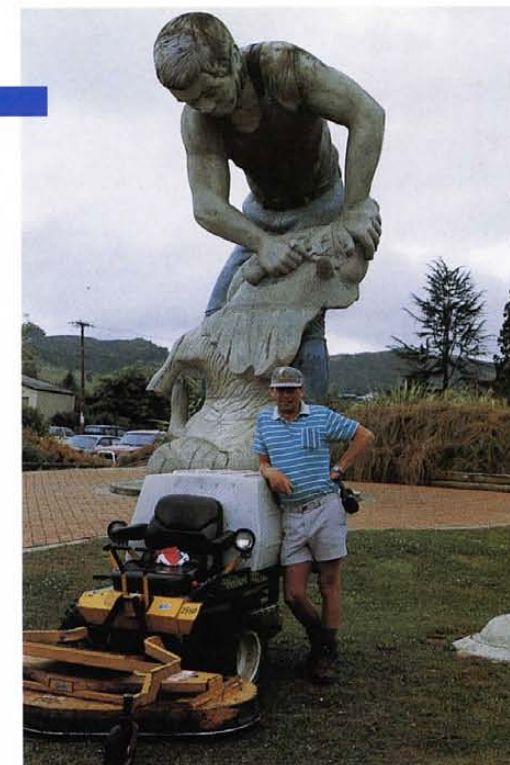
"The bid package Dave and I put together hit the nail on the head," tells this one-time accountant. In the contracting business for 18 months, now, he mows approximately 24 hectares of grass. It takes one week to do the lawns, including parks, cemeteries, and the river banks that stretch throughout the community. Cole has also picked up 12 homeowner properties. He does the work with one full-time employee and a part-timer who operates the tractor mower. For the Walkers, he has four decks: two 42-inch grass-handling decks, one 54-inch rear-discharge deck and one 62-inch side-discharge deck.

Under contract for three years, Cole is set for nearly any contingency. The decks allow him wide-area capability with his Walkers as well as

**Eddie Long saw his first Walker Mower in the states a few years ago. He brought that mower back home with him and has since purchased three more.**

"One is really a spare," he adds with a smile. "I saw my first Walker in the states a few years ago and brought it back with me. Since then, I've purchased three more here in Australia."

Long doesn't skimp on his equipment, either. His big engines power full-feature machines with big catchers and hydraulic lift decks. His newest one, a Model T, has only



New Zealand contractor David Cole used to be an accountant. Now, he mows Te Kuiti, the shearing capital of the world.

the ability to mow in tight spaces and areas where grass needs to be picked up. In Cole's words, the Walker fits the bill or tender to a tee. "Everything is in front and easily visible, it's comfortable, and it does a good job mowing." And it has to. When you mow in this community, sheep are not the only ones expecting a close shave. **WT**



40 hours on it.

Sounding like a professional mowing contractor, Long says he buys the Walkers because of their maneuverability, parts availability and service backup. He admits, though, that he likes to be around quality equipment. "I've always been interested in mechanical things," he says. "The Walkers are my Tonka Toys." **WT**



*City of Burnside, South  
Australia*

## New Walkers feel right at home



**G**ardener Jim Groat had his Walkers for only three weeks, yet already he was feeling right at home with them.

"This is the first time the rank and file actually made a buying decision," he tells, referring to the City of Burnside's recent Walker purchase.

**"This is the first time the rank and file actually made a buying decision."**

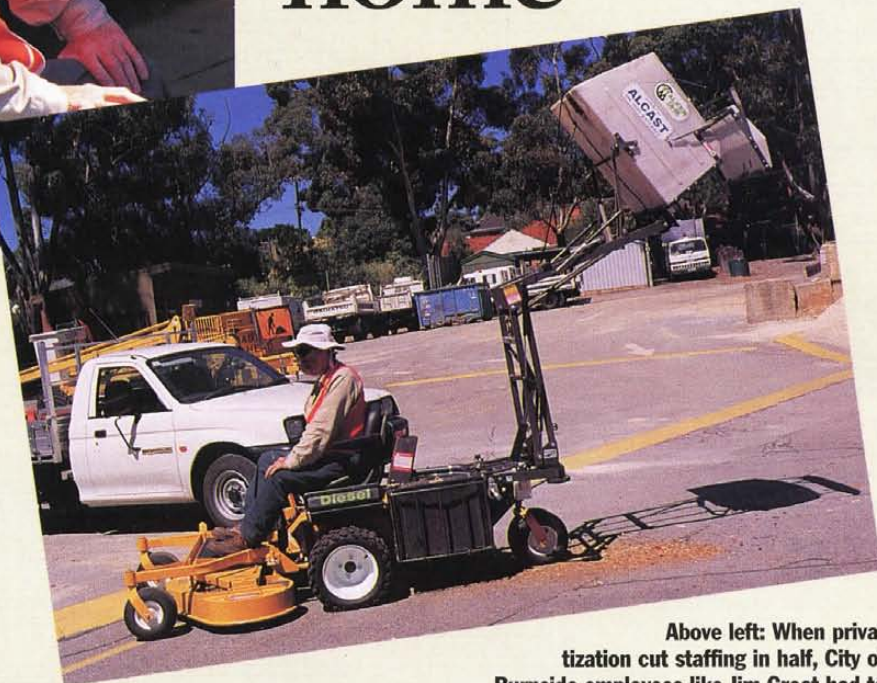
"We tried them for a day, then decided to go with them."

The three diesels came with the high-lift catcher system in place, along with 48-inch grass-handling and 52-inch combination decks. Groat says that although most operators liked their old "steering wheel" mowers, they had little trouble adapting to the lever steer configuration of the Walkers.

But the new mowers were more

than replacement machines. Due to privatization, staffing at the city's grounds maintenance division had been cut from 36 employees down to 16. The grounds crews needed new mowers that would get the work done with less labor requirements and still maintain high quality standards.

City officials looked to their grounds maintenance crews for an answer, and they responded. Sure, for the City of Burnside, the jury may still be out on the Walkers. After all, how much can you learn about a machine in three weeks? But for gar-



**Above left: When privatization cut staffing in half, City of Burnside employees like Jim Groat had to find a better way to get the job done. Right: Groat demonstrates the high-lift system on one of the city's three new Walkers.**

deners like Groat, the decision was the right one.

"It took a day for us to find out how maneuverable the Walker Mower is," Groat says, adding that "We know it's more versatile, too." He also knows the two characteristics working in combination with the high-lift catcher system should make the city both proud and very competitive in the weeks to come.

**WT**



## *City Scape Services faces new challenges*

# Mowing Canberra

**W**ith 18 depots, 80 out-front mowers and 320 employees, City Scape Services has the tools and the people to mow the City of Canberra. And it does.

As an arm of the local government, City Scape Services maintains more than 5,000 hectares, 450 playgrounds and parks, 100 schools, 150 sports ovals, and literally hundreds of thousands of trees throughout the city. This is no small task, especially considering the fact that when

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**“The move toward privatization has encouraged us to become more efficient.”**

Canberra was formed in 1911, it was set up to be a world-class garden city. There is not only a lot of property to maintain — It's maintained to showcase the city and its many garden areas.

But the scope of the job at hand is only one challenge facing City Scape Services, manager Phil Grace explains. Because of the federal mandate to privatize public services, departments like City Scape have had to compete with contractors for their jobs. As individual projects go out for tender, City Scape puts in a bid, just like any contractor.

“The move toward privatization has encouraged us to become more efficient,” Grace says. “We've made several cutbacks already and more consolidation will be forthcoming in the future.”

But cutbacks are only part of the competitive scenario. The business, and that's really what it is now, Grace emphasizes, looks to sharpen its operating acumen in other areas, too. It provides a full array of responsive services to operating equipment in the most efficient manner possible.

“We have about \$15 million worth of equipment in our inventory,” tells Grace. “Because of the amount of equipment alone, service is top priority, and so is having the right equipment to do the job.” Sixteen out of the 80 outfront mowers are Walkers, equipped with both 36-inch grass-handling decks and larger side-discharge decks. City Scape Services purchased the Walkers in large part because they needed a compact rider that had catching capability.

“As one would imagine, we've tested a lot of equipment over the years,” Grace continues. “For our mowers, we needed a robust machine as well as a machine that could operate in small, irrigated areas and confined spaces. The Walkers fit the bill.

“They are robust. And they do the job for us. They're not the cheapest machines, but price isn't everything. Reliability is.”

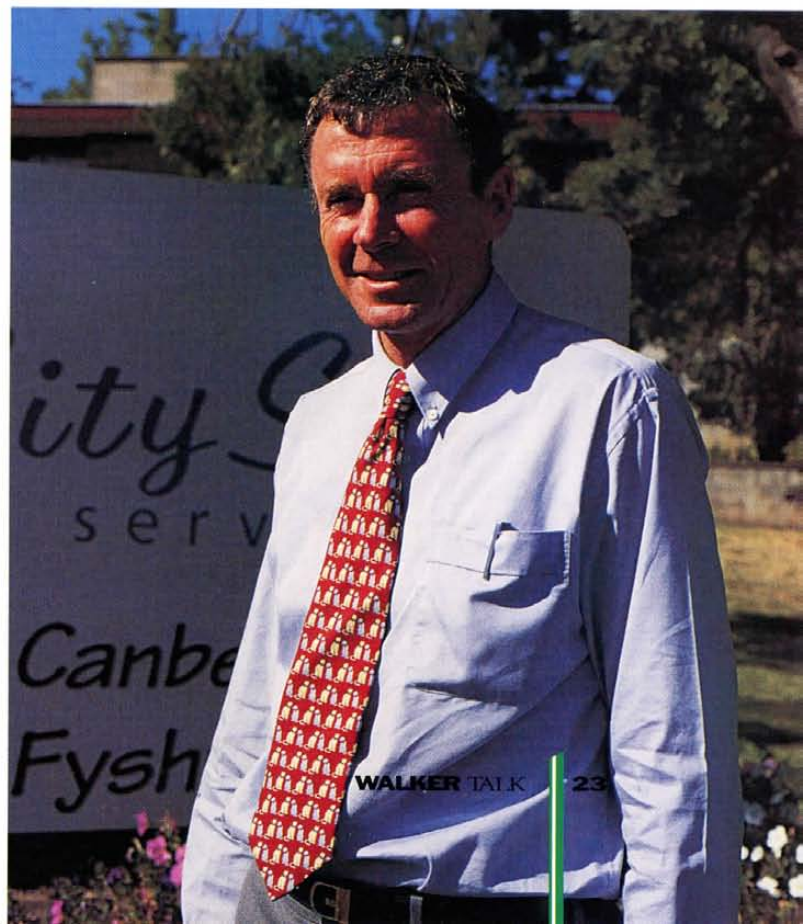
This manager is just as confident in his group's ability to get the job done and compete as he is in the

Walker's ability to perform. Last year, City Scape Services did approximately \$28 million in business and it doesn't expect to lose much to the competition. In fact, the privatization agreement allows Grace and his contingency to tender other jobs outside of the city.

“It's only fair,” he adds. “If contractors can bid on our jobs, we should be able to bid on theirs. After all, we consider ourselves to be intelligent contractors, and intelligent in not only the practical application of services, but also in the business end of things.”

Only time will tell what is in store for City Scape Services. In the meantime, crews are out and about doing what they do best: keeping Canberra looking like the garden spot it is. **WT**

**Manager Phil Grace oversees the maintenance of more than 5,000 hectares of turf in Canberra. Among the \$15 million of equipment in City Scape's inventory are 80 outfront mowers including 16 Walkers.**







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