

# WALKER TALK

DESERT MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

## Benchmarking in Texas

**DESERT MAINTENANCE  
THE BID BEHIND THE BID  
SEEING DOUBLE IN FLORIDA**

**VOL.** 



# WALKER TALK

CONTENTS VOL.7

## 3 Aggressive plans put emphasis on selection and maintenance

Common sense approach helps Phoenix landscaper control growth



## 6 Teaming up in Florida

Ruth and Gordon Ewerks are learning to say no

## 8 The bid behind the bid

How to put together an effective and attractive bid package

## 9 Walker News

## 10 BENCHMARKING to success in Texas

Scott and Company gets head start on maintenance business

## 13 "You are what you think you are!"

Quality promotes more quality for this contractor

## FACING COMPETITION

**R**iders with steering levers and zero turn radius performance were already on the market in '77 when we started designing the Walker Mower. Our vision and innovation was to make a very compact, front-cutting machine with a built-in grass collection system. This package would optimize the performance available from a zero turn radius-type machine. In the years since then, there has been very little offered by other equipment manufacturers

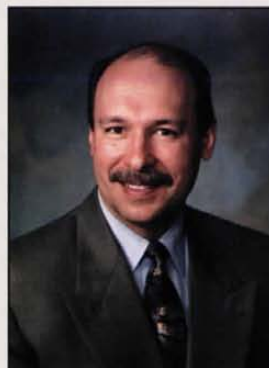
competitive with the Walker — we've had a niche of the market to ourselves.

Other manufacturers have noticed Walker's growing market share. It's not surprising in recent years several new machines have been developed and others are coming that are designed to compete in the "Walker" market. Our

distributors, dealers and customers have watched the new developments and have been asking "What do you think?"

Here's our thinking: Copies tend to validate and boost the original idea. If we continue to progress, update and innovate our original design, the copies will always be behind and our leadership will be maintained. In the other direction, don't assume a "copy" machine will immediately have the performance and reliability of a time-proven machine.

It's well known in athletics that the best performances are turned in when facing competition. Walker expects to turn in our best performance in the years ahead as we face the competition. When faced with a competitor's machine, we will work for the common thought: "It still isn't a Walker."





## DESERT CARE LANDSCAPING, INC.

# Aggressive growth plans put emphasis on selection and maintenance

**N**ot every contractor wants to be big. There's a reason. Being big means incurring more overhead in the form of employees, equipment and property. Large contractors invariably assume more risk and higher insurance premiums than small contractors and there's that feeling of loss of control. So why grow? Making more money probably isn't the answer, at first anyway. There's always a place to put the earnings, a n d

it's usually not in the owners' pockets. But growth has its advantages. If done correctly, it ensures a degree of stability for owners and employees. It also increases a company's exposure in the marketplace, giving it more opportunity to find and win lucrative contracts.

Desert Care Landscaping, Inc., in Phoenix has been on the elevator up since owners Jeff Meyer, Vince Rector and Marc Rector started their company three and one-half years ago by purchasing the

assets of another company. In that short length of time, the business has grown from 50 plus employees to close to 150. Today, it does more than \$5 million in sales, half in maintenance, the rest in native tree salvage and landscape construction. An impressive equipment lineup includes a fleet of 47 trucks, a couple of wide area and outfront mowers, an arsenal of hand-held equipment, close to 20 walk-behind mowers and nine Walkers, not to mention a couple of backhoes, a crane, a watering

**Taking a break: Crew supervisor Amey Schweizer takes a "time out" at The Islands with two Walker crew members. It takes the mowing crew only two days to manicure the 20 acres of turf here.**





truck and a myriad of other support vehicles.

### GOING ALL OUT

"We don't pull any punches with our equipment," tells Marc Rector, company fleet and property manager. "We run the best equipment we can buy and follow an aggressive maintenance routine." An understatement to be sure. For example, during the one and one-half-month long scalping season in Phoenix, when lawns are transformed from summer

afford not to have an aggressive preventive maintenance program." The program, which saves time and money, applies to every piece of equipment they own. And it even extends to parts, including blades. Sharp blades allow crews to mow fast and still deliver a quality cut, says Marc. Keeping blades sharp also prolongs blade life, he adds. Dull blades require removing more material from the blades to get them sharp. The process wastes material and the time of the person doing the sharpening.

One small efficiency. Added to others, big efficiencies result. That describes Desert Care's approach to fleet management. You won't find, for example, a mix of truck brands, mowers and hand-held equipment on the property.

Having like brands keeps the parts inventory to a minimum, saving on money and space, and it allows the mechanic to become more familiar and efficient with repairs. It all adds up in a hurry, which is the reason Marc is there, to keep that part of the business running smoothly.

The other side of the business is in good hands, too, with company president Jeff Meyer and Marc's brother Vince, vice president and

maintenance division manager. Jeff has a background in business and worked his way through college in the landscape industry. Vince has been in the industry 14 years. Their combined experience has been a great catalyst for growth. Both were working for the same landscape maintenance company when they decided to start Desert Care. Marc put his money into the venture, too, but he kept his full-time job at the time installing Otis elevators in Chicago and Bermuda. "I wanted to give Desert Care a couple of years to get established before I quit my job," Marc relates. He joined the company one and one-half years ago.

### PLANNED GROWTH

Everything counts in a growing business, Marc emphasizes, including finding and retaining employees. A profit sharing program helps with the latter. When you talk about reinvesting earnings, investing in employees is just as important as investing in your equipment. "Yes, we're in business to make money," tells Marc. "But we're also in business to secure our future and that of our employees." One way to do that, he adds, is to give employees an incentive to work and to perform at their peak.

Growing companies must also invest in their property. Desert Care owns 4.3 acres of land in Phoenix. Since starting the business, the owners have replaced trees, refurbished and fenced in the parking area, expanded



**Ruben Nevarez with Amey Schweizer: everything counts in a growing business including finding and retaining employees.**

Bermuda grass to winter rye, Walker mowers receive daily oil and filter changes. The heat, dust and generally tough working conditions, combined with seven to nine hours of virtual nonstop operation, dictate machines receive top care, notes Marc. During the regular mowing season, the mowers receive weekly oil and filter changes.

Desert Care's Walker fleet includes a 16-hp '91 unit with more than 3,000 hours on it. Another 16-hp model, a 25-hp unit and six 20-hp models round out the lineup. Each Walker is projected to outlive two engines, each engine accumulating between 2,500 and 3,000 hours.

"We have a fortune tied up in equipment," Marc emphasizes. "We can't







**Marc Rector, fleet and property manager, and Amey Schweizer share some ideas on site.**

the maintenance shop and added office space. They've also added an outside wash station and installed an in-ground dumpster pit to accommodate landscape debris. The improvements, of course, are only a means to an end: to provide quality service to a wide mix of customers.

Both large and small residential and commercial accounts make up its customer rolls. Currently, it has a full plate of both installation and maintenance projects, including The Islands, one of several large master planned communities in the area. Property superintendent Amey Schweizer says one crew comprised of two Walkers and a trimming crew can maintain all of the turf in two days, not bad considering there is 20 acres of turf to mow. The company's wide area mowers can't be used at

The Islands because of undulating terrain and tight turns.

In addition to The Islands, Desert Care has 150 other maintenance accounts, some larger and some smaller in scope. Because of the sheer number and mix of customers, the company finds it more efficient to operate crews that are dedicated to mowing and maintenance. The mow crews maintain close to 175 acres of turf weekly, 130 of which are done by Walkers.

### CHALLENGING CONDITIONS

So you want to mow lawns in Phoenix? Think again, if you're not used to the climate. For one, there is no let up. Lawns are maintained all year long, which puts an additional strain on equipment.

"We can't run our equipment to the brink and then take the winter to repair it," relates Marc. "We have to keep equipment in good repair all year long."

The working conditions take their toll on employees, too. This notion that dry heat is more tolerable than areas where there is more humidity is a myth, relates Marc. He admits when he first came to Phoenix the heat was so unbearable, he could not stay outside for any length of time. It's not unusual to see (and feel) daytime temperatures of 120 degrees and that's hot for anyone, anywhere, especially for crews working outside. To combat the elements, employees arrive at 4:30 a.m. and return

back to the yard between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. during the summer. In that time, they will have gone through 10 gallons of water per crew.

Pollution from automobiles and an overall concern for the environment puts an unusual twist on doing business in Phoenix, too. Ride-sharing is required by the county to help reduce traffic and emissions. This means that companies like Desert Care can't just establish satellite offices all over the valley and expect employees to travel back and forth. Larger properties allow the company to keep equipment right on site which reduces travel, notes Marc.

The flip side. The company's tree

### WALKER USER TIP

*Everything counts when you're growing your company. Good equipment, a solid preventive maintenance program, and having like brands all work together to keep costs in line.*

salvage division was literally born out of concern for the environment. Business for that division, just like the construction market in Phoenix, is booming.

Proper selection and maintenance of equipment has played a big role in the evolution of Desert Care Landscaping. With any growing company, keeping a lid on equipment overhead and keeping downtime to a minimum is critical to long-term success. The terms "maintenance" and "selection" apply to customers and employees, too. By fashioning the right customer mix and hiring the right employees, and maintaining both, Desert Care has helped ensure its path to future growth. **WT**





**W**hat has your mower done for you lately? That's a fair question for any contractor. The answer for Ruth and Gordon Ewerks, owners of KK Enterprises, Lady Lake, Florida, is, plain and simple, "doubled our business." After purchasing their two Walkers, the couple went from mowing 50 residential accounts to 95. They saved time on jobs, doubled their income and even had some extra time left over, enough so they no longer had to work on Saturdays.

Is the story too good to be true? Not really. The Ewerks had been observing Walker mowers for years. They knew they could cut faster with them, but they didn't know just how fast. The first Walker they purchased in 1992 replaced one of their two garden tractors. With Gordon in the seat, the mower cut his lawns and even encroached on Ruth's properties to do her trim work.

"We couldn't believe how much time we saved just by having one Walker," tells Ruth. "We would mow the straight areas with our regular mower and use the Walker for trim work." They bought their second Walker the following year, and now their only challenge is knowing when to say no.

To be sure, Lady Lake is located about an hour north of Orlando. Although the Ewerks live on 10 acres of land that resembles an island paradise, three miles down the road is a huge retirement village. Called the Villages, properties in this development range from all shapes and sizes, with sub developments seem-

ingly popping up in all directions. Although lawn maintenance trailers appear to be a "dime a dozen," news of good work travels fast among residents. So fast, in fact, K & K does 16 lawns on one street. You can't beat that for efficiency.

How many lawns can two people handle? The Ewerks say they've peaked out. A regimen that starts at 6:00 a.m. and ends at 4:30 p.m., with an hour for lunch, is enough work for any two people. The team averages a little over 18 lawns a day, edging, trimming, mowing and blowing in that order. They don't apply chemicals, but they keep customers informed about any developing pest problems and will call applicators in

for needed treatments. They also do special projects, e.g., hedging and other yard cleanup work.

## SUMMER FUN

The fun, a.k.a. hard work, begins in March for the Ewerks. Last summer, an especially long, hot and wet growing season kept them on their toes and on their Walkers for weeks on end. An untimely rain would force them to work 'til 6:00, extended rain would require a Saturday stint. But in most cases, notes Gordon, they could still get their work done on time, despite the elements. Having a maintenance routine that saves time really pays off when the "heat's" on.

Walkers with 42-inch mulching decks are at the heart of the system. "When we first started to mow, everyone bagged their grass," explains Gordon. "Today, none of our accounts bag." The mowers mulch even during the height of the growing season and even a heavy dew doesn't stop them. "It took a while to educate our customers

about the benefits of mulching," adds Ruth. "But it paid off."

A quick glance at their trailer gives away another part of their system. They have two of everything. Two mowers, blowers, trimmers, edgers. They attack the properties as

# TEAMING UP *in Florida* *Ruth and Gordon Ewerks* *are learning to say no*





a team, Ruth going one way off the trailer and Gordon the other. In most instances, they start and finish adjacent properties at the same time, then quickly move to the next. That's one reason why it's so important to keep properties in proximity. By the time they load and move the trailer, even to an area a few blocks away, they could have finished one, maybe two properties. Forget a house that stands alone. There's no time . . . and no money.

Hence, the Ewerks are learning to say no, especially when one new property in one new area could lead to several more. Not to say they won't take on new properties. They will, but only if the lawns are in their line of cut. Even then, there is a limit. Ruth and Gordon don't want the headaches associated with hiring and managing employees, and they've learned to enjoy their off time, on the weekends.

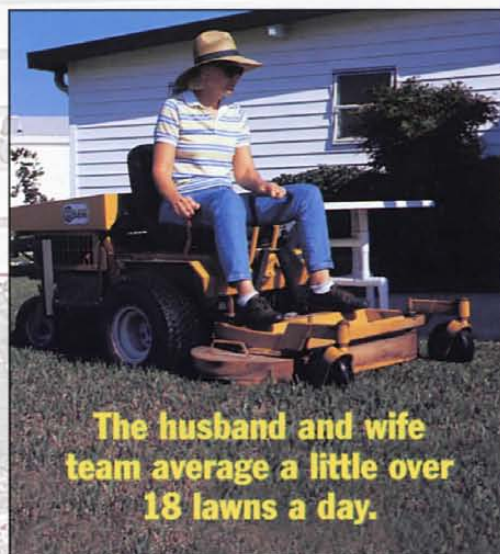
## NEW LIFE

Ruth and Gordon moved to Florida in 1986. They left their Sheldon, Illinois, home where Gordon had been a farmer and later an employee for a school district. Ruth was an office employee, spending time with an insurance agency and a seed company. When their two sons finished school, mom and dad took the opportunity to change venue.

"We left having no idea what we were going to do," recalls Ruth. Her husband landed a job quickly as a

maintenance supervisor for a mobile home park. She found work in another office. When Gordon "walked" from the job two years later, giving lawn maintenance a try seemed only natural. He picked up some trimming work at the park where he was previously employed and with a garden tractor found a couple of mowing jobs.

The family has always mowed



**The husband and wife team average a little over 18 lawns a day.**

lawns, starting in the '70s mowing commercially in Illinois. Their two sons mowed to earn spending money, and mom and dad supplemented their income the same way. With this background, it didn't take Gordon long to build accounts. Ruth quit her job the following spring to work full time in the newly formed business. K & K, which are the initials for sons Kevin and Keith, also referred to Kustom Kutting and Kustom Kleaning. Gordon headed up the former while Ruth started an interior cleaning business, which mowing quickly forced her to abandon.

The rest is history or, in Ruth's words, "Once we got started, it just took off." The Ewerks say there really are no

secrets to their success. Just plenty of hard work and using the right equipment. "Not all contractors down here use Walkers, but if they plan to stay in this business, they will buy one," explains Gordon. His brother-in-law came down for a visit and was so impressed he bought one just to mow the lawn around his farmstead.

Yet there are some other caveats to the way they do business. Take, for example, their accounts receivables. The Ewerks don't sign yearly contracts with customers. They charge by the cut, forgoing the "easier money" many Florida contractors depend on in the slow growing winter months to counteract the oftentimes horribly costly summer growing season.

"We charge a fee for every time we mow, mow as needed and bill once a month," explains Gordon. "We don't want customers paying us when we're not doing anything. Furthermore, when you're on contract, customers expect to see you, even if there's nothing to do. Which is a Catch-22 in Florida because the only time retirement customers will ever see you is in the winter months. To the Ewerks, charging per mow seems less complicated and more forthright. One drawback? You have to have the discipline to save money for the winter when, for a couple of months, lawns might go three to four weeks without a manicure.

What's down the road? Maybe a slight dichotomy . . . fewer accounts and one more Walker, this time one with a grasshandling system to pick up the leaves in the spring.

Who says you can't have the best of all worlds. In the Ewerks case, if they can do more with less and have enough money left over to make their life easier still, then why not do it. **WT**





# The bid behind the bid

**A**sked to name one of the most challenging aspects of their job, and most lawn maintenance contractors will define it in one word, bidding.

Ironically, the hard work that goes into the bidding process is often negated by a simple lack of attention to detail in the presentation itself. All too many sound bids fail because they don't include all of the information requested, or because they fail to present the information in an attractive and professional manner. To lose because your bid was too high is forgivable. But to lose because you didn't go far enough with the facts or because the presentation just didn't look professional is not.

So what comprises an effective and attractive bid? Many things, and bid packages vary depending on the prospective client.

## FOR COMMERCIAL ACCOUNTS

An axiom when bidding on any commercial property is to respond completely and fully to all specifications in a bid request.

Be as accurate as possible on your pricing. Avoid making big promises, especially those you can't keep. Prove to prospective clients that you can do the tough or specialty assignments. Do this by referencing a job where you have completed a similar service. Send a photo, if needed. And remember never to hide any prices. It is almost as painful to explain your mistake as it is to eat the cost. Worse, you may have to do both.

In addition to the bid proposal, all commercial bid packages should include four major elements:

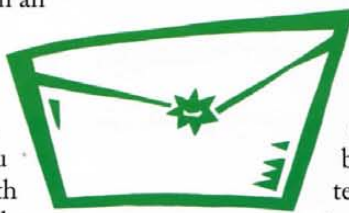
**1 References.** Choose your best, high visibility accounts and include quality photos.

## 2 Complete list of equipment.

Let people know what you will be carrying/riding on their property.

## 3 All certificates and licenses.

Include insurance certificates, workers' compensation, and all required licenses.



## 4 Cover letter.

A concise and strongly written cover letter can really make or break a bid. In the letter, provide a brief history of your company,

including your business philosophy, years in business and types of properties you maintain.

Each bid should be cleanly typed and presented. When property managers/owners see you turn in a tattered proposal, they will assume you may do the same on their lawn.

A folder, with your company

name and logo on the front, is an ideal way to present a bid. Place the cover sheet on top, followed by the specifications (pricing) section on the right side of the folder. This is the first place people look. Use the left side for additional information. Include a business card, or better yet, a magnetized business card. Who ever throws a magnet away?

For sealed bids, simply place the folder in a large envelope.

## FOR RESIDENTIAL ACCOUNTS

The bidding process is similar for residential accounts, with two major exceptions. The sheer number of bids will be greater and there is more personal contact upfront during the bidding process. Both are key considerations.

To save time and money, your proposal packet needs to be easier and less expensive to produce for residential accounts. Forget the envelope, but the folder may still be in order. Once again, include all requested information and all relevant information about your company. Just as you would with commer-

## Seeing is believing

One common mistake contractors make when presenting a bid is keeping their sunglasses on. Believe it, it's true. Your eyes tell a lot about you. The fact a prospective customer can't see your eyes leaves a lot unsaid.

If you're hiding your eyes, the customer is likely to think you're hiding something else. Or

they may subconsciously feel uneasy about you. Have you ever heard people say, "I just don't feel comfortable with that guy. I don't know what it is, but I just don't

trust him." What sunglasses

tell by hiding your eyes may well be worth re-telling with the glasses off. After all, seeing is believing, especially at bid time.





cial accounts, include:

**1 References.** A list of three references should be enough here.

**2 List equipment.** As with commercial accounts, inform people about the type of equipment you'll be using on their properties.

**3 All certificates.** Even residential customers want to know if you're insured, so they know they're protected.

**4 Cover letter.** An introductory letter about your firm is important for residential customers, too.

#### INTERACTIVE ESTIMATING

Unlike most commercial bids, preparing a bid for a residential account may actually involve walking the property with the homeowner. Be prepared to answer the tough questions right on the spot. Know your costs and be able to apply them with your regular mark-up. And be ready to take into account obstructions (trees, children's toys, swing sets, even dogs). Multiply the number of times you would mow each year by the number of obstacles. This is an additional expense for you.

For both residential and commercial accounts, your personal appearance when you present the bid is just as important as the content of the bid and the way it is packaged.

Proper attire in both instances should be driven by the customer and not by your company. Larger commercial accounts may warrant a jacket and tie. For other smaller accounts, a dress shirt and slacks, with a tie as an option, may be more appropriate. Homeowners might be more receptive to a collared shirt and khaki pants.



## WALKER NEWS

### TILT-UP DECK OPTION FOR WALKER MOWER

With the new Tilt-Up Deck option on '96 Walker Mowers, the



42- or 48-inch deck is quickly released, raised and secured in the vertical position. Deck tilt-up makes it easy to clean the deck underside and maintain cutter blades. Also, the machine is more compact for storage or transportation on trailers.

One person can tilt the deck up and then lower it in less than 15 seconds. For safety, the cutter blades are automatically locked and cannot operate in the tilt-up position. A retrofit kit is available for earlier models with 42- or 48-inch decks.

### FACTORY DAY CHALLENGES VISITORS

Walker Mower Precision Racing was the main attraction this year at the 2nd Annual Walker Factory Day. The 145 Colorado contractors, dealers and distributors were challenged by the timed obstacle course which tested even the best Walker operator. The best time on the course was recorded by Don Davis of Cut 'N Trim Lawn Care.

Lunch, factory tours, a service school and Walker Wear giveaways were part of the

day. The event was sponsored by Secrist Sales and Walker Mower of Denver, who collaborated to give away two Deck Tilt-Up Kits.

All 1996 improvements and options were available for inspection and demonstration by the visitors.



### MS/MC RECALL BULLETINS

Two recall bulletins have been issued in '95 to address potential safety hazards found on earlier Model MS/MC units. All owners are encouraged to have their units updated free of charge by contacting their local Walker Dealer (contact

the factory if there is difficulty in making contact with your dealer). The following units are affected:

Bulletin #9576 — All MS/MC Prior to S/N 95-21978

Bulletin #9578 — All MS/MC Prior to S/N 95-22704



# BENCHMARKING

*to success in Texas*

**W**hen Scott and Company, Bay City, Texas, decided to get into the maintenance business, it took a short cut. Instead of starting from scratch and learning the business on their own, owners Scott and Pam Evans took the advice of an industry expert and visited a firm that already "cracked the maintenance code." The visit paid off in a big way. Scott and Company launched a new maintenance division three years ago which already is adding more than \$1/4 million to company sales. The new business is profitable, too.

Not many contractors can lay claim to such aggressive and profitable growth in just three years. Scott and Company attributes its success to a number of factors, including Scott's knowledge of the industry — he has a degree in horticulture. Before taking the maintenance plunge, the owners were already operating a successful landscaping business and tree farm. Having experience in the commercial landscaping business paved the way for bigger and more profitable maintenance accounts, notes Scott. In fact, it was the commercial landscaping customers who nudged Scott

Four eyes are better than two. In addition to her duties in the office, Pam Evans also walks the properties. Every property needs a second opinion, she tells.





and Pam in the maintenance direction. "After repeated requests by property managers for full service quality maintenance, we decided to look into the business," tells Scott. Finding out ahead of time how successful maintenance companies do business was one of the smartest moves they could have made, he adds. A little research upfront saved the company years of experimenting with practices and equipment that would have cost them time and money.

### DUE DILIGENCE

Even though Scott and Company had been in the installation/construction business since 1988, the owners realized a successful move to maintenance wasn't guaranteed. Industry consultant Charles Vander Kooi agreed and suggested a visit to The Good Earth, Inc., a successful South Carolina maintenance company. The visit gave Scott a clear picture of how to run a maintenance business. It convinced him they could succeed in Texas if they followed the rules, produced quality work, projected a quality image and kept production up and costs down. Good Earth operated close to a dozen Walker Mowers, and Scott naturally plugged them into his

**"By giving you an opportunity to share ideas with a contractor in a noncompetitive market, benchmarking can really pay big dividends."**

maintenance scenario.

But that was only the beginning of the benchmarking process. Scott located another maintenance firm eight hours away in San Angelo. The company, Executive Lawn, Inc., also ran Walkers. Before plunging into

the business, Scott and one of his maintenance foremen-to-be, worked on a crew there. Not only did they learn how to operate the mowers, they discovered some of the other practicalities about performing



Three maintenance crews each operate a Walker diesel.

maintenance, from approach and technique to what employees should be wearing at the jobsite. Since then, Scott and Executive Lawn's owner Tim Clark have taken the benchmarking approach a step further by sharing ideas on bidding properties. Tim has traveled to Bay City, about an hour from Houston, to help Scott bid larger maintenance properties, and Scott has traveled to San Angelo to assist Tim on bidding some larger installation projects.

### NICE MIX

Today, Scott and Company does better than \$750,000 in gross sales. Although design/build still represents more than half of sales, maintenance — both as part of installation

projects and as exclusive maintenance contracts — is fast catching up. Maintenance is all commercial while design/build (including irrigation) is 70 percent commercial and 30 percent residential.

Having a business away from the "big boys" in Houston has helped give Scott and Company room to grow maintenance. So, too, has the nature of the maintenance properties — all commercial — which cuts down on direct expenses such as excessive travel and time lost in loading and unloading equipment associated with small residential properties. Maintenance accounts include a cancer center, health care facility, large automotive dealer, three hospitals, plastic surgery center and a 400-plus apartment complex.

Scott and Company has 11 year-round employees, 23 during the peak growing season. Three maintenance crews each operate a Walker diesel, with a 48-inch deck and grass handling system for "fine" work, and a 62-inch deck for larger areas. The company also has a gas Walker with a 42-inch mulching deck. Crews operate Honda push mowers and Shindaiwa hand-held equipment. For large areas, the company is considering buying an Excel with a 12-foot cutting width.

Scott says if he learned one thing from visiting other maintenance firms it's the importance of keeping production up while keeping costs down. "We learned from the 'get-go' to buy the best equipment possible.



It's not the price-tag on the machine that counts but how much money that machine can make for you. We saved ourselves 10 years of not making money, just by buying the right equipment the first time around."

**"We saved ourselves 10 years of not making money by buying the right equipment the first time around."**


It also pays to have a dealer who can provide excellent service. Scott gives plenty of credit to Houston Walker dealer Landscape Power Company for keeping downtime to an absolute minimum. Owner Dan Bridges appreciates Scott, too. He says, "It's nice having a customer like

Add to that a horticulture degree and an outright love for working with plants and landscapes, and the Evanses have a winning combination.

"I'm unusual in another way," adds Scott. "From the very beginning, I wanted to get involved in landscaping." He started working in a local garden center when he was 12 years old and eventually ended up buying the center's landscape and irrigation department after graduating from Texas A & M.

The years of experience have given Scott and wife Pam a unique perspective. In addition to her office duties, Pam walks the properties just to provide "another set of eyes." She explains that when one person continually walks a property, things get overlooked or taken for granted. Every property needs a second opinion.

Like most successful maintenance companies, Scott and Company keeps its employees in uniform. And they add a caveat. While crew members wear blue hats, foremen wear white ones. The reason? If a property manager or another customer has a question, they don't have to search around for the person in charge. They know that person is wearing the white hat. A small gesture, but an important one for customers, adds Scott. (A tip he learned from working with Executive Lawn.)

Another small word to the wise. "Develop a friendship with someone else in the business," Scott explains. "You'll be able to openly share ideas and discuss challenges." As he points out, benchmarking is not just for people getting into the business, it's for everyone. 

"You'll be able to openly share ideas and discuss challenges." As he points out, benchmarking is not just for people getting into the business, it's for everyone.



All Scott and Company foremen wear white hats, so customers know who's in charge.

Scott who didn't have to learn the hard lessons about buying cheaper equipment."

**TRICKS OF THE TRADE**

Three years of maintenance experience and the upfront benchmarking has earned Scott and Company a reputation as a quality full-service landscaping company.

*Day in the life of a*

**Walker Mower**

Scott and Company's Walker dealer provided a tip sheet on ways to keep its diesel Walkers running at peak performance. Follow these practices every day, explains dealer Dan Bridges, and your Walker will be there, ready to perform:

• **MORNING**

Check oil  
Check antifreeze  
Use glow plug and start engine at half throttle  
Complete a once-over before you load the unit

• **AT WORK**

Pay attention to gauges  
Report any malfunctions  
Engage and disengage blades at half throttle  
Idle engine for one minute before shutting off

• **EVENING**

Wash out box and chute, paying close attention to top screen  
Wash under deck and remove any buildup  
Blow out box with compressor  
Open unit and blow off engine and transmissions, even the underside  
Remove radiator screen and blow out radiator  
Have the mechanic perform all daily and weekly checks  
Only the mechanic should check the air filter — no exceptions



## Quality promotes more quality in Arlington, Texas

**I**n one way, Kenneth Vaughan, owner of KLV Landscape Services, Inc. is your typical contractor. "From my early childhood, I wanted to mow," he explains. He mowed lawns while growing up in Arlington, Texas. He worked his way through college mowing lawns and when the opportunity arose, he purchased the lawn maintenance business from a landscape contractor . . . and never looked back. That was in 1982. Thirteen years later, mowing is still the mainstay of his business, but the picture has changed slightly. Instead of mowing seven commercial accounts

**"We really push the quality aspect of our operation."**

and a handful of residential accounts like he did in his first year of business, maintenance today accounts for better than half of nearly \$1.5 million in annual sales. Instead of one maintenance crew, he has five, in addition to two installation crews, two irrigation crews, an enhancement crew and a bush hog crew. Of KLV maintenance contracts, 75 percent are commercial, the rest are larger residential and estate-type properties.

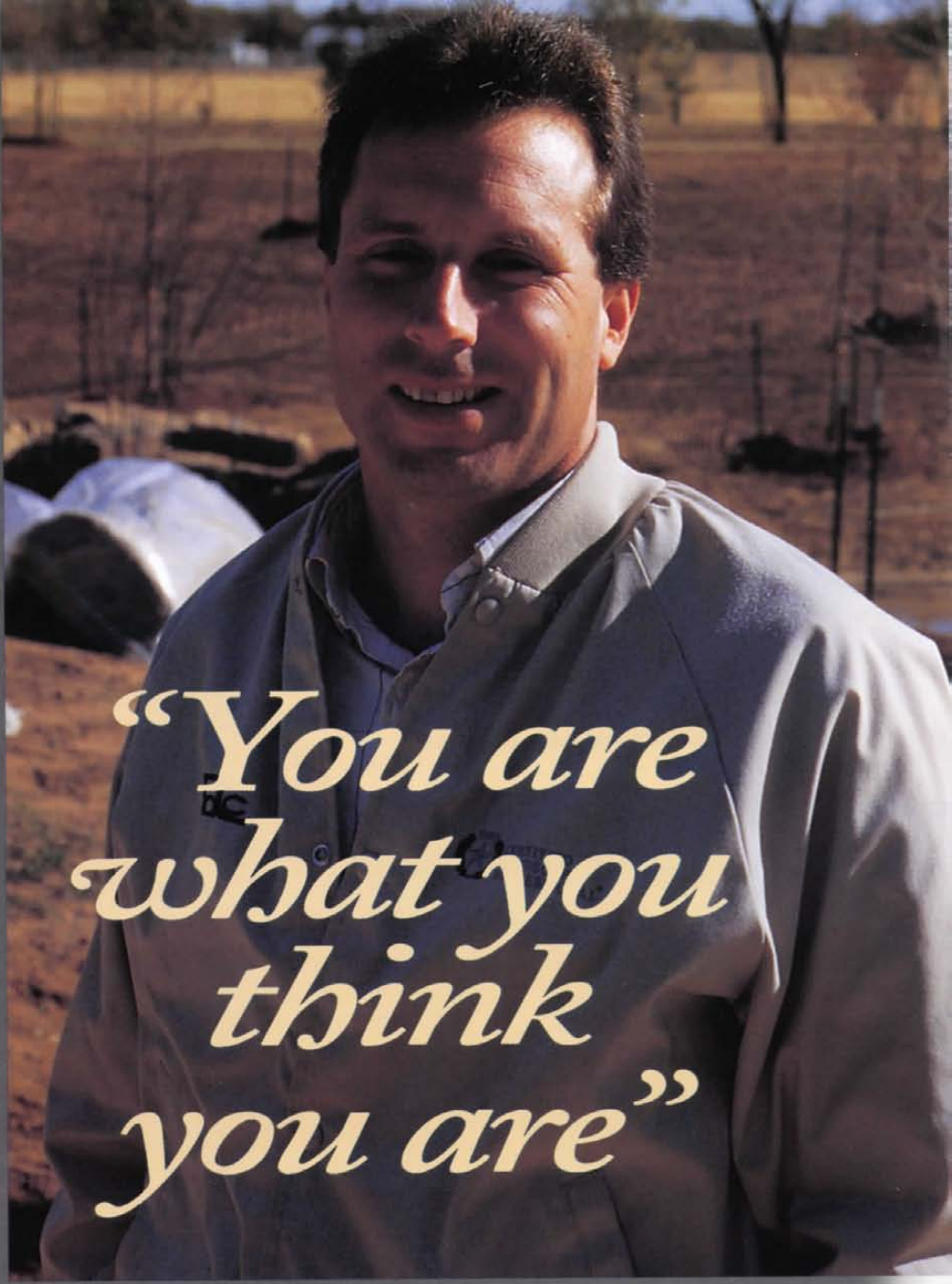
"You are what you think you are," says Vaughan. Starting out, he envisioned his new maintenance business as a successful operation. It happened. Later on, he wanted to expand and grow a successful full-service operation. That has happened, too. And today, he wants to be recognized as one of the leaders in the industry in the Dallas area. Few

would dispute the fact that he has already reached that goal.

Vaughan admits being a maintenance contractor wasn't always at the top of his vocational wish list. He went to school to be a banker. In addition to mowing about 30 yards a week to get him through school, he worked part time (35 hours) at a

local bank making collection calls. It was a good experience, Vaughan relates. At the bank he developed an understanding for the kinds of mistakes in judgment his customers made in their personal finances, mistakes he would strive to avoid at home and at work.

He learned well. Vaughan grew



*"You are  
what you  
think  
you are"*

**KLV Landscape Services owner Kenneth Vaughan looks to sustain a reasonable and controllable 20 percent growth rate per year.**



his new maintenance business gradually, adding his first new crew in 1985. A year later, he added another maintenance crew and a spray crew. Two years later, the present shape of the company took form with the addition of an installation crew. Today, he continues to expand the company at a slow but steady rate, looking to sustain 20 percent annual growth.

### QUALITY FIRST

Ask Vaughan today what drives his company forward and he says

quality. "We really push the quality aspect of our operation," he tells. The company has been a member of Texas Association—of Landscape Contractors since 1985, and last year won a merit, distinction and grand award from the association for three maintenance properties. The key, he points out, is to get employees involved. One of his employees, for example, is president of the local chapter of TALC, and three have passed the certified land-

## WALKER USER TIP

*Finding the right equipment and using it to your best advantage is one key to success. But no matter what type of equipment you use, companies succeed because they have the support of their employees.*

**KLV demonstrated its first Walker during the leaf removal season. As he tells it, "Crew members simply blew the leaves out of the beds and picked them up with the grasshandling system." The process reduced the time it took to handle leaves by 50 percent.**



scape professional program administered by the association. The certification is more than show; some government contractors now require it.

### PRAGMATIC APPROACH

Quality alone won't pay the bills. Crews need to be productive. They need to get the job done in the most cost-effective way possible, without sacrificing quality. When he was introduced to his first Walker Mower in 1993, Vaughan made the connection. Crews could abandon their intermediate walk mowers and mow twice as fast with less fatigue. And, he says, "they could deliver a nicer cut." The best of all worlds.

"We demonstrated the Walker during leaf removal time," remembers Vaughan. "Crew members simply blew the leaves out of the beds and picked them up with the mower's grasshandling system. It saved a lot of time and energy." The Walker would eventually increase the company's leaf removal efficiency by 50 percent. Disposal would not be a problem, since KLV crews would either compost the leaves right on site, or take them to home base and compost them for use later



on installation projects.

KLV bought two Walker Mowers the following year and added another a year later. Today, three diesels with 48-inch decks police properties, and their work goes well beyond leaf removal. In fact, Vaughan says crews use them any way they can, from delivering a fine cut to "scalping" in the fall.

Of the 104 properties his crews maintain, approximately 40 percent of them are overseeded each fall with perennial ryegrass. Standard practice in Texas and in other areas of the Southwest, overseeding with ryegrass is a two-step process: cutting back or scalping Bermuda grass, and laying down the ryegrass seed. Prior to the Walkers, KLV crews would scalp the Bermuda back from 2 1/2 inches to 1/2 inch high using intermediate mowers with side-discharge decks. The debris would be blown to the center of the yard and picked up for removal. Now, the Walker comes through and does the process in one step, cutting not only the grass back but cutting 60 percent off the time it would normally take to do the job, says Vaughan.

The time savings alone during the leaf removal and scalping season convinced KLV's owner of a place for the Walker on his crews. There has been an additional side benefit, too, one you can't point to tangibly, he emphasizes, but one that's still there.

"The Walker mowers have elevated our entire maintenance operation, just by the cut they leave. When the mowing job looks great, it instills an ongoing sense of pride in employees who work harder to make the entire project look as good." Which gets back to his theory that you are what you think you are. Seeing just helps to reinforce the attitude.

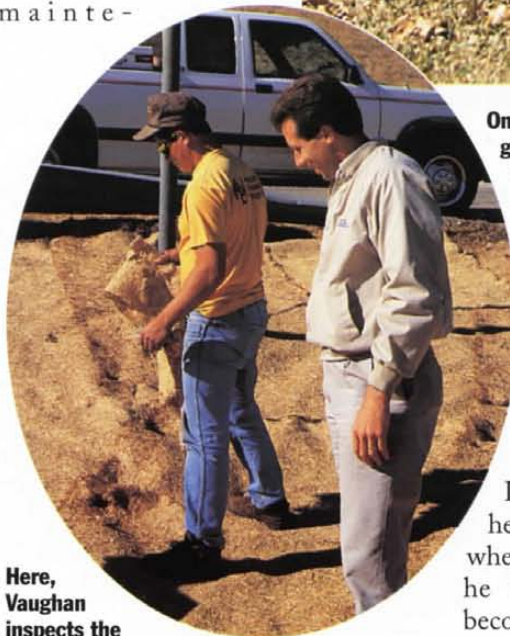
#### CHALLENGES AHEAD

Having excellent, well-trained employees and having the right

equipment goes a long way in the maintenance business. But seeing is believing for customers, too, and it goes beyond leaving behind a well-maintained yard.

"I want to get bigger, yet maintain the ma and pa feeling," tells Vaughan. "Personal relationships are extremely important in this business. If customers see you and you are available for questions, they know you're thinking about them and their properties." What they can't see, can hurt, he adds. Which is one reason, KLV has an office manager and a sales rep. It leaves more time for Vaughan to keep relationships alive.

What a change.  
From a small lawn  
m a i n t e -



Here, Vaughan inspects the installation of a wildflower mat. The addition of a landscape architect will give KLV an even bigger presence in the construction market.



One of the biggest challenges with growth is trying not to grow away from customers. Office managers and sales reps play a key role in allowing owners like Vaughan to maintain personal contact with customers.

nance firm in 1982 to a large full-service operation in 1995. To be sure, you are what you think you are, but even then there are surprises in store. Little did KLV's owner think he'd being mowing with a Walker when he hung his shingle. Nor did he have thoughts back then of becoming a leading full-service landscaping firm. Taking small and controlled "quality" steps helped get him there. **WT**



# WALKER SCRAPBOOK



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1 Moore/Moore Lawn Service At  
First Baptist Church, Gardendale, Alabama

2 Parliament House of Australia, Canberra ACT

3 Mowing in Manhattan, Kansas, Wanda Dustin, owner of Small Engine and Lawn  
Care, holds her sleeping 3-year-old daughter Vanessa

4 GHS Corporation office and warehouse, Denton, North Carolina, Walker Mower distributor for  
mid-Atlantic states

5 Visitors Center, Kennedy Space Center, Florida

6 President Mandela's house, Cape Town, South Africa

7 Bob Walker presents the "Old Pro" Award to P.E. Schneider for pioneering the Walker Program in  
Ontario, Canada, presentation at EXPO 95, Louisville, Kentucky