

WALKER TALK

SEASON MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

Raising
Standards
in Ohio

PEOPLE POWER IN PENNSYLVANIA
ONTARIO'S WORKING COUPLES
JOB COSTING MADE EASY
SEEING IS BELIEVING IN MISSOURI

VOL. 10

WALKER TALK

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WHAT MANUFACTURERS AND CONTRACTORS HAVE IN COMMON

There are differences — manufacturers produce a product (a machine in our case) and landscape maintenance contractors primarily deliver service — yet many aspects of business development, operation and management are the same. The similarity is particularly striking when it comes to the kind of customers that are the foundation of the business and are highly sought after as the most necessary ingredient to starting and sustaining a business. Here's the kind of customers we both want:



— Customers who are discriminating and will pay a fair price for value received; not always looking for the cheapest price.

— Customers who are loyal because of continuing satisfaction with the product or service.

— Customers who by "enthusiastic satisfaction" help win new customers

by word-of-mouth advertising.

— Customers who do their part to receive satisfaction (follow instructions, accept responsibility when responsible, not expecting "freebies" for every little thing).

These customers do exist! Walker Manufacturing has been fortunate to have more than our share. It brings to mind an old axiom that is part of our principles: In order to have good customers you need to be a good customer. Herein lies a paradox we see among some landscape contractors — they want to be paid top dollar for their work and pay bottom dollar for their equipment purchase and equipment dealer service. If you're wondering where all the "good customers" are, the old axiom might just point the way the next time you're shopping for equipment and working with your local dealer.

Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President

Raising the standard in Ohio



Kim and Char Kellogg started their business by maintaining seven properties and grew according to the desires and wishes of their customers and according to their own high expectations.

A drive through Holmes County, Ohio, about 1-1/2 hours south of Cleveland, will turn up all sorts of interesting sights. This Mecca of tourism will introduce visitors to one of the largest Amish settlements in the country and an attendant array of shops and restaurants, enough to keep even the most avid visitors busy all day. What the locals can't provide is bestowed by Mother Nature, a geography of beautifully rolling hills and steep valleys.

The county is at once serene and frenetic. While the countryside offers tranquillity, the small communities provide ample energy. The setting also provides a unique backdrop for Grasshopper Property Maintenance, Millersburg, Ohio, owned and operated by Kim and Char Kellogg.

When they started their business six years ago, few if any of the local maintenance companies striped and edged lawns, and sidewalks were harbingers of leftover grass clippings. All that has changed for the properties maintained by Grasshopper, and for other properties as well. Although they are hesitant to take the credit, when the Kelloggs hung their shingle in 1991, they brought with them a level of professionalism that has since literally raised

WALKER OWNER TIP

- Five Ways to Grow Successfully
- Be legal – obtain the necessary licenses, insurance, etc.
 - Befriend competition
 - Grow employees – and show them plenty of appreciation
 - Manage growth by consolidating and being selective
 - Become educated



One of the key selling points for the Walker was its versatility, tells Kim Kellogg. "It was versatile for working wide areas with the big deck, and small areas with the GHS deck. It makes cleanup a breeze and makes large scale mowing manageable."



the standard of lawn maintenance in the area.

No, the Kelloggs didn't wave a magic wand. Nor did they bring years of horticultural experience and education to the table. They just started their business by maintaining seven properties and grew according to the desires and wishes of their customers and according to their own high expectations. When customers wanted cleaning services performed, the Kelloggs added janitorial work to their resume. When customers wanted pesticide control, the company added chemical application to their repertoire of services. When customers wanted color, Grasshopper delivered with installation services. The company also removes snow.

Six short years later, Grasshopper has grown from a dream into a full-service business that today grosses somewhere in the neighborhood of \$350,000. In addition to Kim



Millersburg Walker Dealer John Schlabach shows Kim a new spreader attachment for the Walker.

and Char, the company employs two full-time year-round employees for outside maintenance, two part-time janitorial employees and three to four seasonal employees.

"If the business has done one thing for us over the years, it has helped unify our family," tells Char. "Before going into this business, Kim was a marketing director for a local radio station and spent many evenings away from the family. His traveling took a toll on the family unit." That's taken a 180

"One of our biggest struggles has been controlling the business and not letting the business control us."

degree turn now, she adds. The entire family spends more time together than ever before and they are pulling toward the same goal. That goal is simply to provide the best landscaping and lawn maintenance service humanly possible.

Kim quickly made up for his lack of experience in horticulture by attending classes at a local college. Now all regular employees take advantage of courses offered by the Ohio Extension Service. Char found that she enjoyed landscaping, too, and had an eye for detail. Their older son Chad has stepped in to work full-time now with friend Brian Rafferty. Even Matthew, only 14, is thinking about having a larger role in the company in the not-too-distant future.

The family approach paid big dividends as has the drive

toward excellence. Seven properties have multiplied to 87 full-care properties and 200 chemical application accounts. In addition, Grasshopper performs janitorial service on four commercial accounts.

HARD LESSON

The growth has been so fast that, last year, it almost topped the proverbial apple cart. When a large local maintenance company folded up its tent, the work came to Grasshopper and the Kelloggs couldn't say no. They found out quickly that more isn't necessarily better. The company struggled through a tough year trying to maintain its high quality standards. This year, they've slowed their growth a bit, already turning down 20 additional properties, thus helping out some of their competitors.

"We think we've raised the standard in Millersburg and the surrounding area a bit," tells Kim. "But in doing so, we've also had a tendency to take on more than we can do. One of our biggest struggles has been controlling the business and not letting the business control us."

The Kelloggs have looked to control the business by finding efficiencies that allow them to do more with fewer people. They recently added two-way radios for faster communication. They've made a serious effort toward consolidating properties and losing other properties that are no longer profitable or fall outside their driving radius. Although their business is currently 50/50 residential /commercial by number of accounts, by dollar volume it leans heavily toward the commercial side. As Char relates, "commercial properties are less competitive and you can grow them by offering customers many different services."

Grasshopper has looked to find efficiencies in its equipment lineup, too. "We were walk-behind believers all the way," explains Kim, "especially because of the hills around here. But a friend of ours had seen a Walker mower in Florida and thought we might be interested."

Kim was impressed after he saw one, but Char played a different tune. "Pay that much for a mower! Ha, Ha," she

told Kim. "You can walk a lot of properties for the extra \$6,000." It was two years before the couple finally decided the Walker made good financial sense.

"The Walker was so adaptable to big hills and small hills alike," tells Kim. "And it was versatile for working wide areas with the big deck, and small areas with the GHS deck. It makes

From the operator

Chad Kellogg has been operating Walker mowers now for three years. He says they use the mowers about 40 hours a week during the mowing season. What does he like best about the machines?

"Three things for sure," he says. "They handle the hills, they're easy to operate at a constant speed and they stripe better than other mowers."

As far as hills go -- and there are plenty of them in Holmes County -- Chad saves the steepest ones for the intermediate walk-behinds. But lesser ones get the Walker treatment, he adds.

cleanup a breeze and makes large scale mowing manageable."

The Kelloggs say the Walkers (they bought a second one in 1996) have made them at least 30 percent more efficient. Their accounts have doubled with the Walkers without having to hire new people and they now can cut in nearly all conditions when others can't. And their workers don't get tired. But there are a couple of disadvantages to owning the machines. Some of their customers think that crews don't work hard enough on their properties anymore and, adds Char, glancing at Kim's mid-section, "Kim doesn't get nearly the exercise he once did."

Grasshopper Property Maintenance has two 20-hp Walkers with one GHS deck and two 62-inch side discharge decks. Two crews, each with a Walker and an intermediate walk-behind (for the steep hills), tackle the properties daily. A landscaping detail crew follows up. Kim manages the application end and Char helps out where she is needed; that's just about everywhere, including supervising the cleaning service in the evenings.

Together the couple puts in an additional 15 hours each week performing janitorial work. They could grow that business, too. It's a natural complement to maintaining commercial properties. And the business can help keep employees busy in the off season.

But right now, the Kelloggs have their hands full. The good news is they could grow in several different directions. The bad news? There are only so many hours in a day. But the fact that they have several options from which to choose is a luxury generated by doing quality work. **WT**

Chad and his mother Char share a couple of moments after the job is completed. "If the business has done one thing for us over the years, it has helped unify our family," tells Char.



ALLIN COMPANIES GIVE FOREMEN MORE RESPONSIBILITY



John Allin, president of Allin Companies, Erie, Pennsylvania, shrugs his shoulders when asked how his maintenance division is doing. "Last year, I would have told you not so well," he relates. After suffering through what the owner considered to be several sub par seasons on the maintenance side, Allin Companies wiped the slate clean and this year started over again, with new people and a new attitude. The results have been encouraging. Profits are up and employee attitude is better all around.

The maintenance malaise has been a mystery to Allin, a 15-year landscaping veteran. His business is one of the premier snow plowing companies in the state, if not in the country. It

John Allin with crew member Mitchell Brozell who sums up his Walker experience with one word, "awesome".

also has a reputation as a premier construction firm. Last year it grossed better than \$1 million in installation projects alone. Snow removal, coming in at \$600,000 and maintenance at \$400,000, comprised the remainder of the revenue.

"Maintenance is supposed to be easy," relates Allin. "That side of the business should really run itself. We struggled for a number of reasons. As all firms can tell you, good people are hard to find. We also started out with the wrong equipment, equipment that was continually breaking down and costing us money. To make matters worse, we weren't getting enough money for some of the properties we were doing."

But Allin emphasizes people, or more specifically not having the right people in the right place, was causing most of

Empowering people in Pennsylvania

"Because of the Walkers, we have retired six walk-behind units and we don't have the breakdown and expenses we had with the other riders."

his maintenance grief. So last winter, he and wife Peggy, company director of operations, "bit the bullet" and literally laid off the entire maintenance staff. Starting anew this spring, they brought in a consultant who helped train new employees in maintenance procedures.

The new staff and training has paid off, especially in one key area, empowerment. "We have given crew foremen more responsibility," tells Allin. "They are responsible for all routine maintenance, including sharpening blades, and for minor repairs and maintenance like changing belts, etc."

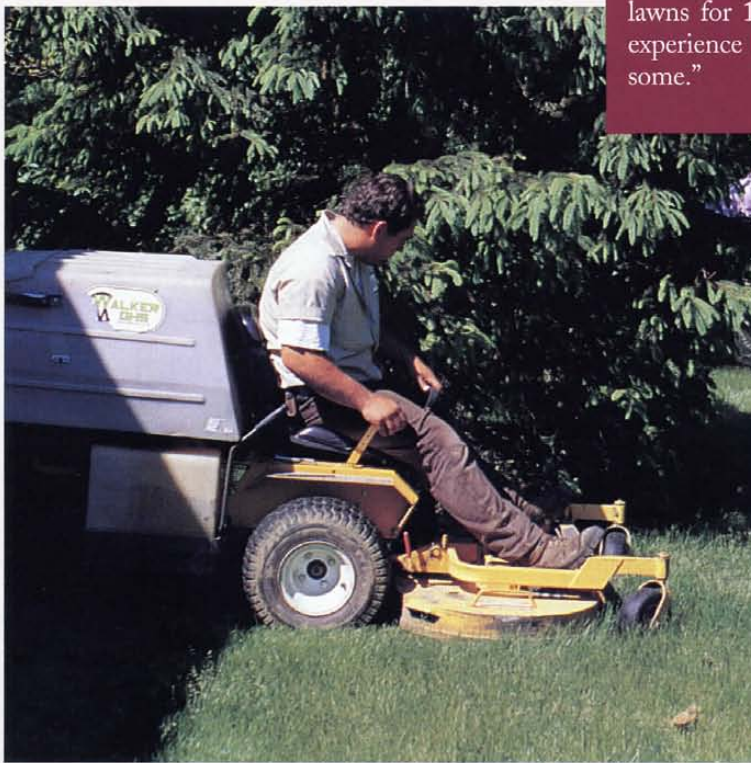
Before this move, one of Allin's in-house mechanics would change and sharpen the blades, perform the routine maintenance and fix whatever ailed the mowers. By giving foremen "ownership" of the equipment on their trailers, Allin says mechanic work orders have been reduced by 60 percent and overall equipment maintenance costs have been reduced by two-thirds already this year.

"Don't ask me to explain it," he adds. "But when the foremen change

the blades (mechanics still sharpen them), they tell me the machine cuts better."

Allin will tell you the move to give employees more responsibility has changed their perception of the job they're doing, and perception is reality.

That one move alone has helped get the maintenance division back on track. But it has been supplemented by other moves, including a reevaluation of properties and an overall price increase of somewhere around 15 percent. The unprofitable



Crew foreman Tony Gonzalez says the major difference between a Walker and a walk-behind is not so much the fact you're riding on a Walker. It's maneuverability.

accounts have since either been pared away or made profitable by the price bump.

The owner says he would be remiss if he didn't include his new Walkers as part of the maintenance cure, as well. He retired the last of his "white ele-

Crew talk

Crew foreman Tony Gonzalez has been operating Walkers now for two years. He says he likes just about everything about the machines. Their low maintenance, great cut, the "nice straight lines they deliver" and their maneuverability. But it's the latter, he says, that really sets them apart. "The major difference between a Walker and a walk-behind is not so much the fact you're riding on a Walker. It's maneuverability. You can get them into places you can't with a walk-behind and maneuver them out."

Allin crew member Mitchell Brozell agrees. Although less experienced than Gonzalez on Walkers, he has been mowing lawns for 15 years. He sums up his Walker experience like this, "the zero-turn is awesome."

phant" riding mowers in 1995 and last year purchased two new Walkers. Within two weeks he had a third one on board.

"The dealer didn't sell me on a Walker," tells Allin. "It was an owner who told me how he enjoyed his Walkers. Since last year, I've sold a few myself the same way."

"Because of the Walkers, we have retired six walk-behind units and we don't have the breakdown and expenses we had with the other riders."

Two of the Walker mowers are on one of three mobile maintenance crews; the other is on an on-site property.

"We will have another three or four Walkers in the near future," Allin adds. "There is no contest between a Walker and having a walk-behind mower. And the price differential isn't that great between a hydrostatic drive walk-behind and a Walker."



John Allin (right) with Jeff Vernon, manager of the landscape maintenance division. According to Allin, giving employees more responsibility has changed their perception of the job they're doing, and perception is reality.



John's wife Peggy is company director of operations. Last year, she and John made the decision to lay off their entire maintenance staff.

GROWTH CURVE

Allin started plowing snow in 1978 and started his landscape maintenance business four years later. He looks forward to continued growth in all three

divisions, in snow removal where Erie gets an astounding snowfall of anywhere from 100 to 300 inches a year, in landscape construction and now in maintenance.

On the maintenance side, the company has recently swung over to doing more mid-size commercial properties, e.g., condominium associations. Currently, it does seven such properties and more are being built in the Erie area every day, says Allin.

Allin Companies condominium customers receive a newsletter in the spring and the fall that alerts them to, among other things, the details of the association's contract with the contractor. Keeping residents informed cuts down on both calls and complaints, Allin adds, noting that residents all have a different view of what a contractor should do on their property. He explains, "In the winter we may have a contract to remove snow from the steps only and not the sidewalk leading up to their steps. If residents don't know that and don't understand what they are responsible for, they will complain about our service or anybody's service for that matter."

Communication pieces such as the condominium newsletters help put out fires before there is smoke and have become a fundamental piece of the company's growth strategy. So, too, have the computers and software that help produce

the newsletters in-house, track profit and loss, and overall keep the company moving forward. Allin sees another use for computer technology in the near future.

"I was recently introduced to a digital camera that would allow us to take a picture of a property and send it over the Internet. This technology would conceivably allow us to manage a property several hundred miles from our location here in Erie. All we would have to do is hire and equip an on-site manager and monitor the property

"With the new technologies available today, if you can manage a property six blocks away, you should be able to do the same 600 miles away."

over the Net.

"With the new technologies available today, if you can manage a property six blocks away, you should be able to do the same 600 miles away."

Of course, the move would require the right kind of property. It would also entail, as Allin emphasizes, making sure you have the right formula already in place for performing high quality maintenance at a profitable level.

The new year has given Allin confidence that maintenance is on the right track once again, to the extent it can be managed from a distance. As he tells it, there are three legs to a profitable maintenance stool. One leg is having the right equipment to get the job done quickly and efficiently. One is making sure jobs are priced at a profitable level. And one is having the right people in place with a feeling of ownership in the job they're doing. Only then will maintenance grow and only then can a company consider growth alternatives made available by new technology. **WT**

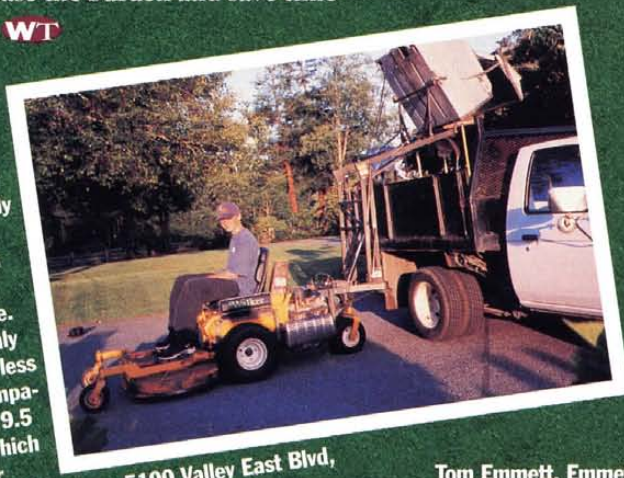
Collecting Clippings?

How to handle what you collect

Traveling around the country and talking with Walker users, we see a variety of techniques employed to handle grass clippings. They vary from simply dumping the clippings onto a tarp and raising the tarp into a truck to employing a vacuum system or other mechanically oriented ways of handling them.

The following are just a few examples of how ingenuity and/or modern technology can ease the burden and save time handling clippings. **WT**

Catcher Lift System from All Seasons, Arcata, California, is available for Walker D/T/C models. Fully automatic system clears more than 68 inches high and reaches more than 3 feet into a removal vehicle. The D/T system weighs only 87 pounds and dumps in less than 18 seconds. The company now has a unit for the 9.5 bushel catcher, as well, which dumps in 22 seconds. For more information contact All Seasons, 5100 Valley East Blvd, #4, Arcata, CA 95521; 1-800/786-2301



From Klipping King, Inc., this system handles grass clippings as easy as 1-2-3. A ground-level loading bucket receives clippings from the mower's grass collection system.



The bucket lifts debris into an 11-cubic-yard collection bin that holds over 3 tons of clippings. A powerful hydraulic scissor hoist dumps the entire load with the turn of a lever. For more information, contact Klipping King, Inc., 706 21st Ave., Scottsbluff, NE 69361; (800) 279-3904



The trailer-ramp-truck system employed by Image Lawn and Landscape, Belton, Missouri (see story this issue) is fairly commonplace among lawn maintenance professionals. The approach is relatively fast and cost-effective. It's made easier by the use of a dump body on the truck.



From Southwest Livestock Equipment, Inc., Scott City, Kansas, this grass trailer is a time-saver and labor-reducer. Simply back up to the basket and dump the grass, then pull away and push the button (or use the optional remote control). The basket dumps automatically into the trailer and comes back down to the ground ready for another load. Trailer features a "live bottom" for easy unloading. Trailers can be built to haul one or two mowers. For more information contact: Southwest Livestock Equip., 1451 S. Highway 83, Scott City, Kansas 67871; 316/872-5811

Tom Emmett, Emmett Equipment Company, Richfield, Ohio, likes this combination of a 25-hp Salsco leaf vac skid mounted on an 18' x 83" trailer. The rig shown is

being towed by a 3/4 ton pick-up truck. Mounted on the truck is a Truck Craft TC 100 insert dump bed with a custom wood debris box. The combination is a good investment, says Emmett, because 1) the vacuum can be used for fall leaf debris pick-up, 2) the insert dump bed has many other uses all season long and 3) mounting the vacuum directly on an equipment trailer eliminates the need for an extra debris handling truck. For more information contact: Emmett Equipment Company, 3031 W. Streetsboro Rd., Richfield, OH 44286. 216/659-9700



A primer on job costing

For people starting out in lawn maintenance, and even for veteran professionals, one of the biggest hurdles is figuring job costs. Oftentimes, it's a Catch 22: You can't bid accurately until you know your costs, but you can't determine the costs until you get the job.

What is one to do? The answer is to have a sound handle on both direct and indirect costs and to be able to overlay these costs on a new property. Easier said than done. But to turn a profit and grow a business, accurate job costing is not only a business requisite, it's the number one priority.

Equipment and labor costs are your biggest expenses on any proper-

ty. Knowing what they are upfront and applying them with a degree of confidence will go a long way toward

To turn a profit and grow a business, accurate job costing is not only a business requisite, it's the number one priority.

developing an accurate job cost and accurate bid.

Most lawn maintenance professionals figure equipment costs by the hour. For each mower, for example,

they add the purchase price (including finance charges and insurance) to the estimated total lifetime maintenance and fuel costs of the unit. They then subtract the estimated residual (trade-in) value and divide the total by the estimated lifetime hours. Remember, when figuring maintenance costs, don't forget engine replacement costs, too. If your mower's engine will run 2,000 hours, then divide the cost of a replacement engine by 2,000 and factor the figure in your maintenance totals.

This exercise should be followed for every piece of equipment to be used on a job-site, from your mowers to your trimmers, edgers, and blowers.

Equipment costs, of course, are

only half of your direct expenses on any job. The other is labor. Unlike equipment, labor costs are easy to determine and most lawn maintenance professionals have a good idea of what it costs them per hour for each employee on the job site. Still, when you factor in these costs, make sure to include benefits, taxes and other payroll expenses.

If you have a handle on these two direct costs for a job, then you can project with reasonable accuracy how much it will cost you to run any piece of equipment on a property. It will cost you X amount per hour to operate your rider, Y to operate your trim mowers and Z to operate hand-held equipment.

ESTIMATING YOUR TIME

Estimating how much time you will spend on a job is key to accurate job costing. Some lawn maintenance professionals measure every property they bid. Others know by experience how much time it will take to maintain a property. In both cases, estimates have to go beyond square footage to include terrain, nooks and crannies and other obstacles, and a breakdown of how much time operators will spend with each piece of equipment.

Really, once you know how much time it will take to complete a job and how much it costs to operate your equipment, you'll be halfway to making a profit. Halfway, because you still have to figure in overhead recovery and profit.

What counts as overhead? Virtually every cost not directly related to performing a job. That would include building rent or taxes, liability and workers' compensation insurance, education, support salaries, postage, uniforms, telephone, and all other expenses. And

don't forget your salary. If mowing is where you make your money, then mowing has to cover these expenses, in addition to covering the direct expenses.

Again, if you're starting in the business, this can be tricky to figure. But for argument's sake, assume you employ six people and estimate billing at 50 hours a week for 40 weeks. The total billable hours for six employees would be 12,000. If your overhead is \$80,000, then your hourly rate would include \$6.66 for overhead recovery.

THE BOTTOM LINE

You crunched the numbers and found out it costs you \$5 an hour to operate a rider, \$12 an hour for the operator and \$6.66 for overhead recovery. You will need to get \$23.66 per hour on a job just to cover expenses. And you need to make a reasonable profit, as well.

What's reasonable? That depends on your market and how competitive it is. But you're in business to make a profit and not, as the saying goes, "to buy yourself a job." So a reasonable profit is necessary. If you're in a tough market, maybe a 5 to 10 percent profit would have to suffice. If you're in a less aggressive environment, 15 to 20 percent or higher may be within reason.

When doing business there will always be additional hidden costs and other surprises. These need to be figured in to help guarantee that costs will be covered and a profit will be made.

Also, you will need to determine a minimum price for maintaining lawns. If your hourly rate is \$30 and it takes 30 minutes to mow the lawn, then theoretically you would charge \$15 for the job. A reasonable fee to

Take-to-the-bank advice

At least once a year, or better yet, quarterly, get someone outside your company who is trained and experienced in business accounting to look over your books. For owners of smaller businesses who feel they cannot afford to pay a regular accountant, a part-time accountant or other credible individual with accounting and business experience will suffice. The truth is, no matter what size business you operate, you can't afford not to have accurate financial information in order to make good business decisions.

be sure, but one that probably won't make you much profit.

The key point in job costing is to know your costs, all of your costs, and to know how much time each job will take. If you can recover your costs on each job and put some money away for profit, you're in business to stay. **WT**



HUSBANDS AND WIVES SHARE MORE THAN LIFE EXPERIENCES

For Liz and Grant Monette in Guelph, Ontario and Bessie and Mike Krsovan in nearby Waterloo, being married is more than sharing a life, it's sharing an occupation, too. Both couples operate landscaping companies.

Liz and Grant have been married 15 years and today operate New Method Lawn and Garden, a nine-year-old full-service landscaping company. Bessie and Mike are celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary this year, 11 of which have been spent operating Classic Lawn and Garden Maintenance.

As one would imagine, both companies are unique, yet they also share several common bonds.

On the unique or different side, New Method Lawn & Garden maintains primarily commercial

Bessie and Mike Krsovan operate two mowing crews. Each morning, they start at different ends of town and work toward each other. At the end of the day, if one crew finishes before the other, it simply helps the other crew.

properties; Classic Lawn and Garden is primarily residential. Both companies, however, run lean and mean, both complement their operations with Walker mowers, and both

**“How many machines
can you operate with
two fingers?”**

rely heavily on respective spouses to get the work done.

Liz and Grant Monette perform full-service maintenance on 14 large

commercial properties, several residential properties, a number of smaller commercial properties and a couple of softball fields. In total, they mow approximately 25 acres of lawn a week with only one crew comprised of the husband and wife team and three seasonal employees.

Like most owner/operators, the Monettes are personally involved on every property they maintain. And so are the Krsovans. Bessie and Mike operate two crews: Bessie leads one with one employee; Mike heads up the other, again with one employee. Together, the two crews are responsible for maintaining 97 residential properties and 15 commercial prop-

erties weekly.

What are the benefits of working together, day in and day out? As Grant points out, "We get to spend a lot of time together." Although he adds, it's not all quality time because work is work.

On the positive side for both couples is an implicit confidence in their partner's abilities and they enjoy the ongoing discourse about work and work-related challenges. On the negative side for the Monettes at least is their inability to escape the discourse. During the mowing season, they work seven days a week, mowing the large factories and other commercial properties on weekends.

Bessie and Mike Krsovan recently changed their mode of operation so they could spend weekends at a cottage 1-1/2 hours away. For them, the challenge is to get the work done between dawn and dusk, which makes for long days during the week.

As all owner/operators can relate, there's more to a lawn maintenance business than mowing and installation. Liz and Bessie maintain the books while Grant and Mike maintain the equipment. There are other responsibilities, as well, including

selecting nursery stock, bidding new properties, customer communication and overall keeping the business at a profitable level.

THE WALKER CONNECTION

New Method Lawn and Landscape purchased its first Walker 8 years ago. At the time they were doing condominiums and needed a mower with more maneuverability.

"We went to the dealer who showed us the mower," Liz explains. "Since it was behind some pallets of seed we told the dealer we could come back later. But he just jumped on the machine, turned it around on a dime and brought it over to us. I knew right then it was the mower for us."

Today, the company operates two 20-hp Walkers, each with a GHS and side discharge deck. Liz and Grant both say they enjoy the flip up deck and additional safety features on their new Walkers, but it's the machine's maneuverability and abili-

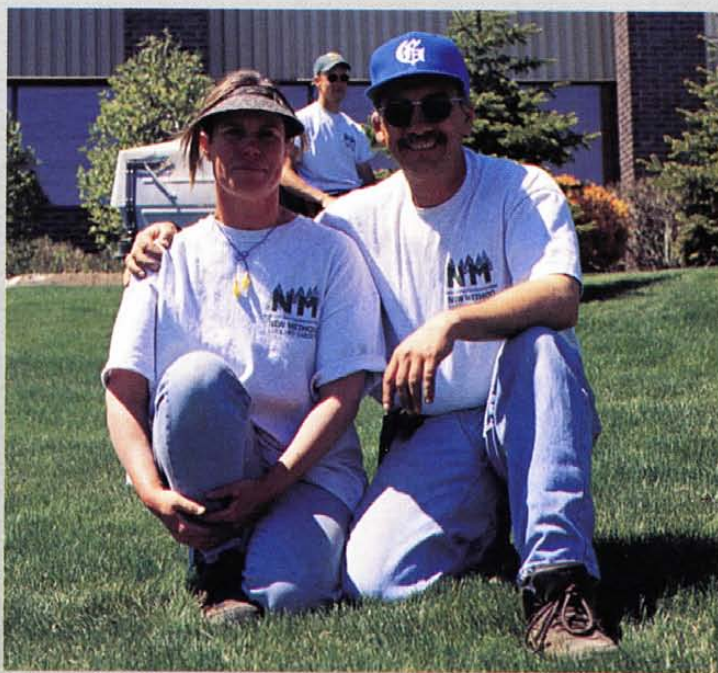
ty to handle grass clippings in tight places that originally sold them, and still sells them.

"How many machines can you operate with two fingers?" asks Liz. As far as clippings go, it's the Walker's compact size, even with the grass catcher, that really makes the machine stand apart from others, she emphasizes. The collection system is a special fall bonus in Guelph, she adds, a city known for its trees.

In addition to the two Walker mowers, New Method employs a Walker sweeper, aerator and tine attachment.

This equipment is complemented by a new John Deere 855 tractor for wide area mowing and Toro mid-size walk-behinds for steep hills, with which the large factory properties are well endowed.

"We think the machines are a perfect match," say Liz and Grant Monette, something they might liken to their own relationship. They met in forestry school, worked in



Successful husband and wife teams like Liz and Grant Monette have implicit confidence in their partner's abilities and they enjoy the ongoing discourse about work and work related challenges.

Bessie Krsovan's crew gets the new Walker. It has been that way since the couple purchased their first machine in 1993.



The skills Liz and Grant Monette obtained in forestry school were easily translated to landscape maintenance.

Even large corporate headquarters can have detail work. Here, one of New Method Lawn and Garden's two Walkers takes a stroll down a garden pathway.



northern Canada together for the forestry service, and eventually settled in Guelph, closer to their roots.

The Monettes think similarly when it comes to many things, including operating a landscaping business. They put an emphasis on detail work and continually make an all out effort to communicate with all of their customers. They even plow snow together in the tough Canadian winters. Will they grow the business together? Says Grant, "We never thought we would get this big. It's easy to grow but difficult to maintain the quality."

Approximately 15 miles up the road in Waterloo, Bessie and Mike Krsovan operate two diesel Walkers with one 48-inch deck, two 42-inch GHS decks and two 54-inch side discharge decks.

Bessie has one Walker with her crew (always the newest one, she adds with a smile) and Mike has the other. They also own two single stage snow throwers.

While Liz admired the Walker's maneuverability, Mike says he was amazed by the light weight of the mowing deck. "I couldn't believe how light it was when I picked it up," he emphasizes.

The couple purchased their first

mower in 1993. The next one followed a year later because, as Bessie explains, her crew with the Walker was more profitable than Mike's crew without the Walker. The addition of the larger side-discharge decks later further improved profitability by allowing the company to eliminate one person. "Even today," says Bessie, "if we can mow a property with a Walker, it will cost us less."

With the exchange rate and addi-

"If you buy something, buy the best. Because you really can't afford to buy more than one."

tional taxes, Walker mowers are far from inexpensive in Canada. But that hasn't stopped these two couples from buying what they consider to be a quality mowing system. "If you buy something, buy the best," say Mike and Bessie. "Because you really can't afford to buy more than one."

Liz and Grant agree, adding "You have to stick with something when it treats you well. Price isn't everything."

Also adding to their bottom line,

say the Krsovans, is the diesel power which cuts back on maintenance and fuel costs. They estimate using only 45 gallons of diesel fuel a month between both machines, and paying nearly 80 cents per gallon less than they would pay for gasoline. Mike also reduced headaches and inevitable downtime by injecting a rubberized foam in the mowers' tires. They haven't had a flat since.

Each morning, Bessie and Mike start at different ends of town and work their crews toward each other, mowing 10 to 12 properties a day. At the end of the day, if one crew is finished before the other, it simply helps pick up the slack until all properties are finished. Two days during the week, they team up to maintain the larger residential properties.

Team work is the name of the game for the Monettes and the Krsovans. Both couples give plenty of credit to their crew members who, as Bessie quickly points out, "work with them and not for them." And after living and working together for so many years, communication and having faith in each other is nearly a given. Both are requisites, of course, for any successful marriage and also serve as a great foundation for a working relationship. **WT**

Seeing is believing in **Missouri**

IMAGE LAWN AND LANDSCAPE PUTS A PREMIUM ON APPEARANCE

When you've been in business only four years and you're looking to grow, what's the best form of advertising? Mike Stegner, owner of Image Lawn and Landscape, Belton, Missouri, believes it's the work you do. In the "show me" state, seeing is believing. When prospective clients pass by Image properties, Stegner wants them to see the best. And they do.

Whether it's a large residential community, one of 12 NationsBanks or a selection of high-end residential and smaller commercial properties, one thing stands out: They are as neat as a pin. The grass is lush green

Last year, Mike Stegner brought in a consultant to help fine tune his operation. Before then, he notes, he didn't know what his costs were. "It was like playing basketball without a scoreboard."

(weather permitting) and there's a tell tale striping effect that says Image crews and their Walkers have paid a visit.

A city of 25,000 residents, Belton is located one-half hour southeast of Kansas City.

"The area is really into striping and the checkerboard effect," says Mike. As he points out, his crews deliver the effect wherever they can and wherever it gets the most mileage for the clients.

At the 18-acre Pickering residential community, for example, a GHS Walker with a 48-inch deck mows the front of the properties leaving behind a series of straight lines that parallel both sides of the frontage roads. At one NationsBank in town, the undulating hills are striped creating a checkered effect that not only can be seen but can't be overlooked from the main highway.

The Walker's ability to stripe was just one reason Image invested in the machine. "What also caught my attention originally," Mike tells, "was its one hand control and low center of gravity," not to mention, he adds,

its ease of operation compared to a walk-behind. "We will never go back to walk-behinds," he says.

Image Lawn and Landscape bought its first Walker, powered by a 20-hp Kohler, in the spring of 1993, its first official year in business. As Mike relates, they had a 15-acre cemetery to do and really needed the machine. The following year, they bought another Walker. More followed, and today, Image crews operate four 20-hp Walkers, two GHS models and two with side-discharge decks. They combine to operate 48-,

52- and 62-inch decks. The company still has the first diesel-powered Walker it purchased, too.

"We run these machines day in and day out," explains Mike, "mowing a total of 70 acres a week."

TOUGH START

In only four full years of business, Image Lawn & Landscape has grown into a full-service landscape company that last year grossed \$240,000 in sales. Revenue is divided among 30 percent landscaping, 20 percent fertilization and 50 percent mowing. The company also repairs and installs irrigation systems and Mike is involved in a second company that does retaining walls. He looks for Image to grow between 10 to 15 percent this year.

If this growth pales to some other larger



Left to right: Crew member Terry Dukes, owner Mike Stegner and Walker operator Kirk Kintner. The company purchased its first Walker back in 1993.

Striped hills at this NationsBank create a checkered effect that really stands out from the highway.



companies, one reason would be the tragic loss Mike suffered last year when his mother — his mentor and cheerleader — died unexpectedly.

"It's tough to lose a loved one," he tells. "The loss itself is horrible, but it also makes you reassess your life and the need to live life to its fullest."

Mike says his mom's death

"We run these machines day in and day out mowing a total of 70 acres a week."

took the "wind out of his sails." Although his current business and clients didn't feel the consequences, he emphasizes, he just hasn't been able to generate the enthusiasm required to grow as fast as he originally planned. But as he relates, his mom would have wanted him to grow and succeed, so he's now pushing forward and doing so with a planned and more pragmatic approach.

TEAM EFFORT

Like so many lawn maintenance professionals, Mike literally started mowing lawns while in high school, even before he had his driver's license. He depended on his stepfather to drive him from account to account. Later, when he hung his shingle, he knew the mowing ropes, but not the business end of it.

Last year, he brought in a consultant to help fine tune his operation. "Before then, I really didn't know my costs," he tells. "It was like playing basketball without a scoreboard. We had plenty of business and were working hard, but we didn't know if we were making money. We do now because we have a better handle on job costing."

Mike carries the sports metaphor further by comparing his business to coaching. He played football in high school, coaches soccer for six-year-olds on weekends and plays softball in a men's league on Monday evenings.

"I'm the coach, the production manager is the pitcher, and the rest of the employees fill in the different positions. To get the most out of the team means everyone has to play their positions to the fullest."

The Walkers have helped in this area, too, he adds. "Using Walkers allows me to use fewer players (employees) and play (pay) them more. It allows them to view their job as a career and not just a temporary job. That strengthens the team and, as we all know, you're only as good as the rest of the team."

Mike's team is quickly making a reputation for itself, one that clients and prospects can literally see. With more than a little help from a consultant and yes, from his Walker mowers, he adds, the team expects to climb into the first division soon. Play ball! **WT**

Crew talk

Most, if not every crew member for Image Lawn and Landscape has used a Walker, but Randy Dukes seems to get the most pleasure out of the machine. Randy has been with the company only two years, but he's used them before, for a total of five years now.

"It's the most incredible mower I've ever seen," he relates. "I'm done for good with walk-behinds. With the Walker you sit low to the ground, which is good for the hills but also good for not raking your head on lower tree limbs."

Randy says the tires are less tough on the turf than other riding mowers, even walk-behinds,



and the Baja tires on the model he uses offer more traction without cutting up the grass.

He also likes the new bigger bagger which affords 36 percent more capacity, although Randy says it seems to hold 2-1/2 times as much as the old baggers.

"I'm done for good with walk-behinds."

This Walker user is also his company's striping expert. "You have to be consistent when you stripe," he tells. "You have to concentrate and stay in the wheel marks. It takes a little more time and patience but it's worth it to see the results."

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