

# WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS TO COME



*The Walker Family  
August 12, 2000*



VOL. **17**



# WALKER TALK

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## BEING A SPECIALIST

I have mentioned before in this column about the importance of having a vision for a company — knowing who you are, how you got there and where you want to go. A business whose leadership has no vision or incorrect vision will not survive in the long term. I believe it has helped our company to succeed by having the vision of being a "specialist." We design and produce specialty products for selected customers. Even within the commercial mower equipment industry we do not offer a machine for everyone.

The specialist is in direct contrast with many of our competitors. With "strategic" acquisitions and consolidations, the vision of some industry leaders is to be the "one source" for everything a landscape contractor needs. For example, Husqvarna's announced

vision is to be the "total source solution" where a landscaper can fill their trailer exclusively with Husqvarna products.

While we recognize the tremendous resources and grandeur of a "one source" vision, we are not dissatisfied with our vision of being a specialist. It appears to us there is a continuing opportunity and future for specialists that will not be overtaken by industry giants.



Of course there are risks in being a specialist. There is a lack of diversity and a resulting concern for stability. However, it can be argued there is more strength and stability in doing a few things very well than doing many things with mediocrity. It's hard not to be average when you have a lot of "balls in the air."

What are the strengths of a specialist in a competitive market? We deliver a better product because of focus, concentration and intensifying limited resources on the product. We deliver better customer service by working with distributors and dealers who tend to be specialists. And we know our customers better and are more responsive to their needs, because we are working with a select group of customers.

I guess you can tell we enjoy being a specialist and competing in this industry. Many of our Walker customers are specialists in their own right, and we are delighted to help you compete in your industry. We share your vision.

*Bob Walker*

Bob Walker  
President



# Part time yet professional

**S**ome of the biggest and most successful landscaping and lawn management operators in the country today started their businesses on a part-time basis.

They may have started by cutting their neighbors' lawns or "mowing their way" through school. Others may have looked at their lawn mowers as a means to generate extra cash beyond their full-time work, and found that mowing was appealing.

Mowing lawns and providing other maintenance services part-time is a fact of life in this industry. The profession is relatively easy and inexpensive to enter, and marketing services is as simple as knocking on the neighbor's front door.

Unfortunately, the perception is that part-timers can be successful without being professional. Since they're operating part-time, they can get away with not having uniforms, good equipment, contracts, training and competent employees. Since they don't have the large overhead and don't really *need* the money, their pricing structure is skewed too low.

This need not and should not be the case. Part-timers who think and act like professionals can make more money, develop a more loyal customer base and grow their businesses faster than those who don't. They will also have a better opportunity to turn their part-time job into a full-time business, if they so desire.

## STARTING OUT

If you're a Walker operator, you're already starting out on the right path. Having quality equipment will help project a professional image. The key is to build on this foundation.

Start by taking a close look at your operation and your procedures. Make sure you're following local regulations regarding the operation of a lawn

mowing business, and that you have appropriate insurance for you, your equipment and your customers. Part-time operators still have a level of responsibility to maintain.

Image is important, as well. As a part-timer, you may not have the resources to buy uniforms or drive around in fancy rigs, but you can still project a professional image by being as neat as possible, and keeping your equipment clean and maintained.

Consistency is important, too. Customers appreciate being on a schedule and having their service providers show up when they're supposed to.

Strive to communicate with your customers on a regular basis and give them custom service. In other words, be responsive. The most successful lawn maintenance contractors understand the true value of their customers and provide exemplary service.

## DEVELOP A PRICING STRATEGY

The key to becoming a professional operator is thinking like a professional. According to green industry consultant Jack Mattingly, the first and foremost step here is to get your pricing set right, and that implies tracking hours.

"Develop a simple time sheet, and track the amount of time you spend on each job," Mattingly relates. "Don't forget to add in travel time. No one pays you for that so you have to factor it in on costing strategies.

"Keep track of the time on a sheet of paper or put the figures into an Excel program. At the end of the month, compare how much time you've spent on each job to how much the customer has paid you. That will give you a dollar per hour idea of how much you're actually making."

He emphasizes the word "idea" because in addition to the number of

hours spent directly on a job, other items have to be included to determine your net profit on a job; how much you're actually making per hour (see "Plugging leaks" on this page).

Mattingly, who has consulted for some of the largest and most successful landscape management companies in the country, says that knowing your actual per hour figure vs. what you've estimated is a key to running a successful part-time operation. It will give operators a chance to raise prices if they need to, or lower them if their pricing structure is too high to remain competitive.

Either way, knowledge is power and is one of the first steps to becoming more professional. **WT**

## PLUGGING LEAKS

Whether you're a big operator, small operator or someone in between, chances are there are some hidden costs in your operation that eat away at profits. For part-timers and those without formal accounting programs in place, these expenses can remain hidden indefinitely. Here are just a few to consider:

- \$ Indirect hours spent performing administrative functions such as invoicing, making sales calls, performing estimates
- \$ Indirect hours spent doing repairs, sharpening blades, and performing preventive maintenance
- \$ Fuel costs, repair costs and other equipment costs
- \$ Replacement costs. Trucks, trailers and lawn mowers will need to be replaced one day. Smart operators set aside a percentage of their revenue for that contingency.
- \$ Other indirect business expenses such as insurance cost and licensing fees



# Squeezing the most out of life in

**T**heir Walker dealer calls them “hard working folks.” For Rick and Joyce Cooke, however, they see themselves as simply getting as much out of life as possible. And how!

In addition to operating their own landscaping business, the young couple designed and built their dream log house, and both have worked two jobs — almost since they were old enough to work.

The Cookes are young, energetic and literally make the most out of every minute. Joyce, for example, carries her laptop computer in the truck and makes out invoices, does payroll, performs property estimates and completes other administrative chores while her foreman drives to another jobsite. “This saves me at least a day’s worth of work each week at the office,” she tells.

Rick, who operates the landscaping side of the business, is always on the lookout for that next machine to allow him to be more efficient at the job site. His most recent addition is a Cat 236 skid-steer loader fitted with a labor-saving snow plow, backhoe and pallet fork attachments.

“We’re always looking for ways to improve our business,” say the owners of Forever Green Landscaping in Foster, Rhode Island. “Being married and working together is like having two owners who are equally zealous about their business,” adds Joyce.

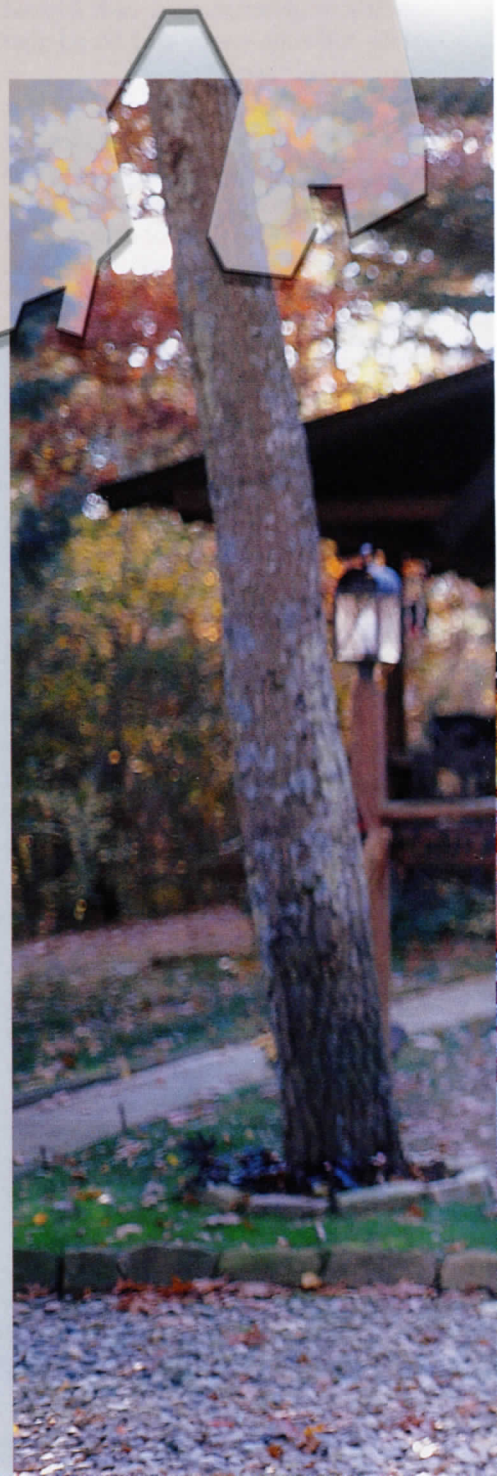
In business 11 years, Forever Green Landscaping today offers a full range of landscaping and lawn maintenance services to 75 residential and five commercial customers. During peak season, the company will operate four crews — one cutting crew, one maintenance crew and two construction crews — with eight employees.

**“We’ve made two decisions that have helped us grow our business.”**

“We’ve made two decisions that have helped us grow our business,” Rick explains. “The first was to go strictly with high-quality accounts, those that were willing to utilize the full range of our services. The second was to develop our skills for providing full service which allows both of our divisions to feed off one another. Joyce gets more maintenance work when I do installations, and she refers renovation work to me.”

Joyce notes there are other benefits to their full-service approach, not the least of which is allowing commercial customers to write one check for all their landscaping needs. The fact that the company pro-rates its service over a 12-month period also helps property managers with their budgeting process.

# Rhode





# Island

Rick and Joyce Cooke have the pioneering spirit at home, where they built their own log home, and at work where they were the first to own Walker Mowers in the state.







**Joyce started mowing lawns a year after the Cookes were married. Today, she runs the lawn maintenance side of the business.**

**Property cleanup is a breeze today for the Forever Green Landscaping crew. They simply blow leaves and debris onto the lawns and pick it all up when they mow.**



Being the one service provider also gives Forever Green Landscaping more control over a property. If the landscaping looks great, the company can take full credit. If it doesn't, it takes the blame. More importantly, having complete control ensures landscaping and all maintenance practices work in harmony.

## MODEST BEGINNINGS

As Rick tells the story, Joyce began mowing lawns a year after they were married. She started with 10 customers, and had 25 by the end of the year. Her equipment repertoire included two 19-inch Sears mowers and two string line trimmers. At the time, Rick was a graphics artist working an 11-days-on, 3-days-off schedule. He helped Joyce on those three off days and after work.

In 1991, the company Rick worked for went out of business. He found

another "pre-press" job working a 36-hour weekend shift, allowing him to devote an entire week to the landscaping business.

"I liked landscaping," Rick tells. "But I made more money in pre-press and our benefits were paid for. At the time, it was hard to walk away. But walk away he did six years later. The rest is history — almost.

By the time Rick entered the scene full time, Joyce's maintenance business had flourished. She had many more customers, and crews had discarded their 19-inch push mowers in favor of 48-inch walk-behinds. In fact, business was so good, she needed another walk-behind.

"I was in favor of one of those new stand-on walk-behinds," says Rick. "But when Joyce saw the Walker, her decision was made.

"I immediately liked the extra grass catching capacity of the mower and the beautiful cut it delivered," Joyce relates. "After trying it out, we found it was even more maneuverable than our walk-behinds."

The Cookes purchased a 20-hp GHS Walker with a 48-inch deck to

be followed shortly thereafter by a 25-hp model. The purchases immediately eliminated two employees. Joyce says the crews now mow as much grass with two Walkers as they once did with four 48-inch walk-behinds.

The company saves on labor costs and saves time at the job site. Fall cleanup is a case in point, Joyce explains.

"Before we had the Walkers, we would stop mowing until all the leaves had fallen from the trees. It was just too time consuming to pick up the leaves one week at a time. Now, picking up leaves is a real breeze. We simply blow leaves and debris from the drives, walks, and beds onto the lawns, and then pick it up when we mow. The Walker acts as a vacuum as much as a mower. It's a win/win for customers who now have clean properties throughout the fall and who don't have to pay for all that raking at the end of the season. And we make money throughout because we never stop mowing.

"We're always looking for anything that makes our life easier and saves time. The Walkers do that. Just as



# DO EXCEPTIONAL WORK AND MAKE MORE MONEY

another example, we do a lot of deck height changing in Rhode Island. With the Walker, changing deck height takes only a minute or two. But the real key is their mowing and catching capability, their maneuverability, and their ease of operation. We get a lot of dew here, but the Walkers leave a nice cut — wet or dry. In terms of maneuverability and operation, shoot, even a 60-year-old woman could cut the grass with a Walker.”

## PROGRESSIVE DUO

The backdrop for Forever Green Landscaping is the Cooke homestead located on 10 acres of property. Here, Rick and Joyce have been working diligently over the years to build their own home literally from scratch. They’ve sawed down trees, fashioned logs, and built a perfectly beautiful structure in a wilderness-like setting. Rick says they didn’t know anything about plumbing, electricity or home construction in general, but just “went for it” after reading more than a few books.

Pioneers at work, too, Rick and Joyce were the first Walker owners in the state. Rick also employs state-of-the-art technology in the landscaping side of the business, taking advantage of his graphics arts skills and experience to provide customers with a digital representation of their new landscape before the first cobblestone is laid or the first shrub is installed.

With an estimated 1,000 lawn maintenance operators and landscapers working in the small state of Rhode Island, the industry is as competitive there as anywhere in the country. The Cookes have decided the only way to grow and prosper in the state is to squeeze as much as they possibly can from every day, take advantage of every competitive edge, and deliver uncompromising quality to each and every customer. It works for them. **WT**

Stephen Roy has been selling power equipment in Johnston, Rhode Island, for only five years. Yet, in that relatively short length of time, he has seen and heard enough about the landscaping business to know that those of his customers who do the best work will bring home the most money.

The logic is pretty clear, says Roy, who has been selling Walker Mowers for four years. “Commercial operators who do really good work can charge more for their service.” More specifically, he adds, those who use equipment designed specifically for their application will be more efficient on the job, get more done at the job site and overall do a better job than competitors who are less savvy about their operations.

Roy points to his leaf-season equipment as examples of tools designed for the job. “We have the best equipment for leaf removal on the market,” he says proudly. “We have RedMax and Little Wonder blowers, Billy Goat truck loaders, and last but not least — Walker Mowers.

“Customers who buy a Walker not only cut their mowing time in half and increase their quality of cut; they also leave here with a machine truly designed to manicure a lawn. The machine cleans the lawn while it mows. It picks up thatch and weed seeds, and during the fall leaves are hardly a challenge at all. The Walker not only picks them up but reduces their bulk substantially so they are easily taken to a compost pile or other drop area.”

Stephen Roy Power Equipment sold more than 40 Walker Mowers in 2000, nearly doubling its sales annually since the first Walker went out the door to Rick and Joyce Cooke four years ago.

“Once we got those first machines out and operating, word seemed to spread quickly,” Roy tells. “Landscapers in the state are a pretty tight-knit group.”

But Roy emphasizes that selling quality equipment is only part of the formula for being a successful commercial power equipment dealer. He provides quality service, too, to the extent that if he can’t get a customer up and running in two hours, he will provide a loaner until the machine is running. In addition, the store is open three nights a week to accommodate the work schedule of his customers and to facilitate repairs.

Yes, Stephen Roy will bend over backwards for his customers. But that should be no surprise. After all, the same theory holds true for dealers just as it does for landscapers and lawn maintenance professionals. Those who do the best work will be the most successful.



Stephen Roy



# *Extended family gathers* To celebrate 50,000th Walker Mower

**W**e came to the reunion because it sounded like a great idea and we wanted to see the factory," relates long-time Iowa Walker users Chuck and Dana Rosacker. "I put my business on blocks for two days to be here," adds Connecticut-based Ed Cook. "I wanted to show my support for the Walker family and wish them the best of luck in the coming years."

Owner/operator Linda Harris purchased her first Walker in 1988. She came from Ohio to attend the reunion and tie in a nice vacation to Colorado, as well. "This is really a beautiful state," she remarks. "I really wanted to see the factory, too, and did I forget to mention they're giving away two Walker Mowers?"

The Walker Mower Family Reunion, held August 11 and 12, attracted 1,700 people from 39 states and 14 countries. In addition to the mower giveaway, attendees were treated to a number of highlights, including taking part in the 50,000th mower celebration on Friday.

Viktor Huss of Neftenbach, Switzerland, won the drawing to drive the mower off the assembly line. In doing so, he was also reimbursed for his trip to Fort Collins.

At the afternoon driving ceremony, Walker Mfg. also recognized four pioneers who introduced the Walker Mower to various parts of North America and the world. **John G. Stead** (Wagga Wagga, NSW Australia), **Percy E. Schneider** (Bobcaygeon, Ontario, Canada), **Sven Gillfors** (Malmo, Sweden), and **Robert "Bob" D. Oestreich** (Port Washington, New York), were all recognized.

More than 200 attendees also took part in the Walker Precision Obstacle Course to see who would be crowned the Best Walker Operator in the World. **Nathan Reiser** of K & D Landscape in Arvada, Colorado, took

home the honors by besting **Sam Stoltzfus** (Peoria, Arizona) and **Gary Bailey** (Winterset, Iowa) by 1.5 and 3 seconds respectively. For winning, Reiser took home a \$100 Walker Ware gift certificate and \$1,000 credit on his next Walker Mower, along with a trophy.

Other events included the supplier door prize program and the Walker Mower giveaway, supplier displays, talent shows, Walker Mfg. Timeline and hot air balloon rides.

The All-Nations flag raising was one of the highlights of Saturday morning; that evening the closing ceremony was capped off with a 20-minute slide show and magnificent fireworks display. Sandwiched in between were Kohler Engines World Famous Brat Fry, Walker Mowers Family Photo and an entertainment stage that was kept busy for nearly the entire picnic, closing with the cowboy poet Baxter Black.

"This is more than just a celebration for our company. It is a celebration of the people from all over the world who believe in this product and have made the production of 50,000 mowers possible," Walker Mfg. president Bob Walker told attendees.

"We believe that setting goals and celebrating reaching them is a way to energize the human spirit. This event gives us an opportunity to be with our family — our suppliers, factory employees, sales and service network, and end-users — to share common ideals and identify with a product that really has impacted all our lives."

The reunion was held 20 years after the decision was made to build Walker's first 25 machines and less than 10 years after the company celebrated the production of its 10,000th mower in 1991. **WT**

*Note: See News Section on page 23 to order commemorative items*



Max Walker turns over Walker Mower #50,000 to Viktor Huss of Neftenbach, Switzerland, as he prepares to drive the mower through the "family row."

*"Thank you Walker family for your hard work and dedication — great job! Well done!"*

— Ruth and Ron Lauchnor (Dealer), Lauchnor's Gravely Tractor, Allentown, PA



Nathan Reiser of K & D Landscape in Arvada, CO, was crowned the "Best Walker Operator in the World" on the Walker Mowers Precision Obstacle Course.





Walker Manufacturing employees proudly present Walker Mower #50,000 at the Friday afternoon ceremony.



Walker Mower #50,000 sits in front of attendees during the dedication ceremony.

*"Thank you for a 'top quality' machine and a 'wonderful' family."*

— Jerry Hall & Mary Lynn Cooke (End-user), California

*"What a fun family event! Thanks."*

— Arlin, Brenda, Jared and Jordan King (End-user), Sun City, AZ

*"Wonderful! It's great to be a part of the family!"*

— Arlin and Becky Geigly (Distributor) Peoria, AZ



The Walker Precision Obstacle Course presented a challenge for participants, but it also was a way for operators to show their skills on the machine.



*"Fabulous! Very moving!"*

— Sherri Dawson (End-user), Dana Point, CA

*"Thanks for 16 years of great mowing!"*

— Ken and Jill Anderson (End-user), Loveland, CO

*"This is a great thing to do!"*

— Royce Nowlin (End-user), Weiser, ID



Viktor Huss of Neftenbach, Switzerland, drives the 50,000th Walker Mower from the plant to the stage.



Bob Walker congratulates Philip Lecher and his children (Alliance, NE) for winning a Walker Mower.



*"This is a REAL treat! — Just one more reason to deal with Walker."*

— Dale and Karen Lee (Dealer), Gordon, NE

*"Awesome!"*

— Greg Smith (Dealer), Australia





Walker Pioneer Sven Giffors from Gilco Scandinavia (Malmö, Sweden)

*"Brilliant!"*  
— Graeme Renshaw, Allen Power Equipment (Distributor), Didcot UK



Paul Penny from Pro Power Canada accepts for Walker Pioneer Percy Schneider (Bobcaygeon, Ontario, Canada).



The Walker Company Quartet (left to right) Dennis Cox (Customer Service), Dwight Carlson (Purchasing), Bob Walker and Dean Walker excite the crowd with some gospel hymns.



Noël Brown of Fort Atkinson, WI, is congratulated by Bob Walker after being chosen as Walker Mower Grand Prize winner.

*"Worth every mile!"*  
— Paul Tanner (Dealer), Winchester Garden Machinery, UK



Walker Pioneers Bob and Annette Oestreich from Precision Work (Port Washington, NY)



High-quality entertainment kept guests humming along and laughing, too.

*"Amazing!"*

— Malene Hansen, Hansen and Killsholm A/S (Distributor) Odense, Denmark



Attendees enjoyed interacting with Walker production employees during the Friday factory tours.



Greg Smith (right) of Walker Mowers Melbourne represented Walker Pioneer John Stead of Specialised Mowing at the event (Wagga, New South Wales, Australia).



The Walker Mowersaurus by Walker neighbor and iron sculptor, Bill Swets.



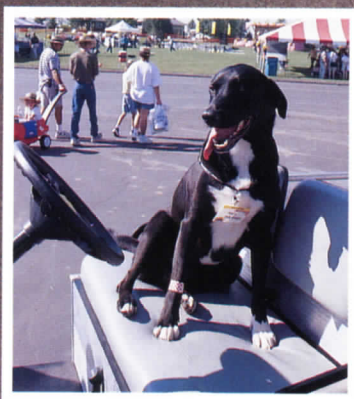
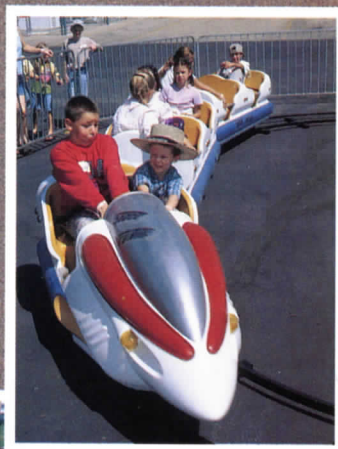


Walker suppliers drew large crowds to their booths and enjoyed interaction with distributors, dealers and customers.

*"Thank you —  
a beautiful event!"*  
— Dustin Peterson, Throlson and  
Associates (Supplier), Le Center, MN



Good food



Molly Walker, the company dog, oversaw operations for the two-day event.

*"Walker —  
A great plant with great  
goals and great product!"*

— Raleigh Brooks (End-User),  
Timnath, CO



Swedish attendees from Walker distributor Gronyte Maskiner were not hard to spot.

*"As we say in Georgia  
'h'all done good!"*

— Bob Seibermorgan, Sunflower  
Equipment (Dealer), Warner  
Robbins, GA



Hot air  
balloon rides  
made spirits soar.



Entertainment for all ages



Arts and crafts fair




# The best-kept secret in

# Fargo

“My competitors always ask me how we can maintain so many accounts,” says Ryan Such, owner of All Terrain Grounds Maintenance in Fargo, North Dakota. “The answer is really our Walker Mowers, but I’ll let them figure it out for themselves. In fact, I think the Walkers are the best-kept secret in town.”

Oh well, the cat’s out of the bag. Such has been mowing and maintaining properties in Fargo since he was 14. Today, he maintains in the neighborhood of 150 properties, a third of which are full-service accounts — meaning he performs all the maintenance including mowing, weed control, fertilizing, sprinkler maintenance and snow removal.

The majority of his accounts are multi-family housing units and grade-A commercial properties,



Ryan Such (standing) with Tom Hinckley: Fargo’s growing season may be short, but the long snow season makes up for it.



although he still maintains a number of upscale residential properties. He gets them all done with two full-time employees, four part-timers and four Walker Mowers.

"We have picky customers," Such relates. "But that's the way I like it. The pickier the better. Customers who care about their properties appreciate the work we do, and do the little things when we're not there that just makes maintenance easier.

"My motto is simply 'care about the little things.' This is not rocket science. We double check properties, blow off the drives, make sure to remove rain gutters and sump pump hoses before mowing and replacing them afterward, and be as responsive as possible to our customers. I can remember early in my career calling four different sprinkler system companies and only one called me back. That was real annoying, and I vowed my customers would never experience a similar lack of response from my company."

### GOOD BUSINESS DECISION

Throughout high school, Such worked for his hockey coach who also operated a lawn maintenance business. After graduating, he pursued a degree in law enforcement while still maintaining lawns. Nearly four years ago, he went to work for All Terrain, and last year purchased the maintenance and snow removal business from the owner. This past year he was offered a position with the Minnesota state police, but turned it down in favor of his new business.

"There is so much potential in lawn maintenance and lawn care," he relates. "It's also nice being able to have the freedom to take time off when you want or when time is available."

As for any lawn maintenance business, time is a premium for All Terrain. The growing season may not be as long in North Dakota as it is in other parts of the country, but the winters more than make up for it.



**All Terrain's crews are called out for snow 15 to 20 times a year. Over the last few seasons, the area averaged 58 inches of snow.**

As explained by Such, crews go out after virtually every snow, if for no other reason than to apply de-icer. If accumulation is over a half inch, they then blow and plow the white stuff. Usually, that means going out 15 to 20 times a year or more, enough to keep crews busy.

Two of the company's four Walker Mowers are equipped with snow blowers. One goes out with a crew; the other stays behind as a backup.

"The snow blower is the perfect width for clearing sidewalks and drives," tells Such. "And we have a lot of walks to clear. In fact, I estimate that we blow somewhere between eight and ten miles of sidewalk after each snow." In one housing development alone, the sidewalk stretches for more than a mile in each direction, he adds.

The two Walkers with snow blower attachments were with the company when Such purchased it. He bought two more last summer — in his words because he can "finish jobs quicker and

the mowers leave a nice cut."

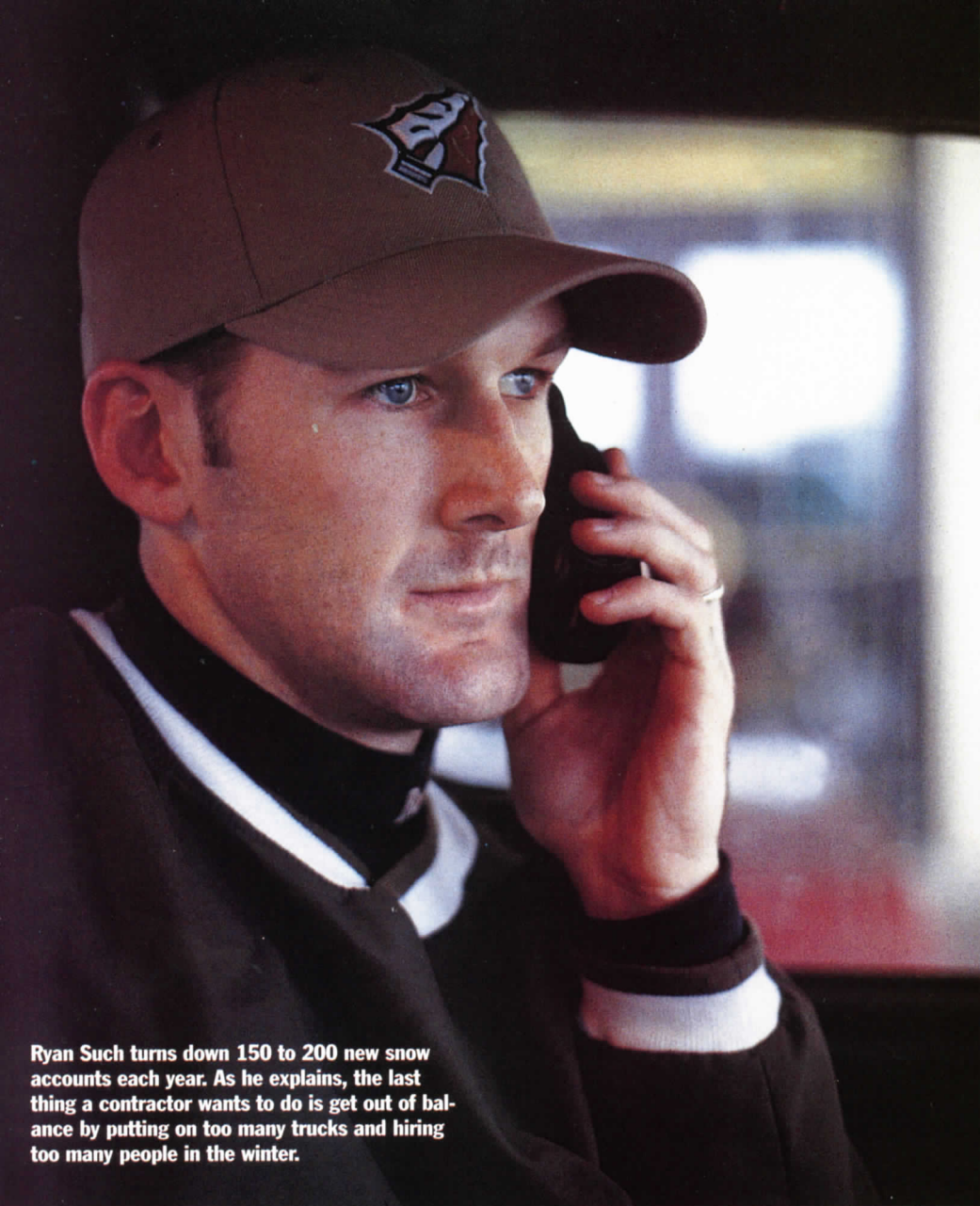
Equipped with 20-hp engines, 48-inch GHS decks and large catcher boxes, the two new Walkers also give Such an advantage over competition by allowing him to underbid competition without sacrificing quality. As he puts it, "My hourly rate is the same as the competition. But with the Walkers I simply get the work done faster." He plans to make it tougher on competition next year by purchasing two more Walkers.

### BALANCING ACT

Although a business owner for less than two years, Such has several years experience managing a lawn care/lawn maintenance operation. He says the most difficult part of his job is in the spring figuring out schedules for his employees. They want to work at least 40 hours and they're willing to put in overtime, but a steady diet of 55 hours is not acceptable.

During the growing season, crews





Ryan Such turns down 150 to 200 new snow accounts each year. As he explains, the last thing a contractor wants to do is get out of balance by putting on too many trucks and hiring too many people in the winter.

work four 10-hour days, with the fifth day in reserve as a rain day. "I've seen too many companies fill their entire week up with work and then when it rains they get behind," he relates. "The key is to stay comfortably busy."

Finding this level of comfort is even more challenging with snow removal. If spring is the most difficult for Such, winter is the most stressful. As he describes, the window to get the work done is very small, and customers can be demanding.

All Terrain is literally barraged every year to do more snow removal.

In fact, Such turns down somewhere between 150 and 200 snow accounts annually. "The last thing a contractor wants to do is put on more trucks and hire more people in the winter than he can use in the spring. We try to stay around the two to three crew size all year long."

In addition to the Walker Mowers, All Terrain's snow lineup includes three plow trucks and a new Bobcat skid steer with a bucket attachment and snow blower. Nearly all of the company's snow properties are full-service accounts. Snow removal, along

with other maintenance services, are pro-rated over a 12-month period and billed monthly.

"Customers pay a flat snow removal fee," Such explains. "If it snows more than 60 inches during the season, the fee is adjusted as a percentage of their contract." As stressful as it is, Such admits snow removal allows him to guarantee winter hours for his employees."

And speaking of employees, the Fargo job market is tight, with unemployment in the 1% to 2% range. There are plenty of jobs in the area in the \$20,000 to \$25,000 range which puts even more pressure on companies like All Terrain in both hiring and retaining employees.

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**"My hourly rate is the same as the competition. But with the Walkers I simply get the work done faster."**

"I've found that you have to do a number of things to keep employees interested and make it easy for them to get along," Such explains. "We go hunting together, play broom ball and fantasy football as a group, and have lake outings or play in a golf tournament. All work to foster team spirit."

All Terrain workers also get a cell phone (\$50 a month value) and after a year of employment, receive 401k-like benefits, along with health insurance.

Still, keeping employees is a tough row to hoe in Fargo and in other parts of the country. It requires companies like All Terrain to always put their most competitive foot forward and maintain a good working environment — without, of course, letting out any company secrets. **WT**





BOB T'S

## Tech Talk

# Understanding electrical systems can be a real charge

**F**or some people when it comes to troubleshooting the electrical systems, the heart starts beating faster, fear and anxiety begin to mount. Why does this occur? Maybe it's because we are now entering the unknown. I would compare it to traveling to a foreign country for the first time without realizing that the language, the customs and the laws are all very different from where we came. It can be quite unnerving and intimidating. How do you prevent this? Knowledge and understanding can quiet those jittering nerves.

So where do we begin? After all, you can't see electricity flowing through the wires and components. One thing you DON'T do is just start replacing parts until the problem goes away. The electrical system as a whole is made up of five sub-systems. They are the starting system, the ignition system, the charging system, the safety system and the accessory system. Keep in mind that all of these systems are interrelated and influence each other.

**Starting System** - There are other components to the starting system besides the electrical parts. The fuel system also plays a major part in starting. When troubleshooting, it must be determined first which part of the system is at fault. The electrical part of the system is comprised of the battery that supplies power, the key switch, the start solenoid and the starter motor. The safety switches and wiring harness are directly related to the starting system. The battery supplies power to engage the start solenoid that directs power to the starter motor that will start the engine cranking.

**Ignition System** - This part of the system is made up of components that are primarily a part of the engine. There are two types of systems: a coil system and a magneto system. The coil system consists of the battery, a coil, the distributor and the spark plug(s). The battery supplies 12 volts to the coil that steps up the voltage. The distributor times the high voltage from the coil to the spark plug(s). A magneto system is slightly different in that a

battery is not required. Spark is produced by magnet(s) in the flywheel passing the coil in the ignition module(s).

**Charging System** - Other than the battery, the other components are a part of the engine. The system components are the magnets in the flywheel, the charging coils or stator, the rectifier/regulator and the battery. As the magnets in the flywheel pass the stator, an AC charge is produced. The rectifier/regulator converts the AC to DC and regulates the DC voltage at approximately 14 volts. This will keep the battery charged.


**Safety System** - This system consists of the seat switch, the PTO switch, the neutral switch, the time delay, the circuit breakers and some relays. The switches all work together so that the unit cannot be started with the FSC (forward speed control) in the forward position and/or the PTO engaged. It causes the engine to shut down if the operator comes off the seat with the FSC forward and/or the PTO engaged. The time delay gives a two-second delay before the unit shuts down when the operator comes off the seat. The function of the relays is to make these components work together. The circuit breakers provide overload and/or short circuit protection.

**Accessory System** - This system is what will provide power to accessories such as lights, implement hitch, power dump and tail wheel lock. Its components include the ignition switch, circuit breaker and accessory switch.

Each system plays an integral part in the system as a whole. Each system has some degree of dependence on the others. For this reason it is crucial that each system is functioning properly. To bypass or disarm a system or component within a system will compromise the effectiveness of the whole system. More importantly, it could jeopardize the safety of the operator. For this reason, we recommend that electrical system troubleshooting and repairs be done by a qualified Walker technician. **WT**



# I hit the wall at three trucks



Four years ago, Mike Kavanagh downsized his business and brought in his wife Mary to operate a crew.

Mike Kavanagh moved from California to Washington in 1984. His plan? Grow the landscaping business he started back home. He wanted to reach the four- or five-crew level and then spend most of his time managing the operation.

He was on plan until 1995 when at the three-truck level he 1) ran out of management ideas to motivate people and 2) ran out of people. The unemployment rate in the state dropped significantly, and “experienced” lawn maintenance workers just stopped calling the help wanted advertisements.

“We have a 2.5% unemployment rate here, and the type of employees I usually retain now work at dot com companies in shipping and receiving,” says the owner of Mike Kavanagh Gardening Services, Poulsbo, Washington. “They make more money and the work is easier.”

Short circuited en route to his goal, Mike made a couple of changes. Four years ago, he downsized and brought in his wife, Mary, full-time to operate a crew. Today, instead of having five crews to manage, the Kavanaghs have two. Between them the company maintains 115 accounts. Eighty-five of them are located on Bainbridge Island, a 30-minute ferry ride from downtown Seattle.

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**“I’m 45 years old and at the end of the day my legs were tired.”**

“The area gets anywhere between 40 and 70 inches of rain annually,” tells Mike. The grass starts growing in March and picks up in April. Some of the properties brown out in the summer, but pick up again during fall rains. Falls around here are usually gray and wet. And in the winter, the lawns will turn spongy.

“Mulching is out of the question here, because lawns never dry out during the growing season. In fact, we bag every property we maintain.”

The couple postures themselves as gardeners offering full-service maintenance to customers, including pruning, fertilizing, aerating, dethatching and bed cleanup. “We try to be organic when we can, and spot spray for weeds and insects when we can’t,” Mike explains.



Mike Kavanagh maneuvers his Walker over steep hills and between tight spots. The wet turf may slow him down, but it doesn't stop him from collecting grass on all his properties.



The lush growth is indicative of an area that gets between 40 and 70 inches of rainfall a year.

"Our program also calls for cleaning up lawns in the fall and applying mulch in the winter. We generally don't fertilize until late spring, although we put down a low nitrogen fertilizer in the winter. Some customers want a purely organic fertilizer which is no problem as long as the soil is good."

#### NEW WALKER OWNER

On the mowing side of maintenance, this entrepreneur always relied on 21-inch commercial walk-behind mowers. One can imagine how much walking was required when maintaining more than 100 properties.

"With so much mowing to do and with so little help, I found myself working 12 to 14 hours a day," Mike reports. "I'm 45 years old and at the end of the day my legs were tired." In addition, he says his mowers, albeit high-quality products, just couldn't take the pounding. They were blowing out engine seals and overall wouldn't stay running. So he purchased a Walker in April.

The Walker, a 20-hp model with a 48-inch deck, features the big catcher. Mike also purchased the nylon dumping bag. "It is a big investment, but I figure we can pay it off in two years because we're not continually replacing mowers, we're getting the mowing done twice as fast and we've saved at least one employee."



**"Mulching is out of the question here, because lawns never dry out."**

The Kavanaghs, who have nicknamed their new mower "Bob," say the purchase facilitates leaf cleanup in the fall, too. It even picks up wet leaves; the only kicker, according to Mike, is they have to mow a little slower when the grass is wet because of the steep hills. Properties with flat terrain are an unusual site around here, he adds.

Today, the company has settled in operating with three employees plus the two owners. The combination, including the new Walker Mower, helped to generate in the neighborhood of \$170,000 last year. The Kavanaghs have no plans to expand their operation, except in one area.

"We're thinking about getting another Walker for Mary's crew," says Mike. "We haven't thought of a nickname for it yet, but first things first."



WT



## FACES BEHIND THE WALKER NAME

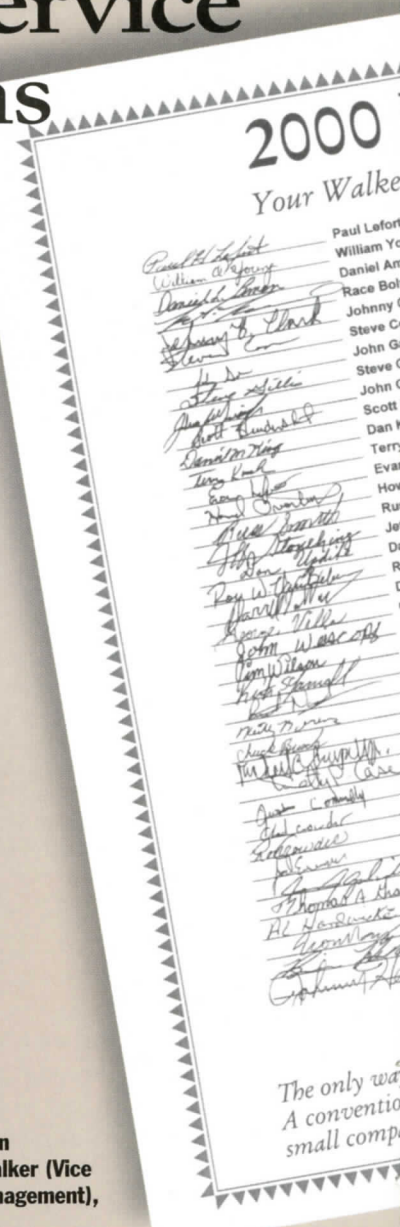
## Finishing Touches ...

# Manufacturing management, marketing, customer service and business operations

"Lean and efficient" have always been good words to describe the talented administrative staff at Walker. This staff of 32 people works hand-in-hand with Walker's 52 distributors around the world, and the numerous suppliers of goods and services to keep the quality of the Walker Mower high. Whether it is buying goods or paying the bills, entering sales orders or cutting work orders, standing at a trade show booth or planning parts to move through a paint booth, cost accounting or cycle counting, employee payroll or employee insurance, graphic design or product design, the Walker administrative staff helps make all of this happen before, during, and after Walker Mowers roll down the production line.



Left to right: Russ Graves (Planning), Debbie Rothgery (Planning), Mark Ellis (Engineering), David Stratton (Purchasing), Mike Ramsey (Purchasing), Paul Lefort (Plant Manager), Terry Christy (Planning), Dean Walker (Vice President, Product Design and Manufacturing), Kyle Fritzler (Cycle Counting), Evan Lefort (Materials Management), Dwight Carlson (Purchasing)





## FACT BOX

- ✓ 150,000 miles were traveled last year by factory personnel for marketing and technical support.
- ✓ The 32 people on administrative staff hold a combined 324 years of experience at Walker. This equals an average of 10 years of employment at Walker for each of these people.
- ✓ 9,921 warranty claims were processed in 2000.
- ✓ 477,000 parts inventory moves were tracked in the factory last year including parts received in the door, parts produced and moving within the plant, and finished goods and spare parts shipping.
- ✓ Over 20,000 production work orders were planned and processed in the factory last year.
- ✓ 11,384 invoices were issued to customers last fiscal year. This represents 936,225 pieces of equipment or parts sold.
- ✓ Approximately 8,600 checks were issued last fiscal year through accounts payable and payroll.
- ✓ Approximately 13,500 invoices from suppliers were processed and paid last fiscal year.
- ✓ An average of 47 customer service requests (phone calls, letters, e-mails) are handled per day.



Max and Margaret Walker  
(founders of Walker Mfg.)

## TEAM

...to sign their names:

Final Assembly

pride

Welding  
by Welding  
y Welding  
Lead  
mbly Weld  
ibly Weldi  
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Assembly  
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Jack Weld  
Mower De



John ...  
Rick White, Sub-Assembly W  
Chad Wulff, Chassis Welding  
Jay Wojcik, Painting Supervi  
Roddy Alexander, Paint Pre  
Shawn Brinkman, Painter  
Shawn Brunmeier, Painter  
Jim Christopher, Powder C  
Joshua Dunn, Paint Prep  
Mark Johnson, Powder C  
Derek Katterlin, Paint Pr  
Frank Martinez, Painter  
Mark Meza, Painting Le

Don ...  
Rich Sewell, Parts  
Butch Stull, Parts  
Carl Cox, Tooling  
Dan Helzer, Custodial  
Don Pilon, Maintenance  
Bill Hoffman, Warranty  
Eldon Keil, Warranty

## HILOSOPHY

resistible superiority and uncompromising quality.  
ge established company; the same product offered by a  
consumer loyalty to existing product lines is great.

Above: Business Operations

Left to right: Grace Franklin (Accounting),  
Connie Reifschneider (Accounting), Ken Weaver  
(Human Resources), Scott Meyer (Information  
Systems), Ryan Doore (Accounting)



## Marketing and Customer Service

Left to right: Eldon Keil (Warranty), Pam Anderson (Foreign Spare Parts Orders),  
Kelly Henderson (Spare Parts Orders), Bill Hoffman (Warranty),  
Jenni Cameron (Administrative Assistant), Judie Kalinski (Spare Parts Orders),  
Carey Doore (Inquiry Follow-Up), Dennis Cox (Customer Service), Mary Odell (Receptionist),  
Bob Tomasek (Customer Service/Warranty), Mary Beth Cline (Finished Goods Orders),  
Butch Stull (Warranty), Tim Cromley (Marketing/Technical Documentation),  
and seated is Bob Walker (President and Business Administration)



# I walked 40 miles a day before my **WALKER**

**I**t may sound a little far fetched, but it's true, claims Ray Albert, owner of Ray Albert Landscaping in Vancouver, Washington. "I used to walk 40 miles a day mowing before I purchased my Walker." Now, he says he walks a lot less, makes more money and has more time to enjoy what he does best — gardening and melding together all the elements of a landscape.

Albert, who has been landscaping for more than 20 years, doesn't look or act his 61 years of age. He walks twice as fast as a person half his age and climbs giant fir trees just for the pleasure of repelling down. He also jumps at the opportunity to learn something new each day, to add to the 150 to 180 class hours he already has logged learning about landscapes and the intricacies of Mother Nature.

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**"What used to take me  
30 to 45 minutes to mow  
now took five minutes."**

"Life is what you make it," he says with a smile. "Have you ever taken time out of the day to watch a yellow jacket and a spider battle it out, or taken the time to interact with nature in other ways? To me, what's important is how much you know and how much you grow intellectually and spiritually. Money just pays the bills."

It's not surprising that this landscaper views his equipment in a different light. When he purchased his Walker Mower 10 years ago, he didn't do it strictly for the money it could make him. Instead, he wanted a machine that would free up more of his time for pruning, edging and overall maintaining properties.

Over the years, Albert's business has enjoyed both peaks and valleys. At the peak he maintained 54 properties using small 21-inch walk-behind mowers. "They were good mowers," he relates. "But I always came home tired."

So he downsized, giving up mowing completely until customers prevailed upon him to mow again. He did, and his account numbers swelled to 35 properties.

"I've always enjoyed working by myself, and 35 accounts with mowing responsibilities was too much work. It just didn't give me the time I needed to maintain properties. Landscapes in this part of the country grow fast and require pruning and trimming virtually all year long." So Albert did two things: He purchased a Walker Mower and downsized. The two moves allowed him to transform his business overnight.

"What used to take me 30 to 45 minutes to mow now took five minutes," Albert says of his 16-hp Walker. "I still stayed on the property about the same length of time, but spent the extra time I now had giving it the personal touch."

The bonus? He still charged the same amount for mowing. Homeowners didn't mind, he says, because the Walker's 42-inch deck left a beautiful cut.

Since purchasing the Walker Mower, Albert has gradually pruned away his less-profitable, less-enjoyable accounts. Today, he maintains 13 properties, including 12 homes and one commercial property — a brew pub.

**Ray Albert didn't  
buy a Walker just to  
make more money.  
He wanted a  
machine that would  
free up his time.  
This entrepreneur  
asks, "Have you  
ever taken the time  
to watch and inter-  
act with nature?"**





## PERCEPTION ISN'T REALITY

"Things aren't what they're made out to be," says Albert, waxing philosophical about his business. "To me, for example, landscaping is an art form — not an occupation. You'll notice that some of the trees I trim have a different look. It's fun to play

around with different designs. And when you look at the leaves on a tree, they're more than leaves. Fallen leaves can be used to make compost, and they act as a natural filter, too.

"My Walker Mower no doubt was designed to be a mower. But over its 1,600 hours of use, I've used it as a

tractor to tow my broken down truck off the road and to raise a couple of telephone poles for a swing set. Anyway, it's more than a mower — it's a lawn maintenance machine. Before I mow a lawn, I blow all the leaves, small papers and other debris on the yard. I'll even blow the small branches I've trimmed from the arborvitae out of the beds onto the lawn. The Walker just picks everything up."

Albert stores his mower, along with virtually every maintenance tool in his possession, in an enclosed trailer. He is a self-contained landscaper if there ever was one, to the extent that talk from his wife, Tessa, about moving closer to their family in Colorado doesn't phase him.

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**"If you work  
hard enough, you can  
make anything happen —  
that's the nature of all  
business."**

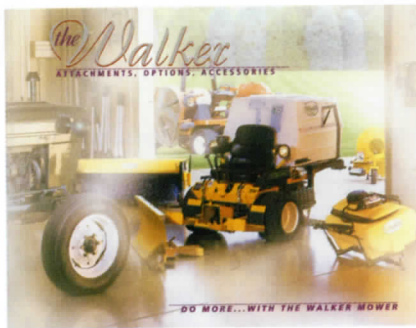
"I'll just take my trailer and find some new accounts," he says. "After all, part of living is being flexible." In some ways we're no different than trees. Those that are most likely to survive over time are those that give a little."

Looking at Albert, one can't help but admire a man who has spent the last 20 years doing exactly what he has wanted to do. But he reminds us that doing what you want to do doesn't mean it comes easily.

"No, landscaping is a tough business. The key to success for me is wanting to do it and persevering. If you work hard enough, you can make anything happen — that's the nature of all business." **WT**







## NEW WALKER ACCESSORY CATALOG

A new 20-page catalog (P/N 6895-17) is now available for Walker Mowers — “Attachments, Options and Accessories.” For Walker owners and prospective owners, the catalog highlights the versatility of the Walker product line — showing many ways to make the Walker do more, work better on the job and fit the individual owner. Also available is a companion, 13-minute video showing many of the accessory items in action (Order P/N 6895-15).

## TWO DISTRIBUTORS APPOINTED IN SCANDINAVIA IN 2000

Arild's Motorcenter A/S, Froland, Norway, and J-Trading AB, Helsinki, Finland, are the two newest Walker distributors. Finland is a brand-new market for Walker while Walker has been sold in Norway since 1995. Walker Mfg. welcomes these two companies to our distributorship family.

## FACTORY EXPANSION DELAYED

As originally reported in Volume 15, plans were made to expand the factory with a 100,000-square-foot addition in mid-2000. Several problems with the design and approval of the new addition caused delays in getting the construction started in time to avoid winter conditions. The current schedule is to start construction in early spring and complete by September 2001. When completed, the new addition will increase capacity to produce Walker Mowers 100% over current output.

# WALKER NEWS

## FRENCH DEALERS AND DISTRIBUTOR VISIT FACTORY

This past July, Walker Mfg. hosted French dealers at the Fort Collins factory. The group of 22 dealers and distributor representatives from



Walker's France and Belgium Distributor, Saelen, were given factory tours, sales and service training, and visited a local Walker dealer. The group was under the guidance of Mr. Olivier Willerval of Saelen and Mr. Wolfgang Loerli from E-Gate — Walker's European representative.

## Walker Talkback Questions from our Readers and Answers

- Q:** Can the GHS catching system be installed later (on an SD model tractor)?
- A:** Yes, the catcher assembly, blower and GHS deck are easily installed on an SD tractor using pre-punched mounting holes. It will be a little more economical to factory equip with GHS than retrofitting. Approximately 85% of the Walker tractors leaving the factory are GHS models.
- Q:** How does the cover for the GHS blower work?
- A:** When a side discharge or mulching deck is installed on a GHS tractor, the GHS blower intake is covered with a plastic plug. Blocking the intake effectively eliminates power loss, noise, and the little dust tornado underneath the tractor that would occur if the intake were left uncovered. An alternative to installing the cover is to stop the blower by removing the drive belt.
- Q:** How does Walker compare with competitors?
- A:** Our specialization, concentration and continuing development of compact, front-cut, zero-turn commercial riding mowers has kept us at the front of this market segment. We respect many of our competitors and recognize the fact that they are also building good equipment. This view of our competitors keeps us working to stay ahead.
- Q:** Why are the mulching blades stacked on the regular cutting blades, and why is the regular blade shorter in length?
- A:** The upper blade cutting edge is 1-1/4" above the regular blade to provide a "recutting" action and reduce the size of the grass clippings. The lower blade is shorter to provide extra clearance with the housing for discharge of the clippings.



## BUYER'S GUIDE AVAILABLE

Available in February, Walker has developed a Buyer's Guide to help prospective customers weigh "front-cut vs. mid-mount" commercial riding mowers. The guide uses a 10-point checklist to help the customer match the best of these two styles of mowers to the intended application.

Since Walker only offers a "front-cut" design, this guide has been carefully outlined to give a balanced presentation on the benefits of a mid-mount as well as the front-cut. Request the guide (P/N 6895-18) from your Walker dealer or the factory.

## FAMILY REUNION MEMORABILIA

For those who were there to remember or those who missed and want to see what they missed, the Walker Mowers Family Reunion is presented in three ways: A 13-minute video program (P/N 5898-11 VHS or P/N 5898-12 PAL), 11x14 Aerial Photo of the entire layout (P/N 5898-13) or 11x14 Family Photo of attendees with the 50,000th Mower (P/N 5898-14). Note: The Family Photo is used on the cover of this issue. These items will be available from Walker dealers (not available direct from factory).

## WALKER PRODUCTS

### GEAR AXLE DRIVE UPGRADE

Three design changes have been made on the gear axle drive to increase durability and service life. The improved axle is identified as P/N 6200-7 and will fit as a direct replacement on earlier units.

1. Install thrust washers on cluster gear shoulders.

2. Increase size of gear housing gussets to hold better gear alignment under load.
3. Use magnetic drain and fill plugs to capture metallic particles in the gearcase oil (plugs will easily retrofit on earlier units by ordering four pieces of P/N 6702-12).

### OTHER PRODUCT IMPROVEMENTS

Item	P/N	Description
Louder Full Signal Horn	5536-2	Starting with S/N 2001-49681, horn sound level increased from 92 to 102 decibels, direct replacement part for earlier units.
Grass Catcher Decals	5801, 5813-1	Change to Lexan® material with sub-surface printing and more aggressive adhesive for increased durability.
Deck Counter-Weight Spring	5743-2	Spring now uses swivel hook for increased strength and durability, direct replacement part for earlier units.

### SIMPLIFIED EFI WIRE HARNESS

For the 2001 Model MT26, a new wire harness from the engine plugs directly into the electronic control unit (ECU), eliminating a separate wire harness, several electrical connectors and one relay used on previous models. A related improvement is mounting the ECU on the chassis frame instead of tractor body.

## PRECISION WORK HITS 1,000

A sales goal set in the beginning became a reality when the northeastern USA Walker distributor, Precision Work Inc., Port Washington, New York, and their dealer network sold 1,000 Walker Mowers in one year (for the 1999-2000 season).



Jeffrey Plotka (left), Sales Manager, and Robert Oestreich, President of Precision Work, share the "Mountaintop" Award.

When starting as a Walker distributor in the early '80s with a territory of eight northeastern states (except Maine) and an unknown product, Mr. Robert Oestreich set the challenge. It was a big mountain to climb, and the achievement was celebrated by presenting the "Mountaintop" Award at the 16th Annual Distributor Meeting in Fort Collins, Colorado, in September 2000. Congratulations to Precision Work and their dealers.

### WEB SITE UPDATE

The Walker Mowers web site has a new look, along with updated and expanded information. Take a look at [www.walkermowers.com](http://www.walkermowers.com).



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