

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS TO COME

Small start, big finish for Texas contractor

- Selling quality in Alabama
- Optimizing mower performance
- Hospital cares for patients ... and plants



Walker



VOL. 22

WALKER TALK

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THE RIGHT SIZE

One of the first ways people like to measure a business is “how big are you?” or “how many employees do you have?” The size question follows popular thinking: “the bigger the business, the more successful the business.” After 44 years in the manufacturing business, we have never been a big business, so we don’t know about being big. However, we have worked with many different sizes of businesses, and our experience says that a lot of success has been found in small businesses as well as big.

Last summer, the survey of Walker Mower registered owners who were in the commercial mowing business (see *Walker Talk* Vol. 21, “The Price is Right”) revealed the average business was small. Yes, there were 5% who had over \$1 million annual sales, but 88% reported \$500,000 and under. Clearly, the majority of Walker contractors are small businesses. We see



that many of these small businesses are very successful, and we are happy to be a part of their success. Many of these owners are “in business for themselves” and are making a much better income than their previous employment.

We don’t see that size is of much importance in the equation for success. We have observed the experience of companies that outgrew themselves and either went out of business or downsized with better results — handling less money but putting more in their pocket — having fewer employees but better opportunities for the remaining employees.

What is the right size for a business? First, I believe the correct perspective is that size is an outcome and not a goal. People who focus on being a certain size are getting the cart in front of the horse. The right size for the business will be the natural result or outcome of having the correct vision and positioning of the company, allowing the business to reach its own equilibrium. By vision I mean, knowing who you are, how you got there and where you want to go. If you are at the right time and place, work hard, take opportunities at hand and operate with the correct principles, your business will “find” the right size without having “size” as a goal.

Every size of business has its strengths and weaknesses, and each has the opportunity to enjoy success. Frankly, we are happy to be a smaller manufacturing company competing with giants, and we are glad to have thousands of small businesses using Walker Mowers rather than a few big companies.

Bob Walker

Bob Walker
President

Walker Owners

TELL THE STORY

"When our owners tell us the Walker Mower is working and helping them succeed, it keeps us energized and focused on building the best possible piece of equipment."

Bob Walker, President; Walker Manufacturing

"Your mowers keep me looking good against the competition."

Ray West,
Professional Grounds
Maintenance, Inc.,
Vermilion, Ohio

"At age 76, my wife and I both enjoy mowing with our Walkers - best thing since sliced bread."

Jack Ray,
Wetumpka, Alabama

"The best investment I have ever made!!"

Bryan Coles, Coles Lawn Care,
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

"Walker is by far the best mower in this size available, and I am exceedingly pleased with my Walker."

Walt Olsen,
N.I.W.S Services,
Gypsum, Colorado

"Walker Mowers saved my business!!"

Marc Davis,
M.D. Landscape,
Weymouth, Massachusetts

"I am very pleased with the performance and durability of my Walker mowers. I advise other landscapers likewise."

Arnie Gundersen,
Luxor Landscape,
Maple Valley, Washington

"Undoubtedly, the best grass machine I have ever owned, I have had many other brands and no comparison in 60 years."

Harold A. Jensen,
Fayetteville, Georgia

"Has changed our lives - more time to extend areas of our business. Just love it!!"

Brett & Carolyn Soutar,
Short Back 'n' Sides,
Waihi Beach, New Zealand

"Please continue to make the most gratifying mowers to own and run in the industry!!!"

Elmer B. Groom,
Groomed Gardens,
Jacksonville, Florida

"I love looking back at my accounts, as I drive away and thanking myself for owning these mowers..."

Paul & Jennifer Sparks,
Sparks Lawn Care,
Titusville, Florida

"I can truly say Walker is hands down the best mower on the market today...I've seen a lot of different mowers, but I own the best: Walker."

Stephen D. McBride,
Mac's Lawn Service,
Portland, Indiana

"I just love my Walker!!"

Michel Bernardin,
St. Philippe, Quebec, Canada

"Best mower sold! I love it and my customers love it."

Robert Fietzsm,
Exquisite Lawns,
Jacksonville, Florida

"We operate a two person lawn care company. My wife and I would not be able to do this without our Walkers."

Gary Vassallo & Loretta Tunstall,
Lawn Cruisers Lawn Care,
Kalispell, Montana

"No other mower does it like a Walker"

Bobby Williams,
Saltito, Mississippi

"I never knew what a pleasure grass cutting was 'til I got my first Walker."

Merle Stremming,
Forsyth, Missouri

"I am 67 and could not be in business without my Walker - We love it!"

Travis Keen,
Travis Keen Lawn Service,
Columbus, Georgia

"You build the best mower in America."

John E. Sharts, Springboro, Ohio

"Will never own any mower other than a Walker."

Mike Pilsbury,
Chariton, Iowa

"Nicest lawnmower we ever owned"

Guy and Claudette Laurencelle,
Lac du Bonnet,
Manitoba, Canada

"Best mower I have ever used."

Vickers L. Cunningham
Dallas, Texas



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The Top Notch team:
(L to R) Daniel Bailey, Chase Hall (seated), Napoleon Tucker,
Chris Wren, David Toney, Tony Lowe (seated) and Cornelius Johnson

When quality is your most effective sales tool

What's the secret to growing a successful lawn maintenance company? For Tony Lowe and Chase Hall, owners of Top Notch Lawns in Montgomery, Alabama, the answer is quality. Deliver it, and customers will come. Seems like a simple enough formula, but one that is not that easy to implement when you operate in an extremely competitive marketplace. Not everyone wants quality or wants to pay for it. The key for these owners was to define the right market and then quickly gear up to deliver on expectations.

"I am convinced that providing a quality product has been the key to our success," says Lowe, who spent five years in the military before joining his junior high school buddy in a new business venture. "When we started out, we took on virtually any property we could find, and had no idea we would be as successful as we are today. Our family, though, supported us through some tough times, and we gradually grew and refined our market niche."

Today, Lowe and Hall are proud of their customer portfolio, one that sports a mix of high-end residential and commercial properties as well as

a number of other accounts they maintain through contracts with three real estate companies. All told, the four-year-old company has 162 customers and growth appears unfettered. The partners credit their success to a common goal of striving to deliver the best quality service they can ... every time they pull up to a property.

DO, RETAIN AND GROW

Lowe and Hall can only sit back and smile when they think about the early days, before they were able to quit their jobs and work full-time in the business. They remember how

their power equipment dealer never really took them seriously, or how competitors never noticed them in their rear view mirrors.

"We've tried to maintain a low profile, just working on honing our business and our service," explains Hall, who spent three years in college before deciding on lawn maintenance as a profession. "When we were finally able to officially launch the business, we had 50 customers and a plan. We always thought that by delivering top quality, the company could move up the customer ladder, and find and retain customers who would truly appreciate our work. Today, we have a 95% retention rate and we're growing every day. And we are able to charge a little more for our service because we deliver high quality."

Partner Lowe agrees, adding that crews bend over backwards to make sure properties are as close to being

as perfect as possible before they leave. "If there is one stray leaf on the ground, we will pick it up before we move on," he emphasizes. "Small details like that make a big difference in a customer's perception of how we are doing."

Both Lowe and Hall share the perspective that the customer is king, queen and the entire court. Their crews take empty trash barrels back to the house, respond quickly to requests, and double- or even triple-check to make sure expectations are being met.

"Ideally, we want to improve every property we maintain and we want every property to better us, too."

The company offers a full-service package, and does most, if not all, of the work, including installing and maintaining irrigation systems without using subcontractors. "Too many companies subcontract-out their work and lose control of the end product," adds Hall.

"We tell our customers that we want them for the long-haul and will do what it takes to keep them." For these owners, customers are more than a means to an end; they are an investment in the future.

SYMBIOTIC RELATIONSHIP

"We look at every property from two perspectives," says Hall, "from the customer's point of view and from our vantage point. Ideally, we want to improve every property we maintain and we want every property to better us, too. There is no point to taking on work just for work's sake. We have to make a decent profit on every account, or it pays to let someone else maintain it.

"That's one reason why we purchased our first Walker Mower four years ago," Hall continues. "We wanted a finish mower for our high-end accounts, and we wanted a machine that would lend to our profitability."

From a performance standpoint, Hall says the Walker Mower is the next best thing to a reel mower. "Because it provides the high-quality cut we are looking for, the mower also allows us to get a higher price for our service," Hall adds.

Top Notch has purchased a 20-hp and 26-hp Walker Mower from its dealer, Lewis Lawn Equipment in Montgomery. The units are equipped with 42- and 48-inch GHS decks, respectively. Both are equipped with speed-up kits and feature Walker's Comfort Seat.

"I prefer using the 26-hp model," says Lowe. "The 48-inch deck is ideally suited for our applications, and it is surprising how much more ground you can cover with it compared to the 42-inch deck." Lowe says he is also impressed by the fuel savings the fuel-injection system delivers.

Lowe admits to using the Walkers in extremely tough conditions, not the least of which include using them to clean up debris from the medians of heavily trafficked commercial properties and scalping some of the lawns in mid-summer to help minimize thatch buildup.

Tony Lowe prefers using the 26-hp Walker equipped with the larger deck. Says Lowe, "The 48-inch deck is ideally suited for our applications, and it is surprising how much more ground you can cover with it compared to the 42-inch deck."



Top Notch Lawns purchased its first Walker four years ago to “finish” its high-end properties.

“Small details make a big difference in a customer’s perception of how we are doing.”

The Walkers, he explains, see action nearly year-round. Crews are on full-service accounts once a month in January and February, three times in March, once a week from April through September and bi-weekly from then to the end of the year. “We are not a ‘mow and blow’ company,” Lowe emphasizes. “We want to keep our properties looking neat and clean all year. We want them edged and properly fertilized. We want the trees trimmed, the flower beds looking nice and, of course, the lawn looking lush and green.”

Customers appreciate the company’s attention to detail. “Tony’s work speaks for itself,” says Willie Durant, sales associate for Haverty’s furniture store. “His crews have been maintaining our property for three years. They do a great job and we get plenty of compliments about our landscaping. Tony is dedicated, too. I recall one evening when he was still working on our irrigation system when I left work at 9 p.m. Do I recommend their service? Every moment I can — with high marks.”

Hearing comments like this helps confirm Lowe and Hall’s business strategy: “When you deliver quality, customers will come calling on you.”



Willie Durant, sales associate for Haverty’s furniture store, recommends Top Notch Lawns every moment he can with, in his words, “high marks.”

Four ways to optimize your mower's performance

If you purchased a new mower or two this spring, by now you've had a chance to grade performance. No doubt, some new owners are as pleased as they can be with their purchases. Others may question whether or not they made the right choice.

No matter what brand mower you operate or how old it is, getting the best performance you can from that machine is more involved than "firing it up" and seeing what it will do in the field. Achieving optimal performance from any mower requires matching it to the application, making sure operators are thoroughly trained, and following a regular preventive maintenance schedule.

To ensure optimum performance next year means repeating the above scenario, and doing some off-season inspection and repair, if necessary. With that said, let's see if we can raise the performance and satisfaction level of your mowing equipment.

1 — START WITH APPLICATION

Just as contractors have market niches, mowers have application niches. Mower type (e.g., walk-behind, compact zero-turn or outfront rider), engine type/size and deck configuration/width all help define a machine's capability. In most instances, contractors who work in hilly terrain would be better served by a walk-behind than a riding mower. Conversely, those with more level, expansive turf areas would fare better with a rider. Similarly, heavily landscaped areas need a machine that is maneuverable with plenty of trimming capability — an application for which Walker Mowers have excelled over the years.

To get the best performance from your mower, start by looking at the big picture and envision how your mower will be used. Then, take the matching exercise a step further. Deck size is important, and not just for maximizing cutting width. Wider decks, for example, are more susceptible to scalping in undulating turf than their narrower counterparts. Lighter, smaller decks are more susceptible to bouncing over the turf at higher mowing speeds.

Whereas, there is little justification to buy extra horsepower and never use it, there is all the reason in the world to have adequate power reserves when the job and conditions call for it.

Mowing operators can enhance their mower's performance by matching deck type to the application, too. If property owners prefer that you mulch clippings, equip your mower with a dedicated mulching deck. The same theory applies to collecting and side-discharging clippings. There are several multiple-function decks on the market, but operators generally can't beat a dedicated deck for performance; one that is specifically designed for a given application.

Consider engine size and type, as well. There's nothing more frustrating for a contractor than to purchase a new mower and then discover that it is underpowered for the application. Most manufacturers will give you a

Mower type (e.g., walk-behind, compact zero-turn or outfront rider), engine type/size and deck configuration/width all help define a machine's capability.

range of engine sizes from which to choose. Whereas, there is little justification to buy extra horsepower and never use it, there is all the reason in the world to have adequate power reserves when the job and conditions call for it.

The first step toward optimizing your mower's performance is to select the right mower for the application, and outfit it to get the job done.

2 — TRAIN FOR OPERATOR EFFICIENCY

As with most equipment, there is a "right" and "wrong" way to operate a mower. And there is the most efficient way. In the beginning of the season, show employees how to operate their equipment in a productive and safe manner. Then, as the season wears on, make sure they haven't developed any bad habits. When new employees come on board, make sure they attend an orientation session on mower operation.

Most mower manufacturers offer operator training materials to aid in training, e.g., Walker Manufacturing offers an Operator Training Video with both English and Spanish versions available.

The key to successful training, though, is consistency. Reviewing operating procedures with all employees all season long will help ensure that operators understand how to get the best performance from their equipment. This brings up another important point. Operators who use the same equipment every day get to know a machine's idiosyncrasies, and will have a better opportunity to get top performance from that machine ... every day.

3 — MAINTAIN FOR PERFORMANCE

It is common knowledge that preventive maintenance will reduce downtime. It will also help enhance the performance of your mower. Something as simple as checking tire

pressure and blade height will help ensure that your mower delivers an even cut.

Preventive maintenance practices fall into two categories: daily maintenance and interval service. Every day, for example, you should clean your mower deck housing and remove clippings and leaves from belt areas, air intakes and engine shrouds. You should also check the air cleaner for dirt buildup, engine oil level, and the function of all safety switches and operator controls. Listen for any abnormal noises, and simply give your mower a "once over" to tighten any loose parts.

Preventive maintenance will reduce downtime and it will also help enhance mower performance.

Your Operator's Manual will spell out mower interval service requirements. Following its guidelines is one of the easiest ways to help ensure that you will continue to receive top performance from your mower. Among "things to do," your manual will explain when to change engine oil and filter, air filter, spark plugs and transmission oil. It will also offer guidelines for cleaning components and making adjustments.

4 — INSPECT AND CLEAN FOR NEXT YEAR

The season is far from over. Storing your equipment is probably the last thing on your mind. But what you do after the last leaf is picked up this fall will help determine your mower's level of performance next spring.


Just as a rule of thumb, all mowers should be thoroughly cleaned, preferably with a pressure washer, to remove grass; this is important for more than aesthetics. Grass leaves behind an acid that eats away at the deck and

deck parts. After washing, lubricate all grease fittings. Change the engine oil and filter, and drain the fuel tank and refill with fuel that has been mixed properly with a fuel stabilizer. After adding new oil and fuel, run the engine for a few minutes.

Engines that are unused for long periods of time can seize or "stick" if not stored away properly. Refer to the engine manufacturers' instructions to prepare the engine for storage (if unused for two months or more). Don't forget the battery. Make sure to remove it and clean the cable ends. Charge the battery before storing it in a dry, warm place.

With air-cooled engines, it is important to pull the engine out of the machine, remove cooling shrouds and thoroughly clean the cooling system. Likewise, the radiator and cooling fan on water-cooled models should be completely inspected and cleaned.

If this seems like a lot of work, find out if your dealer offers an off-season maintenance and inspection program. For a pre-established price, most will inspect your equipment and ready it for storage and the next season. The process identifies any problems that may be on the horizon, gives the contractor the opportunity to have it fixed before next spring, and ensures that the mower will run at peak performance when it is called into duty.

Match, train, prevent and inspect — four ways to get the best performance out of your mowing equipment. It all starts at the beginning, however. You have to make the right buying decision for your operation. If you've purchased the wrong mower for the application, it will never live up to your expectations no matter how fastidious you are about training employees, changing the oil and preparing it for next spring. 

There's nothing 'part-time' about this job

Small start ends up big for Texas contractor.



Walker owner Robert Lodge says he can't say enough good things about his Walkers, adding, "They have made my business what it is today."



Robert Lodge wasn't in the lawn maintenance business nine years ago when a neighbor asked Lodge to mow his front lawn. Lodge worked full-time in the sheriff's department. Yet, he mowed the front lawn as requested, and, as he walked away, the neighbor asked him to mow the back yard, too.

Lodge obliged, but refused the check handed to him. After all, he was just being neighborly. The neighbor, however, wouldn't take no for an answer, and forced him to take the check, one that Lodge later ripped up.

A few weeks later, Lodge mowed the same lawn again. This time, the neighbor presented him with hard, cold cash and said, "Rip this up and both you and I are out \$20." That was the inauspicious beginning of Quality Lawn Care in Amarillo, Texas.

Lodge's neighbor recommended him to another neighbor who recommended him to her mother, etc. Before Lodge knew it, he was working two jobs — and enjoying it. Today, he still has two jobs. Instead of working in the sheriff's office though, he works for the Department of Energy. Instead of a few lawns, he mows and maintains 125 residential accounts and seven commercial accounts. He does it with two full-time and two-part-time employees, along with two Walker Mowers.

Looking back, Lodge just shakes his head. "You've heard the story before," he relates. "I started out with a cheap push mower and string trimmer, a push broom and a trash can — all in the back of a half-ton pickup truck. But I liked what I was doing and people kept on calling."

A year and a half after buying his first Walker, Lodge's business had more than tripled in size.

Lodge worked this way for years, eventually graduating into a couple of 21-inch commercial-grade walk-behind mowers and a rear-engine commercial rider. "I walk by that rider today and just laugh," he says. "It was commercial in name only, and is no comparison to the two Walker Mowers I have today."

It took Lodge seven years to buy his first Walker. At the time, he had built up his business to include one commercial account and 35 residential properties. "I walked into Profits, my local dealer, looking for some oil and trimmer line," he recalls. "My dealer asked me if I was ready. I responded, 'Ready for what?' He replied, 'Are you ready to buy your first Walker?' The dealer had a spe-

cial program running at the time — nine months same as cash. I bought the mower on the last day of the special, on October 31. Within two months I added two commercial accounts and 15 residential customers, mostly for fall cleanup work. Within four to five months, I had the Walker paid for."

Lodge purchased his second Walker last year. Altogether then, a year and a half after buying his first Walker, Lodge's business had more than tripled in size.

As he explains, the decision to pay as much for a mower as he would a nice used car was not an easy one. His wife Cheryl agrees. "I'm not easily impressed, especially with lawn mowers. When Robert told me he was going to buy a Walker, I just couldn't comprehend why he wanted to spend so much money for a mower. Now, I understand."

With those push mowers, Lodge says he used to come home exhausted. Now, with the Walkers, he has more energy, enough energy to work four days on, four days off for the Department of Energy and to grow his business at the same time. "What do I think of Walker Mowers?" he asks with a smile. "I can't say enough good things about them. They have made my business what it is today."



WORK ETHIC

This entrepreneur would rather give more credit to his Walker Mowers and their 42-inch GHS decks than to himself for growing his business. As the saying goes, however, “It takes two to tango.” And Lodge can dance with the best of them. When not working for the DOE and mowing lawns, he either operates his “Music Man” DJ service for area weddings and special events or spends time adding to his sizeable baseball card and sports memorabilia collection.

“Why do I spend so much time working?” he asks. “That’s easy. Cheryl and I have dreams for us and our three daughters.” Cheryl works alongside her husband, helping out on the business end of things and holding down her own job. She recently took some time off to raise their youngest daughter, but is now back at work.

“Rip this up and both you and I are out \$20.”

For the Lodge family, the Walker Mowers are a means to an end, helping them work smarter instead of harder to reach their goals. Over the years, Lodge has learned some other “tricks of the trade.” For example, signing up commercial accounts to 12-month contracts gives him year-round cash flow. This, in combination with his company’s seasonal decorating service, keeps full-timers employed all year.

In addition, he is vigilant about taking advantage of operating efficiencies, including keeping his routes tight to reduce “windshield time.” Lodge explains, “When a new customer calls, I look at my schedule to see when a crew will be in the area, and then encourage that customer to allow us to come by that day. If the customer cannot accommodate us, we will charge an extra \$10 to \$15 for the stop. But nine times out of ten, the surcharge will bring the customer in line.”

Robert Lodge (right) with partner Tully Latham. Working opposite shifts at the DOE allows them to share lawn maintenance duties.



Large commercial properties and tightly maintained residential properties make up Quality Lawn Care's customer mix. Lodge says he is not concerned about growth; he will just add another Walker or two.

Little efficiencies pay off over time, he emphasizes. So, too, will incentives like the ones he gives customers for referrals. For every "lasting" referral, Lodge takes \$20 off a customer's monthly invoice. If every customer gives just one referral a year, Lodge would double the size of his business.

How does this contractor feel about growth? "I am not worried about growing too fast," he says. "Not yet, anyway. I'll just add another Walker or two."

Ultimately, he says he wants to grow, but not so much that it

"I just couldn't comprehend why he wanted to spend so much money for a mower. Now, I understand."

jeopardizes his close relationship with customers. In the meantime, he is preparing for more work by bringing a partner, Tully Latham, on board. Latham works at the DOE with Lodge. Working opposite shifts will allow them to share lawn maintenance duties.

"I am truly excited about our lawn maintenance business and its long-term potential," says Lodge. "We field phone calls every day. We have an excellent team. And we have top-of-the-line equipment. Ideally, I would like to have enough work to have five Walker Mowers and two crews. Each crew would have two Walker Mowers and one would be a spare."

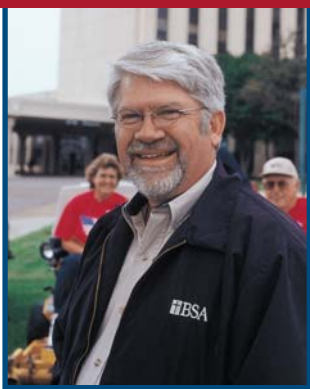
That ideal isn't too far off, he adds. Following close behind is turning a dream or two into reality.



Hospital extends caring hand to its plants, too

"Walker is our secret weapon"





Stuart Hughes says when he interviewed for his position, the hospital already had the best equipment available to get the job done.

The Baptist St. Anthony's (BSA) Hospital in Amarillo, Texas, is consistently mentioned among the top health care facilities in the country. The hospital has nearly 500 beds and offers full-service health care to patients in and around the metropolitan area, living up to its billing as "A Great Place for Patients."

Landscaping/fleet manager Stuart Hughes likes to think of the hospital grounds as a great place for plants, too. His team of five people extends a caring hand to 14.5 acres of irrigated landscape at the main hospital and six other health care locations throughout the city.

"Having or not having a Walker Mower is the dividing line between being or not being a serious lawn maintenance professional."

In health care vernacular, Hughes and his team would be called general practitioners. In addition to mowing and maintaining the turf, his group is responsible for daily grounds cleanup, installing annual color, maintaining the irrigation system, removing snow, changing hospital signage, and servicing a fleet comprised of 40 vehicles and 100 pieces of outdoor power equipment.

"We accomplish a great deal with a relatively small number of people," says Hughes, who has been with the hospital since 1991. "Four to five acres of the grounds require top-level maintenance on par with four-star hotels. We mow weekly, 37 weeks out of the year, and not a month goes by that we don't have one of our Walker Mowers doing something on the property."

According to Hughes, the hospital was one of the first Walker users in the area. In fact, when he arrived in 1991, two Walker Mowers, an '85 unit and an '87, already roamed the grounds. "Except for the hospital, nobody knew what they were back then," Hughes emphasizes. "Today in Amarillo, having or not having a Walker Mower is the dividing line between being or not being a serious lawn maintenance professional."

The hospital operates four Walkers, including the '87 model that has long since been converted from chain drive. Each has two 42-inch decks, a mulching deck and a GHS deck. "We mulch probably 85% of the time," Hughes relates. "Doing so reflects our commitment to environmentally friendly landscaping practices that, among other things, puts an emphasis on IPM (integrated pest management) and common-sense fertilizing. We don't want to throw down a lot of fertilizer and water. Instead, we try to take advantage of the micro nutrients that grass clippings give back to the soil. Using a mulching deck also saves us



BSA has 14.5 acres of turf under irrigation, four to five of which require four-star maintenance.

time." He emphasizes the word "time."

"Roughly 40% of our effort every day goes into some aspect of trash pickup. There is a trash run every morning, and parking lots, both surface lots and underground structures, need to be cleaned routinely. We're not sure how many shrubs there are on the property, but we have more than 1,000 trees, both of which require trimming and pruning. We also install 130 or so flats of annual color each year."

Despite the number of acres the maintenance crew oversees, it spends



Troy Anders customized the shop's vehicle hoist to accommodate Walker Mowers.

only 25% of its time on the Walkers. "With that in mind," says Hughes, "you can understand why I call these mowers my secret weapon. In fact, the mowers save us so much time that we can interact a bit more with our visitors and patients."

RIBS AND MORE

Hughes was raised in his family's high-end furniture business, and later purchased and operated a restaurant-like retail outlet that cooked ribs for grocery store patrons. He operated that business for eight years prior to joining the hospital. All along he was mowing lawns, too, and always had a desire to work outdoors.

"When I interviewed for this position, I found that the hospital had already stepped up to the plate and operated the best equipment available to get the job done," Hughes recalls. "That kind of commitment from management was encouraging."

Still, he adds, maintaining a large hospital has its challenges. The biggest one, of course, is working around a constant influx of people and cars. To lessen its impact on patients, visitors and doctors, Hughes' staff generally works from 6 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. daily. There are exceptions to the rule, including a 2 a.m. parking lot cleaning shift

through which employees rotate.

The hospital also has a variety of terrain and mowing conditions. Despite Amarillo's relatively flat topography, the main hospital features a 50-foot drop in elevation from the front of the property to the back. Sandwiched in between are some steep inclines and undulations that give Walker operators an appreciation for the machine's low center of gravity. Landscaped parking lot islands also test the mower's maneuverability.

Maintaining the hospital's fleet poses another major challenge, one that Hughes shares with fleet mechanic Troy Anders. Out of curiosity, Hughes calculated the average age of the hospital's fleet and was surprised to learn the average vehicle age was 9.75 years.

He suspects the Walker Mowers would fall somewhere in that age bracket, too. "The age of the vehicles and outdoor power equipment, and the fact everything runs so well, is a testimonial to the type of equipment the hospital runs and the level of maintenance Troy delivers on a routine basis," he emphasizes. "A case in point is our '87 Walker that has more than 4,000 hours on it. The next oldest Walker, the '91 model, has logged more than 3,000 hours."

To facilitate servicing the Walkers, Troy customized the hospital's vehi-

cle lift system. A flip of the switch allows the service technician to work on his Walker Mower at eye level.

Having someone with Troy's expertise is more the norm than the exception at BSA, adds Hughes. The hospital operates its own cabinet shop, does most of its own finish carpentry work, and overall maintains a high degree of self-sufficiency.

The grounds department has a high level of expertise, too. Lead maintenance person Teri Richardson, for example, is a master gardener. Troy Main, who has worked for the hospital for 15 years, is the irrigation specialist. His crew mates also refer to him as "straight-line" Troy because he is overly fastidious about making sure mowing lines are straight.

"BSA is a great place for patients. It is our job to make it a great place for plants, too."

The expertise and the equipment give the landscaping department the ability to provide a high level of service to its primary care customer, the hospital, Hughes re-emphasizes. "Again, our goal is to keep the grounds looking great, while at the same time practicing good stewardship of our environment. In addition to mulching, practicing IPM and being conservative with our fertilizing, we also use native grasses where we can to save on water."

He continues, "BSA is a great place for patients. It is our job to make it a great place for plants, too."





BOB T'S

Tech Talk

A technical relationship

Before you flip the page, please read a bit further. This is not a lesson in “Psychology 101” and hopefully you won’t think I’ve gone psycho. A healthy relationship between you (the customer) and your dealer could be compared to marriage. The stronger the relationship, the happier the individuals. My wife and I went to a marriage conference that promoted the idea that a marriage relationship is not 50/50, but rather, it’s 100/100. I had to think about that before I really understood what they meant. I have come to believe that the same is true for most relationships.

It’s easy to understand the importance of a good relationship with the sales personnel at your local dealership (ref: *Walker Talk* Vol. 15 “What to Expect from Your Dealer”). Who would you rather deal with: a friend or a stranger? When it comes to service for your Walker Mower, many of the same rules apply. I’d like to suggest that you apply the following steps to build a strong “Technical Relationship.”

Whether you already own a Walker or you’re considering buying one, make a point to meet the Service Manager, Walker Technician, Parts Manager and Parts Counter personnel. These are the people that will be working on your mower, and a certain level of trust is very beneficial. Even if you plan to do your own service, there will come a time when you will need their help.

Human nature dictates that people will usually go the extra mile for a friend first. Maybe that’s not the way it should be, but that’s the way it usually works. Here’s an example. A belt breaks while mowing. You can’t find your Parts Manual, or maybe it’s back at the office. You rush to the dealer and frantically try to describe the location of said belt to — your friend or a stranger. Now, a stranger may have little empathy. But a friend will calmly walk you through the process to get you the right belt. He then will give you a few tips on installation and any adjustments that may be affected.

When it comes to needing a repair to your mower, the Service Manager and Technician can be your greatest

allies. They will partner with you to get you back up and running so you can get on with your work and making a living. Depending on what the problem is, there may need to be a substantial amount of dialog between the three of you to know where to look for the cause.

Again, discussing the situation that led up to the failure can be very helpful. What were the mowing conditions? Did you hear any unusual sounds or feel any unusual vibrations? Did any warning lights or horns come on?

Good friends will freely communicate with each other. One of the hardest things to tell someone is “I think you were misusing, abusing or expecting more than the machine is capable of delivering.” The truth is: It happens. Good friends can openly discuss those matters without feeling threatened.

As you can readily see, communication is the biggest factor here. That’s where the 50/50 vs. 100/100 rule comes into play. Meeting half way with each other will most likely have half the results. But each of you giving 100% will resolve the situation quickly and painlessly.

One of the hardest things I deal with in Customer Service is a negative attitude. A negative attitude can come from either the dealer or customer. I’ve dealt with both. “The customer is being totally unreasonable. We are swamped and he wants it yesterday.” Or ... “The dealer doesn’t understand my situation. If I don’t cut grass, I’m losing money and customers.”

Obviously there needs to be some give and take from both directions (I purposely did not use the word “sides.” We are all on the same side). Whether it’s a friendship, marriage relationship or business relationship, if it is going to be healthy and thrive, it will require work on everyone’s part. I can guarantee you that the effort will have its rewards.

There you go — a counseling session that didn’t cost \$150 per hour. **WT**

Like son, like father

Freddie and Clifford Adkins are not your typical Walker users. Freddie is a technician for Kentucky Fish & Wildlife. He also raises beef cattle, and, for extra income, mows a few lawns in his hometown of Sacramento, Kentucky. His father Clifford raises cattle, too. When not

“By simply moving two fingers, I can virtually mow anywhere.”

tending to a small herd on land that adjoins his son’s property, he is mowing his substantial home lawn and maintaining four duplexes.

Ten years ago, Freddie purchased his first Walker Mower, a 20-hp unit with a 48-inch GHS deck. Two years later, his father followed suit, purchasing nearly the identical model,



Freddie (left) and Clifford Adkins don't put the kind of hours on their Walkers that lawn maintenance professionals do, yet father and son are still impressed with the mower's durability. Says Clifford, "I tell people around town that if they want a good mower that will last, the Walker is the one to buy."

only two years newer. This year, father and son traded in their Walkers for new models.

"I saw my first Walker Mower at the farm machinery show in Louisville," Freddie remembers. "At the time I was mowing my church's property, a cemetery and a couple of other properties around town. I was using a 1650 Cub Cadet with a belly mower and wanted a machine that would be more maneuverable. The 48-inch deck is ideal for my properties and the GHS system works like a breeze collecting leaves in the fall."

Freddie and Clifford say they are even happier with their new Walkers, due to their increased capacity for holding debris and leaves, and lower-profile tires.

SLEEPY TOWN

Sacramento is located about 60 miles southeast of Evansville, Indiana. The small community was the scene of the state's largest cavalry battle during the civil war, an event that is reenacted every May.

"The reenactment is quite an event," explains Clifford. "Last year I would guess the town's population swelled by more than 5,000 as people from all over the country came to either participate in or watch the weekend battle reenactment."

For both Clifford and Freddie, however, there is little time in May to revisit the past. In fact, the day *Walker Talk* visited, the Adkins father and son team was putting up hay for their cattle. And before the day was done, Freddie was going to jump on his mower and dispatch a few lawns. In between, they took a break to share their mowing experiences.

"I mow about 10 acres a week," Freddie relates, "including that first church I mowed, two cemeteries and

a few other properties around town. It seems there is always somebody who wants me to mow, and if I had more help, I would take them up on it."

This Walker user says he puts only about 125 hours on his mower annually, but still has enough contract work to more than pay for his mower. The one problem he says he has is that his wife, Marilyn, spends more time on the mower than he does. "She just loves operating the Walker," Freddie says.

Clifford's wife, Donna, likes to mow, too, in between tending to her colorful flower beds that ring the couple's house. For years, she ran a hardware store in Sacramento and it was her idea to invest in duplexes for their retirement. That's where the Walker comes in handy, says Clifford, a former electrical contractor.

"When they (cattle) hear the Walker running, they start bawling in anticipation of some fresh cut grass."

"This is the easiest lawn mower I have ever operated," he explains. "By simply moving my two fingers, I can virtually mow anywhere. I tell people around town, if they want a good mower that will last, the Walker is the one to buy."

Granted, neither Clifford nor Freddie make the Walker jump through the hoops that lawn maintenance professionals do. Their two original Walkers only had 1,500 hours between them before they traded them for newer ones. Still, the owners are impressed with the



Freddie saw his first Walker Mower at a farm machinery show in Louisville.

machine's durability. "Even the cattle like the mowers," says Freddie. "When they hear the Walker running, they start bawling in anticipation of some fresh cut grass."

Whether they're mowing lawns or cutting hay, the Adkins family is working to keep their animals in feed. At a market price for cattle of around \$1 per pound, it pays to satisfy their appetites. Their Walker Mowers, on the other hand, have plenty of appetite left over for more grass. When you are working three jobs and help is in short supply, there's only so much time left over in a day to mow.

With that, both Freddie and Clifford look to the sky to see if predicted rain clouds are finally appearing. "A tornado touched down just a ways outside of town last week," Clifford relates. "The weather here can be kind of unpredictable." All the more reason, he adds, to make hay and mow lawns while the sun shines.



Walker Mower Sales Steady

Shipments from the Walker Factory in 2003 are keeping pace with last year. From Walker management's perspective, this is an acceptable level of business considering economy, weather and overall industry performance.

According to the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's (OPEI) statistics, in 2002 total industry shipments of commercial riding mowers dipped 1% and are forecast to increase 9% (perhaps optimistically) in 2003. While some companies are managed for growth as a top priority, Walker puts independence, sound financial practice and taking care of customers ahead of growth. As company president, Bob Walker puts it: "We want to grow, but we want to grow on a sound basis that comes from doing everything else right — where growth is the outcome and not the primary objective."



Representatives of the top Walker dealers in Sweden and Walker Europe Factory Representatives (Walker EU) visit the factory on March 10-11, 2003.

RECALL BULLETINS

Three recall bulletins, issued June 2003, are of particular concern to Walker Mower owners. All owners of affected units are encouraged to have their machines inspected and updated free of charge by contacting their local Walker dealer (contact the factory if there is difficulty finding your dealer). The following units are affected:

- Bulletin #03156: Model MTL, S/N 02-60026 thru 03-63498 (also earlier units with P/N 8013-8 Muffler Upgrade installed), replace defective muffler.
- Bulletin #03163: Model PA6685 (Aerator attachment), S/N 03-0001 thru 03-0264, install upgrade kit.
- Bulletin #03171: All tractors S/N 03-61497 thru 03-65129, all decks S/N DX-75404 thru DX-79859, check and replace "Danger" decals.

WALKER 2004 CALENDAR IN WORKS

A 2004 calendar is being produced for Walker customers and enthusiasts. Titled "Beautiful Places 2004", scenic photographs by commercial photographers are being collected from across the country. All of the places are actual properties maintained by a Walker Mower, but the Walker is a small element of the photo, and the beautiful place is featured. The calendar will be available at Walker dealers late this fall.

EXPO2003
INTERNATIONAL LAWN, GARDEN & POWER EQUIPMENT EXPOSITION

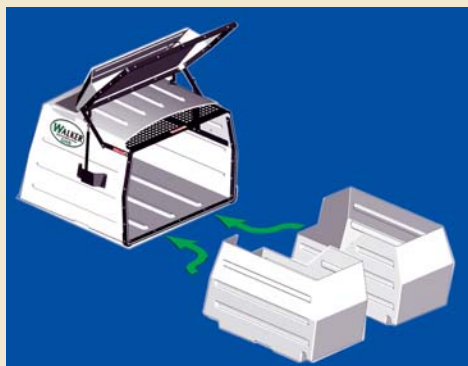
NEW DATES FOR LOUISVILLE SHOW

After 19 years of showing in July, the Power Equipment EXPO at Louisville has changed the show dates to October 18-20, 2003. Walker Manufacturing has faithfully exhibited at the show since the first year and is planning to exhibit again in October.

Show management made the date change based on surveys that showed attendees had a strong preference for a fall show rather than July. Walker supports this change and believes the fall date will be a better time for showing new product introductions. Also, the weather should be more comfortable in the outdoor demonstration area. For more information on the show or to register to attend, go to www.expo.mow.org or call (800) 558-8767.

QUICK-CHANGE SULKY FOR MODEL W

A stand-on sulky has been developed for the Walker by Walker. A unique fold-up design allows the sulky to be used in two configurations. For walk-behind use, the sulky is retracted. Then by changing one wing nut (no tools required), the sulky extends and the foot platform drops down for riding operation. The spread axle with dual caster wheels tracking behind the drive wheels provides a nice, stable riding platform for the operator. The sulky will be a dealer or customer bolt-on option, replacing the single tail wheel on the standard model. Order number is SA9500.



DUMP BOXES FOR 9.5 CATCHER

Design work has been completed and plastic molds are being constructed to produce a set of slide-in dump boxes for the 9.5-bushel grass catcher. Available later this year, the two boxes will divide the weight in half for operators who are moving clippings from the grass catcher into another disposal container (truck, trailer, dumpster). The dump boxes will be made of the same durable polyethylene material as the grass catcher, and are designed to fit tightly into the catcher with minimum lost capacity. The dump boxes will be a dealer-supplied accessory item.

WALKER REAR AXLE OPTION

An optional kit is being developed for Model MD/MT to spread the tail wheels apart in a "wide" axle configuration. The standard tail wheel fork is replaced by the bolt-on axle assembly. Advantages offered by the wide stance include tail wheels tracking behind drive wheels, eliminating the middle tail wheel track and a little smoother ride. On the flip side, the center-line tail wheel will be maintained as the standard configuration, because it offers superior maneuverability for



close-in work and trimming: (not having interference from tail wheels on the outside corners when maneuvering in tight areas). Kit P/N 7420-3 will be available in the fall.



DECK HEIGHT ADJUSTER

Single-lever cutting height adjustment is now available for 42", 48", 52" and 62" decks by installing the Stevens Deck Height Adjuster Kit (Note: Stevens is the Walker distributor in New Zealand and also does engineering development work). This mechanism replaces the four deck height hitch pins and allows the operator to make on-the-go height adjustments from the operator seat.