

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR 28 YEARS TO COME

It's how one defines wealth that counts

- Former teacher puts his landscape company on track
- New Mexico contractor is growing with purpose
- Walker Family Reunion 2 Preview
- Landscape promotes wellness and health in Fresno



VOL. 37

WALKER TALK

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Getting The Family Together



When we entered the lawn mower business 28 years ago, it was not our strategy or grand plan to create a Walker Mower family. And yet with our approach to business (family style) and with the drive to be most interested in people and relationships, a family has been formed.

The Walker Mower, as a product, has become the medium for bringing together a wonderful group of people, literally from around the world. To us, all of the people who have a connection to the Walker Mower are “in” the family; the family includes suppliers, factory employees, distributors, dealers and end-customers who buy and use the Walker Mower.

Since the beginning, as we have traveled and met people associated with the Walker Mower, we began to see a special camaraderie among Walker people. For example, I have attended some dealer open house events where Walker owners who were competitors in the lawn maintenance business were having a good time talking, joking and swapping stories, and it seemed to be happening, at least in part, because they were drawn together by the Walker Mower (just like Harley-Davidson drivers are drawn together). Imagine the fun and fellowship of meeting people from California to New York, Europeans, Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders ... all who are your “relatives” in the Walker family.

Seeing all of this, we began to dream about bringing the family together to celebrate producing the 50,000th mower in August 2000; it was natural to call the event the “Walker Family Reunion”. Around 1,900 family members came to the factory and we had a great time. If you are wondering what you missed, ask someone who was there or take a look at the reunion section on www.walkermowers.com.

Now we are planning “Family Reunion 2” to be held August 1-2, 2008 when the 100,000th Walker rolls off the line. While we will never be able to duplicate the experience of the first reunion, we have been working since early 2007 to plan for the next celebration, planning to make it an unforgettable time for all who come. Many of you who are faithful readers of *Walker Talk* should plan to come. We announced the date early so you could get it on your calendar, and personal plans could be made. I want to give you my personal invitation; I want to shake your hand as you walk in the gate and say, “Welcome to the family reunion” and “Thank you for your part in the Walker Mower story”. 



Bob Walker
President



Tony Sposato was a teacher and coach before starting his lawn maintenance business.

A Company on Track

From 1993 to 1996, Tony Sposato taught health and physical education at a junior high school where he also coached three sports. In the summer of '96, he traded in his whistle and blackboard for a full-time ride on his Walker Mower. Eleven years later, he finds himself running a multimillion dollar company that employs more than 150

people during the busy season.

His mower numbers have grown, too. Today, his primarily two-man crews operate 30 Walker Mowers, 14 Wright Standers and 10 Exmark riding mowers. The former coach grew his young business the old fashioned way: by hiring good people and providing excellent customer service. It also helped to be located in a growing resort area

where property owners were hungry for a little tender loving care. Sposato was more than willing to deliver.

He started mowing lawns in 1992, shortly after graduating with a degree in health education from Salisbury University on Maryland's Eastern Shore. Unlike other "part-timers" who mowed to supplement full-time jobs, Sposato turned the tables and realized



Director of operations, Mark Paine, says a company has to be big on efficiencies, especially when 10 mowing crews need to be out the door by 7:05 a.m.

there was more opportunity in mowing lawns than in teaching.

He purchased his first Walker in 1995. A year later it was off to the proverbial races with his new business. Mowing led to installation work, which soon led to irrigation accounts and a lawn care division. Today Sposato Landscape is a full-service landscape management, design/build company, with maintenance (both commercial and residential) accounting for nearly 80 percent of its annual revenue.

MOWING NICHE

“We have a niche for our Walker Mowers,” Sposato relates. “New developments, including golf course communities, all want their entrances to look nice. They want clippings collected and a manicured cut. Only two of our Walker Mowers are equipped with a side-discharge deck; the rest have 48-inch GHS decks and are powered by 26-hp Kohler engines. We don’t trade in our Walkers. Our intent is to keep them running as long as we can. In fact, we still have the first Walker Mower that we purchased.”

Fleet maintenance manager Jim Leidner credits the mower’s longevity to routine maintenance and what he



Mower operators simply back up a ramp to dump clippings.

calls a “winter freshen up” campaign. “Every winter, the fluids get drained and the engines yanked out of the chassis,” Leidner explains. “We clean the engines and under the flywheels. We also give the engines a compression check. If they meet specifications, we reinstall them and ‘mothball’ the mower until spring. Our goal is to get 2,500 to 3,000 hours out of every engine before replacing it.”

Sposato adds, “The Walker is not an inexpensive mower, but it is reliable, has a nice cut, and is the best bagging unit on the market. I know, because we’ve demo’d them all. Each crew usually operates with two Walker Mowers. Over the years, we’ve found this arrangement to be efficient for most properties. Our trailers are configured so operators simply back up a ramp and dump the clippings.”

Unlike some companies that require their mowing crews to prune and deliver other detail maintenance services, Sposato’s mowing crews mow and trim only. Follow-up crews provide pruning, weeding and other detail services.

GROWTH SPURT

Sposato Landscape is headquartered in Milton, Delaware, only a few miles

from Rehoboth Beach and several other resort communities. Its \$10 million annual book of business is divided among the Milton location and two other sites: an Ocean View satellite office and a direct-report crew at Sea Colony Resort. “In Milton, we operate 10 mowing crews that are out the door by 7:05 a.m.,” explains Mark Paine, director of operations. “We’re big on efficiencies, because you have to be when so many crews are involved.”

Paine came to work for Sposato two years ago. At the time, the company operated 48 trucks. Today it has 73. “Knowing how to grow successfully is no secret,” Paine says. “It’s all about providing excellent customer service and training and retaining good employees. We’re also big on image. Trucks are rinsed daily and washed with soap weekly. We supply crew members with uniforms furnished and cleaned by a service company.

“Standardizing equipment and procedures is important for any size company, but it becomes even more important when other locations become part of the mix,” Paine continues. “We have many of the same reporting systems in place here and at Ocean View. Both locations employ the same type



Delaware's resort areas provide opportunity for growth.

of equipment, too, including cab-over trucks for maintenance crews and Toyota pickups for managers.”

Having been a teacher and coach, Sposato is big on teamwork, along with fostering camaraderie and friendly competition. Crews that get out on time in the morning receive a green dot after their name on the control board. Those that are tardy get a red dot. “Little things like this make a difference,” says Sposato.

Events such as the monthly “burger night” gatherings show appreciation for employees and their hard work. Throughout the year, A-plus work is rewarded when employees receive notes of encouragement or praise with their paychecks. The other half of the note goes into a drawing that is

held on burger night. Winners receive phone cards, lunch boxes, cameras and other gifts.

An “employee of the month” receives a gift certificate to a retail store. An annual fall awards banquet honors Charlie Hustle, Iron Man, Rookie of the Year and Employee of the Year award winners. Once a year the company hosts a field day/pig roast, the highlight of which is a soccer tournament. Managers and supervisors also attend an annual retreat. This year, they will meet off campus in Washington D.C. and listen to keynote speaker and green industry consultant Jack Mattingly.

“Everyone in this business wants to grow,” says Sposato. As he explains, running a successful business is not



Twenty-eight of 30 Walker Mowers are equipped with 48-inch GHS decks.

unlike coaching a winning team. Both require a winning attitude, the right players, excellent training, good equipment and competitive instincts. **WT**

“Until I find a better job”

When I broke away and started my own business again, I began to diversify my service offering, and it didn't take me long to purchase my first Walker Mower.”



Mel and Nancy Taylor team up to maintain 150 commercial and residential sites.

Mel Taylor, owner of Mel's Lawn Maintenance in Las Cruces, New Mexico, started mowing lawns part-time in 1984. At the time, he committed to this work until he found a better job. Twenty-three years later, he hasn't found that elusive something that will give him as much pleasure and freedom as running his own business.

With wife Nancy and five children, Taylor lives in a subdivision just outside the Las Cruces city line. The front yard features a beautiful waterfall and pond the couple built last year. They have at least two cats that keep desert critters at bay, while five dogs share a large pen where Ranger, a herding dog, keeps his canine pals confined to a center location. Further back, a 30' x 60' shop houses three trailers and functions as headquarters for a thriving lawn maintenance operation.

"I started mowing lawns in the early '80s with an electric mower and electric string-line trimmer," Taylor recalls. "I burned out both of those units within a week."

After replacing them with more durable gas-powered equipment, he embarked on what was to be a 10-year period of working summers and struggling to make a living during the short New Mexico off-season. Eventually tiring of the cycle, Taylor merged with another contractor in 1994, only to spend the next two years longing for the days when he was calling his own shots.

"Don't get me wrong," he says with a smile. "I learned an awful lot during those two years. The company worked year-round, doing cleanups and small landscaping projects in the winter. It also owned a used Walker Mower, which came in handy for the smaller residential properties. When I broke away and started my own business again, I began to diversify my service offering, and it didn't take me long to purchase my first Walker Mower."

SECOND TIME AROUND

Over the next several years, the now seasoned owner grew his business with



The 36-inch deck is ideal for close quarters, but Mel plans to purchase a wider deck for long stretches of turf.





The Mel's Lawn Maintenance team. Year-round accounts keep veteran employees busy during the slower months.

a purpose. He restructured his service menu by offering year-round maintenance contracts. The move was especially attractive to smaller commercial properties, but many of his homeowner customers also took him up on the offer to keep their properties looking neat and clean all year long.

Taylor also became a licensed applicator which allowed him to kill weeds and use other control products. As Taylor and his crews visited up to 15 properties daily, his business partner and wife, Nancy, helped him with bookkeeping, worked on small landscape and enhancement projects, and changed out seasonal color for customers.

Walker Mowers became part of the equation when Taylor purchased the first of three 20-hp units in 1998, each equipped with a 36-inch GHS deck. "Honestly, I purchased a Walker Mower because it was the only zero-turn rider I could find that had the smaller deck, which is important for getting through gates," Taylor explains. "I didn't want to be one of those operators who purchased a big mower, only to have it sitting on the trailer because it couldn't be used on smaller proper-

ties." Later, he notes that the mower's maneuverability, not to mention the fact that it tripled his output, led to the purchase of two more. He's also thinking seriously about getting a larger deck for a couple of properties with long stretches of turf.

Mel's Lawn Maintenance puts all three mowers to good use these days. His three crews maintain 150 commercial and residential sites in and around Las Cruces. In addition to the Walker Mowers, trailers are equipped with Stihl and Echo handheld products, along with Snapper 21-inch mowers for those especially small patches of turf.

"That's one of the slightly disturbing trends in this part of the country," Taylor admits. "In an attempt to conserve water, some property owners are changing out their turf for a more natural landscape, while new landscape construction often has a native look, too. I understand their motive, and it's always best to be proactive when it comes to water."

Nancy adds, "To be successful in this business, you have to be ready to change with the times. Our company has to be prepared to go where the

market is going. Currently, we're thinking about doing more hardscaping. Mel and I both enjoy these types of projects, and it only took us a few days to construct our small waterfall and pond. Still, maintenance will always be part of our operation."

Her husband agrees. "Even though installing landscapes can be much more lucrative, maintenance is predictable, and it keeps a constant revenue flow coming in. Mowing lawns also gives us an entry for providing other services. Nancy and I want to be a little cautious about growth. I think we're just about the right size. We would rather grow our service offering to current customers than overextend ourselves. You know, being big doesn't always translate into being more profitable."

Taylor continues, "When you think about it, mowing and landscaping is a luxury for most people. Because of that, it's difficult to raise prices. Instead, we have to find ways to be more efficient, give more than we promise and be consistent."

Taylor says the Las Cruces market is competitive with smaller startup companies always taking a piece of the pie. He admits to being there once, too. He calls it starting at the bottom and working his way up. He's learned the ropes, though. The year-round accounts keep the money coming in and give veteran employees something to do during the slower months.

Taylor glances upward. "The leaves are a little late this year, but they will be falling soon," he observes. "We mulch them and then pick them up with the Walker Mowers. Then, it's only a couple of months of pruning, doing cleanups and finishing a few landscape projects before spring."

Taylor's phone rings ... it's one of his competitors. After he ends the conversation, Taylor explains that he and Nancy get along well with the competition. They often talk and even have lunch from time to time. Unusual? Maybe. But it's something they'll continue to do until they find a better job. Mel and Nancy stopped looking years ago. **WT**

BOB T'S TECH talk



Why You Should Be There

Why should you be where? The Walker Family Reunion 2. I could go on and on about all the activities and entertainment, but you can read about that on pages 10-11. The next question, and a fair one at that, is, "What's the point of writing about the Family Reunion 2 in Tech Talk?"

I believe there are some very good, and often overlooked, technical benefits to investing the time and money to attend. Let me list them so you can decide for yourself.

Are you fully aware of all the tractor models, decks and attachments that Walker has to offer? We will have most of the 33 models of tractors, 25 models of decks, 15 attachments and 48-plus accessories on display. I think it's safe to say that almost everyone will discover something Walker offers of which they were unaware.

You will get a whole new sense of just how versatile and valuable a Walker can be. You'll get some new ideas on how to expand or enhance the usability of your mower. Commercial operators will get ideas on how to offer their customers a greater variety of valuable services.

You may discover that some of the products you will be able to observe and demonstrate will save you time and effort. That translates into more time for yourself and more money in your pocket. You might even save enough to pay for the trip.

"I believe there are some very good, and often overlooked, technical benefits to investing the time and money to attend (Walker Family Reunion 2)."

You'll have the opportunity to meet and talk with many other owners and operators of Walker equipment. Sharing stories and ideas can lead to increased productivity and profits. And it doesn't have to end when the party is over. Trading phone numbers, mailing addresses and e-mail addresses can make it an ongoing resource of ideas and strategies.

I would dare to say that you will build friendships and relationships on which you won't

be able to put a value. Since the

first Family Reunion in 2000,

we have heard numerous stories of people meeting people from other towns, states and countries that have grown into lifetime friendships. Those friendships have led to a continued sharing of mowing and business information.

Then there are the vacations that have deepened those relationships and have

led to some incredibly memorable experiences and photos that continue to refresh those memories.

Let's not forget, there will be food – All kinds of food that will get your taste buds excited.

This list would not be complete if I didn't mention the beautiful Rocky Mountains. All of the activities will have a backdrop of the mountains. You will want to take some time to just sit and gaze at the "Purple Mountain Majesty". I've lived here 15 years and am still in awe.

So, why should you attend the Walker Family Reunion 2? Here are a few adjectives that come to mind. After you've attended, I'm sure you'll be able to add to the list:

fun - exciting - hilarious - fascinating - spectacular - enjoyable - moving - informative - stimulating - amazing - fantastic - profitable - worthwhile - educational - memorable - relaxing ... family. **WT**



Walker Family Reunion 2

One Big,

There's a saying that goes: "There's nothing like the original." But it doesn't really apply to the Walker Family Reunion. While the original Reunion was a resounding success back in August 2000, Walker Family Reunion 2 is shaping up to be even more of a blockbuster event.

Taking place August 1-2 at the Walker Manufacturing grounds in Fort Collins, Colorado, Walker Family Reunion 2 will include a variety of fun and exciting events for the whole family. A lucky winner will also have the honor of driving the 100,000th Walker Mower off the production line. The 50,000th unit was driven off the production line by Walker patriarch Max Walker at the 2000 Walker Family Reunion.

The excitement doesn't stop there, though. Five Walker Mowers will be given away. And country music legends Aaron Tippin and Pam Tillis, not to mention comedian and banjo virtuoso Mike Snider, will each take the main stage during the event. (See "Big-Name Entertainment" on the next page for more on the headline performances, which are sponsored by Kohler Engines.)

PLENTY TO DO FOR THE WHOLE FAMILY

In addition to the big-name entertainers, mower giveaways and historic production of the 100,000th mower, several other events and features are sure to make Walker Family Reunion 2 a can't-miss event.

Camp Walker. Presented by Kohler Engines, on-site camping of all types will be available, along with a full schedule of events within

Camp Walker

this little community known as Camp Walker. Drive the RV, pull the camper or pack a tent—just be there!

Walker World Championship 2008. Presented by Dutchland Plastics Corp., the Walker World Championship 2008 will determine who is the top Walker Mower operator in the world. Put on



your best driving hat and take a shot at the grand prize: \$5,000 in prize money. The top operators from around the world will be competing in this thrilling spectacle.

Walker Village. Presented by Briggs & Stratton Commercial Power, the Walker Village will be located right in the heart of the Reunion, creating a location where kids and adults alike will have an enjoyable time.

Walker Village

Saturday Morning Pancake Breakfast. Start the day off right with a stack of flapjacks and all the breakfast trimmings at the Farrar Corp. Pancake Breakfast. Fill up your tank before a great day of celebration and entertainment.

World Famous Kohler Brat Fry. Bite into a real Wisconsin bratwurst with all the fix'ns. Kohler Engines has been whip-pin' up its famous brats for many years at special events, and they'll be doing it again at Walker Family Reunion 2.

Family Picture Jumbo Tron. Hurry and send a picture of the people who make up your part of the Walker family; it will be displayed throughout the entire Reunion on the Hydro-Gear Family Picture Jumbo Tron. E-mail photos to reunionpics@walkermowers.com.

Micro-Reality Stock Car Racing. Race fans may never make it behind the wheel of a real stock car, but here is their chance to drive a remote-controlled replica NASCAR car around a scaled



version of a real NASCAR Speedway. Six participants at a time drive the indestructible cars—with full control including steering, shifting and forward/backward controls. Players can weave in and out of traffic, block opponents and pass cars on the way to

Happy Family

Register now at
walkermowers.com

the checkered flag. Races that have scale speeds of 200 mph will make this a high-traffic area for everyone. The 16' x 28' banked oval track is located in a covered part of Walker Village.



Supplier Displays. Walker Manufacturing believes that one of the critical components to the success of the Walker program is their relationship with each of its suppliers. Giving suppliers an opportunity to get in front of Walker's guests helps Walker's distributors, dealers and end-customers understand that Walker Manufacturing works hard to establish and maintain strong relationships with high-quality suppliers. Many of these suppliers—including component manufacturers and industry media—will be on hand to visit with you and answer any questions you have about their specific role in the Walker program.

Other notable highlights of Walker Family Reunion 2 include:

- Win a drawing to drive the 100,000th Walker Mower off the production line—and win your trip, too!
- International Island; meet Walker people from all over the world
- Walker Timeline
- Great food
- Factory tours
- Internet Cafe
- Classic Car Show
- Supplier giveaway program
- Sunday morning worship 

TO DO LIST:

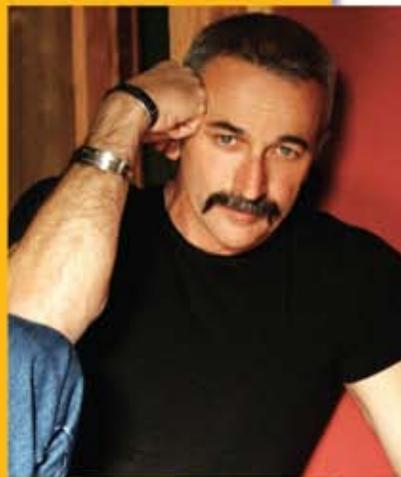
- ✓ Plan now to attend
- ✓ Register at walkermowers.com
- ✓ Make travel arrangements (see walkermowers.com for lodging and transportation options)
- ✓ Check frequently at walkermowers.com for updates and newly added events

Big-Name Entertainment

Known for his blue collar, hard-working music and being one of America's true working men, **Aaron Tippin** brings his lively, values-driven sound to the stage. Don't miss a minute of this multi-award winner's high-energy performance. He even plans to turn a few wrenches to help build one of Walker's 2009 commemorative mowers. Tippin will then autograph the mower and present it to one of the attendees at the end of his concert.

Enjoy the strong sound of one of country music's true sweethearts. **Pam Tillis'** mix of down-to-earth lyrics and true life lessons are sure to bring guests to their feet. The incomparable former CMA Female Vocalist of the Year will put on a creative, exhilarating show.

Be amazed and laugh at the same time by the picking and humor of the **Mike Snider String Band**. As a member of the Grand Ole Opry, Snider has entertained audiences for years, and will be doing the same for the Walker Family Reunion 2.



It's how one defines wealth that counts

After being a Wal-Mart Supercenter co-manager for 10 years, Roger Krans wanted a change. "I wanted to do something different, but I just didn't have the guts to leave the corporate life," he recalls. "I had good benefits and was making a good wage, and starting your own business can be risky when you have a family."

Krans took the risk in 2003, though, doing something full-time that he always enjoyed doing part-time: mowing lawns. He purchased a new 26-hp Walker Mower in April 2003, and quit his job at Wal-Mart three months later. His new career, however, was nearly short-circuited when he and his five-day-old Walker, equipped with a 48-inch GHS deck and power dump,

took an 8-foot spill off the side of a retaining wall.

"I guess I wasn't paying attention and the back wheel of the mower came too close to the edge and collapsed the wall," says Krans. "The mower fell backwards with me underneath it. There I was, stuck with the mower on top of me, and all I could think of was, 'Well, there goes my retirement money,



Roger Krans says he makes a good living mowing lawns, but he enjoys making friends more than making money.



“As for downsizing, it was one of the best moves I’ve made. I immediately became more profitable.”

KRANSCO will operate two mowing crews and one top-dressing crew this season.

not to mention my brand new career.” The startled operator was so full of adrenaline that he pushed the mower off. “My new Walker had stopped running, and when I went to start it the switch key was partially broken off,” Krans relates. “It started and billowed white smoke for about 20 minutes, and has run like a charm ever since.”

Five years later, the owner of KRANSCO in Panama City, Florida, still mows around that same retaining

wall, albeit a little more cautiously. The property owner is one of 128 current customers, a list that includes several higher-end residential properties, a collection of commercial properties and three schools.

FAST GROWTH

The outgoing Krans had made a lot of friends over the years, and his relationships, work ethic and Walker have paid quick dividends. Within

three short years, his business grew from 15 accounts to more than 500. At his peak, Krans operated five crews and four trailers, a level that quickly became uncomfortable for the new entrepreneur.

“I was working too hard and not spending enough time with my family, so I downsized by starting my own guys in the business,” Krans relates. “I think three area contractors have previously worked for me. As for downsizing, it



Downsizing has given Krans more time to spend with his family and pursue other opportunities.

was one of the best moves I've made. I immediately became more profitable, and I had more time for my wife, Lois, and our three daughters, Melody, Charleigh and Amanda. We've since built our own home. Plus, in addition to running this business, I'm a pastor at a small church and operate another company."

Regarding his growth spurt, Krans says it was easy. He was taking on four or five new accounts a week, most by word-of-mouth and as a result of being so visible on properties around Panama City. "I can say for sure that the Walker emblem on my trailer has generated 30 accounts over the years," Krans exclaims. "That says something about advertising, not to mention the mower's performance."

This summer KRANSCO plans to operate two mowing crews and one top-dressing crew. If the demand is there, the owner says he may add one more crew. Still, he's learned his lesson about growth. Krans has learned a few other lessons along the way—some about mowing and some about life.

"Like a lot of new mowing contractors, I didn't charge enough for my work," Krans admits. "When I first started, I charged \$25 per mowing. Now my minimum charge is \$37.50 for my smallest properties, which then goes up in \$10 increments for larger



This proud owner says his Walker trailer emblems have generated more than 30 new accounts by themselves.

homeowners. My minimum for a commercial property is \$65. During the summer growing season, we mow once a week. We collect the grass and compost it at our facility. During the fall and winter, mowing slacks off considerably, giving us time to top-dress our properties. Top-dressing, by applying about 2.5 inches of compost/mulch on the turf, helps the soil absorb water.

"I've also learned that you must have the right equipment," Krans goes on to say. "I feel I have a good mix now. In addition to the Walker Mower, I have a LESCO Viper for larger areas and cleanup work, a couple Honda push mowers and Stihl handheld equipment. I also have a Vermeer chipper, and anticipate buying a Walker Walk Mower in the near future."

Krans says he makes a good living mowing, but it's not about the money. "It's about building relationships with my employees and my customers," he points out. "I wouldn't be in this business if they didn't support me. I train my employees on how to mow, trim, edge, and spray and weed beds. I also

try to impart my work ethic, which I feel is just as important. Every month I put an extra \$100 away for them. If they work hard and perform well on the job, they will get a \$1,200 bonus check at the end of the year. If they lag behind or just fail to perform in other ways, they will only get a percentage of that figure. Working is about life's lessons, too."

Krans shows appreciation for his customers by giving each of them a Christmas gift, and he goes the extra mile when they ask for something special. He still has his first customer, too. "Without my customers, I wouldn't have a business," he emphasizes. "As an owner and operator, one has to be fair, provide a good service and be responsive to customer requests. It has worked for me over the years."

The 47 year old Krans gets motivation from his family, church, friends, employees, and just about everyone he meets. His mantra—it's about relationships and not money—pays big dividends, which means he doesn't measure wealth in acres mowed and dollars earned. **WT**



San Joaquin Gardens **Landscape promotes wellness and health**

A first glance, the 25-acre campus at San Joaquin Gardens in Fresno, California, appears more like a display garden than a retirement community. It's actually both.

As a continuing-care retirement community (CCRC), San Joaquin Gardens has four levels of care: independent residential living, assisted living, health care center, and an Alzheimer's/memory support service as well as Home Care services to the greater community. As a beautifully landscaped campus, it allows residents to participate in gardening activities and provides a beautiful place for all who come to the facility.

Operated by the American Baptist Homes of the West (ABHOW), San Joaquin Gardens currently has 313 housing units. A large renovation project underway will significantly increase that number and add several new amenities, including a variety of dining

venues and activity centers. Tom Walls, director of facilities, has been with the community for 16 years. He manages six departments—maintenance, grounds, housekeeping, custodial, security and transportation—for a total 41 employees.

“Landscaping is a huge part of San Joaquin Gardens and one of its key guiding values: to create beautiful gardens that enhance the health, welfare

“Landscaping is a huge part of San Joaquin Gardens and one of its key guiding values.”

and quality of life of our residents,” Walls explains. “We have a staff of five full-time grounds personnel who are busy year-round looking after the overall facility and tending to the landscape needs of residents.”

The only CCRC in Fresno, San Joaquin Gardens is one of 10 such

communities operated by ABHOW. The minimum age of residents is 62, but the average age is 84 when looking at all levels of care—and it's getting higher every year. In fact, the community was on the national news a couple of years ago for having the oldest living twins in the country. They were 108 years old.

“It's been proven that living in a total care facility like this can add four or five years to an individual's life,” says Walls. “Over my 16 years here, there has been a significant paradigm shift among the elderly. People are living longer and healthier lives, minimizing the demand and need for higher levels of care.”

One thing hasn't changed, Walls adds. “ABHOW is committed to maintaining the gardens and green space that are so fundamental to its mission and the well-being of the residents.” The renovation project will be completed with that fundamental value in



Director of facilities Tom Walls notes that people are not only living longer, they are living healthier lives with less need for skilled nursing care.



Grounds manager Craig Medaris (standing) with senior groundskeeper Homero Carrillo. The groundskeepers divide the 25-acre campus into quadrants, allowing them to provide an even more personalized service for residents.

mind. There will be new garden areas that may include roof top green space and atriums.

GARDEN PARADISE

“As you can see, the landscape has California redwoods, ash and a variety of other trees, including an orchard area with cherry, apricot, almond, plum and fig trees,” reports grounds manager Craig Medaris. “Residents also enjoy a rose garden and nearly a dozen other small gardens that highlight the campus. Our crew plants 400 flats of annuals three times a year and we mow seven acres of fescue turf.”

A former CalTrans employee, Medaris also worked for the state department of correction for 10 years as a vocational gardening instructor prior to joining Walls’ staff last year. As he explains, the campus is divided into quadrants (to provide a more personalized service to residents) and each of the groundskeepers oversees a section. On mowing days, or when the grounds department fertilizes, overseeds and provides other common services, they team up to get the job done.

Medaris points to the two-year-old Walker in the corner of the shop. “We now mow once a week on Wednesday,” he adds. “The Walker is ideal for picking up leaves and it maneuvers easily around garden beds and trees. Two of us mow, two edge and one other person uses the string trimmer. When we’re done, we tidy up the sidewalks.

“We alternate tasks so everyone gets a chance to use the Walker, including our most experienced operator Homero Carrillo,” Medaris continues. “He has been with the Gardens 16 years, while the Gardens have used Walker Mowers for 17.”

Carrillo doesn’t mind playing second fiddle to the mower’s tenure. “The Walker Mower runs smoothly, makes tight turns and helps us keep the campus clean,” he says with a smile. “I like



running it, and it is reliable. I especially like the hydraulic lift and dump. We don’t use the lift as much as we use the hydraulic dump, though. On mowing days, we dump the grass clippings on tarps located around the campus. That saves us time running back and forth to the recycle bin.”

“This is actually our fourth Walker Mower,” adds Walls. “It is powered by a 20-hp engine and features a 48-inch GHS deck. We just retired the first Walker we purchased. Throughout its 17 years of service, it was very reliable with virtually no downtime or serious service issues. In fact, we’ve never had a serious service or repair issue with any of our Walkers.”

A mower doesn’t get the same use at a retirement community that a contractor would give it. Still, being used 16 hours a week all year long for most of its life adds up to a lot of mowing for the recently retired



machine. Because it is used in tandem with a Toro Z-Master, the new Walker only works an eight-hour week. “That, too, is a good machine,” says Walls, referring to the Toro. “It’s no Walker Mower, though. If you put the two machines side by side and ask our grounds people to choose the one they want to use, it’s always the Walker. If

our budget permits, we plan to purchase a new Walker with a 42-inch GHS deck next year.”

CUSTOMERS FIRST

Both Walls and Medaris emphasize that their role first and foremost is to provide excellent service for the residents. “Safety is of paramount impor-

tance here,” says Medaris. “We need to keep the walks clear of any kind of debris, and the first thing we do every Monday morning is police the grounds and check all pedestrian walkways.”

Walls walks the entire campus every day, checking and double checking to make sure everything is in place. “We have a lot of vegetation and new construction in our midst,” he relates, “and there’s just a lot of activity. Many of our residents maintain their own gardens. They enjoy a waterfall and Koi pond, the many interior courtyards and the gazebo lawn. There’s a health club, wood shop and community center, while a trolley service transports people around the campus. Residents can call transportation for a limo ride to area retail outlets, doctors’ offices and other places within a 20-mile radius.”

As Walls emphasizes, San Joaquin Gardens provides exceptional amenities, health care and other services for its residents. By promoting health and wellness, the landscaping is an extension of this service offering. **WT**

LEVEL MANUFACTURING SUPPORTED BY NEW STORAGE UNIT

The Walker factory has added a new 10,000 sq. ft., four-level storage rack/mezzanine to increase storage of finished products (storage of up to 1,500 Walker Mowers).

Walker's commitment to full-time employment (no temporary or seasonal workers) and year-round "level" production creates the need for product storage during the winter.

Going vertical with storage and locating adjacent to the shipping docks offers an efficient use of floor space while minimizing labor to stage shipments in the dock area. Increasing the storage capacity and other recent increases in manufacturing capacity are being made to cover the projected growth of Walker Mower production over the next several years, including the new Model Super B (see next page).



FACTORY EMPLOYMENT UP

Walker factory employment reached 175 in early January 2008, the highest ever in company history.

Adding new products and continuing growth of existing products in the market has caused the factory to set a 14-percent increase in production for the year. This increase was approached with some caution and conservatism remembering that Walker tries to operate by the principle of being "optimum for people"; that includes being careful to not hire new employees until full-time employment can be assured.

After moving through a slower growth period for 2006 and 2007, Walker sees an expansion for the sale of their products in the market for 2008.

CELEBRATING 20 YEARS IN SWEDEN

Bob Walker, president of Walker Manufacturing, visited Vaxjo, Sweden, on September 5, 2007, to be part of a special two-fold celebration.

First, Gronytemaskiner A.B. and the Thomas Horberg family have represented Walker in Sweden for 20 years—nearly 2,000 Walker Mowers have been sold in the country as a result of their efforts.

Secondly, the Swedish national finals for the Walker Precision Obstacle Course competition were held at

the company facilities that day. After holding 13 regional competitions around the country in previous months, 35 finalists ran in the national competition. The winner was Ms. Johanna Nero from Johkoping.

After watching quite a few of these competitions in the past, Bob Walker told Johanna she was a "world class" Walker operator as he handed her the trophy. Her skills have been sharpened by daily mowing with a Walker at church cemeteries. The first place prize is an expense-paid trip to the USA in August for Johanna to compete in the Walker World Championship at Family Reunion 2.



Bob Walker (left) with Johanna Nero and Thomas Horberg

IOWA DISTRIBUTOR SELLS TERRITORY

In September 2007, long-time Walker distributor Garth Van Fosson, Van's Distributing Company, Braddyville, Iowa, completed the sale of his Iowa territory to the neighboring Walker distributor in Missouri, Doug Hartzler, Walker Mid America.

With this consolidation of territory, there are now 20 distributors covering the continental United States for Walker and a total of 46 distributors worldwide.

Walker gives credit to Van's Distributing as true pioneers in the Walker marketing program, introducing Walker to Iowa in the early years. The first Walker Mowers were produced in 1980 and Van's began representing Walker in 1986.

THAT'S A FACT

30 percent of Walker Mowers sold in 2007 were exported.

THE SUPER B – BY WALKER

An exciting new model from Walker, the Super B, is a bigger version of the Model MB. Designed to compete in the commercial mower market, the Super B offers the ground speed and price tag of the popular mid-mount style riding mowers, but with the superior design benefits of the front-cut configuration.

Walker has specialized in front-cut style mowers since the beginning and was determined to offer a competitive design with all the advantages of Walker's proven configuration: comfortable and precise steering controls, high-quality cut, better handling on slopes, better trimming capability, tilt-up mower deck and tilt-up body.

Super B has a 9-mph top speed, is powered by a 27-hp Kohler Command engine with remote air intake filtration, uses Hydro-Gear transaxles for ground drive and is equipped with a lever-actuated mechanical clutch/brake to drive the mower blades. A dedicated (does not fit on other Walker Mower models) 60-inch side-discharge deck has



a 5-inch-deep deck housing and a foot pedal-operated cutting height adjustment from 1 to 5 inches for high-speed, high-volume mowing. The deck design includes a flexible, damage-resistant rubber side-discharge chute.

Other highlights of the design include a fully adjustable suspension seat with armrests, 10-gallon fuel capacity with dual tanks and a selector valve, and a spread axle and dual tail wheels for better hillside traction and a smoother ride.

COMPACT MULCHING DECK OFFERED

The DML36 is now available for mowing jobs that need mulching performance in a compact 36-inch size. The design is patterned after the DML42A, which was introduced to the market in 2006.

LARGER GHS DECK (52")

For 2008, a larger 52-inch GHS deck is available for Walker Mowers. This deck is unique compared to other GHS decks because it uses blades that counter-rotate to the outside, which increases the deck capacity to mow with a nice

clean cut in the middle while handling a larger volume of grass clippings.

For optimum performance, Walker recommends using this deck with the high-capacity 10.5-inch GHS blower on Models MC, MD and MT (although tests in some applications on the earlier units with the 10-inch blower gave acceptable results). The heavy-duty cast iron Peerless gearbox blade drive is included as standard equipment on this deck.



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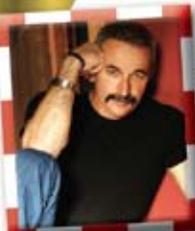
Family Photo
August 12, 2000

August 1-2, 2008 • Fort Collins, Colorado

In August 2008, customers, suppliers, dealers, distributors and friends of Walker (along with their families) from all over the world will converge on Fort Collins, Colorado to help us celebrate the production of **Walker Mower #100,000**. Make plans now to bring your whole family—don't miss a great time with other Walker family members.

We are pleased to present a few of country music's great people to help us celebrate!

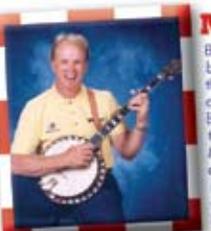
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Mike Snider
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Aaron Tippin
Known for his blue collar, hard-working music and being one of America's true working men, Aaron Tippin brings his lively, values-driven sounds to the stage at the Walker Family Reunion... Don't miss a minute of this multi-award winner's high-energy performance--he even plans to turn a few wrenches to help us build one of our 2009 commemorative mowers; sign it and give it to one of our guests at the end of his concert.



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