

WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS FOR YEARS

Carving out a niche in Louisiana

- Michigan contractor loves his mower and starts a business
- Maintenance business takes off for former flight attendant
- Recession-proof your business with upscale customers
- Retired in Florida? Hardly



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WALKER TALK

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Beliefs Guide Us

In 2007, we developed the list "What We Believe At Walker" that is displayed on the inside back cover of this issue. This was our attempt to communicate and remind our employees and others outside the company of the company's core ideology; a clear definition of our operating principles and what we stand for.



While many companies have values statements or mission statements to unite their teams and propagate their cultures, we decided to write down our beliefs, developed and learned from over 50 years in the manufacturing business. It is important to note that while our beliefs were not written down in the beginning, we have lived the foundational beliefs and developed others from experience as we have operated the business across the years—these are lived-out beliefs.

In this modern era, it is not popular to believe anything with certainty, dependability, with absolute truth and moral foundation. Rather, beliefs are to be tinkered with, taken apart, examined and repackaged to accommodate diversity, tolerance and choice; the thinking is that all beliefs are of equal value, and it does not matter what you believe as long as you sincerely believe something. We disagree with old-fashioned certainty. What you believe does make a difference and you can be sincerely wrong. We have had a few wrong ideas ourselves. Beliefs are important to guide a happy, healthy, satisfying life, and in the same way, to guide a successful business.

The ancient biblical text speaks of a "double-minded" person who doubts and does not believe as unstable, driven and tossed by every wind and wave, and as incapable of receiving wisdom from God. The person or business that does not have beliefs (the great overarching ideas) of who you are, why you are here, what you are to accomplish, and what your operating principles are misses the opportunity to be guided in daily activities and to have a meaningful life.

We understand that our list of beliefs is a work in progress; it may be amended as we go along. It is also understood that not everyone inside or outside the company may agree with it or have the same beliefs, but at least in articulating and living out our beliefs, others will know where we are coming from.

We are thankful for our collective experience, first my parents and then my brother and myself, to be able to develop a set of beliefs to help us guide the company. In a world of changing circumstance, there is great value in testing the situations faced against the beliefs. There is also great value in passing these beliefs to the next generation who will guide Walker Manufacturing into the future. **WT**

Bob Walker
President



Carving out a niche in Louisiana

In business only nine years, this young entrepreneur already maintains some of the highest-profile properties in and around Lafayette, Louisiana. “It’s all about projecting the right image, catering to customers,” says Brad Breaux, referring to working with high-end accounts.

Along with his brother, Ross, Brad operates Greenscape Grounds Management, a full-service landscape management company. The brothers maintain approximately 110 accounts, with 13 full-time employees and four crews. The business mix is 50/50 residential/commercial with annual sales approaching the \$1.5 million mark.

“Like most landscape contractors, we started out mowing residential properties and took nearly any job

we could get,” says Brad. “Over the years, we’ve made a concerted effort to target both the high-end residential and commercial markets, and now we’re in a position to actually be able to pick and choose our customers.” This is a nice position to be in, but it’s something Brad and Ross have worked hard to achieve over the years. You can almost say they are students of the industry.

“No matter where my wife, Kerri (office manager), and I go on vacation, I’ll take a day to visit shopping malls and corporate centers to see how they’re being maintained,” Brad relates. “I look at the plants and notice how the turf is being maintained. If the contractor is on site, I’ll take note of his equipment and the demeanor of

Brad Breaux says the company’s upscale customers appreciate the Walker Mower’s nice-looking cut.

his employees, including how they’re dressed. By doing this, I get a chance to benchmark our company—to see where we stand against others, along with where and how we need to make improvements.”

One look at his operation suggests that this contractor has been an excellent student. Trucks are neat and clean, Brad and Ross are attired in sharp-looking polo shirts and khaki pants, and all employees are in uniform, looking and performing their roles.

“I just can’t stress enough how important appearance is in this market,” Brad adds. “Our customers expect us to be neat and clean, and

actually blend in, just as if we live in the neighborhood. That goes for both our homeowner and commercial customers. When they pay a premium price for the service, they expect quality all the way around.”

LEARNING CURVE

Greenscape’s owner got his start in the industry working for his uncle and cousin in nearby Baton Rouge. He moved there right out of high school and stayed for a couple of years before moving back to his hometown to start his own lawn maintenance business.

“That’s where I learned about the Walker Mower,” Brad says, referring to his Baton Rouge stay. “I purchased two used models from my relatives shortly after I started my company in 2000.” Today, Greenscape crews operate seven models, two Super B’s with 52- and 60-inch decks, one MB, two MTSDs and two MTGHS units, the latter with 42-inch decks.

“The Walker Mowers are ideal for our application,” Brad relates. “They’re compact, maneuverable, and nothing on the market leaves a nicer-looking cut, something our upscale customers appreciate. I also like how easy the decks can be interchanged, something that’s very useful when going from larger areas to smaller areas on the new Super B’s.

“I purchased the Super B’s because they had a little more power and speed

than my older models, and I just liked how compact the earlier MB was,” Brad continues. “Still, when I hear

“When I hear other contractors talk about speed, I wonder just how important it is. One can only go so fast mowing turf, and we hardly ever mow at top speed.”

other contractors talk about speed, I wonder just how important it is. One can only go so fast mowing turf, and we hardly ever mow at top speed. The only benefit I can see from having a faster ground speed is moving between properties or getting back to the trailer once the job is finished.”

The Breaux brothers are as focused on their customers as they are on their

equipment. While showing the *Walker Talk* editor several properties, Brad’s cell phone rings constantly. He answers calls from his customers; others will get a return call later. “You have to be responsive,” he explains. “We’re there for our customers virtually every day, and we strive to do everything related to grounds maintenance, which includes sweeping parking lots for a few clients.”

When it doesn’t have the expertise or equipment, as in the case of fertilizing and weed control, Greenscape subs out to a veteran contractor who treats the company like it’s his only customer in Lafayette.



Brad, Kerri and Ross benchmark their company against some of the best in the industry. Photo courtesy of Rick Dobbs.



From left: Ross Breaux, crew foreman Raphael Yanez and Brad Breaux.

“My brother and I said we wanted to be there, and here we are.” It’s about being focused and doing what it takes to please the customer, in this case two primary customers: a retailers’ association and a homeowners’ association.

This 32-year-old is focused. He’s there for customers virtually 24/7, although he admits to sometimes being too accessible. He doesn’t worry about maintaining his equipment; nearby dealer Southland Engine handles everything but basic preventive maintenance. Vehicles are washed weekly by a local firm, too.

“I’ve learned quite a bit over the years just by observing how other top-rated companies perform,” Brad emphasizes. “One of my favorite ones to study is Valley Crest, one of the largest landscape contractors in the country. Obviously, we are very small compared to them and other contractors that work in large metropolitan areas, but that doesn’t mean we cannot learn from them.”

Over the last nine years, Brad’s company has grown with Lafayette and looks to continue growing with the city. In the meantime,

SHARP FOCUS

One of Greenscape’s largest commercial accounts is River Ranch, what Brad calls a TND (traditional neighborhood development) community. The upscale property is a pleasing mix

of retail and residential. Crews maintain the common areas, along with several single-family homes within the development.

“This is one of those properties we wanted from the start,” Brad recalls.

Greenscape will focus on growing its upscale niche and providing a one-stop service for customers. “We don’t advertise,” Brad says. “We try to let our image, our work and our customers talk for us.” **WT**

‘The best thing since sliced bread’

When Alan McClellan was 20 years old, mowing lawns for a living was probably the last thing on his mind. Then, while walking around the Branch County Fairgrounds, he spotted a Walker Mower for the very first time.

As a matter of fact, the outdoor display featured a new mower, a snow thrower and two decks. “It was the best thing since sliced bread,” McClellan says about the Walker. “I was attracted by its versatility, the way it handled, and how easy it was to maintain. So I purchased the entire display, with the intent that I would mow a few lawns to help pay the bill.” Twenty years later, McClellan operates True Trim Lawn Care in Coldwater, Michigan.

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

“It would be accurate to say that I liked the mower so much that I started my own business,” McClellan adds with a smile. “I picked up some lawns and then was laid off from my factory job. By the time the company called me back, I saw a better future in maintain-



Alan McClellan and son, Cody, with crew members Mike Boies (left on mower) and Rick Wagoner (right on mower).

ing properties than working in the factory. In fact, during the previous year, I had collected nine different W2s, so obviously I wasn't on a career path.”

The new Model C, powered by a 16-hp Kohler engine, put McClellan on a path. He picked up a few commercial properties, all the while honing his mowing and maintenance skills. “I learned on the job,” he admits, “but one thing I had going for me, in addition to my new mower, was my inability to say no. Customers would ask, ‘Do you apply fertilizer and pesticides?’ I would

say, ‘Well yah.’ I didn't, but I soon did. ‘Do you plow snow?’ ‘Well yah,’ but I had to get a snow plow first. ‘Do you sweep parking lots?’ ‘Well yah,’ but I better buy a sweeper.”

After subcontracting his lawn care to TruGreen for a few years, McClellan received his applicator's license by attending classes at nearby Lansing Community College. He farmed out his first large snow plowing job, until he was in a position to buy bigger and better equipment. As for the sweeper, this agreeable and hungry owner purchased



The side-discharge crew is assigned to the more expansive commercial properties where picking up clippings isn't a requirement.

areas during fall cleanup.”

The side-discharge crew is assigned to the more expansive commercial properties where picking up clippings isn't a requirement. The GHS crew primarily handles the upscale lake properties, banks, restaurants and other properties where customers want that manicured look.

“I remember a homeowner inviting me over for an estimate. He told me that if I did a good job, another 10 properties along the lake would probably hire me. He was right.”

“We maintain several lake homes,” McClellan points out. “Once we won our first account, the rest just kind of followed. I remember a homeowner inviting me over for an estimate. He told me that if I did a good job, another 10 properties along the lake would probably hire me. He was right.”

In addition to its Walkers, the GHS crew is equipped with a trailer-mounted vacuum that sucks up clippings in the

one, but no longer sweeps parking lots. “That’s an entirely different animal,” he emphasizes, “with the work having to be done during evening hours.”

What True Trim Lawn Care does is mow and maintain upwards of 180 accounts. With a customer mix divided almost equally between homeowners and commercial properties, the company provides a broad array of maintenance services. In addition to mowing and trimming, crews trim trees, mulch beds, apply fertilizer and weed control, remove snow, salt driveways and

walks, and repair and maintain irrigation systems. They also do some installation work (which includes building retaining walls), and “bush hog” (rough mow) a few properties.

“We operate two three-men mowing crews and one spray crew,” McClellan explains. “One mowing crew is equipped with two 23-hp Walker Mowers with 48-inch GHS decks, while the other runs two 27-hp Super B’s with 60-inch side-discharge decks. We also have a smaller Model S that we use as a backup and in tight



True Trim's owner customized a debris-handling system by fashioning a truck-mounted box to a trailer. When the box is full, the crew hydraulically dumps the debris.

summer and leaves in the fall. McClellan customized the debris-handling system by fashioning a truck-mounted box to a trailer. When the box is full, the crew simply trailers it over to his property and hydraulically dumps the debris.

"None of our equipment runs by itself," McClellan adds. "I try to surround myself with employees who take pride in their work and like what they see when their truck pulls away. I am very fortunate to have that benefit with the group of guys I have now."

Looking back, this now 20-year mowing veteran notes that he has always been able to repair equipment. As a matter of fact, his technical aptitude



goes beyond equipment. During slow winter months, his company will purchase a home and employees will work "fixing it up," to be sold the next spring. "This gives them something to do between snow falls," says McClellan. "Plus, it brings in some revenue for the company."

GROWING HIS BUSINESS

The last couple of decades have been quite a ride for this entrepreneur. Ten years ago, McClellan started selling outdoor power equipment out of a storefront in town, and later moved the operation to his 76-acre property in the country. He has since paired his lines down to one (Walker), although his technician can fix nearly anything.

"I've learned over the years that there is only so much time in the day," McClellan laments. "Running the dealership and keeping my growing maintenance operation going was a challenge, although it did one important thing for me: It got me off the mower. Doing so allowed me to spend more time thinking about the business and selling. That's an important lesson for any smaller contractor. If you want to grow, you have to make it grow."

McClellan also has a young family that keeps him busy, too. He has been married to Kim for 19 years. Cody (age 18), Courtney (14), Caitlyn (8) and Carter (3) keep both parents on their toes. Cody is already following in his dad's footsteps, working with a mowing crew during the summer.

"I think I was about nine when I first drove a Walker around the yard," Cody reflects. "I may have been doing some actual mowing on our property by the time I was 12." When asked about taking over the business, Cody looks at his father and says simply that "Dad wants me to gain experience from the ground up before I think about running the business."

McClellan nods his head in agreement. "Cody is taking an agriculture class at the Career Center in town and is seriously thinking about a two-year degree in horticulture. Ultimately, he will be much more knowledgeable about the industry than I ever was, but he still needs to get first-hand crew experience before running the business. When that day comes, he can say to his employees, 'My dad didn't just hand over the business to me. I worked my way up.'"

Cody is fortunate. His father may not have a degree in horticulture, but has definitely attended the school of hard knocks. His mentoring will allow the second generation to skip a few of the more difficult classes. **WT**

Flying High in Canada

Maintenance business takes off for former flight attendant

What a difference a few decades can make. During the mid 1970s, Sarah Johnston was a flight attendant for British Caledonia Airways, jetting around the world in a Boeing 707. Today, her itinerary is slightly less robust, as she and her son, Dave, install and maintain landscapes for homeowners in and around Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

"I was more adventuresome back then," says Sarah, who left her airline job and native country of England in 1978 to marry and start a family in Canada. For the next several years, she worked in marketing and public relations for two non-profit organizations. After that she worked at a printing company before starting her own company, Greenlife, Inc., Garden Care + Landscaping, located in Manotick, Ontario.

"When the printing company closed its branch in Ottawa seven years ago, I was left with no job," Sarah recalls. "It was September and a girlfriend of mine had an herb garden that she couldn't maintain because of allergies. I helped her out, and then she planted another seed. 'Why don't you start a landscaping company?' she asked. Well, I loved gardening, but it would be a big step for me to start a business, but that's just what I did."

Sarah called her son, Dave, who worked for an area commercial landscape maintenance company. He agreed to join in the venture with his mother, and together they launched Greenlife six years ago.

Sarah admits that the first year was rather difficult. They had two part-time employees, a capital investment of close to \$30,000, and Dave's salary to cover. A federal government program to assist new startup companies

allowed Sarah to get some money to help pay her salary for 12 months.

SAVVY MARKETER

With not a customer in sight (other than her herb garden friend), Sarah immediately made two strategic moves: joined Landscape Ontario and mailed out a newsletter. "Since I didn't know anything about running a landscaping business, including how to price my services, I thought it was important to network with professionals within the industry," Sarah recalls. "Joining the association also sent a message to prospective customers that I was serious about my business and was in it for the long haul.

"Having been in marketing for so many years, I understood the importance of communicating with prospective customers," Sarah continues. "I hired a professional to write and develop a newsletter and mailed it to more than 6,000 area residents." This single move attracted her first customers. By the end of 2004, the new company had serviced 18 lawn maintenance customers (Dave's accounts) and a handful of garden maintenance customers (Sarah's accounts). Their modest equipment lineup included a used Kubota rider, a

Mother and son work well together, with Dave running the lawn maintenance operation and Sarah managing the garden side of the business.





Dave removes the collection hopper during the summer months to reduce weight and lower the mower's center of gravity.

1989 truck and a VW Golf, along with two trailers, a string line trimmer and a backpack blower.

For the first four years, lawn maintenance was the young company's bread and butter. Dave mowed with a used Kubota rider the first year, but in year two they purchased their first Walker Mower. Dave had operated a Walker at his previous job and thought it would be the perfect machine for the job. According to Sarah, it was.

"We grew to 44 lawns that second year, with a 100-percent increase in revenue, and increased that number to 70 lawns a year later, thanks in large part to the Walker Mower. All along, we never wanted to mow more than three days a week. Dave and I both think it is important to give our employees a vari-

ety of work. Mowing five days a week, or doing anything five days a week for that matter, can become tiresome."

The mother-and-son team purchased its second Walker Mower in 2007. Still mowing with only three crew members, Dave put the second mower to good use. It allowed him to procure larger properties and still keep to his three-day schedule. By year's end, the second purchase had helped the company to a healthy 68-percent increase in revenue from the previous year.

"We attribute the increase to our Walker Mowers," says Sarah. "The mowers are efficient and leave a beautiful cut, and really have helped define our business. When looking at new accounts, we want to make sure we can use our Walker Mowers on them. If you would have told me that I would one day have such loyalty to a mower, I

wouldn't have believed it. Now I would be absolutely horrified if we were forced to use a different machine."

UNUSUAL APPROACH

Dave agrees with his mom. "We have two identical mowers, each powered by diesel engines and equipped with two decks, a 48-inch GHS deck and a 48-inch side-discharge deck. We employ the GHS decks for a week or so in the spring for picking up clippings, and for three weeks in the fall for leaf pickup. In between we remove the collection hoppers and use the side-discharge decks. This makes the mowers lighter and lowers their center of gravity.

"Part of my original attraction to the mower is its versatility, and nothing leaves a better cut," Dave adds. He goes on to say that his three-person mowing crew now averages 20 lawns a day.

They've reduced the number of lawns they mow to 45 a week, which means that mowing accounts for approximately half the work week. The other half is devoted to helping out the growing installation business, which Sarah refers to as "Garden Creations."

When asked how he felt about leaving a lawn maintenance company to join his mother, Dave remarks, "After she first asked me, I said to myself, 'No, I'm not going to work with my mom.' But I'm very happy I did. She's not only great to work with, but she's also very professional in every way."

GREEN THUMB

Being born and raised in England, Sarah naturally comes by a love for gardening. But it wasn't until she made contacts with local landscape architects that her installation business took off.

"Again, I have to attribute my relationship with Landscape Ontario for much of our success," Sarah emphasizes. "Just getting to know the architect members has been a terrific boon to our business. In addition to the three individuals on our mow crew, we employ seven horticulturists who spend part of the week designing and installing gardens and the other part maintaining them. Again, we are very sensitive to 'burning out' our employees. We want to make sure they have some variety in their work week."

Thinking back, Sarah says that the first four years in business were very strenuous. But now she has assembled a great crew, and the fact that her company employs a full-time office person has freed the owner to do more selling and communicating with clients. "I've been told that the rule of thumb for hiring an office person is having eight employees," Sarah relates. "It certainly applies to our situation."

What also applies is that true success requires having a strong relationship with several partners. In Sarah's case, her husband and co-owner of the business, Richard Sennott, has been supportive from day one. "Richard is Executive Director of the Ottawa



Top left to right: Dave Johnston, Jen Hendriks, Gang Liu, Jeff Lloyd

Bottom left to right: Melissa Clark, Josee Henderson, Tina Lockett, Sarah Johnston, Mary Stewart

Missing: Laura Lyons and Pat Doucette

District Hockey Association," says Sarah. "His life is hockey, as opposed to gardens, but he has been there every step of the way offering advice and encouragement."

Walker dealer B&T MacFarlane in Ottawa has also been a significant contributor to the company's success. "From day one, they've treated our small company the same way they would treat one of their larger customers," Sarah says. "It's amazing, and when you have only one or two mowers you depend on, your dealer's responsiveness is critical."

The Greenlife owner also recognizes how important it is to be a partner within her community. Sarah's company actively supports various causes, including the local cancer foundation.

In fact, this year her company is mowing the home of a foundation raffle winner—free of charge.

Sarah doesn't fret about the future, thanks to another strong relationship she has with another partner. "I don't wear my religion and beliefs on my sleeve, but I am a Christian and believe that the Lord has a calling for me. If I work hard and do what's right, He will help me find my way."

Indeed, Sarah is flying high in Canada. The days of jetting around the world are long gone (although she travels back to England once a year to visit her mom, brother and friends). In its place, however, she has landed a career that will take her further than any airplane ever would. **WT**



Upscale Customers

A key to recession-proofing your business

Times like these present challenges for nearly all contractors. Although providing mowing and maintenance services is a better place to be than designing and installing new landscapes, most commercial and homeowner customers are watching where all their dollars are going.

Depending on your market, you've likely been asked by customers to find a way to lower their maintenance costs—and that means budget cuts for you, as well. Wouldn't it be nice to have a customer base relatively immune to business cycles?

That's exactly what Mark Polzin, owner of Polzin Landscapes in Cambridge, Ontario, thought when he left the printing industry five years ago to start his lawn maintenance business. "My goal was to find something I could do that would be recession-proof, constant and a good environment in which

to work," he says. "I thought about mowing lawns and decided it would be ideal if I could get a foothold into the high-end residential market."

"One of the nice things about doing upscale work is that you spend a lot of time on one property, instead of loading and unloading several times in a day."

Five years later, Mark maintains 25 estate properties with one employee and one Walker Mower. When asked how he went from printing to mowing upscale properties, Mark says he did a lot of learning—how to properly mow lawns, deliver a crisp edge and overall manage turf. He spent literally hours on the Internet educating himself on turf basics before walking onto that

Pictured is one of 25 estate properties maintained by Polzin Landscapes.

first estate, and probably spent an equal amount of time driving around Cambridge looking at properties.

"I would drive around the city looking at estates that were perfectly maintained," Mark explains. "I wanted to make my properties look as nice as these. All I needed then was a break, and maybe a bit of luck, to get my first customer." The break came through a friend who installed gardens. She referred Mark to a customer, and he did the rest.

STRESS-FREE ENVIRONMENT

Most lawn maintenance contractors wouldn't call their work stress-free. This contractor does, though, in large part because he isn't running around the country from lawn to lawn trying to beat the clock.

"One of the nice things about doing



Mark Polzin puts down a lot of mulch, which keeps weeds down and gardens looking nice. He uses a mulching deck when he can, which is good for the turf.

upscale work is that you spend a lot of time on one property, instead of loading and unloading several times in a day," Mark relates. "That saves time and cuts down on fuel costs."

That's not to say that he isn't conscious of how much time he spends on a property. In fact, when Mark first started mowing his estates, he completed time studies on maintenance procedures and determined the most efficient way to get a job done without sacrificing quality. As he puts it, "I don't speed through a property, yet I don't waste a lot of time, either." He can't if he expects to mow 25 estates each week.

Mark has a few tips for mowing contractors looking to get into the high-end market. "I like to think I manage a property instead of maintaining it," he emphasizes. "I prune trees, weed gardens, do a lot of little odd jobs, and actually provide a personalized care. I put down a lot of mulch, which keeps weeds down and gardens looking nice, and use a mulching deck when I can, which is good for the turf. Before I leave a property, I want it to be what I call photo shoot-ready."

"My Walker Mower has a sharp set of blades for every property," Mark continues. "Dull blades leave a less-attractive cut, and they can actually injure the lawn. We're always in uniform, drive a clean truck and trailer, and keep equipment looking like new. Even though my mower is three years old, it looks brand new. I wash my truck and remove grass stains from my equipment once a week."

Mark says his customers are comfortable with his two-man crew and would likely be "turned off" by a larger crew, one staffed mostly by kids, or one that comes in every week with different crew members.

"You have to truly want to be in this market," he emphasizes. "You have to love gardening, enjoy learning as much as you can about turf and horticulture, and then be of the mindset to leave every property looking like a golf course."

First things first, Mark adds. Get that break and then be ready to take advantage of it. Once you get retained by one customer, the referrals will generate plenty of business and opportunity. **WT**

Upscale Thoughts

Ed Furner, CLT, is a client representative for Mariani Landscape, a long-time provider of high-end landscape management services in Lake Bluff, Illinois. Here are few of his thoughts about entering the upscale market:

"Even though these clients will provide a cushion during tough economic times, we've noticed that they are also adjusting their spending. Many of our clients would allow us to recommend or approve with little concern over price, but now these proposed projects are coming under more scrutiny."

"The best way to crack this market is to get to know who these people are. Business owners have to be willing to invest time and money in getting involved in their communities and making a great impression with all the people they meet. You never know who their friends are, and your reputation will precede you. A sophisticated brochure and letter would potentially work if targeted to certain high-end customers."

"Once you have a high-end residential property, providing exceptional service is a requisite. Often, these properties are complex and require skilled gardeners to meet client expectations. Everything from the quality and look of your equipment and fleet, the way your employees dress and present themselves, how well-versed you are in landscape maintenance techniques, and most importantly, how responsive you are will help define exceptional service for these clients."

"Once you have satisfied clients, they will be your best salespeople, telling others in their social group about your work. These referrals will spread like wildfire."

Retired in Florida?

Hardly

Pete and Mary Maust are not your ordinary Florida retirees. In fact, at age 85 and 80 respectively, they're not retired at all. The couple still owns and operates M&P Lawn Service, and although they don't maintain nearly as many properties as they once did, mowing and maintenance continues to bring home the bacon.

"We mowed 125 properties at our peak," says Pete. "Today, though, we only mow about 10 properties a week." When asked why he and Mary continue to work so hard so late in life, Pete pats his belly and remarks, "To keep food on the table, of course." Mary looks across the table and tells her husband to be a

little more descriptive than that. He gives an abbreviated synopsis of their life, from the time they were married 62 years ago in the small town of Hyndman, Pennsylvania, to today where they work and reside in Tarpon Springs, Florida.

KEEP ON TRUCK'N

If one word can be used to describe the Mausts' early years together, it would be "trucking." From the time they were married until their three children grew up, Pete drove truck for the National Pipeline Company, hauling large equipment from one con-

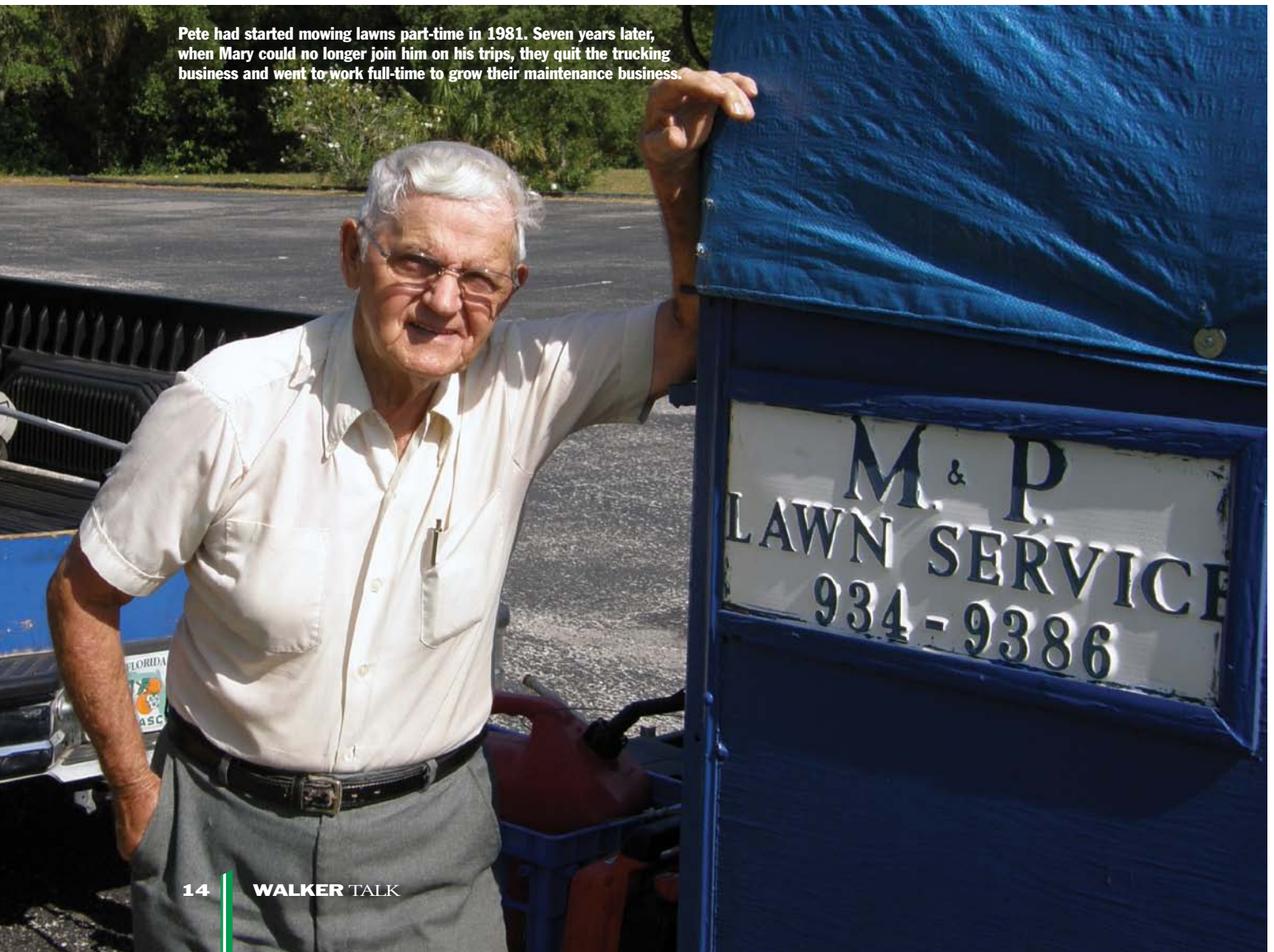
struction site to another. Tagging along was Mary,

with a house trailer and children in tow. They would crisscross the country during the summer months and then spend winters at their vacation home in Tarpon Springs.

That gig ended in the early 1960s, after which Pete and Mary both took a trucking job with a yacht company, hauling huge boats around the country. The fact that they could "team drive" allowed them to deliver their loads in a timely fashion and share the experience of being on the road together.

The couple shared several of these experiences before getting back to

Pete had started mowing lawns part-time in 1981. Seven years later, when Mary could no longer join him on his trips, they quit the trucking business and went to work full-time to grow their maintenance business.





Pete and Mary say they've had a hard, but great, life together.

the real reason they're still working. Mary explains, "One day a pain started behind my left eye. I went to the doctor and had some tests done. It didn't show what was causing the pain. We had a trip to Long Beach, California, so the doctor gave me some pain pills, which I couldn't take because I had to drive. We delivered our yacht and returned home on a Sunday evening. Monday we were going fishing. Pete went for bait and I went to the doctor's office. I left him a note that read, 'I'll be right back.' Instead, I had a massive stroke right in the doctor's office that caused a coma. I was only 49. I didn't walk or talk for about two years."

Mary looks at Pete and says that without the loving support of her husband, she never would have survived to tell that story. They persevered, and eventually Mary's health returned to

"We mowed 125 properties at our peak. Today, though, we only mow about 10 properties a week."

the point where she could drive again with Pete. But the fact that they didn't have health insurance, and Mary has since required several operations, put them forever in debt to the hospital.

FROM PAVEMENT TO TURF

Pete had started mowing lawns part-time in 1981. Seven years later, when Mary could no longer join him on his trips, they quit the trucking business and went to work full-time to grow their maintenance business.

"We started with a push mower, broom, dust pan and an old pair of

clippers," Pete recalls. "By 1988 we had grown the business to the extent that we used five Snapper push mowers and hired many of our family members to help us. One of the first moves we made when we left the trucking business was to buy a Walker Mower. Our neighbor, Ed across the street, used Walker Mowers and knew they would be just what we needed."

M&P Lawn Service has owned three Walker Mowers over the years. Their first was a 16-hp model with a 36-inch GHS deck, which was followed up by two 20-hp models. "Even though we have the grass-handling system, we use the mulching deck," Pete explains. "It's so expensive and difficult to get rid of lawn debris in this area, and the mulching deck does a great job at dispersing the clippings."

The mowing couple has nearly as

many stories to tell about riding on turf as they have about riding on pavement. “We’ve had some scary times,” Mary recalls. “One time I ended up in a retention pond with my Walker Mower. We weren’t alone, either. The pond had its share of alligators and snakes. Well, I just waited on the mower for Pete to come. There was a housing construction site nearby, and four men from the site came over to pull me and the mower out. Another time, my Walker Mower fell into a tunnel created by a large turtle. Again, I waited for Pete to help, and he had to pull out the mower with our pickup.”

Looking back, Mary says that one of the more telling stories occurred a few years ago when she was edging a sidewalk in the pouring rain. “This lady pulled alongside me and said,

“It’s so expensive and difficult to get rid of lawn debris in this area, and the mulching deck does a great job at dispersing the clippings.”

‘Honey, if you know your name and where you live, I’ll take you home.’” The working couple got a chuckle out of this episode, but the lady’s comment speaks to how unusual it is to see folks at their age still working.

“We’ve had a hard, but great, life together,” says Pete. Mary agrees completely, adding, “When I could finally talk after the stroke, I told Pete to look me in the eyes. He did, and I said, ‘Let’s get a divorce; this is no way for you to

live.’ He responded by saying, ‘When we took our vows, the preacher said in sickness and in health. Don’t you remember that?’”

Indeed, the formula for success in their personal and business life has involved a strong faith in God and a deep love for each other. Mary puts it succinctly when she says, “Pete and I have had a wonderful life together. We’ve loved, laughed and struggled through our 62 years. Money was tight, but together we made it. I know through it all that the Lord was always on our side.”

Currently, Mary hasn’t been joining her husband in the field, but she says she will soon. In the meantime, she takes him lunch and looks out for him in the same way he has looked after her over the years. **WT**

M&P is still mowing today to pay off medical debts.



BOB T'S TECH talk

It's Not The Warranty – It's The Company

To be clear from the start, this is not an article about what should and shouldn't be covered under warranty. That was covered in *Walker Talk* volume 23. This article is about the value of warranty.

Today we see a lot of what I would term "Gimmick Warranties". You may recognize some: No Questions Asked, Two-Year, Three-Year, Lifetime ... and the list goes on. No matter how it's worded, salespeople can use it to their advantage to close the deal.

The big question is, "Have you ever read one of those warranty statements?" If you have, did you understand all of the legalese it would take to meet the terms? If you've tried, you quickly realized that they were most likely written by a team of lawyers or even multiple teams. One might even come to the conclusion that the whole purpose is to cause your head to spin, and all you will really take in is what they want you to take in.

Have you ever tried really hard to listen to the disclaimer given at the end of an automobile commercial? I've got a couple of grandkids who I'm sure could give 'em a go for their money. There is no way it could be my hearing or age! Maybe a Supreme Court Justice could figure it out and give a ruling. (Sorry, I didn't mean to get political.)

Some time ago while watching the tube, I became curious about an auto commercial in which the manufacturer highly touted their 100,000-mile, or lifetime, warranty on the drive train. I wanted to know more, so off I went to Google so I could become enlightened. The conditions required to even begin to make a warranty claim are:

- 1) Maintenance schedules called out must be met to the letter. If you're late or miss one, too bad.
- 2) All maintenance must be performed by an authorized dealer. Sorry Jiffy Lube and Grease Monkey, you don't count. What all this means is that if you and your family have finally taken that long-awaited, three-week road trip vacation, you'd better check that maintenance record carefully. You may have to beat it to the nearest dealership in the middle of your trip, thousands of miles from home to get that "50,000 mile,

\$800, we'll need the car all day, two days from now maintenance or lose the warranty" done.

Can you imagine applying all this to your lawn mower—especially if you're a commercial cutter, and it's been raining for a week and you're behind, but it's time for the scheduled maintenance *now*. Oh, and by the way, there are no excuses. You miss, you're out. The rules are tough and there is no room for errors.

So how does this compare to the "Walker" warranty? First, it's only one page long, and that may be stretching it a bit. Go ahead and read it. I'm sure you'll understand it. It's written that way intentionally. There is nothing confusing or hidden. Like a lot of warranties, the basic coverage is one year on the tractor and deck, three years on

the drive, and the engines are covered by their respective manufacturers from the date of purchase. Pretty straight forward with no nonsense!

I think most of us would agree that if there is a problem, it will most likely show up fairly early on, say within the first 200 hours of use. So for a homeowner or small commercial user, they may not put 200 hours on in a year. Let's say at 18 months and 150 hours a jackshaft bearing goes south. Obviously it shouldn't have failed, but it did. Is the customer responsible for the repair?

This is where a relationship with the local dealer is of great value. The dealer can evaluate the failure, determine that this failure is unusual and call his distributor. They then can agree to cover it for the customer and file a policy adjustment warranty claim. Their other option is for the distributor to call the factory and discuss the situation, and Walker Manufacturing can give them special authorization to make the repair under warranty. Simple! Of course the cost of any warranty is built into the price of every piece of equipment, and the more complex the warranty, the more cost it adds on. Ultimately the customer pays.

We believe that the true value of warranty is not in "what is written out", but in the company behind "what is written". Our philosophy is: "Do unto others as you would want them to do unto you", or just plain "Treat people fairly". We feel the return on that investment is much greater. **WT**

Industry Down 35%, Walker Down 23%

With a business slowdown in full force in the USA, the outdoor power equipment industry and Walker Manufacturing are not exceptions.

According to statistics from the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), manufacturers' shipments of commercial riding mowers have decreased 35% for the accounting period starting September 2008. During the same period, Walker sales have slowed 23%. As with many other businesses, Walker is managing the slowdown with reduced daily production, factory furloughs (10 weeks so far in 2009) and a reduction of labor force.

There are a couple of bright spots that are helping Walker navigate the slow time. Export sales have not slowed, but are almost even with last year; Walker's export sales are now 35% of total sales.

Additionally, sales of replacement parts have

increased, which indicates customers are continuing to run older machines rather than buying new—a way of coping with challenging economic times.

With the long life and extended value offered by the Walker Mower, owners have the option of running and maintaining "used" versus buying "new". To be sure, a manufacturing company depends on the production and sale of new machines, but Walker believes that the increased value offered by running long-life "used" machines ultimately supports the sale of new machines.

In thinking about the business challenges of 2009, Bob Walker shared his three priorities of management in a recent employee newsletter: (1) Stay in business, (2) Get our production synchronized with market demand, and (3) Minimize disruption in the lives of our employees and their families. ■

BEAUTIFUL PLACES CALENDAR CONTEST DEADLINE EXTENDED

The deadline for the Beautiful Places Calendar Contest has been extended to September 11. One person will win \$1,000 and have their image printed on the cover, and two runners-up will each receive \$500.

Submissions are voted on by Walker employees. Learn more and submit your entry at www.walkermowers.com (click on the Calendar Contest link at the bottom of the page).



IMPROVED 42" SIDE-DISCHARGE DECK

A new housing and a new carrier frame have been developed for the 42" side-discharge deck. The front of the housing is extended 2-1/2" forward to improve the cutting quality, especially when working in tall grass. Also, a new damage-resistant, molded rubber side-discharge shield is offered with the new design.



BOOM SPRAYER UPDATED

The new version of the boom sprayer uses a high-quality blow-molded tank (25 gallon), offers a heavy-duty spray wand, and provides more powerful spray wand performance with pump pressure increased from 60 to 100 psi. Order Part Number SP6641.



DSD60 DECK SPINDLE

Starting with serial number D14-122606, a seal has been added to the top end of the DSD60 (Super B) deck spindle to stop the tendency of water and dirt to migrate into the spindle bearings and cause premature failure. In case of bearing failure on earlier units, the new style spindle should be installed as an upgrade.

CATCHER REINFORCING KIT

For earlier units with the 7.0- or 9.5-bushel grass catcher, a kit is available to install steel supports on the lower front corners where the plastic has sagged or cracking has occurred. The supports connect to the dump handle for increased strength and durability. Order Kit Part Number 8515-9.



What We Believe at Walker

This card is an accumulation of operating principles and values that we have learned while in business for over 50 years. Many of these principles were developed during Max Walker's early years in the manufacturing business. The beliefs statement is posted on plaques placed throughout the company, and each new employee receives one of these cards. We have also had a number of requests for copies of this card, so they are available upon request.

What We Believe at WALKER

- **O**perate by principles that are optimum for employees and their families
- **P**romises are to be kept; keep your word, tell the truth, be honest in all things (dishonesty cannot be tolerated within the company or in outside relationships, as it is ultimately destructive)
- **P**ursue excellence in all work without excuse—the results of this pursuit are easily seen in every part of the business and in all relationships both inside and outside of the company
- **O**pportunity to lead depends on serving—our suppliers, employees, and customers all voluntarily associate themselves with the company based on how well we serve them
- **R**emember where our help and blessings come from—live and work with gratitude for all the Lord has done for us
- **T**rial and error is powerful in finding the right way—keep your experiments on a small scale, so in error, the damage is small scale
- **U**nderstand that a primary objective of the business is to produce multiplied opportunities; multiplying money is further down the list and is more of a means to the primary objective
- **N**ever allow growth to be the main goal—it is an outcome from doing everything else right
- **I**n all relationships show mercy and forgiveness since the Lord has been merciful and forgiving to us
- **T**he Lord's Sabbath day will be honored by resting from our work
- **Y**our most equitable path is to honor, consider and protect the investments of others as if they were your own (consider employees, suppliers, marketers, customers)
- **A**lways love people, use money
- **B**y working together as a company of people, we can accomplish a better livelihood for ourselves than available by working individually; helping others succeed builds your own success
- **O**ur Lord God, our Senior Partner, has given us this opportunity, we are stewards of the business, the opportunity and the culture; we will operate by principles and ways to honor His name
- **U**nrelenting loyalty to customers builds long term relationships—a strong product opens the door while good service keeps it open
- **N**ever ignore a request; all requests or inquiries deserve the dignity of a reply—do not screen or selectively not respond—you may miss the one opportunity you need to have if you screen
- **D**ignity and honor exist in all work performed by diligent workers—as much as each person should be working at their best opportunity, take pride in their work, enjoy what they are doing
- **S**tay independent—use internally generated finance, product development, and in-house production to keep control and build continuing opportunity

WALKER MOWERS

Dear Employee,

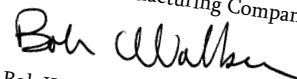
In 1957 our Dad went to work to build a product that would help make the game of golf easier and more enjoyable, and even though the primary use of the *Walker Executive Golf Cart* was for leisure, it improved the quality of life for those who chose to purchase and use the product. Times have changed since the late '50's, but the same can be said today about products that help improve lives. People still use free will to choose our products, and often we hear from our customers how Walker products have helped make their lives easier, businesses more successful and even helped serve the livelihoods of entire families.

As an employee, you should know that every role in this company is honorable and adds to the stability of Walker Manufacturing Company. Your work here helps multiply opportunity for people and companies around the world, and our hope is that your work here will also multiply opportunities for you and your family.

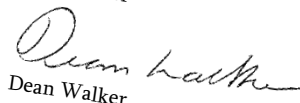
Our "family style" of doing business relies primarily on the concept of associating with good people (employees, customers and suppliers) who are happily working at their best opportunity. Experience shows that a happy employee (working with a positive attitude) is often more of an asset than an unhappy employee even with a strong skill set.

We trust by reading and understanding "*What We Believe at Walker*" (on the other side of this card), you will see our approach to being in this business is that of stewardship to an opportunity with which we have all been blessed.

Sincerely,
Walker Manufacturing Company



Bob Walker



Dean Walker

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us; and confirm for us the work of our hands; yes, confirm the work of our hands.
Psalm 90:17

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Walker Scrapbook



The Cows Love it, Too!

Mr. Shelby Odell of Autsum Farms in Ames, Oklahoma, says they love their Walker Mower and their cows love it, too. "In fact, every time I start the mower up they come running."



On the property of Mr. Joop Bentink's (owner of De Ganzenbeek – Walker Dealer in Voorthuizen, Netherlands), the cows also enjoy the freshly cut grass delivered courtesy of the Walker Hi-Dump.



Tall Grass Short

Longmont, Colorado's Dennis White likes to use his Walker side-discharge deck to "make tall grass short".



Getting the Job Done

Mr. Chris Duncan of Air Charter Taupo (New Zealand) uses a Cessna 206 to maintain five remote airstrips in the Kaimanawa Mountain Range. After removing the seat and deck, Chris loads his Walker Model B into the back of the plane.



Walker Mower Wedding

Mr. Jeremy and Lisa Piesik were wed on September 29, 2007 in Stevens Point, Wisconsin. The Walker Mower was not part of the ceremony, but it was part of the photos. The Piesik family has been a Walker distributor since 1983.