



WALKER TALK

SERVING LAWN MAINTENANCE PROFESSIONALS

**“Mowing is
part of
WHAT I AM”**

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Roy's Lawn Care

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WALKER TALK

Small, Slow Beginnings



In 1977, we were doing contract manufacturing, making tractor cab coolers for another company—that was our main business. The idea to build a riding mower came to us when my dad and I purchased a couple of riding mowers for our own personal use. After a few weeks of using the mowers, we were inspired to make our own design because we thought we could make a mower that would work better on our properties. By that summer we were mowing with our first prototype. All of this work was done as a design challenge and “hobby project”, because at that time we had no grand plan to get into the lawn mower manufacturing business.

The original design was improved upon by building two more prototypes in '78 and '79. First production of 25 units happened the next year. Then we lost our contract manufacturing job in 1983 and went into the lawn mower manufacturing business full-time in 1984 to survive. We nearly went broke that year except for the Lord’s help. The company first made profit from lawn mower manufacturing in 1987, 10 years after the first prototype. Forty years later, the slow start and small beginnings in lawn mowers has become the best opportunity we have ever had in the manufacturing business since my parents started manufacturing in 1957.

There could not be a greater contrast between what we saw in 1977 and where we are today. In the beginning, we had no idea we were looking at our best opportunity. In looking at our experience, I think there is an important lesson to be remembered. Quite often opportunities are missed because of the human tendency to look for big opportunities, and to be impatient and dismissive with what appears to be small. An ancient prophecy from biblical text gives the counterintuitive wisdom for those seeking opportunity: “Who despises the day of small things?” Zechariah 4:10. In context, this question may be restated and paraphrased as: “Do not despise small beginnings.” Bigger opportunity often comes for those who will start with what (little) they have and move ahead to claim what they could not see in the beginning.

Some of the thrilling stories we hear and report in *Walker Talk* often have the component of small, slow beginnings. Some people start a mowing business just to fill in until they can find a “real job”. Then they discover they really enjoy the business of making beautiful places, working outdoors and being their own boss. Ultimately, the story ends with these risk-takers having a much bigger opportunity than they ever dreamed. The other people who are exciting to watch are young people (next generation) who have no choice but to start small and slow, but they are the dreamers who virtually build an opportunity out of nothing. We identify with all of you who started small and slow, for that is where we came from. **WT**

Bob Walker

Bob Walker, President

Roy's team (from left): Anastacio Sanchez, Laura Mejia, Jose Luis Zamora, Roy Mejia, Jose Guzman, Jonathan Mejia, Rafael Batancourt.



Right: Roy with his wife, Laura, who works part-time in the office and does seasonal plantings.



“Mowing is part of WHAT I AM”

Roy Mejia owns Roy's Lawn Care in Wenatchee, Washington. He's 28 years old and operates a company that employs six people. Five days a week, sometimes six, his three mowing crews maintain more than 80 accounts, many of which are HOAs. In addition to mowing, they prune, do cleanups, fertilize and apply weed control, offer enhancements like seasonal color, dethatch and aerate in

the spring, and plow snow in the winter.

“Actually, we will do virtually anything a landscape needs,” said Mejia, who started his company 10 years ago. Life was much different back then, he recalls. “My wife, Laura, and I had started a family early, and for two years I worked summers in my stepfather's landscaping business. In between, I worked at Target and McDonald's trying to make ends meet.”

When events forced his stepfather,

Anastacio Sanchez, to sell his company, Mejia was, in his words, “left up in the air a bit” until a previous customer called and asked him to mow her lawn. “I've always liked to mow,” Mejia relates. “Mowing is part of what I am, so I decided to start my own company. I tried to do everything at first, including installing landscapes, but have since focused almost entirely on maintenance.”



Roy with HOA president Gary Wirta and his wife, Karen. The two were rewarded by taking a chance on the young entrepreneur.

BIG BREAK

It didn't take long for his business to grow. An RV park in the nearby resort community of Crescent Bar asked the young operator to bid on its lawn maintenance. Mejia put together and won the bid. "Hiring Roy as an 18-year-old was a bit of a long shot for us," relates HOA president Gary Wirta. "At the time, I said to my wife, Karen, 'What were we thinking?' But we liked the way he handled himself. We were soon rewarded by his work ethic, punctuality and communication skills, not to mention the fact that he does a great job."

The win was a two-way street. Mejia not only landed a big account that today has more than 253 homes with lawns to mow (the park has since become a summer home for many residents), the transaction also introduced him to his first Walker Mower.

"The HOA was doing lawn maintenance in-house with two Walker Mowers," Mejia explains. "I had never seen one, but I needed better equipment to get the job done, so I purchased one of them. Now our crews have five, the latest being the new model S14 with a 42-inch GHS deck. It's ideal for the small lawns here at the RV park."

Three 25-hp models with 52-inch decks and one 23-hp model, again with a



This scenic open area at the Crescent Bar RV park highlights the striping effect.

52-inch deck, round out Mejia's fleet. He expects to purchase two more this year, noting that "people come up to me all the time and say, 'look at those stripes.' Yes, there's no question the machine does a great job mowing, but it's also very maneuverable and low enough to trim closely under trees."

The mowing season in Wenatchee, a community in North Central Washington with a population of more than 30,000, starts around March 15 and goes through the end of October, approximately 33 cuts per year. Most customers sign up for the mowing season, but some just want a fall cleanup

service, something the Walker Mower is very good at, Mejia adds.

"Our business is growing with the mowers, but we don't want to grow too fast," he says. "My dream is to continue to grow slowly. This will give me time to train my employees, and I don't want to spread myself too thin, either. God gives you what you deserve when it's time."

"Having reasonable goals and being honest is what it takes to be a success in this business," Mejia goes on to say. "I also strive to go the extra mile. Customers appreciate that. It's not what you say or how you look that counts in the end. It's what you do."



The Hi-Dump™ minimizes the handling of grass clippings.

Whatever he's been doing works. Roy's Lawn Care was named best lawn care company in the city last year.

DREAM JOB?

Just because Mejia loves to mow doesn't mean that all of his employees have the same passion he does. Even his stepfather, uncle and two friends who work with him likely can't generate the level of enthusiasm that the company owner does.

"This is not a dream job for most people," he admits. "This is hard work, and employers like myself have to make work fun when we can. Every year we hold an

anniversary party for our employees and their families. Crews often go out to eat as a group and our company hosts barbecues. Last year we took our employees and their families to a theme park where we all had a good time."

Mejia emphasizes that employees also respond to the owner's actions. That's how being honest, humble and kind applies as much to them as it does to customers.

ON DECK

Advertising consists primarily of having the company name on shirts and truck. A Facebook page, however, has

been effective for generating inquiries. "It's not a hard sell by any means," adds Mejia, referring to his Facebook strategy. "Content consists mostly of lawn care tips. But it keeps our name and what we do in front of people."

Then, of course, there's that all important word of mouth. "Hello," someone yelled at the *Walker Talk* editor. "Do you work for Roy's Lawn Care?" "No," the editor replied, "just doing a story on them." "Well let me tell you," the homeowner, Pete Lambro, continued, "this is a great yard service. These guys get it done. I've been here 40 years and I know what a good lawn service is."

You just can't beat that kind of advertising.

What's in store for Roy's Lawn Care in 2017? Despite the owner's desire to grow slowly, it's hard for him to turn down work, hence the reason for two more Walker Mowers this year and at least one more crew. He's also looking to hire a full-time office manager. Laura currently works in the office and does the seasonal planting, but having three children—one boy and two girls—keeps her very busy.

Part of Mejia's long-term growth strategy is to provide current customers with more services. But mowing will always be in the mix. After all, that's part of what he is. **WT**

Sight & Sound Theatres

Walker Mower Plays a LEADING ROLE OFFSTAGE

Cars and buses start pouring into the parking lot about two hours prior to showtime. When the curtain rises there will likely be more than 2,000 people in attendance anticipating the story of Samson and viewing the Sight & Sound Theatres' mission: Bringing the Bible to Life.

Sight & Sound Theatres is celebrating its 40th year in Strasburg, Pennsylvania. A second theatre in Branson, Missouri, opened its door eight years ago. *Walker Talk* visited the Strasburg location last fall, just a week before Thanksgiving.

Young and old alike come from all over the country to see productions—and they're not disappointed. The cast for Samson includes dozens of talented, professional actors and actresses whose performance is enriched by elaborate costumes, towering sets, live animals, amazing effects, and a story told with passion, some humor, and lively song and dance.

BEHIND THE SCENES

The theatre is housed in an impressive 157,000-square-foot building, one of 12 structures that occupy the grounds. The others are home to a variety of important



Leaves pose no problem for the theater's Walker Mower, a collection process made even faster and easier with an electric dump.

offstage activities.

"Everything we do here contributes in some way to the show and visitor experience," explains David Albright, facilities/groundskeeper supervisor. "In fact, probably more than 30 different departments are either directly or indirectly involved with productions. The departments include seamstresses who make and repair wardrobes; artists, welders and carpenters who design and build the sets; and trainers and caretakers who work with the animals."

Albright's department is not to be left out. The theatre sits on a 63-acre property, six of which are maintained in-house by Albright and two other team members, 21-year veteran J. Petersheim (JP) who operates the facility's one Walker Mower, and relatively new arrival, Katie Moran.

Since the late 1990s, the grounds department has owned three Walker Mowers. Its current mower, a 25-hp model with a 48-inch GHS deck, is slightly more than two years old—yet already has close to 1,000 hours on it.

"The mower is ideal for mowing the many islands here and maneuvering around trees and other obstacles," says the 77-year-old Petersheim. "During

the growing season, I average about 25 to 30 hours a week mowing, primarily with our Walker Mower. We also have a Kubota for wide-area mowing."

When asked what he likes most about the Walker Mower, Petersheim reiterates how easy it handles, but then points to the dump box. "The electric dump is a huge benefit," he explains. "I don't have to get off the seat to dump the leaves and clippings. It's a real time and energy saver."

IN CONCERT

One can imagine that a single Walker Mower, including its rotary broom and snowblower attachments, and the Kubota are not the only pieces of equipment on site. Six golf carts, an arsenal of snowplows, and an array of other equipment are used to maintain the grounds.



David Albright (left), facilities/groundskeeper supervisor, with Walker Mower operator J. Petersheim (JP).

“Downtime for us isn’t quite as critical as it is for landscape contractors who lose money for every hour their mower isn’t working. But we have a schedule to maintain, too.

– John Breckbill



Islands and trees are among many obstacles that put a premium on the mower's maneuverability.

Albright notes that 10 people comprise the grounds and facilities department, and all work in concert, again behind the scenes, toward providing an exemplary experience for visitors.

"Whether we're mowing, pruning, installing seasonal color or doing other work on the grounds, we're out of sight by the time the first cars and buses start pulling in," Albright says. "That's not a real issue for us since there is always plenty to do behind the theatre and main building."

As he points out, the to-do list expands dramatically during a 10-week lull between productions, which usually occurs after the first of the year. "If there are any major renovations inside or out that need to be done, that's when we do them," Albright relates.

That's also the time when equipment is repaired and readied for the growing season ahead. Another veteran, John Breckbill, senior facilities maintenance technician, has been with Sight & Sound Theatres for 27 years. His *modus operandi* is being able to fix most anything.

"Downtime for us isn't quite as critical as it is for landscape contractors who lose money for every hour their mower isn't working," Breckbill points out. "But we have a schedule to maintain, too. We can repair most anything in-house, but still depend on our Walker Mower dealer, Daryl Weaver of Weaver Turf Power in nearby Willow Street, for support. He's been very helpful and is an important partner in our grounds maintenance program."

Both Petersheim and Breckbill were with Sight & Sound when the theatre and all but two of the outbuildings were destroyed by a fire in 1997. "The fire started during an annual changeover renovation after work hours so no one was injured," Breckbill recalls. "Luckily the animals all made it through, as well."

As they say, the show must go on. Still, it took 18 months to rebuild—bigger and better than ever.

New productions have their initial run in Strasburg before being shipped to Branson where they are shown two years



During the growing season, 77-year-old JP spends nearly 30 hours a week mowing.

later. To give an idea of just how much time, effort and material are needed to put on a production, Albright notes that it takes 50-plus tractor trailers to transport a show from Strasburg to Branson.

Last year "Samson" ran from the second week of March through the end of December. This year the story of Jonah starts March 11 and runs through the middle of October. Branson is showing "Moses" for 2017, along with the "Miracle of Christmas" that starts production in November. For more information, visit sight-sound.com or call 800-277-1277. **WT**

Slow, Planned Growth **REAPS DIVIDENDS**

Maine contractor Booth Hemingway built a great company over the past 37 years—so great that a group of investors just bought it.

Booth Hemingway grew his company from a bare bones operation. *Walker Talk* readers have heard similar stories before. An aspiring landscape contractor pulls around a \$700 trailer and an old Locke reel lawn mower with a used Datsun pickup. The first year, he grossed \$26,000 with the help of three part-time employees.

That was 37 years ago, and the only reminder of those early days is the old Locke mower that sits at the rear of the shop. Last fall, Hemingway sold his company, Piscataqua Landscaping & Tree Service in Eliot, Maine, to an investment group in Portland, Maine. The company name, employees and all the equipment, including his 23 Walker Mowers, stayed on the job.

GOOD INVESTMENT

The new owners purchased a well-established and very successful company. Piscataqua Landscaping & Tree Service is a full-service landscape management company. In addition to providing an array of construction and maintenance services to both residential and commercial clients throughout the New Hampshire and southern Maine seacoast



Booth Hemingway with Walker Mower operator Aaron Soucy. After 37 years in business, Hemingway sold his company last fall to a group of investors.



One of the company's 23 Walker Mowers in action.

areas, it also has a plant health care and tree division.

In 2015 its revenue stream was divided among construction at 34.7%, maintenance at 32.1%, snow at 24.4%, and irrigation/night lighting and plant health care/tree at 8.8%. Hemingway anticipated that the final percentages for last year would reflect more construction sales and less snow.

When asked how his company grew from a small startup into an attractive purchase for investors, Hemingway cites the following:

- Slow, planned growth
- Systems, including having the right setup/equipment
- Investment in his employees.

PLANNED GROWTH

Slow, planned growth over the years allowed Piscataqua Landscaping (named after the river that borders Maine and New Hampshire) to build a company with 100-plus employees and 22 maintenance crews (10 of which mow). Hemingway added components as demand for new services increased and the personnel and equipment to

deliver them were in his possession.

If there ever was a big break, it came relatively early on when Hemingway developed a working relationship with a real estate company. That helped get the company into construction, which naturally grew maintenance work.

The other services followed in due course as demand for them evolved and the owner felt comfortable in providing them. All were developed organically except the plant health care and tree division, which was added with the purchase of a tree care company.

"Growing slowly was important to me," Hemingway emphasizes. "I didn't know everything about running a business. Over the years, I used various consultants and attended several educational events and conventions. ALCA (now the National Association of Landscape Professionals) had a tremendous impact on me. I would attend its educational programs, learn from the larger companies, and bring business-building ideas home with me.

"Growth came naturally by constantly improving our product and our staff's work experience, and offering

clients superior service," Hemingway adds. "It was only the last 10 years or so that we began to more aggressively market our services."

SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

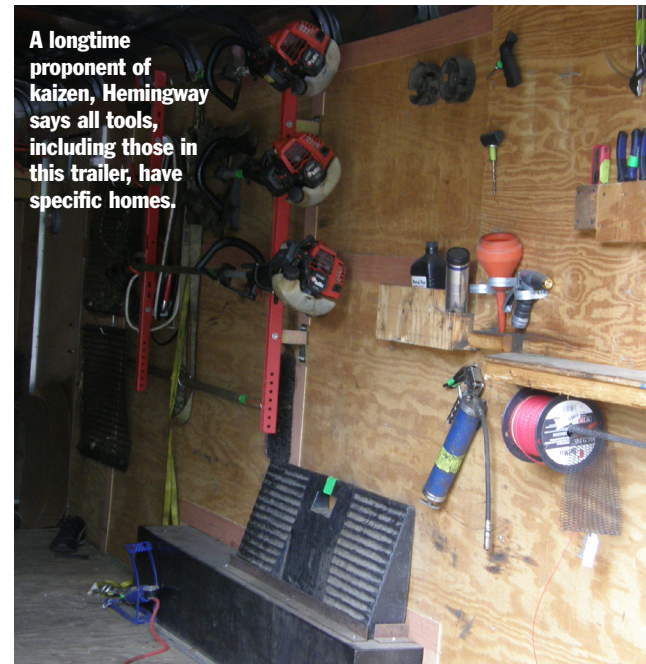
The creation of systems made for an efficient operation and helped increase the company's sales 35 out of the last 37 years. "The key word has been kaizen, the constant improvement in all that we do," says Hemingway. "I first heard the term years ago at an ALCA convention.

"We became 100% paperless using LMN Software and Mini iPads," he continues. "All tools and equipment have specific homes so that employees always know exactly where to find them. All major equipment such as trucks, trailers, Walker Mowers and skid-steer loaders are replaced on a scheduled basis."

Hemingway purchased his first Walker with a 42-inch deck in 1990 after seeing an article in a trade publication. "We found that one Walker Mower with the GHS bagging system could replace two walk-behind mowers, and it did a much better and faster job of collecting clippings and leaves," he adds. "Thanks



The company maintenance division is home to 22 crews, including 10 dedicated to mowing.



A longtime proponent of kaizen, Hemingway says all tools, including those in this trailer, have specific homes.

to the machines' superior hydraulic steering design, they are also much easier to operate than other zero-turn mowers.

"Crews have tried out similarly

equipment setups, as well as having the most efficient crew sizes, are part of a systems approach," Hemingway explains.

"So, too, is providing regular mechanical

to the company's success as developing systems," says Hemingway. "Investing in your employees is critical. Owners can do that in many different ways, anything from providing growth opportunities within the company and having great projects for them to work on, to supplying them with the right equipment for the job, along with the proper training.

"Investing in education and certification is money well spent," Hemingway adds. "It not only enhances client satisfaction and company awareness, but also instills pride and confidence within employees. Successful companies never stop improving and learning. I believe strongly that company owners also need to invest in their communities, to give back to those who've supported them over the years, and to invest in themselves, by planning ahead for the day they retire."

For Hemingway, a gradual, systematic approach to growth, implemented by a well-trained staff, provided the path to success. It worked for him and can work for other company owners who also started out with a used truck, trailer and old mower—and a dream. **WT**

"Investing in education and certification is money well spent. It not only enhances client satisfaction and company awareness, but also instills pride and confidence within employees."

– Booth Hemingway

designed mowers, but Walker has always been their unanimous choice. Our loyalty to the machine over the years has been strengthened by upgrades that continue to improve performance."

Every lawn maintenance trailer has two 25-hp Walker Mowers with 48-inch GHS decks, in addition to one push mower, three string line trimmers, two backpack blowers, and assorted tools. The mowing division runs two-person crews.

Hemingway emphasizes that everything a crew could possibly need is located inside the trailers. "Trailer/

maintenance, such as sharpening blades every day and washing trucks."

INVESTING IN PEOPLE

Prior to starting Piscataqua Landscaping, Hemingway earned a four-year degree in Spanish and a two-year degree in horticulture. He started his career baling hay and mowing lawns, later becoming a gardener on a private estate. He was employed there for seven years before going to work for a landscape contractor, and after that a tree service company.

"Thinking back, surrounding myself with talented staff was just as important

Business tips for landscape company owners

Is Your Business READY TO SELL?



Chances are, selling your company is the furthest thing from your mind. Even so, running your business like you're preparing to sell it will not only make it an attractive buy (if and when that day comes), it's also the only way to operate and help ensure your future and that of your employees. This advice comes from veteran landscape contractor Mike Rorie.

LOOSE ENDS

Rorie compares selling a landscaping business to selling a house. To get top dollar for it, the homeowner doesn't want to have a lot of loose ends hanging around. That could be anything from having a roof that needs repair to peeling paint, appliances that don't work right, and window frames that need replacing.

To complete the analogy, a potential business buyer will likely interview your key employees, check to make sure your margins are healthy, review your balance sheet, and inspect your facility and equipment. Depending on the type of sale, the buyer may even want to talk with a few customers.

A disgruntled employee who should have been fired months ago would be an obvious loose end. So, too, are margins that are well below industry averages, a balance sheet showing lots of red, and old equipment in disrepair. As Rorie points out, the "loose ends" will devalue a potential sale. The same loose ends will be a drag on a company's annual performance—even years before a sale is contemplated.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Run your business today like you're going to sell it. "This will unburden you from having to tie up some last minute loose ends when you decide to sell," says Rorie. "Running your business in the right way now will also increase its value later. Most business sales, especially

Smart buyers will want to keep key employees on board to ensure a steady revenue stream. Good equipment in good condition can also be a plus.

those to a third-party investment group, are pretty cut and dried. They're all about the money. The seller negotiates a business value with the buyer based on EBITDA (earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization), and then a multiple of that figure is applied. Depending on the market, the multiple can range anywhere from four to eight times the EBITDA."

Revenue and earnings potential is the primary way to value a company, Rorie adds, but money isn't the only measur-

may take their "temperatures" ahead of time to determine how committed they are to staying put, and even talk with them about a benefits package before a sale is completed.

Having systems in place to help optimize scheduling, routing, billing, and other standard operating and administrative procedures can be attractive to buyers unless they're inclined to bring their own systems with them.

Having good equipment in good repair is always a plus, but Rorie emphasizes that

benefits, attending meetings, having a company car and so forth.

Most buyers can connect the dots and get beyond anemic bottom line numbers that don't always tell the whole story. At other times, it's up to the seller to "add back" expenses he or she has run through the company that otherwise would be labeled a profit.

"When selling your business to an investment group or another company, it's pretty cut and dried: It's about the money," Rorie re-emphasizes. "Company dollar value also plays an important role when selling to employees, but in this case, it is incumbent on the owner to plan ahead and have key people in place to assume management roles."

The same holds true when selling to family members. Having key employees in place is certainly important. Money and profit, however, may take a back seat to giving sons and daughters the opportunity to carry on the family business name.

Still, no matter when or to whom you plan to sell, running your business like it's going on the market tomorrow will deliver dividends today. **WT**

Mike Rorie has been a participant in the green industry for over three decades. He founded GroundMasters in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1979 and grew the company to a multi-city regional operation before selling to a national provider in 2006. In 2014, with the help of his daughter and former management team, Mike started a new commercial grounds maintenance company, GroundSystems. He is also the CEO of GIS Dynamics, maker of Go iLawn and Go iPave property measuring systems for contractors.



"Running your business in the right way now will also increase its value later. Most business sales, especially those to a third-party investment group, are pretty cut and dried. They're all about the money."

– Mike Rorie

ing stick. Depending on the market and type of services a company provides, the customer, management team, systems and equipment all come into play — in that order.

Landscape maintenance companies with a book of recurring business are generally more attractive to buyers than companies that primarily provide one-off design/build services. Ongoing revenue is a plus, but so too is a brand that isn't tied too closely to the owner and his or her design reputation. Remove the owner and so goes the brand.

Owners who've been in business several years understand the notion that it's best to spread work around. In other words, don't rely on two or three customers to provide the lion's share of revenue. Rorie notes that customer vulnerability can rate high on the list of considerations for potential buyers. Having too many eggs in one basket is never a sound business strategy, and it can be a substantial obstacle to a sale.

Value can be defined in other ways. Having a strong management team is an asset for any company. Smart buyers will want to keep key employees on board to ensure a steady revenue stream. They

buyers are purchasing much more than your vehicles and equipment. They're buying a business, and equipment can be replaced more easily than your customers and management team.

NUANCES

All sales are not created equally. In some cases, the owner may be selling to a competitor or an investment company. In others, the employees could be the buyers, or maybe it's a family member or members who want to buy the company. In all cases, having a healthy, profitably run company is good for both the seller and ultimately the buyer.

The word "profit", though, often carries two different connotations: 1) before you're thinking about selling, and 2) after you put your company on the market. In the first scenario, profit creates a tax burden. For scenario two, profits add to the company's sale value.

Healthy companies don't always show a great deal of profit, Rorie adds. Profit can be poured back into a company in any number of ways, anything from buying and maintaining good equipment, growing sales and employees, and offering new services, to providing company



At the ripe old age of 17, David Bartlett already has 65 weekly accounts to maintain, along with another 70 fall cleanups.

Older Before His Time

Customers can't believe their North Dakota contractor is still a teenager.

David Bartlett doesn't look 17, not at all. In fact, residents of the 65 weekly properties he maintains think he's north of 21. That works to his advantage, but appearance isn't the only thing that misdirects customers. Bartlett's equipment, personality and dedication all point to an individual who is much older and wiser than his age.

At 6:30 every morning, the owner of Bartlett Yardworks in Bottineau, North Dakota, leaves his parents' house for his 20' x 40' storage unit in town, something he's had since April of last year. He hooks a 7' x 18' twin-axle trailer onto his '04 Ram 2500 diesel and heads off to nearby Lake Metigoshe where customers have summer homes.

On his trailer is a new 25-hp Walker Mower with a 48-inch GHS deck. He purchased it from Outfront Power Equipment in Fargo at the end of last season to replace a used MT 26. He still has the latter for a backup.

David's trailer also hauls around an array of Stihl handheld equipment, a Honda push mower, and a debris dump box he built himself. For fall cleanup, he makes room for a Billy Goat leaf blower. A Hi-Dump™ for his Walker Mower would be a nice addition, but he suspects the additional weight would likely be prohibitive on the steep terrain so characteristic of his accounts.

LEARNING CURVE

Along with his weekly accounts, David also does around 70 cleanups in the fall, what he calls his busiest time of year. "I'm learning," he admits, "and adding



Lake customers, who are home only part time, trust David to look after their properties.



Hills, retaining walls, tight corners and sheds are just a few obstacles that highlight lake properties.

a few services as I go. Currently I mow, aerate and do some snow removal, along with other odds and ends customers ask of me.”

How to price is part of his learning curve, David adds. Jobs start at around

The Bartletts live only two miles from the Canadian border. Lake Metigoshe, an international waterway, is less than a mile from the border and cuts across into Canada. “I have friends who visit who’ve never been to Canada,” David tells. “I put them on my jet ski and take them across the border. That’s no problem as long as we don’t go ashore.”

The new recreational watercraft is a luxury for the young entrepreneur. His father, Jim, taught engineering at North Dakota State University in Fargo for 13 years before moving his family to Bottineau. “Dad always taught me and my brothers to be responsible,” David recalls. “As kids, he would challenge us to buy toys that were more than toys: They had to be something that taught us something. It didn’t make me and my brothers very happy, but it certainly was a learning experience.”

That experience helped David determine his choice of mowers, always looking for quality and sound engineering. The jet ski, on the other hand? You can’t work all of the time.

BUILDING TRUST

If 17 seems young, how about 13? That’s when David and his older brother, Andrew, discovered there was money to be made mowing lawns. With another older brother, Jonathan, chauffeuring them around, the two mowed 13 properties the first year with a couple of push

mowers. In the spring of 2014, they formed Bartlett Yardworks and graduated into an Exmark zero-turn mower. A year later, Andrew left to take a different career path.

“My company has grown mostly by word of mouth,” says David. “I’ve put out door hangers while Andrew, who now owns a production company, helped design my website and a brochure I use as a mailer. He has also produced a video that introduces me to prospective customers and helps build trust.

“With lake properties, where customers are here only part time, having someone who is trustworthy and will look after their properties is all important,” David emphasizes. “I may spot something that I can take care of myself or, if not, I can email, call or text them and find someone who can do the job. The bottom line, though, is having trust that I will do the right thing.”

David has done the right thing so far—to the tune of grossing nearly \$70,000 in 2016. Not bad for a 17-year-old who says growth has been stunted by not having a credit score, something that will change this year when he turns 18. One only knows what he will do with the additional credit. Maybe he’ll want a later-model truck, or perhaps another trailer with a new Walker Mower would be nice to outfit another crew. Rest assured, whatever he buys will make him money. **WT**



A dump box is especially handy during fall cleanup season.

\$35 and range upward depending on the property. As David points out, lake properties can be tricky with hills, retaining walls, tight corners, sheds to mow around, outdoor living spaces with fireplaces and kitchens, and other natural and man-made obstacles. “That’s where the Walker Mower comes in handy,” he emphasizes. “It’s compact and maneuverable, and the floating deck doesn’t scalp the lawn.”



Technical Documentation

I'm one of those guys, like a lot of men, who doesn't like to ask for directions when I get lost. Another shortcoming I have had to work on is looking at the directions or instructions when I purchase something that requires assembly or operating instructions. I have always assumed that instructions were for other people to use, but not for guys like me, or so I thought.

I would like to think age and experience have helped me see the short-sightedness of this type of thinking. That is why I am very appreciative of the way we approach technical documentation here at Walker Manufacturing. Let's look at a few reasons why I feel this way, and hopefully you will gain an appreciation for it as well.

Here at Walker, we continue to strive for excellence and consistency in technical documentation. We think documentation is an asset and adds value to the product by providing current operator and parts manuals for the ongoing safe operation, maintenance and service of your Walker Mower. Because safety, operational and maintenance information is found in the operator's manual, it is important to us that the customer has this information at their fingertips along with parts lists and diagrams.

We have a full-time technical writer on staff whose responsibility and expertise is in this area, and we have surrounded him with a team of quality people. I believe this shows Walker's

ongoing commitment to this process and the desire to provide quality technical documentation.

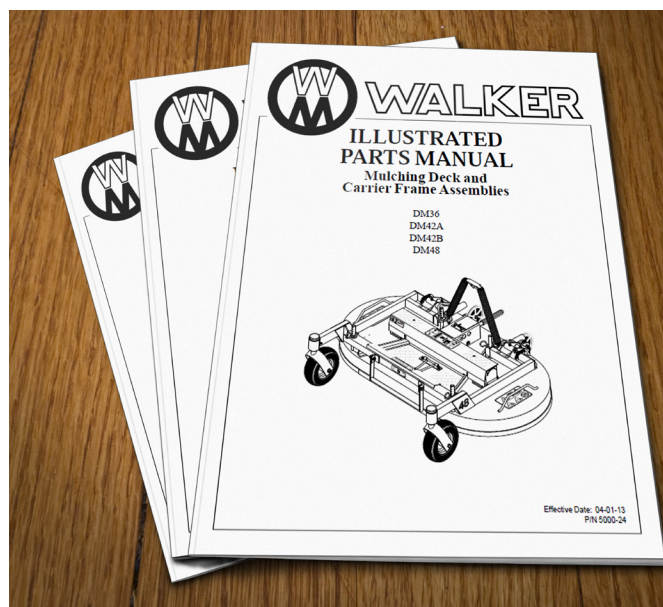
In addition, we have developed a new strategy whereby we are creating operator's and parts manuals for each individual tractor model (instead of the combined manuals used previously). We are following a similar strategy with decks by creating manuals for collection, side and rear discharge, and mulching decks. Furthermore, we are creating combined parts and operator's manuals for all of our implements and attachments. This has been a huge undertaking, to say the least, and it's a never-ending body of work to keep up to date.

Moreover, our documentation team has taken on the ambitious task of revising our manuals on a yearly basis. So far, they have lived up to the challenge. By setting such an aggressive goal, we have committed to providing all past, present and future customers with the most current manuals that capture important changes and updates to the product.

Nearly all of our manuals, both legacy and current, are available for download at walkermowers.com/support. If you locate your manual(s) online and do not want to print them yourself, your

Walker Dealer will be happy to get the printed manual for you.

Hopefully I have made my case for the importance of manuals when it comes to your Walker Mower. Our goal is to provide you, the customer, with the



best overall experience when it comes to your Walker. We believe one of the ways this will be achieved is through excellence in the quality and consistency of our manuals.

By the way, I still get lost and need directions from time to time—and still struggle with admitting it. So I have learned to use my iPhone as a GPS and it helps a lot. Plus, it keeps me from admitting I'm lost. I guess it's a guy thing. **WT**

Top Walker Dealers Honored

In September 2016, Walker Manufacturing introduced two new dealer recognition programs, honoring their best-performing, most active dealers worldwide.

The first award was given to the “Top 25 Dealers” based on the number of unit sales registered over the last three years. Using that three-year-period sales metric emphasizes dealers who have strong, consistent sales performance over extended seasons, while encountering the typical variations in weather and economy.

The second award is named “Five Star Dealer”, created to recognize the top five dealers worldwide, using several areas of measurement and qualification. Walker distributors participated in the selection process and nominated their best dealers. The final selection was made by the Walker factory team. Being a Five Star Walker Dealer is a lifetime achievement award and is given only once; in subsequent years there will be another group of five. Five Star Dealers also received an all-expense paid visit to the factory and were honored at the annual distributor meeting, plus they

enjoyed a weekend getaway at the Four Seasons Resort in Vail, Colorado.

Creating dealer awards is a new initiative for Walker. For many years, Walker distributors have been recognized for their performance, but not dealers. Walker Manufacturing and their distributors recognize they would not have the opportunity to be in the manufacturing/

distribution business without the sales and service delivered by their dealers. Thinking back, Walker recognizes that dealer award giving is overdue; it is time to recognize the top-performing dealers with a note of appreciation and recognition for a job well done.

You can see the list of award-winning dealers on the next page.



Walker Factory Shipments Create Optimism for 2017

After a flat year in 2016, shipments for Walker Manufacturing’s 2017 fiscal year (starting October 1) have strongly rebounded to some of the highest levels in the company history. Shipments are up 36% in the fall quarter, well ahead of forecast. Export sales are also increasing after a significant decrease in 2016.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the factors that influence business cycles, Walker believes pre-election jitters from the US

presidential campaign may have caused some hesitation and caution in the domestic and worldwide markets, resulting in slowed sales in 2016. In addition, even though the US dollar continues to be strong in comparison to foreign currencies, there appears to be some positive change in outlook that is re-energizing the export markets where Walker is doing business.

With the increase in shipping, the Walker factory has made two increases

in production rates since October, and there may be some additional upward adjustment in the spring. Walker production uses a “level” manufacturing plan with year-round production and full-time jobs for employees. While looking at the optimistic signs for 2017 sales, the factory will exercise caution and use a balanced approach with orders, forecasts and inventory to avoid underproduction or overproduction.

TOP 25 DEALERS

Morgan Power Equipment

Joe Salters
Halifax, MA

Chad Little Outdoor Power Equipment

Bruce Weeks
Scarborough, ME

Stephen Roy Power Equipment

Stephen Roy
Johnston, RI

Fletcher's Outdoor Power Equipment

Frank & Vicki Fletcher
Delmont, PA

Ace Outdoor Power Equipment

Brian Lonnergan
Bayville, NJ

OMC Power Equipment

Doug Watt
Christchurch, NZ

Aubin Equipment

John Aubin & Heather Merrill
Cape Cod, MA

G & G Equipment

Will Giefer
Frederick, CO

Bissett Equipment Corporation

Bob Pospischil & Kevin Malone
Holtsville, NY

J.M. Hayden Equipment Company

John Hayden
Newfields, NH

Maximum Outdoor Power Equipment

Carl Witte
Wichita, KS

Smith's Lawnmower Sales & Service

Brian Smith
Caldwell, ID

Master Mower

R. C. Zwolsky
Marietta, GA

K C Motors

Ken McCormick
Levin, NZ

Stihl Shop East Tamaki

Hamish Cook
Auckland, NZ

Weno Power Equipment

David Garner
High Point, NC

Pioneer Nursery & Equipment

Jeff Freeman
Oklahoma City, OK

Price Small Engines

Steve Price
Opelika, AL

Stihl Shop Te Awamutu

Matt & Sharlene Hird
Te Awamutu, NZ

Gatmans Mowers & More

Jim Wreaks & Ian Masefield
Auckland, NZ

Capital Tractor

Don Greer
Montgomery, AL

MAC Equipment

John McCrimmon
Loveland, CO

Proffitt's Lawn & Leisure

Joe Brogden & Patty DeRight
Amarillo, TX

Lawn Equipment Company

Scott Ritchie
Boise, ID

Cloutier Pro Mini Moteur

Philippe Cloutier
Saint-Therese, QC, Canada

FIVE STAR DEALERS

Fletcher's Outdoor Power Equipment

Frank & Vicki Fletcher
Delmont, PA

Power Plus Equipment

Dave Stutzman & Paul Yoder
Arthur, IL

Aubin Equipment

John Aubin & Heather Merrill
Cape Cod, MA

Stihl Shop Te Awamutu

Matt & Sharlene Hird
Te Awamutu, NZ

Smith's Lawnmower Sales & Service

Brian Smith
Caldwell, ID

S18 OFFERS MORE POWER



The new Walker Model S18 has a Briggs & Stratton Vanguard engine installed in the "S" chassis, shared with Model S14. The efficiency, high-performance and lower price of the Model S chassis, combined with a bigger engine, will move this model into more commercial applications and makes an interesting addition to the Walker product line. Additional standard features of this model include a four-gallon fuel tank and a quick-disconnect U-joint coupler on the PTO drive. Initial production of the S18 has begun in early 2017. Deliveries to customers are scheduled to begin in the spring season.

POWER DUMP KIT AVAILABLE FOR MODEL S

The convenience of dumping the 7.0 bushel grass catcher from the operator seat is now available for the Model S. A dealer-installed kit installs the power ram to lift the catcher, door opening mechanism and a switch by the operator seat to control dumping. Order Kit P/N 7620-17 for Model S14 or 7620-18 for Model S18. With the addition of this kit, the Power Dump feature is now an available option for all Walker GHS models.



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Permit # 1013



Previous winners



Enter the 2018 Beautiful Places Calendar Photo Contest

Your photo could WIN \$2,000!

Enter Your Photo in the Walker 2018 Beautiful Places Calendar Contest

Participation is simple! Take a horizontal (landscape) photograph of a beautiful location where the Walker Mower is in action. Make sure to focus on the beautiful location, so the Walker is only a portion of the shot and not the primary feature. Then submit your photo entry by filling out the submission form online at:

walker.com/requests/calendar

The Walker 2018 Beautiful Places Calendar will be published in late 2017 and feature 13 photos of Walker customers in action all over the world. Winning submissions will be chosen by online voting and votes from the Walker team.



Hurry! Photos must be in by July 1st.

Prizes

1ST PLACE:
**\$2,000 CASH AND THE
CALENDAR'S FRONT COVER**

2nd Place:
\$1,000 cash and a spot
in the calendar

3rd Place:
\$500 cash and a spot
in the calendar

4th - 13th Places:
Walker Ware Prize Pack (valued at
\$100) and a spot in the calendar