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Market Insights for Equipment Dealers

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Customers by Supporting
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DEALER PROFILE

“One thing I’ve learned over the years is that when one part of your business drops off, ANOTHER ONE USUALLY RISES.”

David Garner, owner
Weno Power Equipment, High Point, NC

SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT

Walker Brings on Third Generation ... Expect Some Changes Page 16

CHAINSAW MARKET WATCH
Will typical fall peaks outdo the unusually strong spring?
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CATALOG!

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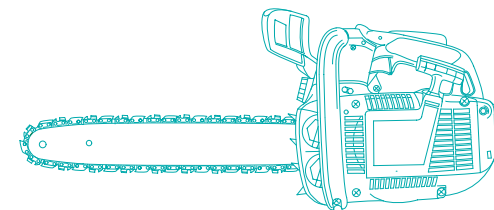
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DEALER PROFILE



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SUPPLIER SPOTLIGHT



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ONLINE EXCLUSIVES

Gain Support of Customers by Supporting Independent Businesses
Independent We Stand offers small business owners the tools to educate local communities on the benefits of supporting local businesses, and to attract customers with the independent marketing message.
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Rotary Offers Complete Line of Tiller Parts for 2013
A wide selection of replacement parts for tillers is featured in Rotary's 2013 sales catalog. Rotary's free catalog includes nearly 200 new items and is available for servicing dealers and distributors.
greenindustrypros.com/10775114

Plan to Succeed

Each year, around this time, our magazine goes through the process of developing business plans for the following year. We talk about what went well the current year, and what we want to improve upon in the next year.

A large part of our success is in this process. It is important that we take a step back from our daily duties of producing the magazine and website, and assess our products and priorities. Dealers should take the same course of action and find the time away from their daily operations to evaluate their people, products, policies and procedures.

Industry tradeshow GIE+EXPO in Louisville, KY, October 24-26 is a great event to attend for gathering ideas to use in your business planning. This year, a special day has been set aside exclusively for dealers. Dealer Day on Wednesday, October 24 will offer dealers the opportunity to talk business with distributors and manufacturers without the presence of landscape contractors.

There are also many educational and training opportunities for dealers and their staff at the show. In his column on page 8, Bob Clements addresses the importance of making the time to take advantage of educational opportunities like those provided at GIE+EXPO. The show will feature a Rental Class and Professional Technician Training. Special classes are also offered exclusively for dealership owners and

managers. To learn more about these and other opportunities, see the GIE+EXPO Preview on page 6.

One thing many dealers these days are forced to plan for is business succession. You may learn some valuable lessons from the Supplier Spotlight on page 16. In the article, the Walker family addresses the process of bringing on their third generation. They plan to welcome change while holding tight to their core values.

Whether it is through industry tradeshows or publications like ours, it is important that you make the time to educate yourself on better business practices. As the industry evolves, improving your education will help you to better plan for the challenges ahead. Take what you learn and implement it in your own business plan. ◀



To contact Lisa Danes:
Phone: (920) 563-1634
Email: lisa.danes@cygnus.com

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YARD & GARDEN

Market Insights for Equipment Dealers

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ADVERTISING

Publisher.....Rick A. Monogue
rick.monogue@cygnus.com

Integrated Media Consultant..... Julie Goss
julie.goss@cygnus.com

Inside Sales Representative..... Jenny Hallett
jenny.hallett@cygnus.com

EDITORIAL

Associate Publisher.....Gregg Wartgow
gregg.wartgow@cygnus.com

Editor..... Lisa Danes
lisa.danes@cygnus.com

Graphic Designer..... Rhonda Cousin
rhonda.cousin@cygnus.com

PRODUCTION

VP Production Operations..... Curt Pordes
curt.pordes@cygnus.com

Production Director..... Steve Swick
steve.swick@cygnus.com

Media Production Representative..... Connie Wolf
connie.wolf@cygnus.com

CIRCULATION

Audience Development Manager..... Angela Kelty
angela.kelty@cygnus.com

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Cygnus Business Media:

John French - CEO; Paul Bonaiuto - CFO; Kris Flitcroft -
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Volume 35 Number 6



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GIE+EXPO Visit us at the GIE+EXPO 2012 at
Indoor Booth #3094 and Outdoor Booth #7624-D.

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GIE+EXPO



THE GREEN INDUSTRY & EQUIPMENT EXPO

INDOOR EXHIBITS

Wednesday, Oct. 24, 3 – 7 p.m.

Dealers, distributors, retailers, media only.

Thursday & Friday, Oct. 25-26, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

OUTDOOR EXHIBITS

Thursday, Oct. 25, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 26, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m.

The GIE+EXPO is held at the **Kentucky Exposition Center** in Louisville, KY.

For more information on the event, visit gie-expo.com.

WEDNESDAY DEALER DAY

All features included with your registration unless noted otherwise.

9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Dealer Resource Pavilion open

9 – 10:30 a.m. Professional Technician Training, \$30

Classes offered three times each and will cover Basics in Electrical Diagnostics, Basics in Two-Stroke Engine Diagnostics and Basics in EFI Systems.

11 a.m. – 12 p.m. Education for dealership owners & managers

11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Professional Technician Training, \$30

1 – 3 p.m. Rental Class, \$25, includes lunch

Part 1 - EPA-Compliant Engines & Your Legal Obligations under the Clean Air Act

Part 2 - E-15 Fuels: A Huge Problem for the Rental Industry

1:30 – 3 p.m. Professional Technician Training, \$30

2 – 3 p.m. Education for dealership owners & managers

3 – 7 p.m. Indoor exhibits open to dealers, retailers and distributors only

5 – 7 p.m. Welcome reception for dealers, retailers, distributors and exhibitors on the tradeshow floor

6:30 p.m. \$5,000 giveaway sponsored by Stihl

9 p.m. Kansas concert at 4th Street Live!

Dealer Resource Roundtable Breakfast - Thursday

Take advantage of the opportunity to network with dealers from throughout the U.S. and hear their most effective business strategies. The breakfast is \$25 per person, Thursday, October 25 at 8-9:30 a.m.

Order tickets by using your Registration Dashboard or calling Show Management at (800) 558-8767. The roundtable is sponsored by Gravelly and Stihl inc.

Rental Dealers Have Opportunities for Education and Training at GIE+EXPO

GIE+EXPO recently added a class specifically for rental dealers to its comprehensive education schedule.

Part 1 - EPA-Compliant Engines & Your Legal Obligations under the Clean Air Act

Part 2 - E-15 Fuels: A Huge Problem for the Rental Industry

New fuels and stringent EPA regulations are causing real problems for

those in the business of renting and servicing equipment. Manufacturers' engineers and technical specialists from small equipment suppliers to the rental industry will give presentations on the changing technologies as they stand now and where we can expect them to go in the future. There will be time at the end of each presentation for questions and answers.

Free Owners' and Managers' Sessions

Branding and Marketing Your Business, presented by Bob Clements

In today's volatile marketplace dealers can no longer be confident that they will be able to maintain the lines they currently sell, so it is a smart strategy to brand and market your business independently of your vendors. This program will look at the importance of branding along with marketing strategies to quickly and cost-effectively grow a profitable business.

Developing a Successful Business Plan, presented by Bob Clements

In this session participants will be given the tools and strategies for developing a working business plan to prepare for the 2013 season. Learn to drive profits, direct your employees and reduce the stress and frustration of constantly putting out fires.

New Product Introductions



Earth & Turf Model 60SP Topdresser

Earth & Turf Products is introducing the Model 60SP, an economical, very maneuverable, self-propelled topdresser, ideal for spreading dry or wet compost and sand, plus a variety of other materials.

- Easy loading into 6.5-cubic-foot hopper
- Powered by a 190 cc Briggs & Stratton, 875 series engine
- CV belt drive, forward and reverse
- Maximum load weight of 650 pounds

Indoor booth #5019

➤ Visit greenindustrypros.com/yg/einquiry and enter 45



Ditch Witch SK750 and SK755 Compact Tool Carriers

Ditch Witch will be introducing two new compact tool carriers to its popular SK line. The SK750 and SK755 will replace the SK650. Multiple design improvements increase productivity, operator comfort and performance in tough conditions.

Indoor booth #1104, outdoor #7634D

➤ Visit greenindustrypros.com/yg/einquiry and enter 50

Oregon ST250 String Trimmer/Edger

The Oregon Cordless Tool System is expanding in February of 2013 to include the ST250 40V Max String Trimmer/Edger.



- Oregon lithium ion battery pack
- Convert from trimming to edging quickly and easily
- Fully charged battery voltage measured without a workload is 40 volts, nominal voltage is 37

Indoor booth #11054, outdoor #6018D

➤ Visit greenindustrypros.com/yg/einquiry and enter 52

Toro Z Master Pro 6000

Toro will be debuting several new products at the 2012 GIE+EXPO. Several new EFI mowers will be introduced. These mowers will feature EFI technology similar to that found on the Toro Z Master Professional 6000 Series EFI mower features closed-loop EFI technology from Kohler engines to allow the engine to automatically adapt to changes in load, weather, fuel and altitude.

- Faster response times, up to 25% higher fuel efficiency
- 29-hp Kohler EFI engine

Indoor booth #7152

➤ Visit greenindustrypros.com/yg/einquiry and enter 47



Scag Cheetah

Scag will be introducing expanded deck size options for their Cheetah mower at GIE+EXPO. With a two-speed heavy-duty hydraulic drive system, double tube steel main frame, and adjustable Operator Suspension System, the Scag Cheetah is designed for superior performance and comfort.

- Variety of high-horsepower gasoline engine options
- Ground speeds up to 16 mph
- 48-, 52-, 61- or 72-inch Velocity Plus cutter deck

Indoor booth #7060

➤ Visit greenindustrypros.com/yg/einquiry and enter 48

SnowEx Drop Pro Spreader

SnowEx Drop Pro spreaders are ideal for parking lots, parking structures, sidewalks and other off-road uses.

- SD-600 - 6-cubic-foot capacity, 36-inch spread width
- SD-1400 - 14-cubic-foot capacity, 50-inch spread width
- Polyethylene hopper
- Variable-speed digital controller
- Gate-free flow control system

Indoor booth #9072

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Kubota RTV400Ci Utility Vehicle

Kubota's RTV400Ci is a 16-hp utility vehicle that fits into the bed of a full-sized pickup. The RTV400Ci features a new Continuously Variable Transmission (CVT Plus) and is powered by an electronic fuel-injected single-cylinder gasoline engine.

- Maximum speed of 25 mph
- Ergonomic and conveniently-placed controls
- Contoured bench seat and low platform with ample leg room

Indoor booth #5094, outdoor #7004D

➤ Visit greenindustrypros.com/yg/einquiry and enter 51

efco DS 2200 and DS 2400 Series Line Trimmers

The efco DS 2200 series has a power to weight ratio that has the homeowner in mind. The DS 2400 delivers enough power for a professional user while still remaining extremely light.

Indoor booth #290, outdoor #6133D

➤ Visit greenindustrypros.com/yg/einquiry and enter 53



Make Time to Make Money

Remember to take time outside of the dealership to learn better business practices in order for your business to flourish.



Bob Clements

Years ago as I was struggling in my business, I had the opportunity to be mentored by an older retired business owner. If I was willing to take his advice, he was there to help me understand how to make my business produce a profit.

One afternoon, he called me and offered to pay my way for a workshop helping new business owners understand the basics of financials and business plans. I thanked him for the kind offer, but turned it down because I just didn't have the time to take a day off. I had a payroll to meet at the end of the week, and wasn't sure where the money was going to come from to meet it.

A lesson to learn from

After hearing my reason for declining the offer, my mentor laughed and proceeded to tell me a story that forever changed my thinking about business and training. It was a story about two lumberjacks, both very skilled at their craft. The first was a younger man who was big and powerful and was known for his ability to cut a great number of trees in a day. The second was an older man who was much smaller than the younger man but also carried the reputation of being a great lumberjack.

One day, both of the lumberjacks were cutting at the edge of a town and the local people were making bets as to which lumberjack was the best. When the younger man heard of the bets being made, he decided to challenge the older lumberjack to a contest to settle the argument once and for all.

When morning broke, the entire town showed up to cheer on the lumberjacks. The competition started and the young

man leaped into action. He swung his axe vigorously and continuously without stopping, knowing that every tree he felled brought him closer to the victory he knew he would have.

The older man started with the same energy as the younger man, but at the end of the first hour he stopped swinging his axe and took a break. Seeing this, the younger lumberjack's confidence grew. He thought if he worked harder and swung his axe more, victory was surely his. This pattern continued on throughout the day until dusk when the contest came to an end and the downed trees were counted.

The younger, larger man stood proud and exhausted by his pile of trees confident that he was the winner. The smaller, older lumberjack also stood by his pile of trees. Unlike his competitor, the smaller man was still fresh, ready to continue if necessary. He was also confident and secure in the knowledge that he had done his best.

When all the trees were counted, it was announced that the second woodsman, the smaller and older man, had indeed felled more trees and won the competition. The younger man and the townspeople stood in stunned silence at the announcement.

The older man was not at all surprised. He knew all along that in order to win, especially against a larger competitor, he would have to take the time each hour to stop and sharpen his axe.

Investing time in your success

I let the story sink in and told my friend that he could count on me using the ticket for the workshop. It is important to remember that you need to take time off from your business to learn how to better maintain or grow it. Today, I am so glad I took time out for the opportunity to learn more.

The reason I bring up this story at this time is because I have had several dealers ask me over the last few weeks if I thought it would be a good use of their time to send their techs and managers to the training sessions going on at this year's GIE+EXPO. There are many valuable opportunities for dealers and their staff at GIE+EXPO.

Some benefits of attending include EETC technician training on electrical and two-stroke diagnostics as well as how to troubleshoot the new EFI engines. It's also important that managers and owners participate in the workshops I am conducting with the help of my team on parts, service and dealership operations.

I discovered long ago you can be the young, strong lumberjack and work yourself to death, or choose to be the older, wiser man who understands the value of a sharp axe. This year more than ever, I encourage you to take the time out of your dealership, and invest in your people and yourself by coming to the GIE+EXPO, attending the workshops and leaving with a sharp axe ready to go into the 2013 season. ◀

Bob Clements is the president of Bob Clements International, a consulting firm that specializes in the development of high-performance dealerships. His organization works hands on with dealerships throughout North America, helping them attain the personal freedom and financial wealth all entrepreneurs strive to achieve. For more information, visit www.bobclements.com.



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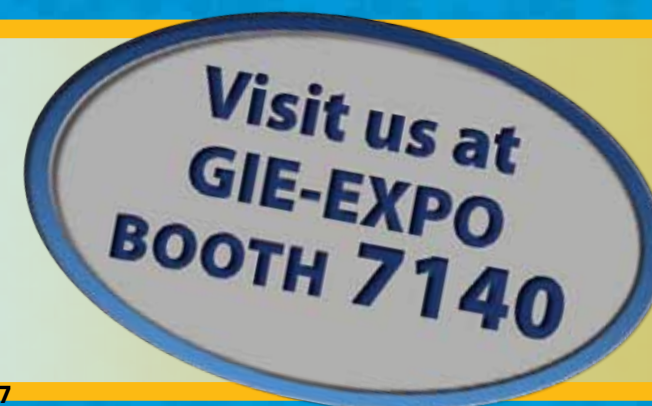
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Piecing Together the Power Equipment Puzzle

David Garner's four-man crew, along with his wife G'Anzie, have been with him virtually since day one. They're a little bit hip and a little bit old-school, and they find a way to make it work for both the dealership and the customer.

Weno Power Equipment looks a lot like many other successful lawn and garden equipment dealerships of similar volume. But in some aspects, they look very different.

Located between Greensboro and Winston-Salem, NC, in the city of High Point, Weno Power has been around a long time; 57 years to be exact. It's a multi-generation dealership. They've built their reputation on service and parts

availability. In fact, like many dealers, they've seen a revenue shift toward parts and service over the last few years. And even though they specialize in commercial, namely landscape contractors, they've also seen a slight shift toward more home-owner business. On the other hand, Weno Power doesn't have a spacious showroom. They don't sell three or four riding mower lines, nor do they sell big tractors or skid steers. And, even though they do several hundred thousand dollars in parts and service business, they do not have a computerized business management system.

No sir. Weno Power Equipment does it their way. They're

Weno Power Equipment in High Point, NC.



DEALERSHIP DATA

WENO POWER EQUIPMENT
High Point, NC
wenopower.com
Founded: 1955, current owner since 1996
Owner: David Garner
Employees: 4, plus wife G'Anzie who runs the office from a separate building
Sales Mix: 50% wholegoods, 25% parts, 25% service
Customer Mix: 50% consumer, 50% commercial
Shop Labor Rate: \$50 per hour, \$60 for riding equipment
Major Lines: Billy Goat, Classen, Cub Cadet, EarthWay, Echo, Echo Bear-Cat, Honda, Little Wonder, Pluigr (SourceOne), Stihl, Walker, Yanmar

The world's largest supplier of outdoor power equipment parts.

Founded in 1957, Rotary is a family-owned business that takes exceptional pride in supplying guaranteed quality parts backed with superior customer service. Altogether, Rotary offers over 8,500 parts, tools and accessories for outdoor power equipment including hundreds of new items for 2013.

Quality always comes first at Rotary

A longtime leader in blade manufacturing, Rotary produces over 8 million austempered mower and edger blades every year at its state-of-the-art plant in Glennville, GA.



Rotary Corporation manufactured its 195 millionth blade in 2012.

Rotary blades are made in the USA from premium grade high-carbon steel, then heat treated and tested to meet rigid standards for quality, durability and performance. Rotary's blade division was one of the world's first to be certified for ISO 9000 Quality.

Approximately 80% of the company's outdoor power equipment parts are made in the USA including a variety of foam air filters manufactured by Rotary.

More parts, more value

The industry's most complete line of outdoor power equipment parts, tools and accessories is featured in Rotary's 2013 sales catalog including nearly 200 new items.

It contains over 1,450 pages with comprehensive listings by sizes, order numbers, product illustrations and original equipment numbers for replacements.

New for 2013 are choke control cables, Pro Gear transmissions, drive shafts, spindle assemblies for Toro, John Deere and Cub Cadet plus electric PTO clutches for Cub Cadet and Dixie Chopper.

Other featured items include various deck belts for Exmark, Grasshopper and Husqvarna models and idler pulleys for John Deere and Cub Cadet.



2013 Sales Catalog is available for qualified servicing dealers and distributors.

Rotary has also introduced new mulching blades for Dixie Chopper, Husqvarna, MTD and John Deere, as well as PTO switches for Cub Cadet and MTD.



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*Source: Statistical data for UPS ground packages shipped within the continental U.S. as of Nov. 2010. Subject to change. Delivery time may vary in certain geographic areas.



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YOU CAN COUNT ON ROTARY! CALL 1.800.841.3989



David Garner is a third-generation owner who was a national champion in small engine repair back in high school.



highly focused and a bit old-school, but it seems to work.

“One thing I’ve learned over the years is that when one part of your business drops off, another one usually rises,” says David Garner, the third-generation owner who took over in 1996. “You need a lot of different pieces to put this puzzle together, especially in a place like North Carolina where we don’t get much snow.”

A little of this and that

Weno Power focuses on five main equipment lines: Cub Cadet, Walker, Honda, Echo and Stihl. Garner says these lines allow the dealership to draw in several types of customer segments, including both residential and commercial lawn maintenance contractors, and both mid-market and high-end homeowners.

The dealership also sells generators, tillers, chipper/shredders, concrete saws, fertilizer spreaders, fun-karts and trailer accessories, in addition to selling and renting aerators and dethatchers.

While these categories don’t put up huge numbers on an individual basis, together they are a sizable piece of the revenue pie. “We even stock a few snowthrowers every year—because we want to be that dealership customers think of first when they need something,” Garner explains.

Weno Power Equipment has also begun selling smaller compact utility tractors. The tractor market is actually where the dealership established its roots many years ago. Weno Power used to be known as Garner’s Motor Service, and was an award-winning Case dealership. But by the 1980s they moved away from the Case line—and the ag business in general—to make a push into lawn and garden. They changed the dealership name to Weno Power Equipment, a play on the phrase “we know power equipment.”

Now the dealership is back into tractors with the Yanmar brand. “Right now we’re focusing on just the smallest model, the Yanmar Sc2400,” Garner points out. “We need to see how it goes

before moving into the bigger models. There is a lot of competition in those higher-horsepower categories, so we’re taking our time in building up our tractor business.”

Road rage

Garner has also been taking his time in implementing some facility renovations at his decades-old dealership. That’s for good reason. First, Garner is a conservative businessperson who doesn’t like to take on a lot of debt. Secondly, and more importantly, he’s been waiting to see how a highway project turned out.

The City of High Point widened the highway that passes in front of Weno Power Equipment. Garner wasn’t sure how the change would impact the flow of traffic in and out of his dealership, not to mention the physical size of his parking lot. Now that the highway project is completed, Garner is ready to revive plans for a project or two of his own.

For starters, he’s looking to have new siding put on the building’s exterior, just to freshen things up a bit. Going forward, a new warehouse could be built behind the dealership; a concrete slab already exists, and shipping containers are sitting there now. Garner is even thinking about tearing down his house, which sits on the same plot of land. That section of the property could be used for yet another storage or service building, or even additional parking.

“We’ve been thinking about adding on for years,” Garner relates. “We’re using every square inch we have right now. But bigger isn’t always better, so we want to make sure we do it right and that our customers benefit from any changes.”



Weno Power doesn’t have a spacious showroom, but they find a way to make it work by using every possible square inch.

› continued on page 14

Maybe I’m just a terrible salesman.

I mean, I’m not the kind of guy who can convince you that you need something I wouldn’t use myself. That’s why I sell Grasshoppers. I have to believe in what I’m selling, because it’s my reputation at stake. And with Grasshopper, I know I’m carrying a brand I can count on. You don’t want to keep coming back to have something fixed, put back on or updated. You want to come in just to chat. Put a dent in my cushion. Drink my coffee. Tell me you think the Vipers are going to beat the Barons on Friday. Oh, I’d disagree, but in the end, we’d cool down and vow never to argue about high school football again. I’m not good at changing people’s minds, but at least we can agree about Grasshopper.



Model 335 Big Block



GIE+EXPO

Booth# 9130 (inside)
Booth# 7542D (outside)

For more information, call 620-345-8621
or visit grasshoppermower.com

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High tech, no tech

Like most dealers will tell you, customers benefit most from their timely service and vast parts inventories. Weno Power Equipment is no different—and neither is Garner.

Garner grew up in the family dealership. As a high school kid, he won the 1982 VICA National Championship in small engine repair at the International Lawn, Garden & Power Equipment Expo in Louisville, now known as GIE+EXPO. So needless to say, technical service is Garner's forte.

Garner makes sure that is also true of each of his employees. Marshall Wigfield (16 years with Weno), Jeremy Bryant (14 years), Rick Frady (14 years) and Ray Davenport (12 years)



Piecing together the power equipment puzzles means staying on top of industry trends and supplying customers with the products they need. Ethanol fuel additives such as the Star Tron product are a recent example.

all started out in parts or service. Each continues to spend time there today, although Frady spends the majority of his time in sales along with Garner.

"We do have 'specialists' here, but we try to remain flexible," Garner says. "We make it a point to meet and greet every customer that walks in. Sometimes that means we have to pull someone from the back up to the front."

That philosophy goes against what many successful dealers and consultants recommend. Garner acknowledges that, but says the "jack of all trades"

approach seems to work just fine for his staff.

"We look at every customer and every sale as equally important. Whether you're selling a \$12,000 mower or a \$20 part, you have to take care of the customer. The secret to success in this business is really no secret at all: You have to be honest and fair, and treat others as you'd want to be treated."

The Weno Power staff also seems to work just fine without a computerized business management system. Garner says he's often looked into buying one, but has just never felt comfortable in making the investment. They use PartSmart for looking up parts, and run all sales activity through a basic retail management software product.

But Garner hasn't completely written off the idea of investing in an industry-specific software platform. "There are some instances where I do wish I had one," he relates. "One area is with product registrations and customer history. And while we do a good job of managing our parts inventory, we could probably do an even better job if we were computerized."

Even though Weno Power Equipment isn't fully computerized, that doesn't mean the staff is adverse to technology. Wireless phones and earpieces help ensure that phone calls are answered swiftly. Roughly 60% of the Walker mowers the dealership sells have electronic fuel-injected engines. A new line of business that continues to grow is ethanol fuel additives; Weno sells the Star Tron product.

Ethanol-related engine problems



While Weno Power Equipment doesn't utilize a computerized Business Management System, they are "online" and make good use of tools such as PartSmart.

represent one of the latest challenges facing power equipment dealers like Weno Power Equipment. Floorplanning represents another. Garner has tried to limit his activity in this area, focusing primarily on manufacturer-supplied plans from Cub and Honda.

"Floorplanning has gotten a lot tougher over the past few years," Garner says. "We try to use our local bank when possible. It makes more sense to get a lower-interest loan from the bank, and use that money to pay cash for our wholegoods inventory in order to get the manufacturer's cash discount. So my advice to other dealers is to make sure they have a line of credit and good relationship with their local bank."

That's sound advice from a veteran dealer who doesn't really consider himself as a "role model" for other dealers. But sometimes those types of dealers are the most successful. Because they are so focused on simply meeting their customers' expectations, they don't realize that what they're doing is exceptional. Contractors like Mike Stegall help set the record straight, though. "I couldn't have built my business without the support of Weno Power Equipment," Stegall says.

At the end of the day, statements like that are what really matter. ◀

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Dean, Ryan, Ted and Bob Walker (left to right)

Walker's Third Generation On Deck

As the third generation prepares to take over Walker Mowers, a consultant has been contracted to ensure a smooth transition that welcomes change while maintaining the company's core values.

Walker Mowers has long been known as being family-owned, operated and oriented. As the third generation makes their transition into the business, many of the company's dealers and end-users are wondering what changes are in store. To assist with the transition, a consultant has been brought on to see it through. The hands-on, thorough transition will likely lead to some changes in the end, but the company's core values will remain the same.

Trusting in an expert for the transition

When brothers Bob and Dean Walker took over the family business decades ago, it was a very different transition

in a different time. The company was smaller, still coming into its own. As Dean's sons Ryan and Ted begin their transition, Bob and Dean reflect on their own experience and the transition they hope to facilitate for the third generation.

"When I started with my dad, it was 15 people and we did a lot of different things," says Bob. "I basically just came to work and learned the business. The company now is 150 to 160 people. The complexity of the company and business today is a lot different from 30 years ago."

Bob and Dean spent a lot of time working in the business experiencing the day-to-day activities. The time

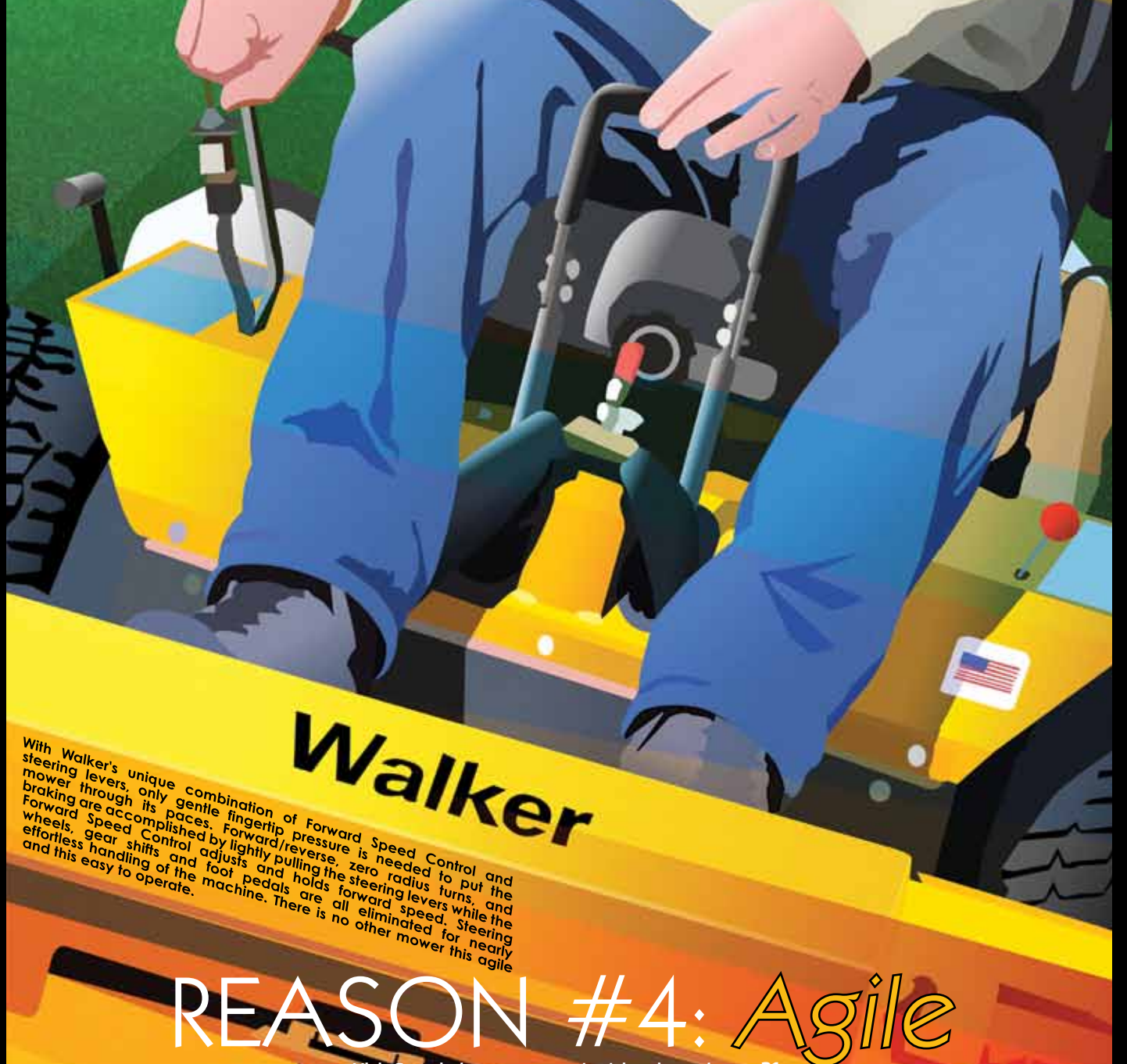
they spent there prepared them for an unfortunate event that required an immediate transition. Father and founder Max Walker had a stroke that left the company in the hands of his sons. Bob now oversees the business and marketing, while Dean oversees product development and manufacturing.

"When we joined we did so in purely a working role," says Dean. "We were in survival mode as a company and didn't know where we were going or if we had a future. The transition came much later, but by that time we had been involved in the business and working with our parents for years. It was almost a seamless transition when it happened."

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As the company has grown and the day-to-day business has become more complex, the brothers agreed that bringing on a consultant for the succession would help their chances at another smooth and successful transition.

“We both felt that instead of trying to be the trainers in a family setting, it would be better to have someone that is more objective,” says Bob. “My brother and I are both very emotionally connected to the business. You tend to get into your groove or way of thinking. It’s good to have the next generation ask a lot of questions and have a better answer than ‘that’s the way we have always done it.’”

The consultant will not only be a neutral party to bounce thoughts and ideas off of, but is specialized in the succession process and possesses the tools Bob and Dean may not.

“Like a lot of things, if you try to wade through the water yourself, you will find it to be much more difficult than if you have somebody to guide you through the process,” explains Dean. “Part of the function is the outside perspective our consultant gives us and them. He can listen and advise based on his experience and perspective.”

Time on the job gaining experience

Bob and Dean gleaned their experience with Walker Mowers through many years on the job. While they gained a lot of experience before their transition into their more active roles, it was not a premeditated transition.

“It was much less intentional than what we are doing,” says Dean. “We are in a much quicker transition as far as the time between bringing them in and when we plan to turn the business over to them. It is going to be a much shorter time period and there is a lot more pressure on them than what Bob and I had on us.”

The consultant has developed a plan that involves Ted and Ryan spending

periods of time experiencing and proving their knowledge in six areas of the business. Those six areas are: finance, manufacturing, engineering, purchasing, customer service, and sales and marketing. The consultant has worked with the heads of each of these departments to develop a curriculum for teaching the ins and outs to Ted and Ryan through hands-on experience.

“Some people like to put a lot of emphasis on talent, but I feel it is sometimes overstated. I think you need a blend of experience and ability—the experience part comes over time,” explains Bob. “We will try to align them with where their strengths are, but in the beginning they just need to get a feel for how the company works.”

The amount of time they spend in each area is entirely dependent on how long it takes them to grasp the role and challenges of each area of the business. It is up to the consultant and department heads to evaluate their performance and decide when they are ready to move on to the next area of the business. Once all six areas are mastered, they will move on to the next step in the transition.

“The rotations are phase one, then they will begin to mentor for leadership in the company. My brother and I don’t intend to retire and walk away at that time,” says Bob. “Hopefully we can do as well as my dad did. We told him we wanted responsibility. It wasn’t always easy, but he gave us more and more every day.”

Expect some changes, but the same principles remain

The full transition before the third-generation brothers assume leadership

roles will be eight to 10 years. At that time, and perhaps during the transition, it would be reasonable to expect some changes. Bob and Dean are already witnessing the effects of the new perspective and positive energy Ted and Ryan bring to the business.

“As you go generation by generation, there are always changes,” says Bob. “It is fairly naïve to think it will stay the same. There are foundational principles that have been developed, and those will stay the same and be used and appreciated by the next generation as much as the previous generations. If you are going to bring a family member into a business, they have to be passionate about the business. They can’t be there just because they are in the family.”

In the last year, Ted and Ryan have both displayed their passion and concern for the business and its success. Dean hopes their presence in the day-to-day operations will help to put others at ease.

“Our employees and our channel have been concerned for a long time about what the future of our company was,” says

Dean. “People both inside and outside are excited and very receptive to Ted and Ryan and the future of the company. Any time there is possibility of change down the road it’s always a little bit unnerving and unsettling. The best thing is that people can see what kind of people they are and where their heads and hearts are.”

Bob says that the day he signed on as president of the company didn’t feel any different than the day before. He and Dean are hoping they can set Ted and Ryan up for just as comfortable a shift. They trust that the decisions made by the third generation will be in line with their core values and have everyone’s best

interests in mind.

“The person driven by ego wants things to fall apart so everyone will notice they are gone,” says Bob. “We look at all the other people beside the owners that have a stake. Suppliers, distributors, over 1,000 dealers, and the end customers that bought the product with the promise that there would be spare parts and continued support.

They trust that the decisions made by the third generation will be in line with their core values and have everyone’s best interests in mind.

When you look at it that way, it becomes less about ‘me’ and more about ‘us’. When you have that view, careful succession planning makes perfect sense.”

Ted and Ryan’s goals are in line with Bob’s desire to take each person the Walker brand touches into consideration when they take on their future responsibilities. Their time spent in the different rotations during the transitional process is helping them to better understand each individual involved.

“The rotations are certainly valuable from a purely educational standpoint, but what I’ve discovered to be even more important is the opportunity to develop relationships with the people that really make this business possible,” explains Ted. “We are dependent on people to be successful, and we have a great group of people here at Walker and in our distribution channel.”

Along with great people, the brothers have a growing respect for Walker products. Ryan says he hopes to maintain the company’s core principles while helping Walker Mowers continue to create innovative products.

“The foundational beliefs that guided my grandfather, Max, my uncle, Bob, and father Dean, will continue to be our center,” says Ryan. “We are a company that takes risk, innovates to create value, and continues to seek opportunity in the lawn care industry. These attributes of

Walker Manufacturing are our competitive advantage, and I will do everything I can to nurture innovation and a passion to get better. We are in the manufacturing business and it is imperative we continue to improve Walker Mowers.”

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› By Lisa Danes

Early Season Chainsaw Sales Rival Typical Fall Peaks

After the early spring and out-of-season storms led to a surge in dealer chainsaw sales, manufacturers will continue to pique consumer interests with new products as dealers wait to see if the fall weather will keep the momentum going.

Like most product categories, chainsaw sales saw a boost from the early spring. To top that off, a lot of dealers saw the “upside” to tornadoes with an increase in chainsaw parts sales and maintenance as a result of the unexpected need to clear storm debris. The fall peak season could add to these sales, leaving dealers reporting high numbers at the year’s end.

“Chainsaw sales are doing great both at Echo and in the industry as a whole,” says Brad Mace, product manager at Echo. “Chainsaw shipments from manufacturers are up about 10% (as of June) while Echo is up considerably more than that.”

While the product segment has seen significant growth, it is still down from prerecession levels. According to Mace, when compared to 2006, industry chainsaw shipments are down about 5% as of June.

Storms in the early part of the year, in the form of unexpected tornadoes and snowfalls, helped to push chainsaw sales. The push in sales, however, did not match the effect of the fall 2005 hurricane season on dealer inventories.

“Chainsaw shipments have done very well in the first part of the year through April due to storm activity, including cleanup from the ‘Snowtober’ in New

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MARKET WATCH

England and the January snow storm in Seattle,” says Steve Meriam, manager of national sales and product development for Stihl Inc. “Although a strong market, 2011 and first quarter 2012 are still not as strong as 2006, as we were coming off of a very active hurricane season in fall of 2005, and restocking activity had a positive impact in 2006.”

User Desires

Husqvarna has also experienced growth over 2011, especially among their high-end chainsaws. Their professional users are seeking products that are easy to maintain.

“Our AutoTune feature automatically monitors the performance of the unit, taking things like fuel type into account, and automatically adjusting to optimize the saw’s performance,” explains Jeff Dewosky, vice president of dealer sales for Husqvarna.

Commercial and consumer cutters are looking for similar features that add up to a durable and easy-to-use product. Whether in the yard or on the jobsite, the chainsaw should offer quality results and be comfortable to handle for extended periods.

“Fuel efficiency, low vibration and good power-to-weight ratio are particularly important to pro users who are using units for an extended period of time, and should be considered by home users with larger properties, as well,” Meriam explains.

“Contractors or commercial users are looking for power, durability, and more and more are looking for a lightweight product,” agrees Mace. “To that end, Echo has been focusing on lightweight chainsaws.”

While there is a noticeable increase in chainsaw sales this year, it is not an easy sell. Customers are looking for lots of quality features at a reasonable price. Before they make the decision to buy, end users want to know they are getting what they pay for.

“A good value for their dollar is what customers are looking for, whether they are a home user or pro,” says Meriam. “Reliability and durability are desirable traits.”

The primary feature homeowners are seeking is an easy-to-start chainsaw that starts every time. When they only use the equipment a few times a year, it is important that it is reliable.

“Sixty percent of consumers use their saws four times a year or less, so they want product that is easy to start and safe to use, which is why we equip our saws with the effortless pull system (EPS),” says Dewosky. “EPS reduces the effort to pull by 30%. In addition, our integrated choke and on/off switch make starting the saw extremely easy since there is only one step involved.”

New product regulations and features

The ever-changing emission regulations keep manufacturers on their toes—and consumers want to trust that the products they buy will comply. Noise and emission regulation compliance is continuously bringing new technology and products to the market.

“Echo has been able to meet all the new emission regulations with standard 2-stroke engine technology,” says Mace.

Low noise and low emissions are especially factors on residential properties and in certain communities. Stihl offers an emission-free option with their battery-powered products.

“We’ve been pleased with the results so far, but have been marketing the full line of battery products for less than a year,” says Meriam. “We anticipate that the lithium-ion market will grow over time as battery technology continues to improve.”

Meriam suggests that dealers target niche customers and applications. Residential users should be sold on the convenience of the units that require no fuel mixture or power cords. Professional users will prefer the units for applications

that are sensitive to noise and exhaust emissions.

“Customers will also find lower operating costs appealing. How much will depend on which battery, which tools, and their personal operating practices,” adds Meriam.

It all falls on the weather

Typically, the chainsaw market sees the bulk of their sales in the fall with the storm season. This year, weather has shown to be even more unpredictable than usual. The early spring could have an effect on the surge of sales dealers

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MARKET WATCH

usually plan for in the fall. The extended tree care season could mean replacement parts and chainsaw sales.

“Due to the early spring throughout the U.S., sales for all types of outdoor power equipment has been pulled forward by several weeks,” says Mace. “The early spring resulted in a longer landscaping or tree care season which should promote strong sales this fall as equipment needs to be replaced.”

Chainsaw sales this fall will also depend on the storm activity in the South and East. With the future storm season being unpredictable, manufacturers like Husqvarna are hoping to grab consumer interest with new product introductions.

“Typically, fall peak season performance depends heavily on the amount of activity during storm season,” says Dewosky. “This fall, we have new product rolling out, so we expect to have a strong season regardless.” ◀

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*Source: Statistical data from an independent study conducted by a major university in 2009 - 2010.

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Changing equipment lines is not a decision to take lightly. Bringing on a new brand can be a real culture shift and a strain on operations, from stocking different parts to training employees on how to properly run the machines. Sometimes, there's a learning curve. That's why Kurt Kluznik, president of Yardmaster, stayed with his equipment brand for more than 15 years, until recently. Kluznik now owns a dozen Snapper Pro mowers. Most of his locations are switching over to Snapper Pro, and Kluznik says aside from being cost competitive, the exceptional service has made him a Snapper Pro advocate. Kluznik compared Snapper Pro to other mower lines and discovered he didn't have to sacrifice quality to get value.



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