



The brothers strive for 100% efficiency on each of their 80 properties.

“We’re not just making a living, we’re making a life!”

Some individuals start mowing lawns with the intent of one day operating a huge, successful operation. Others are very content to hang a shingle as an owner/operator and stay that size forever. Others still search for a half-way point; not too big and not too small. In Twin Falls, Idaho, young T&M Mowing owners Tyler and Matthew Shropshire have another goal. Mowing is a means to an end, to one day live a life of self-sufficiency, on a multi-generational family farm. In the process, they have honed their operation from a parent-inspired learning experience into an efficient and profitable business.

“It is truly amazing to think how far

Tyler and Matthew have come with their business,” says proud mother Janis Shropshire. “This truly started out as a home school assignment when Matthew was nine and Tyler 11. I wanted to give them a project that would help develop their math and social skills, and make the connection between what I was teaching them at home and real life.”

By any standard, the experiment paid big dividends for the brothers. Now ages 17 and 19, they tool around town with a spiffy truck and



The Shropshire family (left to right): Tyler, Janis, Allen and Matthew. T&M Mowing started out as a home school project.

trailer, maintaining 80 residential properties a week. The experience taught them how to grow a business by being confident and self-assertive, by providing impeccable service, and by being true to their word. Says their father Allen, “Having them develop a successful lawn business wasn’t our



T&M's trailer is designed for ease—easy dumping and easy access to tools.

first priority. We wanted the business so they could develop character, and every year we worked on different skills. Early on, for example, Janis helped them design and produce business cards and flyers for their business, while I taught them how to maintain and repair their equipment.”

A captain in the Twin Falls fire department, Allen worked with Tyler and Matthew on his days off, helping them with mowing and trimming, training them to leave a property in prime shape. “We would go back two, sometimes

three times to make sure a property was maintained correctly,” says Allen. “Now, their skills surpass mine and they return the favor when I help them. I guess what goes around comes around.”

“We were tempted to get a bigger, more powerful unit (Walker Mower), but that didn't make sense for our situation.”

SMALL STEPS

With their parents' help and encouragement, Tyler and Matthew mowed five lawns their

first year in business and grew their accounts slowly. Mom and Dad fully funded the project for four years so the young boys' enthusiasm would remain high. When the boys were

small, Mom and Dad purchased a used John Deere rider for them, to pull a trailer loaded with their hand mower, trimmers and gas. When their business expanded city-wide, Janis drove them to all of their accounts.

“I enjoyed being part of their business and seeing them grow up,” Janis recalls, admitting, however, that she was probably as happy as anyone when Tyler was old enough to get his driver's license.

After the understudies had mowed lawns for four years, their parents gradually started shifting expenses over to them, teaching them the meaning of profit and loss and the value of operating debt-free. Three years ago, with full responsibility for their company's financial position, T&M Mowing met all expenses and even turned a tidy profit. It was time for the owners to look for different equipment to help expand their operation. Tyler and Matthew knew what they wanted. After all, they said, “Everyone around town had a Walker, and we were really impressed with the quality job they did.”

Their father, however, was not convinced. “I had stacks of mower brochures but was not sure about the Walker because it was so expensive,” Allen recalls. But his sons won the day, with one stipulation: They had to pay cash for the mower.

“Once we decided to get a Walker, Matthew and I measured all our properties, including the backyard gates, and determined that the smaller, 18-hp model with a 42-inch GHS deck would be ideal for us,” Tyler relates. “We were tempted to get a bigger, more powerful unit, but that didn't make sense for our situation. The small Walker would suite our purposes and it was more affordable for us.”

T&M Mowing purchased the Walker mid-year three years ago. By the end of that first mowing season,

it allowed the brothers to grow their business from 36 to 54 accounts. The next year they expanded their customer list to 72, and this year the count stands at 80 and holding. This was done while actually eliminating one of their mowing days.

“We’re doing just about all we want to handle,” says Tyler. “We could do more and work longer hours, but making more money is not the main concern.

We want to work smarter, not harder, and continue to deliver a beautiful job, with honesty and integrity.”

SMART APPROACH

“Yes, the boys work smarter and not harder,” says Allen. “I remember one of Bob Walker’s columns in *Walker Talk* where he emphasized the smart approach to business. Our sons took that message to heart and have since streamlined the way they do business. Matthew agrees, noting that they have redesigned their trailer several times to accommodate efficiencies. He points to the trailer, saying, “See where the trimmers and blower are located? We installed trimmer racks and a place to store the blower outside the trailer. Now, all we do is walk up to the trailer to grab a tool rather than always having to walk around to the inside. Seems like a small thing, but it makes a difference when you maintain 20 yards a day.”

“We’ve also reconfigured the back of the trailer to accommodate the dump box on the Walker,” Tyler adds. “When we get a hopper full of clippings, all we do is back up the trailer ramp and dump the hopper. Previously we would dump the clippings on a tarp and then lift the

tarp into the truck. The process was always difficult and took two of us. Making it a one-person operation saves time.”

The brothers have also rethought their on-site operation to make it more efficient. Instead of alternating tasks, they now perform the same tasks on the same property every week. They also strive to make sure neither of them stands around waiting for the other to finish. “We want to finish at exactly the same time,” says Matt. “Most of the time, it works out that way.”

Using the Walker has made a difference, too, but not solely from a productivity point of view. “We like the fact that the steering is so precise,” says Tyler. “It was a bit difficult to master it at first, but once we did we were able to mow close with more confidence in tight quarters. That cuts back on trimming and leaves a nice, manicured look.”



Tyler says they want to “work smarter, not harder, and continue to deliver a beautiful job, with honesty and integrity.”

DOWN THE ROAD

At this point, the T&M mowing team is reluctant to accept new work. The brothers work four days a week, starting at 9 a.m. and finishing at 6 or 6:30 p.m., sometimes



T&M’s Walker Mower has helped the young owners more than double their business while eliminating one mowing day.

even later. As they say, they have a life outside of work. The company will consider a new request only if it allows the owners to consolidate their mowing routes.

In the meantime, working on becoming more efficient and better operators allows them to free-up time for other endeavors and, in their words, “give the customers a bargain.”

Janis and Allen have no regrets about the home school project and where it took their sons. “In school, we always believed it was more about character than curriculum,” Allen says. Janis adds, “After what Tyler and Matthew have learned from starting and operating this business, I have no doubt that whatever they decide to do, they will be successful at it.”

As the parents both emphasize, the skills their sons developed and lessons learned from the mowing business equip them for more than just making a living; they’ve prepared them for making a life. **WT**