

GHS Corp. Operates Family Philosophy

Major Walker distributor serves key East Coast market in six states.

BY DEXTER EWING

Family: The mere mention of the word conjures up many definitions, be it connected by blood or a sense of belonging induced by a single purpose or concept. Walker Mowers is a family-owned company, in business since 1980. Currently, the company is still family owned and operated. It only makes sense that Walker's Mid-Atlantic States distributor GHS Corp. also carries through with that family philosophy. In existence since 1984 and operating out of the small town of Denton, NC, GHS Corp. handles the distribution of Walker Mowers and attachments/accessories to six states up and down the East Coast.

GHS Corp. may be a big business in commercial mowers, but there isn't anything big about the way they are run. They are only big on the concept of "family."

"Many other companies use terms like 'partners,' 'team,' and 'lean, mean selling machine,'" begins Standish Hopkins, co-owner of GHS along with his father, Levon Hopkins. "Following the Walkers' lead and our own conscience, we've placed far greater importance on 'family.'"

According to the elder Hopkins, "In our business, we believe that every member is an important and vital part to our success." The basic tenet that the Hopkins and GHS Corp. operate on is it is easier to build relationships anchored in family values than profit margins or stock values. Every dealership that is a part of this network that GHS Corp. serves is viewed as an integral part of this unique family. "If any member/dealer is hurting because of weather, accident, etc., we are all hurt-

ing until those problems are solved," says Standish. Family comes first, and in situations where a particular model doesn't sell for a dealer, GHS will facilitate the relocation of that unit to another dealer who can sell it. Therefore, no Walker Mowers dealers are stuck with inventory that will not be sold to their customers. "Family' encourages long-term thinking, and long-term commitments," interjects Levon Hopkins. "It increases their security and helps bring fun and joy to the work day, because we celebrate success together as a family."

The territory that GHS Corp. serves spans six states, including eastern Tennessee, North Carolina, Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. GHS Corp.'s sales staff is well trained in the knowledge of selling the various models of Walker Mowers and related attachments/accessories that are currently available to increase the four-season versatility that the Walker mower is famous for. "We believe Walker Mowers



All dealer deliveries are made using this specially outfitted Peterbilt semi which can hold up to nine fully assembled Walker units and has a hydraulic "walking floor" and hydraulic tailgate for easy one-man unloading at Walker dealers, without the use of a forklift.

are simply and purely the best long-term investment one can make in this industry," cites Standish. He explains that currently there are over 500 combinations when matching decks, accessories and tractors in the Walker line.

GHS Corp. stresses versatility of the Walker line, as well as the numerous attachments that permit one to move snow, dethatch for early spring clean up, move dirt, edge sidewalks, cut borders around flower beds, and the list goes on. If a customer is interested in a demonstration of a Walker or one of its many attachments, the GHS sales staff will transport that particular Walker mower plus any attachments to the potential customer's site and let them try it out on their own turf. Having a fleet of nine trucks total, and seven enclosed trailers, the GHS sales staff is able to haul multiple Walker units plus some attachments to the potential customer for a demo session. And when it comes time to deliver new Walker Mowers and attachments to dealers, GHS Corp. relies on its 2006 Peterbilt delivery truck, which can hold up to nine fully assembled Walker Mowers in one trip. A special feature to the truck, a "walking floor," as Levon calls it, allows a single driver to unload crated or fully assembled Walkers and place them on the ground at the dealership using the hydraulic tailgate lift.

"Our dealers have no need for a forklift," states Levon. "Our driver can place the material or the mowers (assembled or palletized) on the ground at the dealership without interrupting their day." Speaking of delivering Walkers to dealers, Levon offers, "Over 98% of all Walker Mowers delivered by GHS personnel are fully assembled, ready to mow." He asks that his dealers double check torque settings on the blades (60 ft. lbs) and drive wheel lugs (80 ft. lbs) for additional safety. By delivering fully assembled mowers directly to the dealer, this saves the dealership the time and effort of uncrating the mowers, assembling, pre-sale servicing and any disposal costs associated with wooden crates. "These features of doing business with GHS Corp. save our dealers thousands of dollars in expenses," Levon explains.

In addition to its extensive fleet of trucks, GHS Corp. may very well be the only distributor that has a small airplane, in



GHS is owned and run by Standish Hopkins, left, and his father Levon Hopkins.

which company officials can take off and land on their own site in Denton, NC. Levon is also a flying enthusiast and has his pilot's license. "The plane is a huge benefit," says Levon. "It allows our salesmen and staff to be present in several states on the same day where and when needed without wasting time sitting in traffic looking through a windshield." He further explains that the plane, a 1980 Cessna 182Q, shrinks GHS' territory down to 1½ hours out of Denton. This in turn translates to superior customer service, allowing GHS sales staff to visit many dealers personally in a shorter amount of time than it takes to cover the same amount of ground just by driving. "This is simply an example of investing in our business that gives us an edge sometimes needed to compete in this industry," Levon sums up.

"We have property leased in Fredericksburg, Va. allowing us to hangar the plane there," says Levon. "We can work

in that area with our trucks, trailers and demo units and make deliveries often."

'Just Like Home'

Back at the GHS Corp. headquarters, the theme of family carries on into the work setting there. Pulling into their "estate," one is greeted with the sight of a pond in front of the main building. Strolling along the wooden sidewalk up to the front patio area complete with relaxing outdoor furniture, then stepping inside the main lobby/showroom area, one thing is immediately apparent: The place feels more like home than a big business. The décor of the entire place is done up more like someone's residence than a business. There are comfortable leather couches, a grand piano, pictures of Levon's and Standish's families scattered about. It feels like you are at home, except for the new Walker mowers parked in the living room as part of the interior decorating plan!

Everyone who works at GHS treats all guests with down-home Southern hospitality. You cannot help but to *feel* at home when visiting GHS Corp. And this is exactly the type of mentality that they wish to conduct business. They treat everyone like family, no matter if you are a Walker dealer, an end user, or friend of the company. In a day and age in which we live in, business is business and it is very rigid, structured, and formal. So, it is quite refreshing to do business with the folks at GHS Corp., who do not see you as a business associate but rather, a member of their family. **PET**



Walker MTs rest on the racks with their decks flipped up, and Super B tractors in the foreground await their 60 in. side discharge decks to be attached.

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