



FACILITIES AND MAINTENANCE

By Richard Behan

Avoid Utility Vehicles that Impact Curb Appeal

We all know that you should not judge a book by its cover, but the "cover" displayed by most universities is a significant reason why students choose where they plan to live for the next several years of their lives.

Unless a student receives a scholarship from just one college, an incoming freshman's traditional fall routine is for the family to check out various campuses together. They will do advance prep work by googling the most beautiful campuses in addition to researching academic standards and costs.

First impressions are made at the curb. Are the buildings modern? Is the campus filled with beautiful architecture, stately buildings that speak to centuries of history? How are the grounds, the landscaping and the vistas? Finally, let us not forget the stadium, the center of weekend life and college pride: the grandeur of its entrance, the field, and the stands and facilities are as important to prospective students as the record of the teams playing there.

Protecting Paver Brick Engravings

A common trend among universities includes raising funds by selling paver brick engravings. After students, alumni and corporations will pay \$100-150 for special mentions engraved onto special bricks, facility management then has a stewardship responsibility of keeping them

in pristine condition. The task of maintaining miles of paths, walkways, entryways and roads on the campus is a monumental one, especially if you live in the snow-belt region.

As last winter showed many in the Midwest and Northeast, snow is not a thing of the past. Most colleges have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on these paver bricks, stones and ornamental ground coverings, and they then spend more each spring trying to repair them after the brutal winter takes its toll.

The same challenges exist for the walkways surrounding the stadium and the field turf, whether natural or artificial, and the surrounding tracks. Snow, ice, and slush can be harsh on the turf and interfere with stadium events held year round. Many stadium fields are covered with synthetic tarps during the winter which cost tens of thousands of dollars; removing snow and water from them without ripping or tearing the tarp is a tricky task. Furthermore, while drainage systems have been installed in most stadiums, standing water can still occur which must be removed before events can be held at those venues.

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In colleges and universities, engraved paver bricks are becoming more and more common. Engraved paver bricks are used in walkways and on walkway borders, in gardens, in social areas like student unions, and in new building dedications. They also often serve as gifts for faculty and staff retirees or to honor past administration or members of a college's Board of Trustees. Additionally, engraved bricks are considered an opportunity for potential fundraising donors to leave a lasting mark on the college they attended or where their

children have attended, a chance to become a permanent part of the campus environment and—their donations—scholarship assistance and other forms of financial aid to worthy, incoming students.

Beyond Traditional Methods of Snow Clearing

There are significant challenges in maintaining these beautiful, image-creating surfaces described above. The traditional methods of



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clearing snow from the ground surface are using steel, sharp-edged plow blades pushed by utility vehicles and trucks. These are great for concrete and blacktop surfaces which are smooth and crack-free; however, they are not surface friendly. Potholes are a major problem for municipalities and universities alike; the steel edges of the blades rip up the raised ground caused by the ice that has formed under the surface.

Paver bricks are not immune to the scraping, scratching and lifting caused by the elements and the steel plow blades. As of late, there has been a steady acceptance in the industry of attaching rubber or polyurethane cutting edges to their plows. Polyurethane cutting edges are very quiet in operation and exhibit better abrasion characteristics than rubber and most metals, but it comes at a higher cost. They are perfect for streets made of paver brick and work quite well when attached to smaller vehicle plow blades, but don't try them on your turf.

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More Efficient Methods For Snow Pushing

Good old-fashioned manpower is another method. Getting a team of workers out there with snow shovels has always been an option. Traditional shoveling has dwindled as a viable alternative to plowing except in the tightest of areas. Budget cuts, worker compensation claims, and employees missing work are reasons for this. Anyone who has ever shoveled a sidewalk knows how frustrating it can be to get the shovel blade caught on cracks.

The standard shovel requires bending, twisting, and strenuous lifting, all of which makes this task the least desirable of all methods. Luckily, shovel types have improved recently as companies have introduced snow pushers, which are easy on the back and may even come with wheels. Most of these shovel blades are short in height, though, and thus can only be used under limited snow fall conditions. One must be careful when clearing the turf, of course, since the sharp edge can tear the tarp or snag on the grass.

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Snow blowers are an efficient method of clearing sidewalks and paths, but they are not paver-brick friendly. Like the steel blades attached to ATV's, they can leave rust marks and scratches on the expensive ground covering. Power brushes are a welcomed advance in technology and are great to clear light snow from paver bricks and even stadium turf. There are units which are pushed like snow blowers or they can attach directly to utility vehicles. They

can be quite expensive though, ranging from \$3,000 to \$9,000 per unit. Additionally, while they don't harm the bricks and stone, they can cause problems when used on turf. They have a tendency to rip the grass or remove the lower rubber base of the synthetic turf.

I am aware of certain innovative souls who have attempted to modify their plows' cutting edges to get a rounded edge. Some have welded rounded steel pipes to the bottom of their plows

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or cut a slice into large PVC tubing and bolted it to the blade. These modified plow edges work great for a limited time but must be used with extreme caution. The PVC can crack and dislodge itself from the plow resulting in sharp edges once again making ground contact when least expected.

If it's not clear by now, facility managers have a very important role to play in attracting students to their campuses. Their task is not easy; they must keep the grounds in pristine condition and safe for foot and vehicle travel and must do so while dealing with brutal winter conditions.

Special attention must be taken when dealing with paver bricks, etched stones and stadium turf in order to keep the curb appeal beautiful and long lasting.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Richard Behan, President of Nordic Auto Plow, is coinventor of a lightweight, rounded edge plow blade for UTV's, ATV's, Z-Turns, passenger cars and has patents pending for 2' & 3' wide adjustable, rounded edge snow pushers and rounded cutting edges for steel blades.

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