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COVER STORY

OCT 2 2 2007

28 Fueling the Future MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Can alternative fuels work in this indust ABRARIES

Contractors who choose alternative fuels are taking the road less traveled and, despite obstacles, are unveiling rewarding and profitable results.

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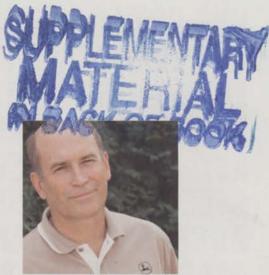
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#### GIE+EXPO: LIVE FROM THE SHOW FLOOR

Can't make it to the inaugural Green Industry and Equipment Exposition in Louisville, Ky.? Are you attending the show Oct. 25-27 but want to find out more about the products or educational sessions you missed? Log onto lawnandlandscape.com for daily coverage of the event and be the first to know.

## > GO GREEN, SAVE GREEN Did you know there are tax incentives available for those who use alternative fuels? Log onto

for those who use alternative fuels? Log onto lawnandlandscape.com's October issue Online Extras section to find out how to qualify.

#### > BUSINESS FORMS

Go online for examples of forms you can use every day in your business. Our library includes templates for accounting, fleet management and estimating forms. In addition, check out our extensive database of MSDS labels – everything you need for a thriving business. Find them under the Resources button on the homepage.

#### ONLINE QUOTABLE

"You can't expect everyone else to fix things for you. You've got to do your part."

- Chuck Twist, on the Lawn & Landscape Message Board, responding to a recent

question posed about advocacy in the industry.

lawnandlandscape.com/enewsletter.

## In between issues, log onto *lawnandlandscape.com* for the latest acquisition, legislation or other industry news that affects your business. Sign up for our weekly e-newsletter at

## YOUR INDUSTRY IN-DEPTH

Lawn & Landscape's exclusive State of the Industry research continues at lawnandlandscape.com. Click on the October Online Extras section to gain even more insight into the industry.



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#### The Honest Truth - From our Readers

For 27 years, Lawn & Landscape has been conducting in-depth research into the professional contractor market. With the help of our ardent readers, we collect insight into market trends, growth contributors and detractors and pricing tactics. We annually pull this research together into a report known as the State of the Industry.

This month, you'll find our report in a special section beginning after page 50. Key findings, regional influences and economic indicators are detailed. Our research is complemented by interviews with contractors nationwide as well as charts to help you track patterns.

The numbers and comments pretty well tell the tale of the tape, but it's always interesting to me to read the verbatim comments that we collect from our research. Some of the comments are amusing - made in jest - while others are contributed in a more reflective state of mind. Regardless, the remarks are generally made with profuse truth.

In answer to the question: What factors are limiting your company's ability to grow or diversify? Quality labor, escalating fuel costs and charging bona fide prices topped the list. Here's an assortment of other comments:

"Eroding dealer base; and lack of expertise backing up products." "Finding a profitable niche." "Finding the ideal client who is willing to invest in their landscape on a large scale." "Commercial truck insurance."

"H2B programs in jeopardy." "Illegal workers taking jobs away from legitimate companies." "Keeping immigrant labor and drivers' licenses."

"If you want me to say gas prices - I'm sorry, my customers pay for the gas I use. My most urgent problem is weather.'

"Increased regulation." "Not enough water." "Inflation and people wanting to save their money." "Lack of professionalism." "Lack of training." "Lack of profit."

"Macro market factors in the housing industry." "Liberal Congress."

"Our need to be truly a green industry." "Overhead costs."

"Rolling capital and high energy costs." "Uneducated customers and fly-by-night companies." "Underbidding. Prices are significantly lower than they should be for landscape installation and maintenance.

We also asked our readers: What is the most urgent problem facing the lawn and landscape professional?

"A business plan." "Advertising costs." "Debt." "Cash to advertise more. Labor is abundant as I sub everything out.'

"Ability to find and retain strong middle management." "Capital or finance to purchase better equipment in order to grow."

"Cost of land for storing equipment." "Finding supervisors with drivers' licenses." "Finding new customers and a marketing program that has a direct correlation of

dollars spent to getting new customers." "I have lost trust in employees and am just burnt out.

"I'm growing like crazy; just not enough hours in the day." "Inability to attract quality designers to a small company."

"Lack of experience with setting up business books correctly. I am too fussy with my work and underestimate.'

'Making the jump to a year-round operation." "Working capital."

Understanding your costs, operating your businesses efficiently and making a profit are the core strategies of the editorial content in Lawn & Landscape. In the coming months, we'll take an in-depth look at the key factors limiting your ability to grow and suggest how you can keep the needle moving forward.

Thanks for sharing your concerns with us. Please contact me - any time - with ideas, concerns or just to say hello. You can reach me at ccode@gie.net.

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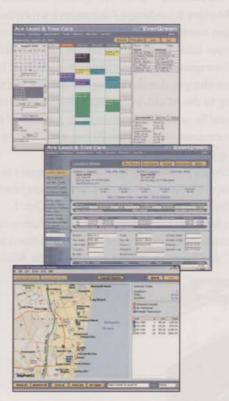
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# DHS No-Match Letter Rule Delayed

andscape professionals who feared a tangle of red tape from government "no-match" letters after the Department of Homeland Security announced its new immigration enforcement measures can breathe a sigh of relief. However, it may be only temporary.

In response to a suit filed by the AFL-CIO, the ACLU and other labor groups, a federal judge issued an order temporarily blocking the government from implementing the new DHS measures that rely on error-prone social security records as a tool for immigration enforcement.

"It's a stopgap measure for now," says Tom Delaney, the Professional Landcare Network's director of government affairs. "We're just saying the government didn't do their homework before they proposed this rule and they didn't check the effect it would have on small business." The Essential Worker Immigration Coalition, of which PLANET and the American Nursery & Landscape Association are members, filed papers to join the case early last month.

The new rule makes the employer liable for failing to respond to "no-match" letters, although it's common for discrepancies to occur because of innocent factors like typographical errors, name changes due to marriage or divorce and the use of multiple surnames, according to the ACLU. In fact, according to the Office of the Inspector General in the Social Security Administration, 12.7 million of the 17.8 million discrepancies in SSA's database – more than 70 percent – belong to native-born U.S. citizens, according to an ACLU news release.

The judge's ruling also stopped the SSA from sending out no-match letters to an estimated 140,000 employers on Sept. 14. As of press time, a formal court hearing on the permanent suspension of the DHS rules was set to take place Oct. 1.

"This is a crucial and significant first step in challenging this rule, which would be a bureaucratic and costly nightmare for employers and many U.S. citizens and other legally authorized workers," said Lucas Guttentag, director of the ACLU's

Immigrants' Rights Project.

- Marissa Palmieri



### H-2B Users Push Congress for Bill



Sandy Munley, executive director of the Ohio Landscape Association, encourages fly-in participants to continue their lobbying efforts.

awn and landscape professionals are encouraged by their visits to members of Congress and their aides during a fly-in to Washington, D.C. Sept. 6. About 80 contractors, along with more than 100 members of other industries that use the H-2B guest worker program, visited the nation's capitol to urge their representatives to co-sponsor Senators Barbara A. Mikulski (D-Md.) and John Warner's (R-Va.) Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2007 (S. 988).

Among those who flew in were more than 30 green industry representatives from Ohio who spent the day meeting with their representatives and staff members. The contractors and other advocates feel an urgency to get the cap exemption bill passed because Ohio is one of the top five states that uses the program. And, because of the state's northern location, the national cap of 66,000 people is nearly met by the time Ohio's landscaping and maintenance season starts, making the returning worker exemption even more important to them.

One of the group's victories was a meeting with Senator Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), which led to Brown's co-signing the bill. He replaced republican Mike DeWine, an H-2B supporter, after last fall's election.

continued on page 16



#### GREEN INDUSTRY REMEMBERS STUART SPERBER

Stuart Sperber cultivated not only tree saplings, but countless friendships over the course of his life. The CEO of ValleyCrest Tree Co. died Sept. 7 after a two-year battle with throat cancer. More than 1,200 people attended his funeral.

"Friends, relatives, employees, customers, competitors and ex-employees came," says his brother, Burton Sperber, founder and CEO of ValleyCrest. "Ten people came up to me and said, 'I was Stuart's best friend.' He was probably as loved as any man I have ever met."

Burt worked side-by-side with Stuart for 50 years at the family's business. Stuart's nephew, and president of Valley Crest, Richard, worked with the brothers for 25 years.

Stuart was considered by many to be a pioneer in the industry because he was one of the first to grow trees in con-

tainers – instead of the ground – so they could be used for landscaping year-round. Throughout his career, he stayed active in the industry. Cal Poly Pomona, his alma mater, honored him earlier this year with both the distinguished alumnus of the year and an honorary doctorate in recognition of his continuing contributions to the school and to the industry at large. He also received the first Award of Distinction from the school's College of Agriculture.

Stuart is survived by his wife of 44 years, Leslie. "Stuart was engaged after the first date with his wife," Burt says. He is also survived by his children Rochelle and Tadd, Adam, Julie and Rob, his seven grandchildren, Garrett, Mallory, Jerremy, Arielle, Maia, Lucas and Brady and his twin sister Deanna. — Heather Wood







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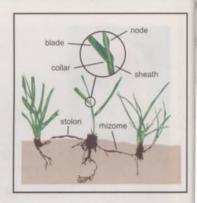
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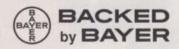
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#### inside the industry

continued from page 13

Chris Hayes of Groundmaster of Loveland, Ohio, has derived as much as 70 percent of his workforce from the H-2B program at times during his 10 years with the company. Among the representatives he visited was Marcy Kaptur (D-Ohio), who was on board as a bill co-signer. "I gauge today as a success," he says.

The bill provides a five-year extension for the returning worker provision that was included in similar legislation originally passed in 2005. The provision

was set to expire on Sept. 30.

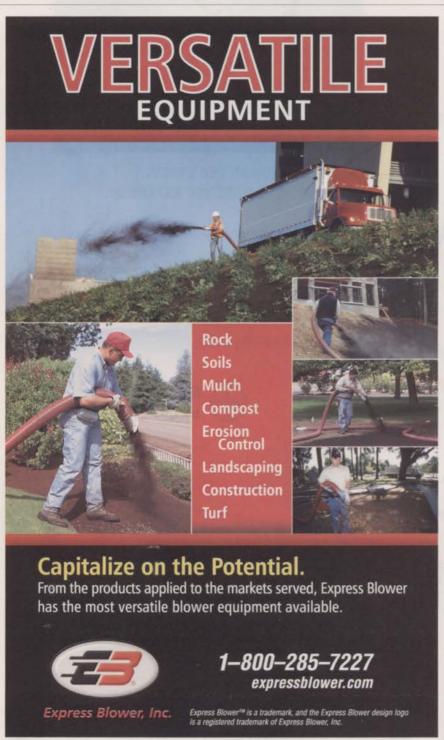
"I told small businesses they could count on me to keep fighting, and to-day they are bringing the fight to their elected representatives," Mikulski said in a statement. "Without these seasonal workers, many businesses would not survive - forced to limit services, lay off permanent U.S. workers or, worse yet, close their doors."

Some members of Congress were reluctant to sign as co-sponsors of the bill because they fear it might make them appear to be soft on immigration, said Sandy Munley, executive director of the Ohio Landscape Association. But the advocates reached many representatives during the fly-in and tried to convince them that the bill was more of a small business matter than an immigration matter. In fact, the bill promotes border security by conducting background checks of the workers, Munley told a representative's staff member.

Kurt Kluznik of Mentor, Ohio, employs about 85 H-2B employees out of a total of 275 Yardmaster employees. He stressed to representatives that the workers come to the U.S. without their families and don't take up permanent residency here.

"To lump them in with illegals is not the correct way to do it," he says. "As an industry, we support secure borders and regulating illegals." – Heather Wood





**USE READER SERVICE # 15** 

# RISE

#### **Grassroots Efforts Start at the Local Level**

Grassroots advocacy was the message heard loud and clear by attendees at the 17th annual RISE meeting held recently in New Orleans. "Like no time before – we are in a situation where legislative proposals will be moving from local to federal and from federal to state to local. And like no time before – we must grow our grassroots network to address challenges at all levels of government," says Allen James, president of the Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment. "Right now we're ahead of the game on fertilizer issues; however, we still have catching up to do on pesticide issues – this year we saw more than 500 pesticide bills proposed in states – expect more in 2008 along with those at the federal level." RISE members include suppliers, formulators, distributors and national and state associations.

With the green movement touted daily in the media – particularly House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's quest for an allorganic or "green" Capitol grounds and buildings – members of the industry in conjunction with RISE need to expand efforts to promote the benefits of the industry and demonstrate enhanced industry stewardship.

James re-caped important themes from the week-long meeting:

- "For the first time there were more attacks on the use of our industry's products than on agriculture. We experienced almost continuous activity in state legislatures and the media."
- "This year we were successful in preventing many unnecessary pesticide bills in the states and we brought considerable resources to fertilizer issues in key states, including Florida and New York."
- "This year one thing became abundantly clear, science is not selling at the state or local and now federal level."

Despite challenges at all levels to enact bans on pesticides and fertilizers, the outlook for the industry is positive, says Josh Weeks, vice president, Bayer and incoming RISE chairman. While fertilizer issues are not prevalent at the federal level, they are becoming the predominant issue on the local front.

"Both the political climate and technology are changing, changes that call for new ways of thinking, "he says, "but we're still poised to reach our big audacious goal and we do have a righteous cause." – Cindy Code

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NEWS

#### The Case of the Fraudulent Foreman

For eight months, upper management at Landscape Florida in Naples was unaware that a trusted employee was stealing money from right under their noses.

By the time the crime came to light, Martin Cavazos was accused of embezzling nearly \$36,000 from the company by cashing paychecks made out to fake employees. "It was a complete surprise," says Craig Hutchinson, vice president of operations at Landscape Florida. "He was a very trusted employee who had been promoted from foreman to a management position."

Cavazos was responsible for managing timecards, distributing paychecks and hiring and firing. "Employees were being terminated, but their timecards were not being monitored carefully by those who should have been monitoring them," Hutchinson says, adding another employee was believed to have been Cavazos' accomplice.

According to an article in the Naples News, a handwriting expert determined the signatures on the employee applications did not match the signatures on the most re-

cently cashed paychecks. Cavazos pled no contest to organized fraud in late August. His sentence is yet to be determined.

To prevent this type of situation, Hutchinson stresses landscape business owners "double check, double check, double check." In addition to terminating all employees suspected to be associated with the crime, the company has since established a new management system to better monitor "who's coming and going." – *Emily Mullins* 





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- Make nightly deposits so excess funds aren't left onsite.
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- Bond with employees who handle money.
- Conduct background checks on employees to uncover any past financial problems.
- Assign the responsibilities of preparing paychecks, receiving customer payments, making bank deposits, signing checks and handling bank reconciliation to different employees.





#### City Sued Over Landscape Truck Ban

A Massachusetts landscape contractor says his city is putting him out of business.

Leonard Russo, owner of Russo Earth Care, is taking the city of Haverhill to court over a recent ordinance that bans his work vehicles in his neighborhood, the Eagle-Tribune reports. The law bans commercial vehicles weighing more than 3 tons from two streets in his neighborhood, one of which he lives on. Some neighbors don't want Russo operating in the area, however his family has run a commercial business in the neighborhood since the 1950s.

Russo's lawsuit requests a temporary injunction to stop enforcement of the law until his case can be heard in court. - Mark Phillips



Source: Entrepreneuer.com

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NEWS

#### Small Business Vote Still Undecided

For the small-business world – and the green industry in particular – the 2008 election will be as pertinent as ever, with mega-issues like health care and immigration still unresolved.

While the 2008 general election is still more than a year away, presidential campaigns are in full swing with candidates attempting to stake their claims in Iowa and New Hampshire. But many small-business owners haven't yet made up their minds about who'll they'll vote for. According to a recent *Fortune Small Business*/Zogby International poll:

- 28 percent of respondents selected "none/not sure" when asked who they thought was the candidate mostly likely to help small business.
- Republican Mitt Romney received 21 percent of the vote, followed by Democrat John Edwards at 19 percent.
- Thirty-six percent of respondents said Democrat Hillary

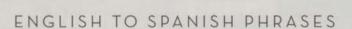
Clinton would do the least for small business.

Though party affiliations of entrepreneurs in the study were 37 percent Republican, 35 percent Democrat and 28 percent independent/minor party, *Fortune Small Business* noted an up-tick in respondents describing their politics as "progressive" or "liberal" – 30.4 percent this year vs. 24 percent in a similar poll in 2004. The percentage of moderates reduced to 22.9 percent, down from 30.5 percent, and there was no change among conservatives/libertarians at 46.6 percent.

Health care reform topped the list of entrepreneurs' policy concerns, followed by taxes and immigration. Regarding the type of health care reform they'd like to see implemented, 34 percent of respondents said federally-administered universal health insurance; 29 percent favored consumer-driven programs like health savings accounts, the survey says. — Marisa Palmieri



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considering that a growing number of landscape contractors are employing Hispanic or H-2B workers, improving communication is becoming more crucial to ensure quality work done right the first time.

In an effort to aid landscape and lawn care professionals in their communication efforts, Lawn & Landscape will be running a few phrases each month in English and Spanish, including a pronunciation guide, courtesy of the book "The Lingo Guide For Landscapers" by E.G. White. To inquire about ordering the book, which costs \$14.95, visit www. lawnandlandscape.com/store or contact the Lawn & Landscape Book Department at 800/456-0707.

If there is a phrase you are having trouble with, let us know at mzawacki@gie.net.

ENGLISH: Very good, thank you.
 SPANISH: Muy bien, gracias. (mooEE bee-EHN, GRAH-seeahs.)

 ENGLISH: You have a good crew of men.
 SPANISH: Tiene un buen equipo de hombres. (teeEH-neh oon bwehn eh-KEY-poh deh OHM-brehs.)

 ENGLISH: Drug use is not tolerated.
 SPANISH: No se permite utilizar drogas. (noh she pehr-ME-teh oo-tee-lee-SAHR DROH-gahs)

 ENGLISH: Get someone to help you.
 SPANISH: Consiga a alguien que lo ayude. (kohn-SEE-gah ah AHL-gee-ehn keh loh ah-YOO-deh.)

 ENGLISH: The port-a-pot is out back.
 SPANISH: El baño portable está allí atrás. (ehl BAH-neeoh pore-TAH-bleh ehs-TAH ah-YEE ah-TRAHS.)

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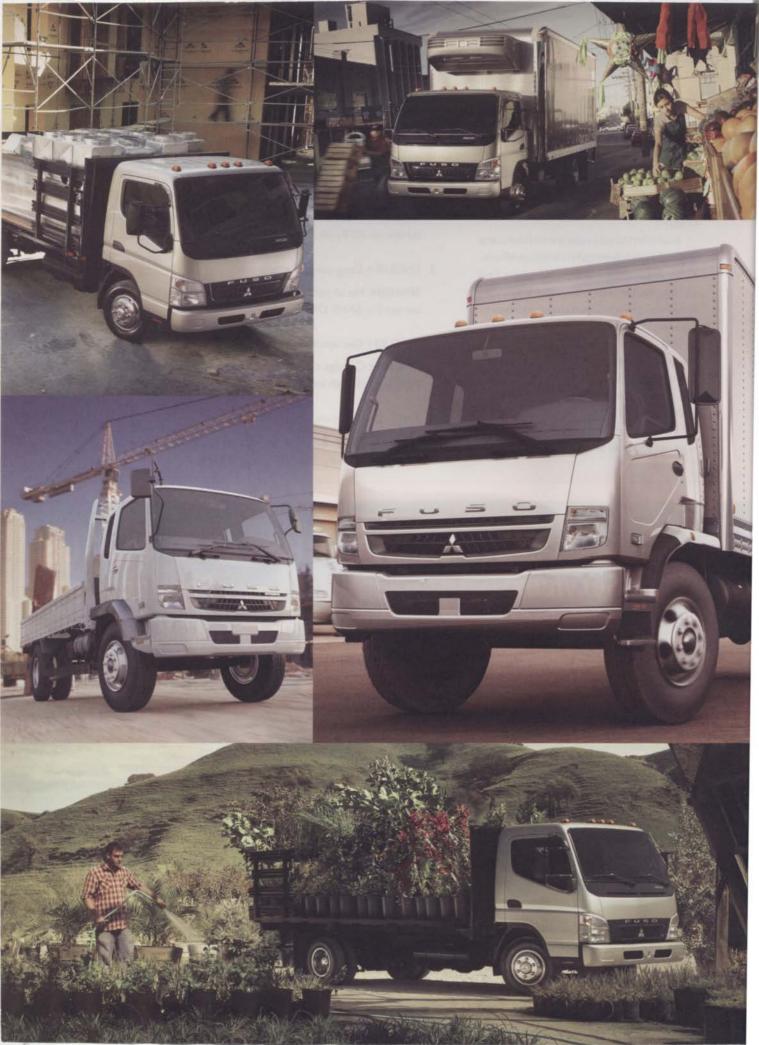
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# market watch

### LATE MORTGAGE PAYMENTS RISE

Mortgage delinquencies jumped again in August. Nationwide, 3.56 percent of mortgages were at least 30 days past

due, according to The Wall Street Journal.

Delinquencies have climbed since August 2006 in all 50 states, and 10 states have posted an increase of more than

one percentage point. Until recently, rising home prices meant it was easy for many borrowers who had trouble paying their bills to refinance or sell their homes, the Journal says.



This year, the world experienced recordbreaking weather extremes on nearly every continent, and global land temperatures reached their highest levels since records began in 1800. But all the heat might not be attributed to human-inflicted global warming, the United Nation's World Meteorological Organization says. Floods, drought, heat waves and storms could just be the cyclical nature of the earth's climate.

Source: The Financial Times



### South Florida Water Restrictions Eased

The South Florida Water Management District recently relaxed rules regarding lawn and landscape irrigation. The new rules lift the one-day-per-week watering rule to allow homeowners to water their lawns and landscapes twice each week for up to four hours each of those two days. A variance secured by the Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association which expands the number of days to six and hours to three to irrigate newly installed landscapes, remains in effect.

\$15.2 billion

The estimated value of Florida's green industry sales.

Source: Florida Nursery, Growers & Landscape Association



#### OCTOBER-NOVEMBER

OCT. 16 – 18 International Construction and Utility Equipment Exposition, Louisville, Ky. Contact: www.icuee.com, 866/236-0442

OCT. 25 – 27 Green Industry and Equipment Exposition 2007, Louisville, Ky. Contact: www.gie-expo.com

OCT. 25 – 27 Jim Huston's Brainstorming Meeting: Building a Great Company, Sherman Oaks, Calif. Contact: 800/451-5588

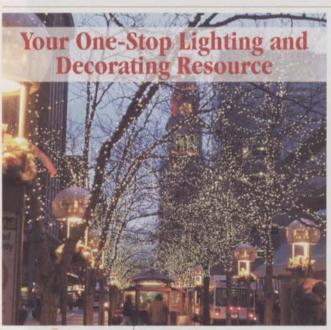
NOV. 8 – 10 Tree Care Industry EXPO, Hartford, Conn. Contact: www.tcia.org, 800/733-2622

NOV. 9 Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council's 2007 "Turning a New Leaf" Conference, Annandale, Va. Contact: www.chesapeakelandscape.org, 410/634-2847

#### Calendar Note

To ensure that your meeting date is published, send an announcement at least 12 weeks in advance to Heather Wood, Web editor, at hwood@gie.net.





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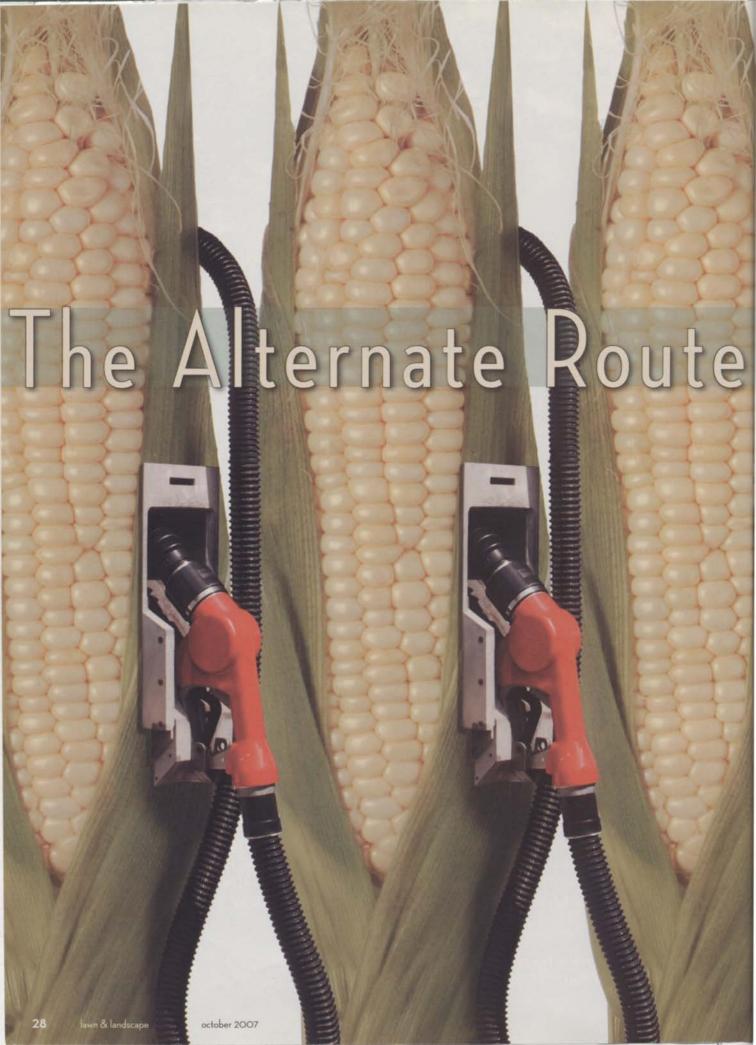


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Contractors who choose alternative fuels are taking the road less traveled and, despite obstacles, are unveiling rewarding and profitable results.

When it comes to alternative fuels, James McNew cuts to the chase. "Right now, everything is sort of a mess," he says. The vice president of technical and marketing services for the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, Old Town Alexandria, Va., McNew is more than skeptical about the use of alternative fuels like propane, ethanol and biodiesel to power landscape trucks and equipment. It's not that he doesn't support the environment or a domestic, renewable fuel supply. It's just that he's yet to see the proof that it will work — and work well. "Our position on alternative fuels is that they're not bad if introduced in the right places and in the right ways," he explains. "Renewable fuel is the right thing to do in this country, but we need to be smart about it and make sure we're not creating more problems than solutions."

Alternative fuel is a hot topic right now as many people look for ways to lessen their environmental footprints. A myriad of bills addressing the issue are currently floating through Congress, and state regulations are popping up left and right controlling emissions of everything from blowers to buses. After weeding through the governmental jargon, it seems most everyone agrees that gas prices and the country's dependency on foreign oil are too high. Coming to an agreement on when and how to combat this problem is the hard part. "This issue is in its infancy, so it's difficult to gauge the future demand and what it will evolve to," says Garry Busboom, director of research and development, Exmark, Beatrie, Neb.

"It's hard in an emerging market to look into a crystal ball and see what will happen down the road."

But solid proof does exist that alternative fuels can run vehicles and equipment just as well as gasoline or diesel, and landscape industry pioneers in this area can speak on the pros and cons of making the switch. Most admit that, initially, some flexibility, homework

by emily mullins | assistant editor

and financial investment are required. But after the kinks are worked out, operating a business in a greener, more responsible way is relatively easy, not to mention rewarding. "I don't call myself owner of a green company, but a greener company," says Kurt Bland, owner of Apex, N.C.-based Bland Landscaping, and an avid user of biodiesel. "I haven't changed everything; I've just made one more responsible decision."

> IN THE BEGINNING. The use of alternative fuels spans back farther than many people may realize. For example, a 2006 exhibit at the Los Angeles Petersen Automotive Museum showcased a 1917 Woods dual-power car with a gasoline engine coupled with an electric motor-generator, similar to a modernday hybrid car. While the current rise against global warming has motivated many people to be "green," one can argue that alternative fuels became a forefront issue with the Clean Air Amendment of 1990. With this bill, Congress overtly acknowledged for the first time that changes in motor fuels and their compositions contribute to reducing exhaust pollution. The act created two new gasoline standards to reduce fuel emissions in highly-polluted cities, and also required gasoline to contain fuel oxygenates, or cleaner-burning additives.

Ethanol is one such additive that contributes to cleaner-burning gasoline and is arguably the oldest alternative fuel, used in the Ford Model T back in 1908. It's an alcohol-based fuel produced by fermenting and distilling starch crops like corn, barley and wheat that have been converted into simple sugars. Since 2000, corn used for

ethanol production increased from 628 million bushels, or 6 percent of that year's crop, to 2.15 billion bushels last year, accounting for 19 percent of production. The USDA estimates that the increase in ethanol production will drive the demand of corn used for fuel to 3.4 billion bushels this year, more than one-quarter of the expected crop. Ethanol is usually used to increase octane and improve the emissions quality of gasoline, and most often comes in the form E85 - a blend of 85 percent ethanol and 15 percent gasoline.

Many major vehicle manufacturers have at least one model that is E85 compatible, and all major auto manufacturers approve the use of up to E10, according to the National Ethanol Vehicle Coalition. Some companies, like Ford and General Motors, have flex-fuel vehicles that are capable of running on either gasoline or E85. Like with most alternative fuels, accessibility is one of ethanol's biggest drawbacks. According to the NEVC, there are 6 million E85-compatible vehicles in the U.S. today, but because only about 600 of the country's approximately 170,000 gas stations carry E85, most of them run on gasoline.

In addition, according to the NEVC, ethanol has an energy content of 10 to 20 percent lower than gasoline; however, this can vary depending on factors like how a person drives, tire air pressure and weather conditions. Contractors must also keep in mind that while E85 is the accepted alternative for gasoline engines, diesel engines require E95 - a blend of 95 percent ethanol and 5 percent gasoline. Fueling a diesel engine with gasoline higher than 5 percent lowers the flash point, or the lowest temperature at which a liquid can form an ignitable mixture, to unacceptable

levels.

McNew predicts biofuels like ethanol will receive the biggest push in the alternative fuel market, especially with the 2005 Energy Policy Act, which mandated an increase in ethanol production from 4 billion gallons per year in 2006 to 7.5 billion gallons per year by 2012. But before ethanol is considered the end-all solution to the country's energy enigma, everyone needs to be aware of the impacts. "In the political world, people are asking, 'Can we increase the ethanol from

current levels? How will the growth of the ethanol market affect the current fuel supply?" McNew says. "There are a lot of great questions, but so far there aren't any great solutions."

BUYING INTO BIODIESEL. Biodiesel, produced from organic sources like soybeans, cooking oil and animal fats, is also causing a stir when it comes to alternative fuels. It can be used in its pure form (B100), but is usually blended with petroleum diesel to improve cold weather performance and also for cost efficiency reasons. The most common form of biodiesel is B20 - a blend of 20 percent biodiesel and 80 percent petroleum diesel.

Some contractors use biodiesel in their day-to-day operations and have found the pros outweigh the cons, especially once the initial kinks are worked out. Bland actually stumbled across the opportunity to participate in a biodiesel experiment lead by the Triangle Clean Cities Coalition, a Research Triangle Park, N.C.-based group founded in 1999 to reduce dependence on petroleum by promoting alternative fuels. The experiment simply aimed to discover if people who used biodiesel for a period of time would continue to use it once the experiment was over.

After researching the program, Bland decided to participate and contributed three trucks ranging in age from 10 years to brand new to the experiment. He saw only favorable results - less soot, a cleaner smell and better gas mileage, to name a few. He also noticed his employees found the process interesting and everyone felt good about doing something benefi-

cial for the environment.

By the time the experiment ended eight months later, Bland was sold on the idea of biodiesel. He began to seek out biodiesel manufacturers and found a local supplier who had just received the funding to turn waste products into 1 million gallons of biodiesel per year, and the companies created a partnership. The whole transition took 18 months, Bland says, adding that today about 47 of his 95 vehicles run on B20. He plans to eventually convert all of his gasoline-run vehicles to biodiesel, but says currently it's not financially possible. "It's a phasing-in process," he says.

continued on page 34

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Wed	10/17	Brentwood	7:12 AM	12:02 PM	Irrigation Irrigation	4:50 3:03	7:53 hours
Thu	10/18	Crestview	7:17 AM 12:50 PM	12:19 PM 3:46 PM	Planting Planting	5:02 2:56	7:58 hours
Fri	10/19	Crestview	7:13 AM 12:44 PM	12:07 PM 3:39 PM	Planting Planting	4:54 2:55	7:49 hours
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continued from page 30

Adrian Mondello, founder of Redwood Landscaping, Boulder, Colo., is another contractor who believes in alternative fuels. He has used B50 in his company's trucks and equipment for the last five years. The decision to switch from regular diesel fuel was for both employee and environmental health reasons. But Mondello has

alth reasons. But Mondello has found that it's also helped business because environmentally conscious Boulder residents appreciate the company's extra effort to lessen its environmental impact. "It creates a sort of trust between us and our customers because they know we're not out there just for the quick buck," he says.

Mondello agrees that biodiesel can be difficult to come by, so the company came up with a plan to alleviate the problem. For around \$300, Redwood's employees built a fueling station that can hold 150 gallons of fuel, which is delivered to the company about every three months. Another problem with biodiesel is its tendency to freeze in the winter due to its high gel point. During Colorado's coldest three or four months, the company simply switches to 100 percent diesel. "The use of alternative fuels just takes a little bit of adjustment to make it work," Mondello says. "Those who are against it are basically just too lazy to figure it out." Like with any alterna-

tive fuel, there are factors contractors need to consider when using biodiesel. First of all, it's relatively easy to come across a bad batch tainted with water and other contaminants that can decrease the fuel's efficiency or even destroy an engine. For this reason, it's important for contractors to ensure that all of their biodiesel is tested and

certified according to ASTM (American Society for Testing & Materials) standards, and stored in a way that preserves its quality. The National Biodiesel Board suggests users request certificates of analysis from their suppliers prior to use.

Biodiesel marketers and producers can further establish their credibility by joining the National Biodiesel Accreditation Program's BQ-9000 Quality Management Program, a voluntary program for the accreditation of producers and marketers of biodiesel fuel. The program is a combination of the ASTM standard for biodiesel and a quality systems program that includes storage, sampling, testing, blending, shipping, distribution and fuel-management practices. According to its Web site, the program helps companies improve their fuel testing and greatly reduces any chance of producing or distributing inadequate fuel. To receive accreditation, companies must pass a rigorous review and inspection of their quality control processes by an independent auditor. BQ-9000 is open to any biodiesel manufacturer, marketer or distributor in the U.S. and Canada. There are currently eight BO-9000 certified marketers and 19 BQ-9000 certified producers.

The risk of contaminated biodiesel is why Bland uses B20 rather than B100, he says, adding that some manufacturers will void a vehicle's warranty if they can prove use of improper fuel was the cause of its system's failure. "Using biodiesel can be risky," Bland says. "There are people out there making faulty biodiesel, so every batch you buy has to be tested."

Cases of faulty biodiesel are some of the strongest and most common arguments against the fuel, and not many things can deter a contractor faster. Alternative fuels like biodiesel and ethanol have been known to soften and degrade certain types of elastomers and natural rubber products like fuel pumps and hoses over time, and can also result in product failure, particularly in machines with smaller engines, McNew says. "Ethanol blends higher than 10 percent could be detrimental, particularly to small engines that aren't meant to run on it," he explains. "I can see it being used for larger vehicles rather than outdoor power equipment.'

While some manufacturers discourage the use of biodiesel, the Engine Manufacturers Association says B5 can safely be used in most engines. But the fact remains that any biodiesel - whether B5 or B100 - needs to be tested. Bland notes the "urban legend" his mechanic told him about the contractor who had to spend \$12,000 to replace his truck's fuel system after using contaminated biodiesel. "The source failed to mention that he'd been using homemade biodiesel that had never been tested," Bland says, adding that these fears shouldn't stop contractors from researching the use of biodiesel. "Sometimes the whole story doesn't get told.'

COST COMPARISONS. At the time of Bland's conversion, biodiesel cost more than \$1 more per gallon than gasoline or diesel fuel. But as gas prices have skyrocketed, the price of biodiesel has stayed relatively the same. Most days, gasoline and biodiesel are just about equal, while biodiesel is usually 10 to 20 cents more per gallon than regular diesel. For example, on July 9, Bland paid \$2.97 per gallon for on-road biodiesel. At the pump, gasoline cost \$2.97 and diesel cost \$2.85. "To convince some environmentally unconscious contractors to pay 10 cents more for biodiesel would be a hard sell," Bland says. "I realize that I'm giving up 12 cents a gallon when I use biodiesel over regular diesel. I'd like to keep that margin, but it's a cost I'm willing to pay for children in this area to breathe cleaner air."

Although more expensive, Bland credits this year's extra \$1 million in revenue to his choice of more efficient fuel. For example, he traded in two gasoline-powered trucks that averaged 8 to 10 miles per gallon for a biodiesel-powered van that averages 25 miles per gallon. Although he's so far spent \$12,000 more on gas than last year, he's only gone over this year's estimated fuel budget by \$4,000. "If you can produce \$1 million worth of work on \$12,000 worth of fuel, that's pretty damn good," he says.

Bland admits the availability of biodiesel clearly affects its cost, and that he's lucky to have several biodiesel suppliers in his area, which is conveniently surrounded by an urban farm community. Research from the National Biodiesel Board shows there are currently 148 active commercial biodiesel production plants in 41



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states around the U.S. that produce 1.39 billion gallons of fuel annually. And more plants are popping up regularly. This past August, the largest operating biodiesel plant in the nation opened in Grays Harbor, Wash., with an annual production capacity of 100 million gallons. As more contractors catch on to the idea of alternative fuels, availability will increase,

Bland says. "Right now people in general are reluctant to try it," he says. "But if you look at a map and identify who's using it, you can see that it's starting to spread like an epidemic.

#### PROPANE PLAYERS.

While most of the focus regarding alternative fuels is on vehicles, contractors also have options when it comes to equipment. Propane is the byproduct of natural gas processing and crude oil refining and is often referred to as liquefied petroleum gas, or LPG. According to the Propane Education & Research Council, propane is the nation's third most common engine fuel after gasoline and diesel, is clean-burning, nontoxic and evaporates if spilled. Propane can be used in both light- and heavy-duty vehicles including cars, trucks, forklifts and buses, and is already used somewhat in the landscape industry. A handful of manufacturers, including Dixie Chopper and Enviroguard, have commercial propane-powered mowers on the market, and others have equipment in the works. When considering

the benefits of propane, some may wonder why more propane-powered equipment is not available. Exmark's Busboom says there are some obstacles that need to be tackled for propane-powered equipment to be readily accepted.

Because propane is a pressurized fuel, manufacturers don't have the same flexibility with fuel-tank shape and size as they do with gasoline-powered machines. Typically, a propane tank needs to be about 67 percent larger than a gasoline tank in order to run for the same amount of time before having to refuel, Busboom says. In addition, propane-powered engines will generally produce about 10 to 15 percent less horsepower than an equivalent gasoline-powered engine, he says, adding that customers may not be as happy with the performance of a propane-powered mower as compared to the gasoline units in their fleets. To achieve the same performance as a gasoline-powered mower, contractors would need to purchase a larger propane engine option, if available, which adds to the cost premium of the propane-powered mower.

Other potential problems with propane mowers are fuel availability and the ease at which contractors can refuel their machines, Busboom says. Some companies, like Exmark, are currently working with engine manufacturers to encourage the development of systems that can better

handle alternative fuels.

Dixie Chopper introduced its first propane-powered mower in late 2005 in response to emerging legislation restricting the emissions of on-road "We knew it was just a matter of time until these restrictions trickled down to off-road equipment," says Matt Land, national sales manager for Dixie Chopper, Coatesville, Ind. "Rather than wait until it was mandated, we decided to go ahead and get started.'

Acceptance has been - and still is - rather slow, Land says, adding that most resistance stems from contractors being unaware of its environmental and economic benefits. Many contractors have also questioned the safety of sitting between two propane tanks and a hot engine. However, because propane doesn't emit vapors, it has safety benefits gasoline doesn't, Land says. "People cook steaks on propane grills, so it doesn't make much sense to be afraid to mow grass with a propane-powered mower.

In terms of cost, propane can cut fuel expenses in half and can be purchased anywhere propane tanks are sold, like gas stations and even Wal-Mart. For example, when gasoline cost \$3.58 per gallon, propane cost \$1.72 a gallon. Dispelling the idea that propane-powered equipment isn't as efficient, Land says the energy in a gallon of propane is just about equal to that of gasoline - as long as it's used in a mower with an engine specifically designed to run on propane. "Propane gets a bad rap because many believe it doesn't have the power of gasoline," Land says. "Propane has different properties, so when people try to convert gasoline engines to run on propane they can see a good 20percent reduction in power, which is significant loss of performance.

Land says this type of bad experience can deter contractors from the propane path. The fact that propanepowered mowers can cost about \$800 more than their gasoline counterparts can also discourage budget-conscious contractors. But most commercial contractors can quickly make up that difference in fuel savings. "Most accountants will say a three-year return on investment is good," Land says. "That extra \$800 could be made up in three weeks in fuel savings alone."

While most contractors aren't jumping on the propane bandwagon just yet, some may soon have no choice. McNew says that government regulations will slowly but surely increase the demand of propane- and electrically-powered equipment. For example, there are four counties in Arizona that have implemented restrictions on noise and pollution caused by outdoor power equipment. "Contractors in those counties can use gasoline-powered machines only if an alternative is not available," he says. "Propane and electric machines are the only types legally allowed in those areas. That type of demand is happening and will continue for sure."

**GETTING THERE.** It's this customer demand that McNew says is necessary for the mass use of alternative fuels like ethanol, biodiesel and propane to be viable in the future. But until manufacturers sense a demand for new types of equipment, available options are likely to stay as they are. "It's sort of a chicken-and-egg scenario," he says. "There is not a lot of incentive to be the first manufacturer creating something new. The guys that jump out ahead of the curve generally loose money, but create the momentum for someone else to make money."

#### electric engine options

An alternative to alternative fuel involves vehicles that run on electricity. For example, hybrid cars combine an internal combustion engine that runs on gasoline and an electric motor powered by batteries. The combination allows the electric motor and batteries to help the conventional engine operate more efficiently, cutting down on fuel use, while the gasoline-fueled combustion engine overcomes the limited driving range of electric vehicles.

Sampuran Khalsa, owner of Nanak's Landscaping, Longwood, Fla., is one contractor who recognizes the benefits of hybrids. Last year, Khalsa remodeled his company's fleet of non-production vehicles with seven hybrid Toyota Priuses, which get about 50 miles per gallon, and 30 high-efficiency Toyota Scions, which get about 30 miles per gallon – a move that will save Nanak's 15,000 gallons of fuel this year alone.

One challenge Nanak's encountered was a cultural change of deviating outside the pickup truck, the standard vehicle in the landscape industry. "Employees were reluctant at first to drive these smaller vehicles, but once they got into them and started getting positive feedback from our customers and people in the community, a general sense of enjoying being in the forefront started to happen," Khalsa says, adding that, in time, he hopes to increase the efficiency of the firm's 300 production crew vehicles as well.

All-electric vehicles, or EVs, are also on the market. EVs do not have internal combustion engines, and are recharged using electric power grids. Tesla Motors, a San Carlos, Calif-based manufacturer of EVs, says benefits of these vehicles include reduced dependence on foreign oil, zero emissions and a cost of less than 2 cents per mile driven. While there are more electric cars than trucks available today, some manufacturers are entering the fleet market. For example, Phoenix Motorcars in Rancho Cucamonga, Calif., produces zero-emission, freeway-speed fleet vehicles, including electric trucks and SUVs for commercial fleet use.

Battery-powered equipment is also popping up in the landscape industry. After a year of researching various methods of alternative fuels, Kelly Giard, founder of Clean Air Lawn Care In Fort Collins, Colo., decided electric equipment was the most sustainable choice. The company currently has 10 branches throughout the U.S., all of which operate with battery-powered push mowers and hand-held equipment. Current battery technology is not strong enough to operate riding mowers, which Giard runs on biodiesel, he says.

Giard's battery-powered machines are charged with solar

or wind power. It takes four to eight hours to fully charge a machine, which will run for about one hour, he says. This can create problems, such as having to haul multiple backup machines to each job. Batteries also tend to drain more quickly if a lawn is at all wet, Giard says. But benefits include healthier employees, cleaner, quieter equipment, and total independence from the need for fuel. "The economic plus is we don't have to buy gasoline, and electricity is cheap," Giard says, adding that it costs \$5 to \$10 a month to charge his eight to 10 push mowers.

Giard has been encouraging manufacturers to improve the technology. For example, current mowers do not come with interchangeable batteries so once its battery dies, the entire mower is out of commission until it's recharged. Giard compares it to the cell phones of the early 1980s vs. the high-tech options available today. "In the next five years, I think we'll look back and laugh at the equipment we're using now," he says, adding that as battery technology improves, the machines will improve.

Hydrogen is an energy carrier similar to a battery and is also a contestant in the alternative energy race. Hydrogenpowered vehicles are currently available on a very limited basis - 200 public vehicles existed in the U.S. as of April, according to information from the Gale Group. Most of these vehicles are found in California, where the bulk of the research on them is taking place. Additional research indicates that hydrogen-powered outdoor equipment is not far behind. A recent breakthrough in fuel-cell design could make hydrogen-powered systems practical in machines as small as lawn mowers and chainsaws. Prior to this research, fuel cells were inefficient on such small scales due to the need for fuel recycling and excess hydrogen in standard designs. The new design allows for 100 percent of the fuel to be used and eliminates the need for a fuel recyclina system.

Kurt Bland, owner of Apex, N.C.-based Bland Land-scaping, says he is anxiously awaiting the appearance of hydrogen-powered vehicles on the market, but adds there are many challenges to overcome before that can feasibly happen. One such challenge is the need for hydrogen fueling stations, and another involves the safety of working with hydrogen, which is an explosive gas. "Hydrogen vehicles will be the future of transportation, but I don't think we'll see any real progress on them for at least the next 10 years," Bland says.

Land couldn't agree more. He and others at Dixie Chopper have been somewhat frustrated with the slow acceptance of their propane-powered mower. Although sales have doubled each year since the mower's 2005 introduction, Land predicts selling fewer than 500 this year, compared to about 15,000 gasoline-powered riding mowers. He expects sales to spike in

the next few years as more municipalities find ways to be green, adding that Phoenix's local government recently placed orders for propane-powered mowers. "Anytime a company pioneers into a new market with a new concept it takes a little while to catch on," he says.

Governments also can encourage the use of propane by extending

on-road tax incentives to apply to offroad equipment, Land says. Currently there are numerous tax incentives for people who use or produce alternative fuels, as well as a federal income tax credit of 50 cents per gallon for people who run propane-powered forklifts. "If legislators would apply that incentive to propane mowers, that much more money could go in contractors' pockets," he says. "Most contractors don't mow grass from dawn to dusk because they're nice guys, but because they're trying to make a living. If they can save money using propane they'll do it."

Education will also be an important component of creating awareness on the topic of alternative fuels, and Brian Feehan, managing director of engine fuel programs for the PERC, Washington, D.C., says it's on the way. For example, the council is currently in the middle of a comprehensive marketing campaign to publicize the development of a new propane-powered F-150 pickup truck. The truck's new liquid injection technology gives it the same horsepower, torque and pulling capacity of its gasoline-powered counterpart. The council plans to spread its message through trade shows, trade publications, advertisements and manufacturer partnerships. "With

this new truck, customers will see no difference in ability, and that's a substantial change," Feehan says. "We went into our pickup truck development program knowing customers using alternative fuels want the same performance as conventional fuels and we were able to meet that challenge."

Some state or federal standards will also have to come into play for manufacturers to provide appropriate equipment to run on alternative fuels, McNew says. Today, Environmental Protection Agency standards require an oxygenate in fuel for emissions reasons and mandate that most machines be able to run on 0 to 10 percent ethanol. But as individual states adopt their own ethanol standards, manufacturers will have a hard time keeping up. "Some states are saying they'll accept fuel with 15 percent ethanol, while others are agreeing to 30 percent," McNew says. "When you have different levels of ethanol around the country you're getting outside that

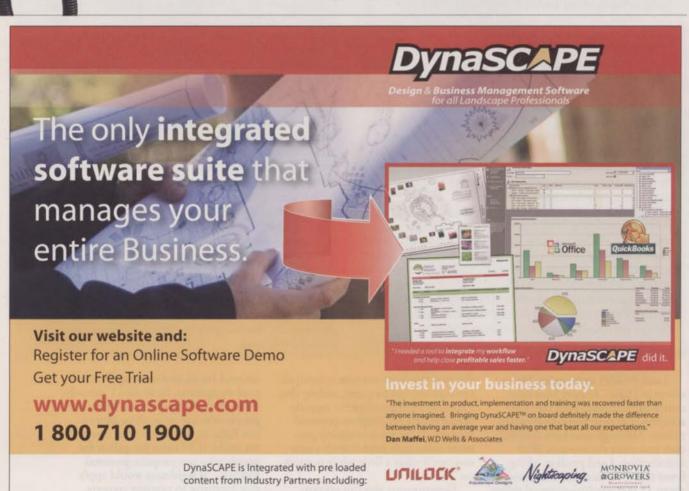
operating window of 0 to 10 percent, which can create issues with engine material compatibility."

So it seems those involved in the world of alternative fuels have come to three primary agreements: today's gas prices are too high, the country's dependency on foreign oil is too strong and alternative fuels need to be tested and standardized before they're used. And most also agree that now is the time to work out the kinks. "People sometimes have a negative connotation to alternative fuels because they think it's just a bunch of hippies trying to save the world," Bland says. "But really it's responsible people from responsible companies making responsible decisions." III

sidebar on page 37

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For information about alternative fuel tax incentives and ASTM testing standards, visit the October Online Extras section.



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#### vehicles on vegetables

ot quite ethanol but not quite biodiesel, using vegetable oil is yet another alternative way to run a vehicle. Brad Wolfe, owner of Organo-Lawn in Boulder, Colo., currently runs nine of his 14 trucks on waste vegetable oil, or WVO, and plans to convert his entire fleet before 2009. Wolfe gets his oil free from a local restaurant that would otherwise have to pay to dispose of it. "We're actually running our trucks on a recycled product because the oil has already been used once for cooking food," Wolfe says.

One of the main factors that influenced Wolfe to switch was the health of his employees and of the environment. Another was the ever rising, and unpredictable, cost of gasoline. He found it near impossible to budget or price his services accordingly as gas prices fluctuated almost daily, reaching more than \$3.20 a gallon. "We found we were constantly over or underpricing and we wanted control over that," Wolfe says.

To convert the WVO into usable condition, it first

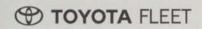
has to be filtered to remove food particles and carbon built up from cooking. For about \$2,000, Wolfe and his crews built an in-house filtering system which he says took some "trial and error" to get just right. "It's such a new thing that even some of the resources we were using as guides didn't have good methods of how to do it," he says. For example, many sources say one should filter oil down to 10 microns, which Wolfe says would clog a filter within a week. The company triple-filters the oil down to 1 micron, so one filter can last a few months, or about 3,000 miles. Between 120 and 150 gallons is delivered to the company each week, which takes about four hours to filter, Wolfe says.

A conversion kit is then needed to transport the fuel into and out of the trucks. (Oil will not ignite until it reaches 100 degrees Fahrenheit, so it needs to be purged from the truck's system before it cools in order for it to start up the next day, Wolfe says.) The kits cost about \$1,500 each, and Wolfe currently has seven with two more on the way. Because oil thickens as it gets colder, filling up a truck can take from five minutes on a hot summer day to 30 minutes during cold winter months. Ejecting the fuel can be done in seconds with the touch of a button, Wolfe adds.

All in all, it costs Wolfe about 25 cents to collect and filter a gallon of vegetable oil. WVO is also considered a zero-emissions fuel, because the carbon that is released into the atmosphere when it is burned is "cancelled out" by the carbon absorbed by the plants grown to create the oil, Wolfe says. Another advantage is the buzz the company's environmental consciousness creates in the Boulder area that gets clients talking about more than just its lawn care services. "When you do something new, people talk about it," he says.

However, the switch is not without its cons. Wolfe's WVO-powered vehicles require more maintenance than his other trucks. There was also a huge learning curve he and his crews had to tackle, especially during the initial transition last year. For example, most of the available kits are designed for cars rather than trucks, so parts like the fuel lines were not as durable as they needed to be. "The idea of these kits was kind of pushed onto the market before the kinks were worked out," Wolfe explains. "We had to do some modifications to retrofit them in a way that works well for us."



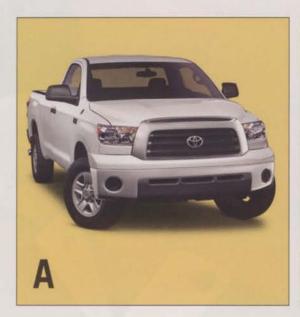


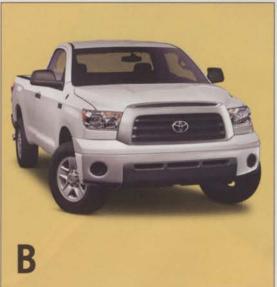


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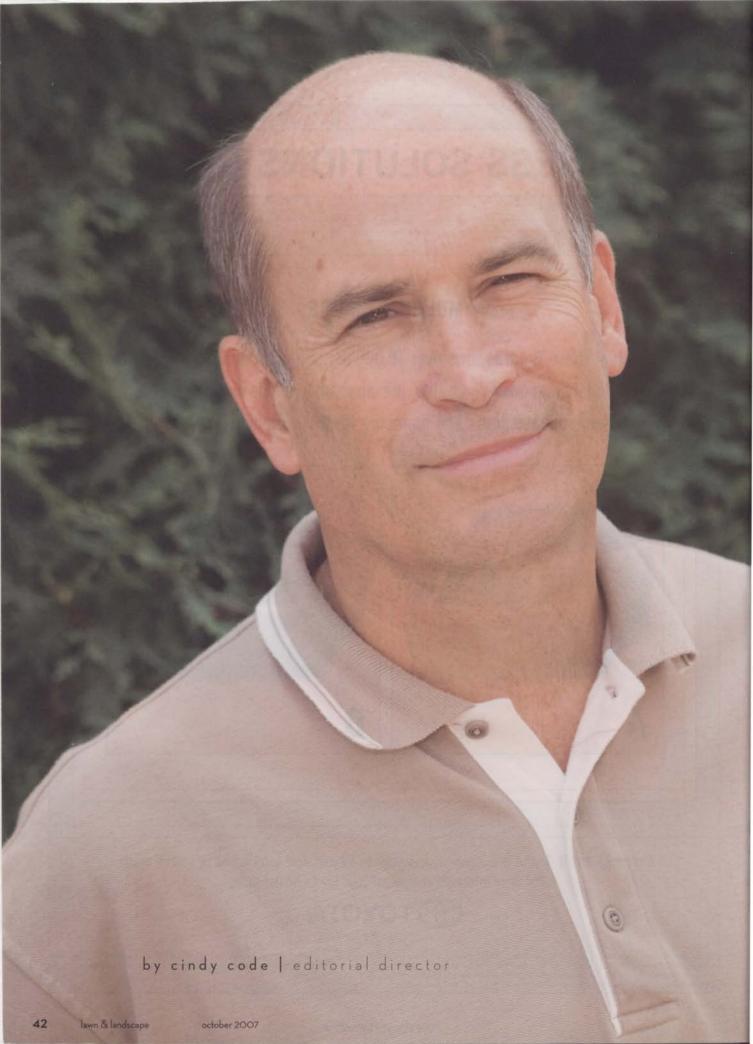




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# Behind the Merger

While a range of behind the scenes business moves have occurred since John Deere acquired LESCO, strong customer service remains the primary focus moving forward.

n 1962, Jim Fitzgibbon and Bob Burkhardt founded a local supply business – Lakeshore Equipment and Supply Co. – selling primarily turf maintenance equipment to lawn and landscape contractors near its Cleveland, Ohio, headquarters.

Forty five years later, that internationally known company – LESCO – reached more than \$570 million in sales through its 325 plus service centers and 120 stores-on-wheels.

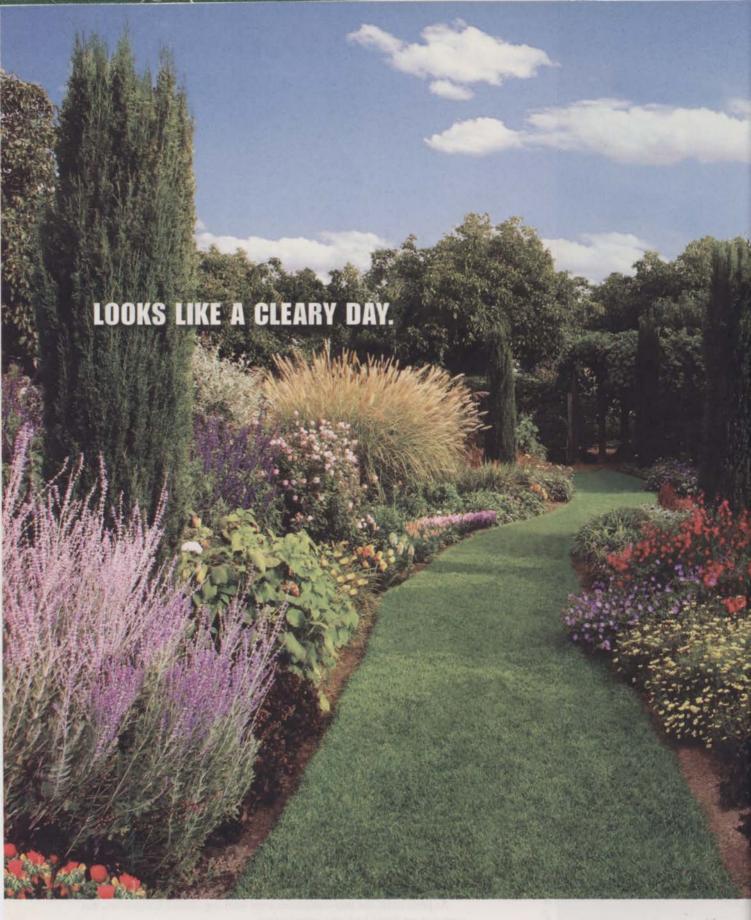
Throughout 2006, LESCO headlined the news as it transitioned from its dual focus as both a distributor and manufacturer and struggled with profitability and keeping shareholders happy. Amid management changes and persistent sales rumors, LESCO continued to open new locations and build and strengthen relationships with landscape contractors who relied on LESCO not only for product purchases but technical expertise.

Earlier this year, John Deere purchased LESCO and merged it with its subsidiary, John Deere Landscapes. The acquisition was the conclusion of months of preparation and homework by John Deere management to not only increase the volume of consumable products sold by John Deere Landscapes, but to complement John Deere's Golf & Turf One Source business, which focuses on bringing solutions to golf course superintendents.

At press time, the two companies were working toward integration, but were not yet fused into one organization.

Long-time John Deere employee, David Werning, president of John Deere Landscapes and senior vice president of the John Deere Commercial & Consumer Equipment Worldwide, was at the center of the acquisition. He spent considerable time in the field interviewing both employees and custom-

Photos: John Deere



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ers in a sincere effort to ensure expert customer service during the transition and into the future.

In an exclusive interview with Lawn & Landscape magazine, Werning discusses the acquisition and future plans for the company.

#### LL: How does a larger organization (John Deere Landscapes) meet the needs of customers better than a smaller one (LESCO)?

**DW:** Business takes place on the local level. Therefore, we believe that customer service can only be provided at the local level. Corporately, things can be centralized for efficiency, but customer service isn't one of them. Whether it's a small one-store operator or a company with 650 locations, the customer's experience is defined by the service provided locally.

We're a larger company that allows us to do some things that smaller businesses can't do. Subsequently, our store managers can keep their eye on the ball and take care of the customer. Local stores are authorized to make decisions based on the unique needs of their customers.

The professional landscape contractor has a significant amount of interaction with his distributor. In many cases, it's the most important and significant relationship they have. Manufacturers can't do that.

### LL: How have LESCO employees responded to the merger?

**DW:** The reception that we've received from all field employees – both John Deere Landscapes and LESCO – has been refreshing and far exceeded my expectations. It's what you hope to see – cooperation taking place at the local level. For example, if a LESCO store has to make delivery of three to four pallets of product for a customer and can't make it for some reason, he can call a John Deere Landscapes guy and ask for help.

LL: Everyone wants to know how many service locations will close as

## a result of the merger. Please set the record straight.

DW: There's no initiative that says we're going to close stores. It's not in any part of our planning. Once the acquisition was announced, we visited John Deere Landscapes and LESCO customers in 10 major metro service areas for their input. We asked them to help build a business model that would work. Much of this business is about the people. It would be a mistake to close branches and lose their expertise. We plan on increasing sales and stores, so why lose people?

We have cases where branches are located across the street from each other. As leases expire, we'll look at the long-term viability of each location. As long as we can provide the same level of service we will consider consolidating stores, but we will maintain the people from each store who have the product line expertise and customer relationships.

Over the next four to five years, we have a robust schedule of opening new stores. We see a tremendous opportunity to expand in areas where we currently don't have a significant presence. John Deere Landscapes now has about 300 stores, LESCO has 350 and 110 stores-on-wheels. Our plan is to grow north of 20 to 30 stores a year. We're underrepresented in the West, so there's a growth opportunity for us. If we didn't close any stores it wouldn't disappoint me.

#### LL: What is the total job loss at LESCO?

DW: In the best of situations, a merger calls for change. I don't have a specific number of employees who will be eliminated. We keep focusing on how we'll run the company moving forward, and the number of people the business will demand. I don't mean to be evasive. Our driving belief from day one is to rightsize the company moving forward. The changes we've already made at the Cleveland, Ohio office were about rightsizing.

#### LL: What's changed at the local

DW: It's a big company. We still need to peel the onion back and see what's different. There's different reporting and operating procedures, but the reality is that much hasn't changed. It's still a familiar person behind the counter. Where LESCO has been and where it's returning to is similar to the way John Deere Landscapes operates. You can't provide customer service from afar. The only person who is able to make those decisions relative to customer service is the guy standing behind the counter. He is trained and educated. At the end of the day, it's his job to make the decisions necessary to ensure the customer is provided with the service needed.

#### LL: What will happen to the LESCO name?

**DW:** We have two strong names in LESCO and John Deere Landscapes. It would be ridiculous to get rid of the LESCO brand name. From a consistency standpoint, we'll convert the storefronts over time from LESCO to John Deere Landscapes. But we have no intentions of removing the LESCO brand from the products.

## LL: What will happen with the LESCO Stores-on-Wheels?

**DW:** The primary graphics on the trucks will stay the same, but the John Deere Landscapes name will be added. We have no physical truck changes on the horizon. Products carried on the trucks will be determined by customer requirements.

#### LL: How much product crossover will appear at former LESCO and John Deere Landscapes branches?

**DW:** When we open a new store in a new area there will be extensive crossover of products. However, in markets with a density of stores the crossover will be minimal.

If customers who regularly go into a LESCO store need maintenance or repair parts for an irrigation system,

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we'll carry those. But we won't carry a full line of irrigation products. It's all about the convenience of the customers and it will evolve over time. The key is to maintain the expertise at the store and not to dilute the focus on any customer.

#### LL: What relationship will the John Deere Landscapes/LE-SCO branches have with John Deere equipment dealers?

**DW:** The first phase is operating John Deere Landscapes and LESCO as one company. We need to get systems and processes squared away. LESCO mowers will continue to be sold in the same manner as they are currently sold, but long-term we will certainly look for opportunities and ways to help our Deere dealer partners.

### LL: Tell me about the history of John Deere and the evolution of John Deere Landscapes.

DW: John Deere is an agricultural company, which is both good and bad because of the cyclical nature of the industry. John Deere has worked to diversify itself and really focused in on brand definition in the green industry. John Deere looked at both the manufacturing and distribution sides of the business as well as the professional landscape contractor. In 2000, we started talking to folks which culminated in the acquisition of McGinnis Farms. That was followed by Century Rain Aid in 2001. Those two companies became our platform for John Deere Landscapes. Four years later, based on John Deere's commitment to the green industry and the strong performance of John Deere Landscapes, we acquired United Green Mark. At its core, John Deere is an engineering and manufacturing company. John Deere Landscapes starts where John Deere ends. As far as systems and processes go, the two companies don't overlap that much.

John Deere Landscapes' management began with myself and one other employee. The rest came from the acquisitions based on their individual industry expertise. We relied heavily on the existing management teams. The vast majority of the senior management is still around today and now includes some LESCO managers.

## **LL:** How similar are the customer bases of John Deere Landscapes and LESCO?

**DW:** Our John Deere Landscapes customers have primarily come from the installation side of the business i.e., irrigation, hardscapes and nursery. LESCO customers are more maintainers of the landscape i.e., lawn care, mowing and fertilizing.

The merger of John Deere Landscapes and LESCO is one of both expertise and customers. We think we can provide service to both audiences particularly as contractors diversify their service offerings. We can simplify the distribution model and reduce the number of vendors they need to work with.

### LL: How has distribution changed and evolved since you've worked with John Deere Landscapes?

**DW:** Certainly, there's been consolidation. I think a lot of it is because of the need for scale and scope, and the need to pro-

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vide services customers are requesting.

As business has evolved, the customer segments we serve in the professional landscape industry look at distribution for more than product and product expertise. They look for non-product ways to assist them in their businesses educating them on business processes or things that make them more efficient or cost effective. It's accelerated in the last five years and will continue to accelerate.

We talk to our customers every day asking them for ideas and suggestions besides the basics. Delivery capabilities, fair and reasonable pricing and knowledgeable people behind the counter are key, It's where a large part of distribution is going.

LL: What do you anticipate from the service industries – lawn care,

## landscape and golf – that you serve over the next few years?

**DW:** We have opportunities to look at the markets – individually and combined – to develop a business that can best serve each market, grow our stores and identify new customers.

John Deere saw LESCO as the leader on the consumable side of the business. By combining consumables with equipment i.e., LESCO stores and stores-on-wheels working in tandem with John Deere dealers, we will provide an integrated business approach to the superintendent and the contractor.

#### LL: Describe your management style?

**DW:** I'm a believer in empowerment. I've never enjoyed being micromanaged. I like to be told what the objec-

tives are and be given the freedom to operate within those objectives. It's no different than how our customers want to be serviced.

#### LL: Who are your mentors?

DW: I'm very fortunate to have learned from everybody I've worked for. I've learned a lot from inspiration and a lot from perspiration. You are an accumulation of people you've interacted with, and the ones I've enjoyed most are the ones who liked to learn and liked to listen. Attitude is the biggest driver. If you are a believer in people with a positive approach, you'll generally get more out of them.

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Visit October's Online Extras for more with David Werning, president of John Deere Landscapes.



## Here's just a sampling of what attendees had to say about this year's inaugural event:

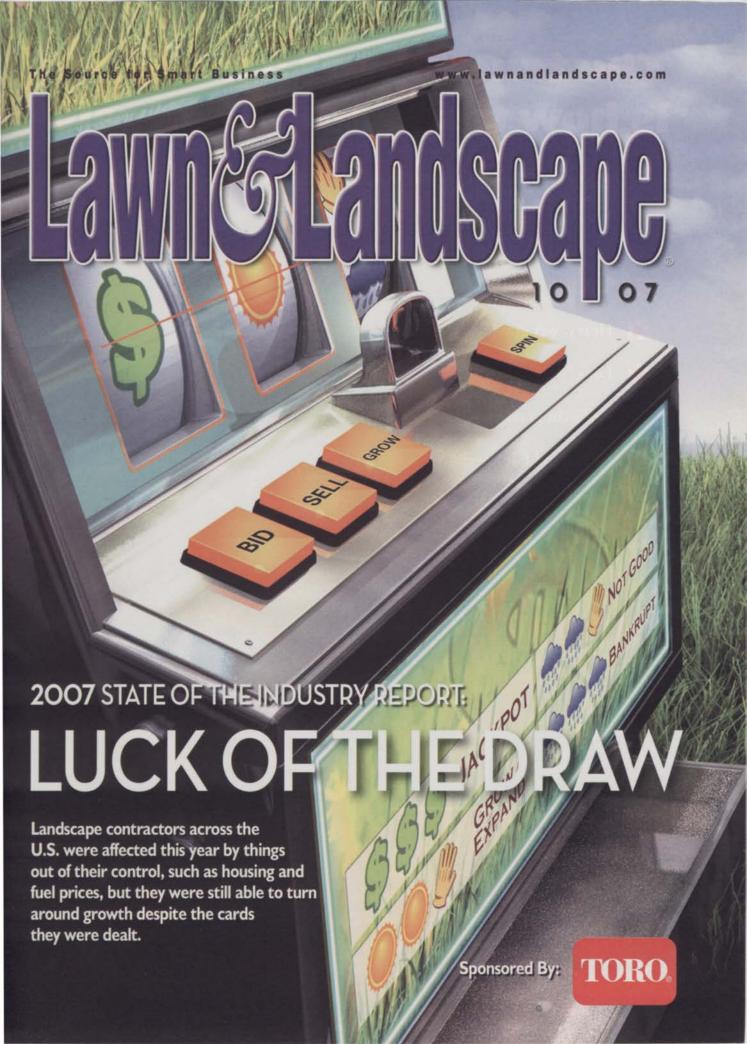
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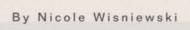




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# Resilience Reigns

Most contractors believe 2007 was a good year, despite late worries brought on by a shaky housing market and increasingly cautious client spending.

"Housing Markdown"

"Mortgage Mayhem"

"Jobs Decline"

"Oil Prices Hit All Time High"

"U.S. Very Near Recession"

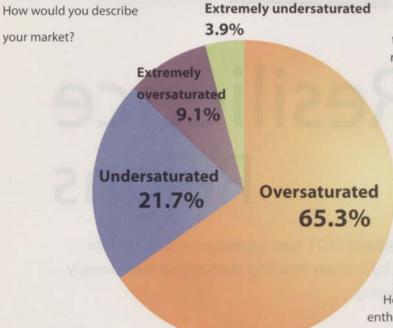
The headlines dominating major newspapers and magazines across the country lately don't necessarily make the average landscape company owner feel good about the growth of his or her business now and into 2008.

But as history illustrates, the industry is surprisingly resilient. Most of the year brought more than enough work and adequate profit for the majority of landscape contractors, according to Lawn & Landscape research and extensive interviews with contractors serving various service and customer segments across the United States. Customers who didn't have the time or interest in doing their own lawn care, maintenance or design/build projects before still don't. Homeowners want yards their children can play in during evenings and on the weekends, while commercial property managers still want to attract customers to prim, professional-looking properties.

And the numbers support this theory. The average net revenue increase for landscape contractors this year is 16 percent with a 10.9 percent net profit margin, according to Lawn & Landscape State of the Industry research, conducted by independent research firm ABR Research with more than 700 contractors responding. And contractors are calling this "not excellent, but good." So while the figure is certainly healthy for a typical small business, the confidence of the average landscape business owner is a bit fragile. But for any entrepreneur in a slightly shaky market, maybe this is the best mind-set to have, suggests industry consultant Jim Hus-

#### **COMPETITIVE CONCERNS**

Source: Lawn & Landscape research



ton. "The general trend is pretty positive, but I always remind people, it's America – there are always wrinkles," says the owner of J.R. Huston Enterprises, Englewood, Colo. "The economy is pretty strong, in spite of the recent stock market shift. In fact, 2007 started out stronger than anticipated. It's softened up a bit in the last couple of months, but generally it's been good."

It's these "last couple of months" that seem to have contractors' nerves tensing up.

GROWTH GOALS. Most of the landscape contractors we talked to across the U.S. cited 10 to 15 percent revenue increases, pretty much in line with the research average. Again, this is considered healthy growth by many industry and business consultants. However, the recent news has contractors feeling less enthusiastic about their success.

For instance, Dan Cheslock, president of \$1 million Mountaineer Lawn Care in Morgantown, W. Va., calls his 10-percent growth years in 2006 and 2007 "good but not outstanding. On the national level, with the foreclosures and house building being down, it's not good for the industry, but in landscaping we tend to be a little insulated from that." Cheslock's business is 80 percent chemical lawn care for 90 percent residential clients.

In Massachusetts, Michael Ciccarelli, owner of Ciccarelli Landscape in Woburn, also experienced about 10-percent growth this year. With an 80-percent maintenance business and 80

		Sales Fr	om					Sales Fron
2006 GROSS SALES	% of the Industry	Lawn mowing/ maint.	Lawn	Construction/ design-build	Irrigation	Tree & ornamental care	Snow & ice removal	Single-family residential
Less than \$50,000	20.2%	58.0%	8.5%	13.3%	3.0%	8.3%	2.4%	79.8%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	18.5%	49.6%	10.8%	14.7%	6.3%	6.3%	3.7%	72.2%
\$100,000 - \$199,99	9 17.4%	37.7%	10.7%	21.7%	7.1%	6.3%	3.8%	67.6%
\$200,000 - \$499,99	19.0%	31.3%	14.4%	26.3%	11.4%	4.2%	4.1%	66.1%
\$500,000 - \$999,99	9 10.7%	27.1%	10.8%	32.5%	7.7%	3.8%	4.8%	56.4%
\$1 million or more	14.3%	21.3%	10.0%	32.9%	12.5%	4.0%	4.2%	45.9%
Average (Sales From	m)	40%	11%	22%	8%	6%	4%	66%

percent residential customers, he says, "customers may not be willing to spend the big bucks to rip out a landscape and redo it, but they are willing to spend the money to maintain and add to what they have."

Contractors who do predominantly commercial work are touting similar figures. Bruce Birdsong, president of \$10 million Precision Landscape Management, Dallas, cites 10- to 15-percent growth for his 70-percent commercial maintenance business.

Even for predominately residential design/build and renovation/remodeling businesses, which some say should be feeling the effects of the unstable housing market the most, growth has been stable. Business is up about 10 percent for Surroundings by NatureWorks in Carmel, Ind., says President Randy Sorrell. However, recent stock market news does make him nervous about his high-end customers. "The economy is a little tenuous, so I'm not quite as confident as I was a couple of weeks ago but we are booked out pretty far with some projects so that puts us in a good position," he says. "Though 99 percent of our business is cash and check, I'm worried about the credit market for

2008. A tight credit and bond market tends to make people nervous, so they may not spend as much."

Bill Lillie, owner of Sprigs & Twigs Landscapes in Gales Ferry, Conn., feels the same way, despite the fact that his \$410,000 business is enjoying a 32 percent increase over 2006, exceeding sales goals in all business segments - mostly installation, design and maintenance to 90 percent residential customers. But just as contractors are getting worried about the recent headlines, so are customers, and Lillie has noticed this in his region. "Overall, the economy has had an adverse affect on our business, even though our sales are up significantly for the year," he says. Customers are out there, but they are harder to get. We are seeing more tire-kickers and do-it-yourselfers. For the first time this year, we traveled out of state to New York and Massachusetts to serve qualified customers. The housing market is poor - there are many homes for sale with no apparent sales activity for many months. While home sellers should be spending money improving curb appeal, there seems to be a current reluctance to spend money on landscaping. But I expect this to change fairly dramatically as the housing market further weakens and sellers come to realize they must do everything possible to sell their homes, especially by improving curb appeal with landscaping."

In fact, fickle is one word many use to describe today's homeowner, who is much more susceptible to shortterm planning and the emotions the economic concerns evoke and therefore much more volatile compared to their commercial counterparts, Huston says.

According to the U.S. Commerce Department, consumer spending is modest. Retail receipts grew 0.3 percent in August, the same pace as in July. Looking at some specific markets, motor vehicles and parts sales grew 2.8 percent, furniture purchase receipts grew 0.5 percent, electronics grew 0.4 percent and health care grew 0.3 percent. Building materials spending, as expected in response to the housing slump, dropped 1 percent; clothing sales dipped 0.1 percent and gasoline receipts plunged 2.4 percent.

Overall, these reasonable spending levels don't scare contractors too much. "It's still a good, strong market," points out Chuck Carr, president of \$1 million Carr Landscape Management,

				Region			Numbe	r of Empl	oyees		
Multi-family structures	Commercial/ industrial	Government/ institutional	er electry	West/ Southwest	East/ Midwest	South/ Southeast	1 - 2	3 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 24	25 or more
3.4%	13.7%	1.6%	o bo	13.2%	22.7%	22.0%	39.4%	17.9%	5.9%	6.5%	2.6%
6.2%	18.7%	2.6%	100000	24.9%	15.9%	17.0%	28.9%	26.1%	16.4%	6.5%	5.1%
5.9%	22.6%	4.3%	35/2	13.8%	19.5%	17.6%	20.6%	29.1%	19.7%	9.7%	3.8%
5.1%	25.1%	1.9%		19.1%	17.7%	21.4%	8.9%	22.3%	42.8%	13.8%	9.0%
12.1%	25.7%	5.4%	No. of the last	11.1%	11.5%	8.8%	0.0%	4.5%	13.1%	33.1%	11.5%
10.7%	30.7%	11.2%	Percent of	18.0%	12.7%	13.1%	2.2%	0.0%	2.0%	30.6%	67.9%
7.0%	22.0%	4.0%	respondents Average (Sales)	26.1%	<b>46.9</b> % s547,345	25.2% \$574,313	26.8%	20.0%	22.7% \$304,276	18.5%	11.6%

Source: Lawn & Landscape research

# CONTRACTORS INCREASE PRICES 10 PERCENT

Many business owners believe a price increase will drive customers away but those offering something unique may be surprised by their pricing power. Pricing issues often vex small businesses, especially in today's climate with competition rising along with cost. But veteran business owners and pricing experts say that if more small companies freshly examined their competitive positions and service offerings, they would find they could raise prices, keep key customers and boost their bottom lines.

For instance, if you enjoy a 10-percent profit margin, a 1-percent service price increase can deliver a 10-percent hike in profits, experts say.

To cover rising fuel and labor expenses, contractors interviewed said they generally raised prices in the 3- to 5-percent range this year, depending on the service offered. Many expect to raise prices the same levels next year.

But when looking at residential and commercial mowing prices in *Lawn & Landscape* research, contractors raised prices even higher – 11.6 and 10.1 percent, respectively, in both service categories. Residential mowing prices jumped from \$39.50 per hour in 2006 to \$44.10 this year, and commercial mowing prices increased from \$43.70 last year to \$48.10 this year.

Consultants applaud these increases. The reason? Owners know their costs are rising but sometimes forget that fuel prices are soaring and workers are demanding higher wages. In turn, consultants say business owners don't appreciate the value of the added quality they offer, their fast and reliable service, or other superior benefits they provide – or could provide – to justify higher bills. In essence, industry experts say price doesn't always matter as much as contractors think it does, especially if customers want what they can't get elsewhere.

Porter Ranch, Calif. "The difference recently is people are shopping a bit more than they would last year. They are getting more proposals and taking longer to approve them. There's a little nervousness with the whole mortgage issue – people are being more cautious. They're still spending, but just taking longer. There's still plenty of work out there."

When people take longer to make decisions, "that is not a sign of an economy that I would call robust," adds Huston.

services & customers. While there are contractors touting positive growth from every service segment, the one area in which owners might be feeling the biggest impact because of housing's slowdown is new design/build/installation projects. Contrac-

slowdown in nonessential-type jobs," explains Todd Patton, president of Patton Property Maintenance in Heymarket, Va. "But the people who really had money before still have money and are getting the regular maintenance-type work done."

Jamie Bush, president of Jamie's Lawn Service in Plano, Texas, agrees. "People are going to cut many other expenses before their own lawns," he says. "Even in the worst case scenario, residential maintenance will be OK."

Landscape maintenance is the most profitable service for Ciccarelli. "What I've seen is the construction end slow down and the maintenance end pick up," he says.

"Not as much as what was getting spent is being spent on installation, I agree," says Paul Wieting, owner, Seagull Lawn Services, Houston. "But

#### The Average 2007 Landscape Contractor

Gross Sales	\$626,867
Years in business	13.7 boom and our man factoring attendance
Total Employees	14.4 (7.1 seasonal and 7.3 year-round)
Net Profit	10.9%
Net Operating Cost Change	16.1%
Revenue Per Employee	\$45,756 (considering 13.7 total employees)

Source: Lawn & Landscape research

tors offering that service as their main focus might want to start looking at other areas like maintenance and existing landscape renovations/enhancements to keep business at current revenue and profit levels and/or grow business, Carr suggests.

"People who pulled big equity loans out of their homes in the last two to three years to finance toys and wants like big landscaping have blown their wad and have nothing left now – that would account for the when people start cutting back on big landscape projects, it will free up enough of the money that is left that they will do what they can to make what they already have look better."

The rapid move of more contractors offering maintenance services as housing problems worsen can negatively affect current maintenance contractors by increasing competition for clients, meaning job profitability could decrease, points out industry consultant Bruce Wilson, Wilson-Oyler



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#### SERVICE STATS

## WHAT WAS THE FASTEST GROWING SERVICE FOR YOUR BUSINESS IN 2007 AND WHAT DO YOU PREDICT WILL BE YOUR FASTEST GROWING SERVICE IN 2008?

SERVICE	% OF CONTRACTORS 2007	% OF CONTRACTORS 2008
Design/build/installation	33.1%	36.1%
Mowing/maintenance	30%	23.8%
Lawn care	17.3%	15.9%
Irrigation	8.9%	10.4%
Trees & ornamentals	4.8%	5%
Snow removal	3.3%	3.2%
Waterscapes	2.6%	5.6%

WHAT PERCENT OF YOUR ANNUAL SALES COME FROM THE FOLLOWING SERVICES?				
SERVICE	% OF SALES			
Lawn mowing/maintenance	39.5%			
Construction/design/build	22.1%			
Lawn care	11.2%			
Other (lighting, consulting, seeding, etc.)	9.7%			
Irrigation	7.7%			
Trees & Ornamentals	5.7%			
Snow & Ice Removal	3.6%			

# WHAT PERCENT OF YOUR ANNUAL SALES COME FROM THE FOLLOWING PROPERTY TYPES? PROPERTY TYPE % OF SALES Single-family residential 66.1% Commercial/industrial 21.6% Multi-family structures 6.9% Government/institutional 4.1% Other 0.5%

#### BY WHAT PERCENT HAS YOUR TOTAL GROSS SALES REVENUE CHANGED FROM 2006 TO 2007 IN THE FOLLOWING CATEGORIES? SERVICE **NET % CHANGE** Total revenue 16% Chemical/fertilizer services 13% Lawn maintenance 12% 12% Construction Irrigation services 12% 11% Snow/ice control Arbor/tree care services 7% 4% Nursery/retail

Source: Lawn & Landscape research

Group, Thousand Oaks, Calif. "They start coming in and bidding pretty competitively on maintenance, so it does eventually affect the maintenance contractors. It always has and probably always will."

And, according to the research, contractors already feel the competitive pressures in their respective markets with 65.3 percent calling their markets oversaturated and another 9.1 percent referring to them as extremely oversaturated.

According to the research figures, all service segments queried showed net percent increases this year, with chemical/fertilizer services taking the lead at 13 percent, followed by lawn maintenance, design/build and irrigation all at 12 percent, snow and ice removal at 11 percent and arbor/tree care services at 7 percent.

Beyond the staple services like construction and maintenance, specialty services like landscape and holiday lighting, water features and deer control, will continue to grow, predicts industry consultant Ed Laflamme, Grass Roots Consulting, Wilton, Conn. In fact, waterscapes topped the list of new services companies plan to offer in 2008, followed closely by irrigation, according to Lawn & Landscape research. "As contractors try to grab more market share from their existing clients, these kinds of services are solid, encourage recurring revenue and they aren't affected by the economy as much," he says.

Lee Helmberger, owner of Lee's
Lawn Service, Omaha, Neb., is one
such contractor who has added on
a niche service – gutter cleaning
– to his 60-percent maintenance,
40-percent tree and shrub business.
Customers asked the company, which
plans to bring in between \$70,000
and \$100,000 in revenue this year, to
perform the service while it was out



trimming trees, and Helmberger says it's been profitable. "It's something a house with a lot of surrounding trees on the property might need two or three times a year," he shares. "We already have the equipment – a backpack blower – and we've been able to wrap the service into our fall cleanup services."

Another service opportunity on the horizon is irrigation. "Water is an issue more everywhere with higher demand for water because of drought – there is just not going to be enough water," Wilson says. "The ability to manage water is eventually going to become a core competency that contractors are going to have to have."

This all points toward the general trend in corporate America to offer customers a one-stop shop, Arlington points out. "The ability to offer the customer one contract and manage everything from there is huge," he says.

In terms of client segments, while the residential market is experiencing some waves as a result of real estate challenges, "the commercial market is relatively strong," Huston says.

Brett Lemcke, vice president of \$2 million RM Landscape in Hilton, N.Y., agrees, saying his commercial clients seem to be spending a lot more than they have in the past.

Wilson, however, feels the commercial market will feel the effects of the tighter credit situation at some point – just later than the residential market.

"I think the commercial market is starting to slow down," he points out.

This is one reason Ciccarelli isn't expanding into the commercial market as quickly as he could because he's worried property managers will soon become overly price conscious. "I've been offered large commercial jobs and I've refused because it's too easy to lose that business the first time someone else comes along and underbids you," he says.

What strategies do consultants offer for contractors to lessen the blow of the unstable residential market, the potentially volatile commercial market and an increasingly competitive maintenance service segment?

Don't try to outbid the other guys," Laflamme suggests. "The best strategy is to market additional services to existing clients. See if they will incrementally spend 10 to 15 percent more – that will offset any losses.

"It would be smart to tighten your belt a little, and if backlogs are starting to shrink, bid tighter," Wilson advises. "And bid more work because you're not going to close as much. Increase your sales activities and then tighten your belt."

"Focus on your own plan and how you're going to execute it," Huston adds. "How contractors fare in this economy will have less to do with the external economy and more to do with their training, computerization and systems."

# MEDIAN VS. MEAN

In most research studies, the average – or mean – is revealed, which shows the total divided by the number of respondents.

But in some cases, a number known as the median, or the mid-point where 50 percent of respondents are above and 50 percent are below, can actually show a more typical picture because it is not skewed by larger figures normally reported by a smaller percentage of respondents.

For instance, according to this year's survey, the average revenue is \$626,867. For economic impact studies, this number is sound – it provides an average figure counting all companies who responded, which represents a good mix of all types of contractors in appropriate percentages.

But when looking at the median, the revenue drops to \$200,000, meaning 50 percent of contractors' gross sales are below this number and 50 percent are above. So we took the research figures and split them in two using \$200,000 as the mid-point to see if there were any average differences between the half who are below this mark and the half above it.

Here are some of the key findings:

Larger companies did more commercial work on average compared to their smaller counterparts. They also did more design/build over maintenance work.

- Larger companies charged between
   \$1.80 and \$4.30 more per hour for residential and commercial maintenance work.
- •The average contractor in the less than \$200,000 category will bring in \$80,296 in 2007 gross sales, while the average contractor in the more than \$200,000 category will bring in \$1.3 million in gross sales.
- Larger companies paid their employees more – from 60 cents (for experienced mower operators) to \$5.90 (for experienced irrigation technicians) an hour in the hourly wage category jobs and from \$7,454 (for foremen) to \$39,968 (for owners) per year in the salaried positions.



By Nicole Wisniewski

# Real Estate's Rocky Road

Economists and contractors analyze recent housing news to better plan for business in 2008.

As the housing market grinds through what some call its worst slump in a decade, some wonder how long it will take before the economy starts to slump along with it.

Most agree the immediate cause of the housing slump is the end of a flawed boom that was fueled by subprime lending and speculative buying – all of which happened at a swift and overstretched level. Not to mention, home prices in some areas jumped to unheard-of levels, and homeowners who got used to them are now overreacting to prices that have dropped from these levels but are probably more in line with normal growth, economists say.

According to the National Association of Realtors economic outlook, released in September, the market should expect a 1.3-percent decline in existing home prices in the fourth quarter of 2007 compared to a year earlier. This means prices will be down approximately 1.7 percent for the year. The group also sees continued weakness in new home prices, with values down 2.2 percent this year, and down 3 percent in the first quarter of 2008 compared to the first quarter of this year.

Regarding the pace of existing home sales, NAR forecasts an 8.6 percent drop in the pace of sales this year, topping the 8.5 percent drop seen in 2006. While the group believes existing home sales should rebound 5.8 percent in 2008, that would still leave the volume of sales more than 11 percent below the record sales of 7.1 million seen in 2005. New home sales volume is expected to drop even more sharply, posting a 23.8 percent drop this year and another 7.4 percent drop in 2008. Housing starts are expected to post similar declines each year.

Despite these figures, economists say a resulting recession, which often is defined as two or more consecutive quarters of negative growth and/or job losses, is possible. After all, that's what happened the last time real estate hit a major slump in 1990, albeit it was relatively mild.

Though the housing industry itself is in recession and those who have lost homes are suffering financially, a slump by itself doesn't always drag the rest of the economy down with it, economists point out. The housing industry represents a relatively small piece of

the U.S. economy – about \$1.5 trillion of the \$13.8 trillion in gross domestic product, according to John Schoen, senior producer MSNBC.com. For instance, government spending at \$2.7 trillion is a bigger piece of that pie, he says, adding that "mortgage defaults are probably still rising, but the overall dollar impact of these painful events is still relatively small."

Also, other signs are not pointing toward a national recession. Though job growth slowed in July, the economy grew 3.4 percent in the second quarter of 2007 and added 2 million jobs in the first half of the year. According to the quarterly Anderson Forecast, released in September by the University of California at Los Angeles, the GDP will grow just more than 1 percent for the fourth quarter of 2007 and the first quarter of 2008. And 70 percent of the economy is based on consumers buying goods and services, and demand here still remains strong, Schoen adds.

Economists do report a higher risk of downturn today vs. six months ago, but the general consensus seems to be the odds are against a recession. "Economic growth will remain 'tepid' for the remainder of 2008 and return to 3 percent in 2009," says David Shulman, senior economist for the Anderson Forecast.

Many contractors seem to agree with this assessment, adding that the credit crunch may be the biggest factor affecting their customers. "This is not the first time there have been issues with foreclosures, but maybe the first time in many of the adult lives of people in our industry," points out Andrew Garulay, owner and landscape architect, Yarmouth Port Design Group, Yarmouth Port, Mass. "The 1990-1991 recession was

way worse than now – mortgage rates were in the high teens. Optimism is great, but the reality is this happens in cycles and we have been in an extra long and potent cycle. A great deal of what we do is unnecessary and is essentially a luxury. Make no mistake, when things are tight, the first things to go are the luxuries. We are vulnerable to bad economies – that is a fact. Whether we are heading into one or not is yet to be seen."

Bill Smallwood agrees. "Let's look back at the last 10 years where home prices have increased almost 100 percent," says the owner of W.J. Smallwood Landscaping in Salem, N.H. "What has driven the economy? Cheap money. When you can borrow thousands, if not hundreds of thousands for 4 or 5 percent, you take it. People from all economic classes took this money and invested it into their homes. At another time maybe some of this money would have gone to extravagant vacations but due to the uncertainty across the world many people chose to take their free money and reinvest it into their homes.

"Now with the home values on the decrease, mortgage rates going up, mortgage lending qualifications getting stricter and the subprime lenders going out, it is going to affect the way everyone spends," he continues. "Money is going to start to have more value again as people won't be able to just write another home-equity check. People will actually have to take from savings to pay for their projects."

According to industry consultant Bruce Wilson, contractors are enjoying a pretty decent year, despite housing woes, mainly because landscaping is the last trade on most sites. "It's the next 12 months contractors are worried about," he says.

## MARKETS TO WATCH

According to a report released by the US. Census Bureau in September, the fastest growing housing markets in 2006 were located in Arizona, Florida, Texas and Nevada.

At the state level, Florida added the highest number of homes (273,000) followed by Texas (198,000) and California (181,000). Among the states with the fastest growth rate, four out of five states are in the West: Nevada (4.5 percent), Arizona (3.5 percent), Idaho (3.4 percent), Florida (3.3 percent) and Utah (3.1 percent). The only state with a drop in housing units, falling by 5.7 percent, was Louisiana. Overall, there were 126.3 million housing units in the United States in 2006, a 1.4 percent increase from 2005.

As a result, many contractors are keeping an eye on changes in their regional economies and making adjustments accordingly. "We have started putting into place plans for a major downsizing in order to ride out the next two to three years, especially since I do not see the economy getting any better with a presidential election upcoming," Smallwood shares, offering contractors advice. "Be prepared for a lot of uncertainties. Be prepared to tighten your belts. Pay attention to your financials and make the hard decisions."

While 2008 may prove rocky for some, the National Association of Home Builders does view 2009 as a solid recovery year, according to its September report. While the NAHB predicts housing starts to be down 17 percent in 2007 and 12 percent in 2008, it predicts housing starts to be up by 12 percent in 2009.



By Marisa Palmieri

# Something to Watch:

# Private Equity's Influence on Consolidation

One thing to watch this year is the landscape industry's national companies in light of recent private equity deals, says consultant Bruce Wilson, former president of Environmental Care and former vice president of ValleyCrest Cos.

In the last 12 months the industry's Big
Three, TruGreen, ValleyCrest Cos. and the
Brickman Group all underwent some type of
private equity transaction. TruGreen's parent
company ServiceMaster completed a deal to
be bought out and made private by Clayton,
Dublier & Rice; ValleyCrest Cos. sold majority
ownership interest to MSD Capital, the private
investment firm of Michael Dell, chairman
of Dell Inc.; and the Brickman Group, which
has held private equity partners since 1998,
recapitalized with Leonard Green & Partners.

In addition to raising the profile of the green industry in the eyes of financial community, these transactions reflect the industry's largest companies' greater access to capital for further growth, whether it's organic or through acquisitions. "Brickman, ValleyCrest and ServiceMaster have private equity behind them now more so than before," Wilson says. "Will there be more acquisitions? Possibly. It's something to watch."

Brian Corbett, managing partner for CCG Advisors, an Atlanta-based growth and exit strategy consulting firm, foresees a slight increase in the number of acquisitions among the industry's largest firms, but not like the roll ups that took place a decade ago. "It's not like the wild west days of '97, '98, '99, when

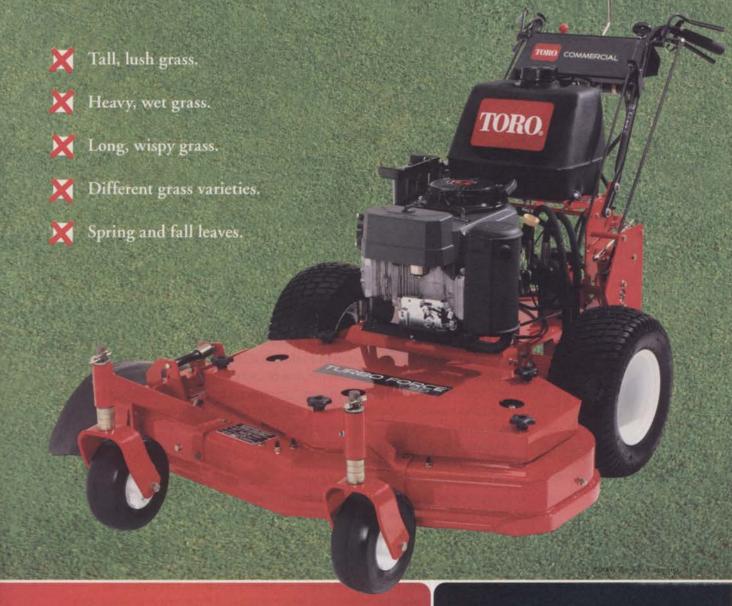
LandCare and TruGreen got everyone fired up," Corbett says. "Brickman and ValleyCrest realize they can't buy 10 companies per year and integrate them successfully."

Since their private equity deals took place, ValleyCrest acquired three firms, including Homestead, Fla.-based Tropics North, which reported \$37.1 million in revenue in 2006. Brickman also completed three acquisitions since its recapitalization in January. Expect TruGreen to make some acquisitions, too, once its investors define the path they'll take to grow the business, Corbett says, noting the deal just closed in July and private-equity buyers usually hold their investments for four to seven years. "[ServiceMaster's buyers] are going to have to dig in and grow the business," he says. "Acquisitions are almost always part of that."

The Davey Tree Expert Co. – the industry's fourth largest company – is in growth mode, too, with 13 acquisitions in three years.

What types of companies are likely to be acquired by the industry's largest firms? Companies in the Sun Belt that don't rely on snow revenue are attractive, Corbett says, as are maintenance firms with strong recurring revenue portfolios. But ancillary services like tree care and irrigation are on buyers' radars, he adds. And size does matter, especially in markets where the buyers do not already have a footprint. In a region where buyers are established, they're likely seeking better density and market share, so there may be opportunity for \$1-million to \$5-million companies.

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Count on it.

By Marisa Palmieri

# Labor in Limbo

More of the same this year: no comprehensive immigration legislation, the H-2B program remains flawed and recruiting challenges persist.

Landscape business owners frequently name personnel issues as the part of their work that keeps them up at night. Contractors say pressures include obtaining a reliable workforce that allows them to fulfill client contracts, maintaining a steady flow of work to provide for employees and their families and offering those employees fair compensation.

As an entrepreneur Chuck Carr, president of Carr Landscape Management in Porter Ranch, Calif., is confident in his ability to make sales, but he often worries he won't have the staffing on a reliable basis to get the work done. In addition to day-to-day employee worries like safety and timeliness, business owners face unforeseen challenges. This summer, one of Carr's employees lost a family member. "It's a horrible situation," Carr says. "I'm paying him because I feel bad for him, but I also have to find a replacement. And that type of thing happens every day in businesses everywhere. As a business owner, employee issues are probably the biggest thing you worry about."

**UNEMPLOYMENT'S EFFECTS.** David Whitcomb, owner of Creative Exteriors, a Dillsburg, Pa.-based full-service landscape company, sees labor becoming a problem as his company grows from the \$1-million range to \$2 million-plus. "The people we have are great, but we need to find a few more," he says. "I can see it being a limiting factor for us. I'd like to hire a few more key people, but quite honestly I haven't found them yet."

Part of the reason Whitcomb might be having trouble is Pennsylvania's historically low unemployment rate, which reached 3.8 percent in March of this year. Eleven other states also have logged historically low unemployment rates through the first eight months of 2007, including Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, Nebraska, New Mexico, New York, Texas, Utah, Washington and West Virginia. The national unemployment rate in August 2007 was 4.6 percent, which was also the 2006 yearly average. Until last year, the U.S. hadn't experienced such low levels of unemployment since before 9/11.

Hiring "key people" – supervisors, middle-managers and the like – as Whitcomb would like to do, is tough everywhere, contractors say.

#### Even in Michigan, where the unemployment rate is 7.2 percent, prospective employees aren't knocking down contractors' doors. "My biggest concern right now is getting people right out of college who want to spend time in the field and then move into a crew leader or supervisor role," says D.J. Vander Slik, owner of D.J.'s Lawn Service, Grand Rapids, Mich. "A lot of guys coming out of the two- or fouryear schools tend to be leaving for larger markets like Chicago or North Carolina. Maybe it's the economy in Michigan. It's frustrating."

In the Charlotte, N.C., area where Mark Smith operates Environmental Design Landscape, managerial roles are tough to fill. "We can grow the supervisor out of the foreman, but it's hard for them to make that next step to manager or assistant manager," Smith says, "We can hire foremen and executives, but the gap between that is tough."

While companies are strapped for potential leaders, owners know the key to growth is attracting, retaining and developing employees from the bottom up. Access to reliable production labor allows them to create more

## NO IMMEDIATE FIX FOR **IMMIGRATION OR H-2B**

In June, the Senate took up the bipartisan-drafted, Bush Administrationbacked comprehensive immigration reform bill. Industry members and associations generally supported the bill, hoping it would bring some relief to their labor challenges and reform the seasonal temporary worker program. After a raucous debate in the national media, the bill collapsed in late June, leaving contractors only the existing H-2B program.

Following the downfall of comprehensive reform, the Department of Homeland Security in August issued new immigration enforcement reforms including a new rule for employers who receive letters from the Social Security Administration and DHS saying an employee's Social Security number does not match the government's database. Experts say this move could require landscape companies to lay off workers in droves and in turn could further tax the H-2B program as demand for legal foreign workers will increase.

Some say the new rules threaten to violate workers' rights, unfairly burden employers and require them to use error-prone Social Security records as a tool for immigration enforcement. This summer the AFL-CIO filed a lawsuit to stop the government from enforcing the plan. A federal judge in California granted a temporary restraining order prohibiting the SSA from sending out "no-match" letters to as many as 140,000 employers as planned on Sept. 14. (As of press time, a hearing on the matter was set for Oct. 1.)

In addition, the failure to pass the Save Our Small and Seasonal Businesses Act of 2007, which extends the provisions that exempts returning workers to be counted against the 66,000 H-2B cap, would exacerbate the strain on legal workers. (As of press time, Congress has not passed the repeat-worker exemption, which expires on Sept. 30.)

In conjunction with the new no-match rule, DHS also expressed its intent to reform the H-2B program; however, employer groups say such reform would take at least a year to execute and will fail to provide the immediate relief needed as a result of DHS's new no-match rule.

DHS told employer groups that regulatory reform for H-2B is the best solution outside of enacting comprehensive immigration legislation. Unfortunately, it could be years before Congress takes up immigration again, as politicians typically won't touch such a divisive issue during a presidential election year or during the first few years of a new presidency.

Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management in Hillsboro, Ore., sums up the helpless feeling many contractors have right now. "The country needs to resolve the illegal immigration issues while acknowledging that the estimated 15 million illegals cannot be replaced without some form of guest worker program," he says. "H-2B is a Band-Aid and not the solution. We cannot change it and I am afraid Congress will not fix it, as all they want is a political solution which will probably not work."

crews, thus more foremen, supervisors, account managers and so on up the chain of command. That's why many contractors turn to the federal H-2B program for seasonal, temporary workers.

But spring 2007 was a tough time for many contractors who rely on the H-2B program. Delays were widespread, and they cost contractors a lot of business. Smith estimates H-2B delays cost him about \$80,000. Workers were supposed to arrive in late February or early March, but didn't show up until June.

Whitcomb attributes a 40 percent lapse in sales during the first four months of 2007 to H-2B delays. His workers were seven weeks late. "That's part of the reason our irrigation sales are down 12 percent this year," he says. "I wasn't able to sell it in the spring because we didn't have our installers."

The painful H-2B process this year coupled with the downfall of comprehensive immigration reform and the Department of Homeland Security's new immigration enforcement rules leaves the industry uncertain about its pool of labor for the future. (See "No Immediate Fix for Immigration or H-2B," page \$15.)

"We were able to get the workers we need, but the process has been slow in Mexico," says Bruce Birdsong, Precision Landscape Management in Dallas. "It's tough to get appointments because of backlog. I think it will continue to be a problem."

A LOOK AT WAGES. Employee requests for wage increases were common this year, several contractors observed. "Because of the increase in price of fuel and everything else our employees purchase, everyone is looking for more than a cost-of-living increase in their pay," Vander Slik says. To deal with these requests, his company diligently gives employee reviews three times a year and allots pay increases on a case-by-case basis.

Contractors also note that this year's increase in the federal minimum wage may have an effect on their businesses in the future. In May, President Bush signed the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2007, which increased minimum wage for the first time in a decade and includes provisions for two more increases through 2009. On July 24, federal minimum wage increased to \$5.85 (up from \$5.15); it will

#### Wage Report - Hourly

POSITION	AVERAGE HOURLY WAGE BY COMPANY REVENUE					
Control to a control to the public of the	All firms	Under \$200,000	\$200,000 or more			
Mower Operator (entry-level)	\$8.00	\$7.60	\$8.50			
Mower Operator (experienced)	\$10.40	\$10.10	\$10.70			
Spray Technician (entry-level)	\$8.00	\$5.80	\$9.80			
Spray Technician (experienced)	\$11.10	\$8.90	\$13.10			
Construction (entry-level)	\$8.40	\$7.40	\$9.30			
Construction (experienced)	\$12.30	\$10.60	\$13.80			
Irrigation Technician (entry-level)	\$7.60	\$5.30	\$9.50			
Irrigation Technician (experienced)	\$10.90	\$7.70	\$13.60			

Source: Lawn & Landscape research

#### Wage Report - Salary

POSITION	AVERAGE SA	ERAGE SALARY BY COMPANY REVENUE				
	All firms	Under \$200,000	\$200,000 or more			
Foreman	\$28,099	\$23,122	\$30,576			
Designer/Architect	\$39,696	\$31,411	\$43,185			
Account Manager	\$37,412	\$20,391	\$41,629			
Supervisor	\$37,196	\$22,375	\$40,823			
Owner/President	\$58,031	\$35,346	\$75,314			

Source: Lawn & Landscape research

rise to \$6.55 next July 24 and to \$7.25 on that day in 2009. Though many contractors already pay well above the federal minimum wage or operate in states that have higher minimum wage standards, they're expecting a general strain on their pay scales.

In Oregon, where Bob Grover operates Hillsboro-based Pacific Landscape Management, the state minimum wage is adjusted for inflation by a calculation based on the Consumer Price Index. "It has risen from \$5.50 per hour in 1997 to \$7.80 per hour in 2007 and will likely be \$8 per hour or more in 2008," Grover says. "Although we have always paid above the minimum wage, the constantly rising minimum wage has put much pressure on our overall wage scale. Our average wage has risen over 20 percent in the past three years."

While wages at Grover's company may be going up, industry wages overall are generally stagnant or down, Lawn & Landscape research shows. The average wage paid to an hourly employee was down 6 percent from last year; the average salary was down 5 percent. One theory behind lower average wages is the advent of more, smaller companies in the industry as a whole.

Companies with revenues less than \$200,000 pay considerably less for both hourly and salaried positions than their larger counterparts – which may drive down averages (see wage report sidebars above and on page \$16).

**DOING SOMETHING ABOUT IT.** To combat some of the difficulties surrounding labor, contractors say they're stepping up training and recruitment efforts hand in hand.

Though it can be difficult, Vander Slik believes college recruiting is the way to go. This year he attended his first Student Career Days, sponsored by the Professional Landcare Network. He didn't garner many leads from the event, but he says it will take a few years for this strategy to be effective, as D.J.'s Lawn Service doesn't exactly have the name recognition that Brickman or Davey Tree do.

At Pacific Landscape management, a general recruitment strategy is to continue to grow to provide greater opportunities for employees. "As we grow, opportunity exists for employees at all levels," Grover says. "We emphasize training and continual development, which is very exciting for applicants and existing employees."

Vander Slik offers a view of personnel management that many landscape contractors likely share: "If I never had to deal with human resources again that would be awesome," he says. "But that's what we sell. Labor."



By Marisa Palmieri

# Policing the P&L

Not surprisingly, the cost of doing business is going up.
Contractors do what they can to limit their ever-increasing expenditures.

To anyone who's ever looked at a landscape company's profit and loss statement, it's no secret that the cost of doing business is ever-increasing. The average landscape firm's total operating costs increased 16 percent from 2006 to 2007, according to Lawn & Landscape's State of the Industry research.

"Everything is creeping up from insurance to fertilizer," says Ed Laflamme, president of Grass Roots Consulting, Wilton, Conn. "Increases are across the board, and things aren't just going up 2 or 3 percent. Some areas are exponential."

THE COST OF HEALTH CARE. No doubt when Laflamme says "exponential" he means health insurance. At R.M. Landscape, like many businesses across the country, double-digit increases in health insurance premiums have become the status quo. "We know it's going up and there's nothing we seem to be able to do about it," says Brett Lemcke, vice president of the Hilton, N.Y.-based construction, maintenance and snow removal firm. Two years ago the company reduced it's coverage to a plan that would be more affordable for employees. Nevertheless, R.M. saw an 11 percent increase in health insurance costs this year.

R.M. isn't alone. A study the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation released in August says premium increases have been between 8 and 14 percent per year since 2000, though inflation and changes in workers' earnings are typically in the 3 to 4 percent range. The Kaiser study also confirms that small businesses across the country are being forced to reduce coverage or pass more health insurance costs along to their employees. Green industry consultant Jim Huston of J.R. Huston Enterprises, Englewood, Colo., sees the trend of passing along increases to employees in the landscape industry. "A lot of contractors are capping it at something like \$200 per person per month and the employee pays the rest," he says.

All of the increases have landscape business owners researching alternatives in addition to the standard practice of shopping health insurance every year. Mark Smith, president of Environmental Design Landscape in Newell, N.C., had to raise co-pays slightly this year to control costs. He's so frustrated by the current system, he's kicking around the idea of identifying the monetary value he pays for each employees' benefits and turning that money over to them. "I'd like to say, go to the marketplace

and do what you'd like with it," Smith says. "As an individual, you can get insurance that's 40 percent less expensive than a business can. It's so out of control, so we're having these conversations right now."

Matt Bakker, vice president of administration for Landscape Design Services, a Holland, Mich.-based design/build and maintenance firm, hopes his company's new "health by choice" plan will be the answer. "We implemented a new plan Aug. 1 with only a 2 percent increase in cost but a higher level of benefits," he says. The plan, provided by a local carrier, requires employees to get an annual physical, have some basic tests done and fill out an online health questionnaire. If they don't comply within 90 days, their benefit level decreases. "The hope is by creating an awareness of health issues and going to the doctor more often, it will reduce costs," Bakker says.

**OTHER INSURANCE COSTS.** Though health insurance is rising, contractors are grateful to report the costs of other types of coverage are holding steady.

"Workers' comp is fairly stable, even in California where it had been a debacle," Huston says. "In most of the country it's typically about 8 percent of payroll for landscape labor, and in California in the last few years it's about 6 percent." General liability has been stable since the post-9/11 increases, Huston adds.

David Whitcomb, president of Creative Exteriors, Dillsburg, Pa, says workman's comp and liability have been on par with recent years. "With workman's comp, our guys have been very good and very careful this year, so we haven't had any claims or huge spikes," he says. "And with liability, there's not huge issue there. It's nothing more than what we were anticipating."

FUEL COSTS. As with increasing health insurance costs, contractors – and Americans in general – are getting used to the fact that the prices at the pump are trending upward. After prices skyrocketed in late summer of 2005 as a result of the active hurricane season, fuel prices last year remained high. The 2006 national retail average for all formulations of regular gasoline was \$2.57 per gallon; the national retail average for No. 2 diesel was \$2.70 per gallon, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Though fuel remains a top concern (it ranked No. 1 on a list of contractors' business-limiting factors"), this year contractors knew to expect burgeoning fuel budgets and prepared themselves to handle the situation. "It seems to me they're conditioning people to get used to the high prices," says Lee Helmberger, owner of Omaha, Neb.-based Lee's Lawn Service, a maintenance and tree care business. "In Omaha we follow the national trends as far as fuel prices - I just filled up with diesel at \$3.02 a gallon. For a good part of the summer diesel was cheaper than gas, but now they're leveling off and starting to meet again." (See graph "Fuel Price Tracking," on page S21.) Helmberger accounts for the price of fuel by raising prices. This year he raised prices between 5 and 7 percent. "I didn't lose any customers, so I've used that for a measuring stick that we're doing pretty well," he says. "My customers have been good about understanding my costs are increasing all the time."

Other contractors are finding innovative ways to keep fuel costs down - like tightening routes and dropping customers on the outskirts of their service areas. Whitcomb created an incentive program that has caused fuel costs to drop - his fuel costs are 14 percent less this year than they were at this point in 2006. How? The company started a program that encourages crews to stay on the job site all day long - no side trips for lunches or forgotten supplies. Each crew has its own credit card and fuel budget - and the crew members get to split the difference between their budget and balance at the end of the month. "As long as we stay under budget, they get to keep that money," Whitcomb says. "The benefit for me is they stay under budget and on the job site, so they're more productive."

In Porter Ranch, Calif., Chuck Carr feels very little relief at the pump. "Prices are still high here, it just now dropped below \$3 a gallon," says the president of Carr Landscape, a maintenance and renovation firm. "Fuel is 37 percent higher this year over last year and I don't have any more trucks, so it's tied directly to the price of gas." Though he says he doesn't panic too much over fuel, which is only about 3 percent of his total budget, he has taken some measures to reduce costs, like trading in his pickup for a four-cylinder car that gets better gas mileage. It makes sense, Carr says, because he logs a lot of miles doing

How would you characterize your equipment/service budget in 2007?

Decreased somewhat 8.3%

Significant decrease over 2006 2.6%

Significant increase over 2006

46.4%

26.9% Increased somewhat

sales – not an activity that requires a gas-guzzling truck. He's pleased with the savings, but he knows that's not the end of cost increases this year. Carr adds: "Of course labor, insurance and rent went up."

**HARD AND SOFT GOODS.** High fuel costs hit contractors indirectly, too, as their suppliers' costs typically increase at a similar pace.

Rich Arlington, president of Arlington Lawn Care, a \$3 million full-service firm in Erie, Pa., has seen a 12 percent price increase in his soft goods over the last year. "Hydroseed mix, plants, irrigation supplies. They all tell me, it's fuel and insurance," he says.

Though many contractors say growers and nurseries raised prices several percent or boosted delivery costs, the average contractor spent 23 percent less on plant material in 2007 vs. 2006, State of the Industry research shows. This could mean one of two

things, contractors say – there are more small companies in the market that don't provide plant installation, which would bring down average expenditures, or widespread regional droughts in the spring and early summer could have slowed plant purchasing.

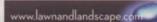
In addition, price increases in plant material and seed have caused some contractors to rethink their purchasing strategies. Instead of pre-purchasing these materials and spending time and materials to maintain them, companies are practicing the just-in-time aspect of lean management. For example, Bakker works with a seed supplier that provides next-day delivery, so he doesn't have to stockpile seed. And although his company has the space to hold plant material, he's focusing on paring down the stock to reduce the labor and maintenance costs of holding plants on-site. "We're trying to dial back the green goods we carry and purchase as-needed to stay a bit leaner," he says.

Several contractors say many of their suppliers didn't increase prices this year, indicating they understood the landscape companies were feeling the pinch. "A lot of vendors held their prices

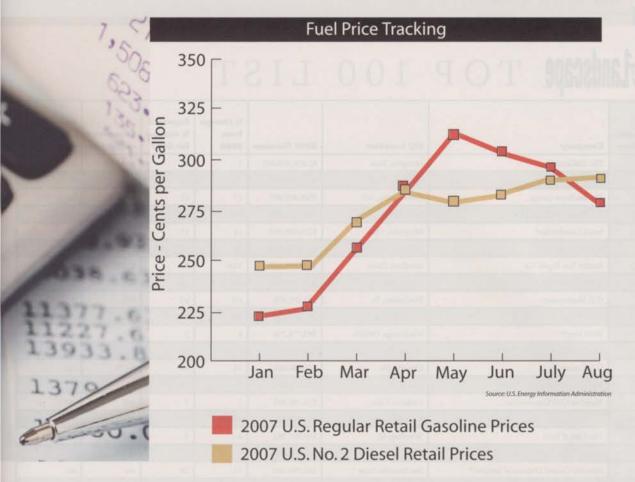
#### A Look at Equipment & Supply Spending

Category	Average Expenditure	% Change from 2006
Technology (computers, business/design software, GPS systems)	\$12,544	55%
Trucks & trailers	\$51,842	29%
Water features	\$27,386	24%
Landscape lighting	\$12,519	23%
Snow & ice products	\$16,651	22%
Mowers (walk-behind/riding)	\$17,051	17%
Pesticides/fertilizers/PGRs	\$37,283	14%
Irrigation controllers/valves/sprayheads/rotors	\$42,345	-8%
Handheld equipment (backpack/handheld blowers, trimmers, edgers, chainsaws)	\$3,902	-13%
Equipment rentals	\$2,867	-20%
Trees/shrubs/plants/seed/sod	\$70,331	-23%

Source: Lawn & Landscape research



For more equipment information, visit the October Online Extras for the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's model year shipment forecasts.



steady over 2006, especially plants and shredded bark mulch," says D.J. Vander Slik, president of D.J.'s Lawn Service, Grand Rapids, Mich. "We were very happy about that – it was very appreciated."

Arlington noticed the same thing. "Prices have been staying pretty good for us," he says. "Manufacturers have been cordial to our industry – they understand we're struggling, too."

In terms of equipment, contractors say they made purchases that would help them run a more efficient operation in light of increased fuel and labor costs. "I don't see much of a hold-back on equipment purchasing, because that's what's saving the contractor money," Laflamme says. Plus, dealerships are rife with zero-percent financing offers on equipment and trucks.

State of the Industry research supports what Laflamme has seen among his clients. The average contractor spent 20 percent less on equipment rentals in 2007 than 2006, but boosted truck/trailer and mower expenditures. On average, contractors spent \$51,842 on trucks and trailers (29 percent more than last year) and \$17,051 on mowers – a 17 percent increase over 2006.

Vander Slik, who purchased \$500,000 worth of equipment this year, says he sought new equipment with better engines that would boost efficiency and reduce maintenance costs.

Lemcke, who notices mower prices eking up, says his company looked more to online auctions and out-of-state purchases this year to keep an eye on spending. "Contractors have always been a little careful, especially with big purchases," Laflamme says, "But they're still making purchases they know are going to increase productivity."

In light of boosting efficiency and productivity, investments in technology and software are up this year. The average contractor spent \$12,544, or 55 percent more, on computers, software and technology this year than last year, according to the research.

Arlington is one contractor who's invested in technology in recent years. "We've made purchases in data and customer management systems – it allows us to manage more data with less people," he says. Does he think investing in technological advancements is a trend in the industry? "It should be," Arlington says.



# Lawn Flandscape TOP 100 LIST

2007 Rank	Last Year	Company	HQ Location	2006 Revenue	% change from 2005	Expected % change for 2007	Year-round employees	Seasonal/ part-time employees
I	1	The TruGreen Cos.	Memphis, Tenn.	\$1,496,595,000	1 0	2	n/r	n/r
2	2	ValleyCrest Cos.	Calabasas, Calif.	\$870,000,000	n/e	n/r	n/r	n/r
3	3	The Brickman Group	Gaithersburg, Md.	\$506,000,000	17	15	1,900	5,850
4	Á	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	Kent, Ohio	\$462,000,000	8.3	5	5,500	600
5.	5	Scotts LawnService <sup>6</sup>	Marysville, Ohio	\$210,000,000	14	15	1,500	230
6	6	Gothic Landscape	Valencia, Calif.	\$171,000,000	15	-12	1,800	n/r
7	7	Bartlett Tree Expert Co.	Stamford, Conn.	\$142,000,000	15.6	9	1,400	200
8	8	Initial Tropical Plants	Riverwoods, Ill.	\$112,000,000	n/r	in/r	1.150	150
9		U.S. Maintenance	Norristown, Pa.	\$93,205,800	n/r	n/r	462	0
10	10	Lawn Doctor <sup>6</sup>	Holmdel, N.J.	\$87,000,000	10	.9	800	150
11	9	Weed Man*^	Mississauga, Ontario	\$83,774,250	6	5	750	2500
12	11	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	Tampa, Fla.	\$78,000,000	0	n/r	1,200	200
13	12	U.S. Lawns <sup>a</sup>	Orlando, Fla.	\$76,000,000	12	10	1,475	420
14	13	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	Miami, Fla.	\$61,042,000	9.1	10	720.	0
15	14	American Civil Constructors	Littleton, Colo.	\$56,500,000	2	5	300	300
16	26	Autumn Landscaping	Englewood, Colo.	\$52.800,000	40	20	800	n/r
17	15	The Care of Trees	Wheeling, Ill.	\$51,897,982	6.1	5	463	14
18	16	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	Woodbine, Md.	\$46,500,000	.0	5	330	190
19	19	Grounds Control Division of Sanitors**	San Antonio, Texas	\$45,700,000	11	20	n/r	n/r
20	18	Acres Group Professional Landscaping	Wauconda, III.	\$45,100,000	11.1	13.1	106	644
21	36	Choate Irrigation USA	Carrollton, Texas	\$45,000,000	30	15	350	25
22	36	Creative Environments Design & Landscape	Chandler, Ariz.	\$44,000,000	20	-10	400	n/r
23	17	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	Middleton, Wis.	\$42,376,000	1	10	225	425
24	20	Landscape Concepts Construction	Richmond, III.	\$41,695,000	26	0	260	40
25	30	Dixie Landscape Co.	Miami, Fla.	\$41,320,000	2.5	-2.5	335	0
26	27	Ruppert Nurseries	Laytonsville, Md.	\$41,054,870	32	27	350	n/r
27 (t)	34	Teufel Landscape	Portland, Ore.	\$40,000,000	29	5	296	119
27 (t)	21(t)	Toll Landscape	Lambertville, N.J.	\$40,000,000	30	0	n/r	n/r
29	21(t)	Oak Leaf Landscape	Anaheim, Calif,	\$37,500,000	7	n/r	320	0
30	37(t)	Tropics North***	Homestead, Fla.	\$37,100,000	25	10	425	n/r
31	21(t)	Marina Landscape	Anaheim, Calif.	\$37,000,000	6	10	310	n/r
32	29	Denison Landscaping	Fr. Washington, Md.	\$36,840,000	22	10	160	120
33 (t)	35	AAA Landscape	Tucson, Ariz.	\$36,000,000	45	25	625	n/r
33 (t)		McDonnell Landscape	Brookeville, Md.	\$36,000,000	217	16	86	34
35	24	Jensen Corp. Landscape Contractors	Cupertino, Calif.	\$35,040,000	5	н	280	0
36	39	Metroplex Garden Design Landscaping	Dallas, Texas	\$33,509,000	24	n/r	36	n/r
37	28	The Groundskeeper	Tucson, Ariz.	\$33,500,000	10	9	700	n/r
38	33	Nanak's Landscaping	Longwood, Fla.	\$33,000,000	14	15	450	200
39	31	Mariani Landscape	Lake Bluff, Ill.	\$32,000,000	n/r	n/r	100	380
40	32	Cagwin & Dorward	Novato, Calif.	\$31,858,960	7.8	10	424	3
41	41	CoCal Landscape	Denver, Colo.	\$30,700,000	16.7	5	250	300
42 (t)		American Landscape Cos.	Canoga Park, Calif.	\$30,000,000	-10	-10	350	50
42 (t)	42	NaturaLawn of America^	Frederick, Md.	\$30,000,000	25	8	350	50
44	45(r)	Nissho of California	Vista, Calif.	\$29,000,000	21	10	420	2
45	50	The Greenery	Hilton Head, S.C.	\$28,360,000	20	10	405	25
46	44	Groundmasters***	Loveland, Ohio	\$28,087,280	15	15	201	250

2007 Rank	Last Year	Company	HQ Location	2006 Revenue	% change from 2005	Expected % change for 2007	Year-round employees	Seasonal, part-time employee
47	37(t)	Chalet	Wilmette, Ill.	\$27,500,000	7	5	110	310
48	84(t)	Piedmont Landscape Contractors	Chamblee, Ga.	\$27,500,000	83	30	250	100
19	25	Lipinski Landscape & Irrigation, Inc.	Marlton, N.J.	\$27,250,000	-13	20	50	80
50	43	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	Portland, Maine	\$27,000,000	8	8	400	n/r
51	57(t)	Mainscape	Fishers, Ind.	\$26,558,000	35	48	274	184
52	48(t)	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.^	Plainfield, III.	\$26,500,000	11	11	n/r	n/r
53		Reyburn Landscape Contractors	Henderson, Nev.	\$26,300,000	1	14	300	0
54	40	Clintar Groundskeeping Services*	Markham, Ontario	\$25,573,192	4	7	175	300
55	63	Mission Landscape Services	Tustin, Calif.	\$25,500,000	34	18	600	0
56	45(t)	Scott Byron & Co.	Lake Bluff, III.	\$25,000,000	3	5	95	200
57	73(c)	Ecoscape Solutions Group	Charlotte, N.C.	\$24,500,000	36	35	290	30
58	70	FAIRCO	Scottsdale, Ariz.	\$24,470,000	47	-10	250	n/r
59	-55	Odyssey	Stockton, Calif.	\$24,250,000	18	0	300	n/r
60	59(r)	LMI Landscapes	Carrollton, Texas	\$23,680,000	26	30	310	n/r
61	59(t)	R.H. Dupper Landscaping	Tempe, Ariz.	\$22,300,000	14	3	120	75
62 (r)	53	Countryside Industries	Wauconda, III.	\$22,000,000	0	20	50	350
62 (t)	84(c)	Florida Landscape Service	Orlando, Fla.	\$22,000,000	22	0	125	0
62 (t)	51	Meadows Farms	Chantilly, Va.	\$22,000,000	1	5	200	400
65	62	Benchmark Landscape	Poway, Calif.	\$21,540,000	12	5	300	0
66	64(t)	Dennis 7 Dees Landscaping	Portland, Orc.	520,200,000	11	10	300	n/r
67 (t)	78	Landscape Specialists	Lake Forest, Calif.	\$20,000,000	25	10	400	100
67 (t)	150	Moore Landscapes	Northbrook, III.	\$20,000,000	10	10	36	200
67 (t)	57(t)	Realty Landscape Corp.	Newtown, Pa.	\$20,000,000	n/r	n/r	n/r	n/r
67 (t)	99(t)	Stiles Landscape Co.	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	\$20,000,000	30	0	150	50
71	68	Complete Landscaping Service	Bowie, Md.	\$19,902,250	n/r	15	130	295
72	61	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	McLean, Va.	\$19,650,000	1	15	150	120
73	56	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	Germantown, Wis.	\$19,200,000	4	8	240	100
74 (t)	64(t)	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	San Antonio, Texas	\$19,000,000	15	15	250	120
74 (t)	64(t)	McHale Landscape Design	Upper Marlboro, Md.	\$19,000,000	1	2	200	n/e
76	64(t)	Mariposa Horricultural Enterprises	Irwindale, Calif.	\$18,500,000	12	15	328	0
77	20,3147	Luke Brothers Landscape Services	Holiday, Fla.	\$18,200,000	17	5	400	n/r
70	80	Gachina Landscape Management	Menlo Park, Calif.	\$18,178,051	14.4	19	240	ra.
79 (t)	75	Clarence Davids & Co.	Matteson, III.	\$18,000,000	11	7	85	215
79 (t)	81	Ouside Unlimited	Hampstead, Md.	\$18,000,000	10	5	100	100
79 (t)	71	Sebert Landscaping Co.	Bartlett, Ill.	\$18,000,000	10	15	50	200
79 (t)	7.4	Shearon Environmental Design	Plymouth Meeting, Pa.	\$18,000,000	0	10	300	100
79 (t)		WH Canon Co.	Romulus, Mich.	\$18,000,000	n/r	15-20	225	n/r
84	76	Northwestern Landscape Co.	Puyallup, Wash.	\$17,892,000	12	12	225	100
85	77	Western Dupage Landscaping	Naperville, Ill.	\$17,354,000	8	10	40	140
86	69	The Highridge Corp.	Issaquah, Wash.	\$17,100,000	1.5	5	188	70
87	92	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	Denver, Colo.	\$16.693,772	14	2	175	55
88	/~	Scapes	Marietta, Ga.	\$16.605,000	B	10	100	50
89		Andre Landscape	Azusa, Calif.	\$16,283,741	52	n/r	160	n/r
90	89(r)	Dora Landscaping Co.	Apopka, Fla.	\$16,000,000	nte	n/r	90	30
91	(0.2(6)	Russell Landscape Group	Dacula, Ga.	\$15,970,180	30	25	270	115
92	72	Girard Environmental Services	Sanford, Fla.	\$15,660,000	-5.4	9.4	110	30
93	82(c)	New Garden Landscaping & Nursery	Greensboro, N.C.	\$15,565,164	32	5	200	35
94	97	BIO Landscape & Maintenance	Houston, Texas	\$15,365,164	28	29	145	180
_								0
95 (t)	89(t)	Carson Landscape Industries	Sacramento, Calif.	\$15,000,000	7	2	215	
95 (t)	84(t)	Hermes Landscaping	Lenexa, Kan,	\$15,000,000	n/r	n/r	170	150
97	87	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	Albuquerque, N.M.	\$14,700,000	4	25	170	100
98		DLC Resources Visionscapes	Phoenix, Ariz. Tucker, Ga.	\$14,535,000	3	7	235	n/r
99	88					5	95	-30

<sup>^</sup> Franchise system. \*Revenue reported in Canadian dollars; converted to U.S. dollars based on average 2006 exchange rate of 1.134. \*\*Acquired by the ISS Group in May 2007. \*\*\*Acquired by ValleyCrest Cos. September 2007. \*\*\*\*Acquired by The Brickman Group late 2006.

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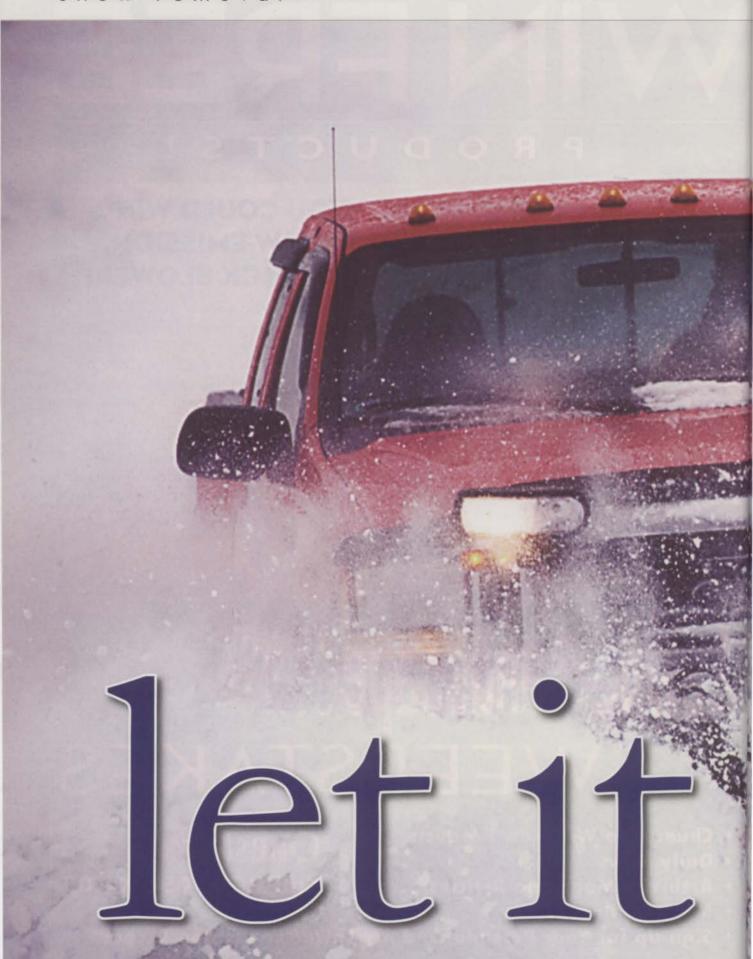
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Questions?



Strengthen your strategies for growth,
new business development and sound snow
fighting for a more profitable winter.

S now removal is an alluring business for landscape contractors looking to keep their labor force and equipment from going idle once the temperatures drop and winter's first flakes begin to fall. In fact, nearly three-quarters of snow fighters are landscape contractors during the warm weather.

And as many veteran snow contractors are well aware, the snow and ice removal business is either feast or famine because it all depends on Mother Nature.

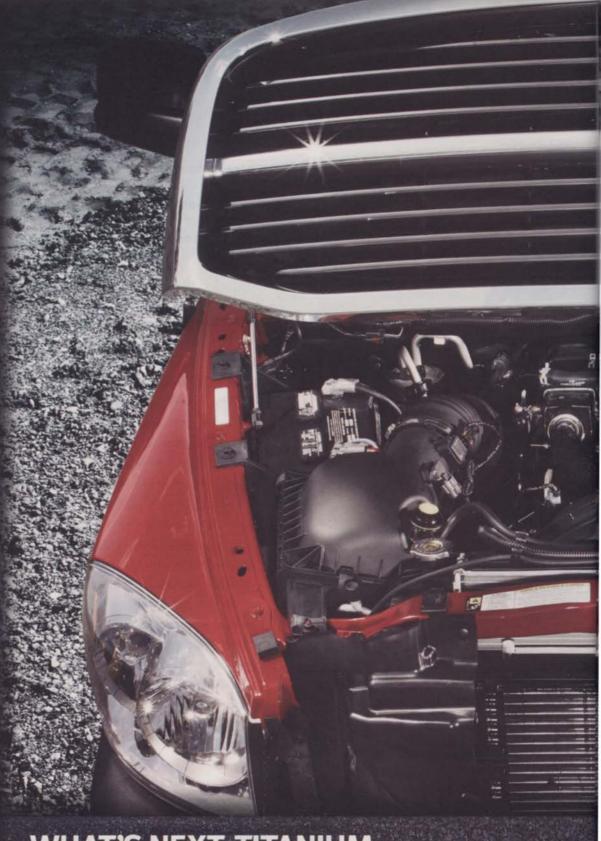
However, contractors still find ways to turn a winter profit. For example, despite a pair of unseasonably back-to-back warm winters, nearly 45 percent of contractors reported an increase in snow-related revenue during Winter 2006-07, according to research data compiled by GIE Media's Snow Magazine, one of Lawn & Landscape's sister publications.

So how does a landscape contractor offering snow removal services boost his winter revenue? Whether you're a seasoned pro or new to the world of snow removal, it's good practice to establish a solid growth strategy as well as sound operational procedures and business systems to maintain service consistency and improve efficiency even in the leanest of winters.

continued on page 80

# SINOW/

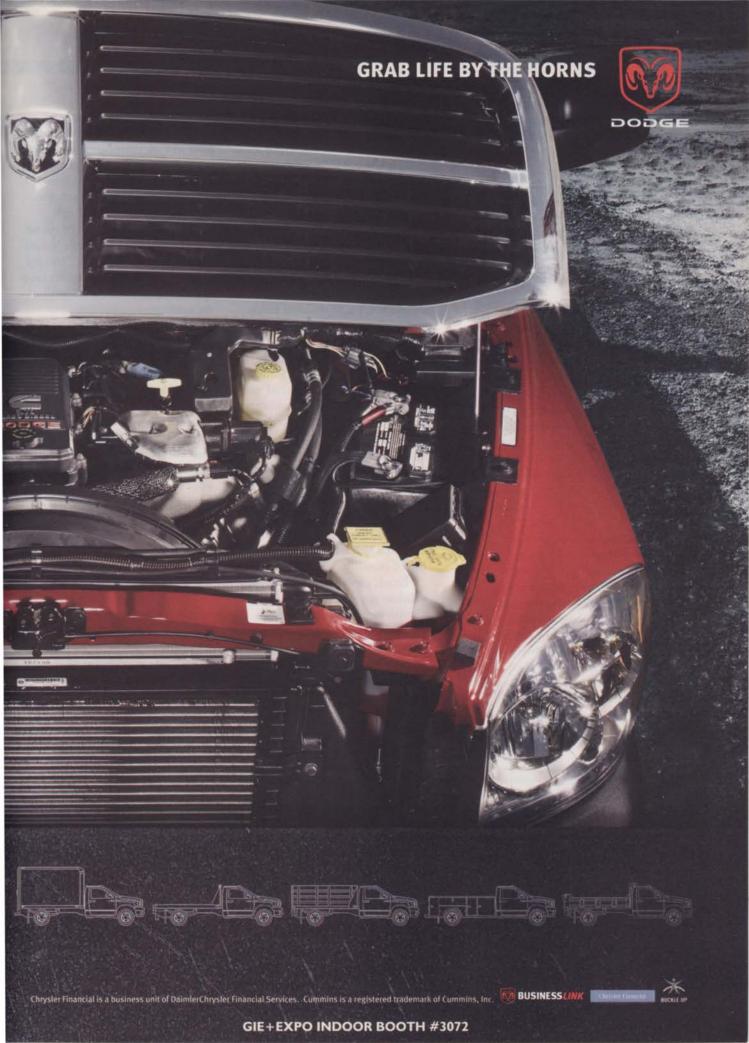




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\*2007 Dodge Ram 3500 Heavy Duty Chassis Cab vs. 2006 Ford and GM one-ton, pickup-based Chassis Cab models.



#### **SNOW TIPS**

Some seasoned snow fighters share their best tips to help you improve your snow and ice removal operations.

"Don't price snow removal jobs too cheaply. You might land a few more jobs, but you'll be too busy to take on the higher revenue opportunities."

Gregory Bashaw Fairway Snow Services North Bellmore, N.Y.

"Don't get too overconfident as a snow removal contractor. Customers created your business and the lack of customers can destroy your business. Employees, vendors and subcontractors are customers, too. Through the years I have made mistakes with all levels of customer and employee relationships. I would say of all things, this is the biggest mistake I have made and probably everyone else growing up in the business makes, too."

Richard D. Arlington III
Arlington Lawncare
Erie, Pa

"My greatest mistake as a snow contractor has been not knowing when to say 'No.' We took on a large contract during the middle of a snow season. It was hard to say no because we wanted the account. Adding the properties stretched us and by starting the properties midstream during the middle of the winter, we did not have enough time to plan the execution. We did handle the job, but we felt if we had more time to prepare we would have been happier with our performance."

Brian Akehurst Akehurst Landscaping Service Joppa, Md.

"Extending too much credit to some businesses was a hard lesson to learn. When the sun starts shining and the snow melts they forget all about the snowplow guy."

Harry Miller Miller Snow Removal & Salting Washington, Pa.

"Definitely trying to do everything myself and finding it difficult to delegate any authority to reliable workers."

Tony Seminerio A&T Lawncare & Landscaping Rockford, III. continued from page 77

**SMART GROWTH.** Ron Hittle's initial business strategy was to grow his snow operations, The Hittle Snow Co., rapidly and indiscriminately, which coincided with the way the landscape portion of the business, parent company Hittle Landscaping, was expanding.

However, this model didn't serve the snow removal operation as well as it had served the Westfield, Ind.-based company's landscape operation. As the landscape side produced steady and predictable profits, the company re-examined its snow business.

"We were serving a lot of the same clients," says Jeremy Hittle, vice president, general manager and son, of the company's separate landscape and snow removal divisions. "But it was two different worlds."

Geographically, Greater Indianapolis doesn't see a lot of snow during a typical winter. An average year will dump 27 inches of snow on the region, which translates into between eight and 15 snow events, two or three of which are substantial 4- to 8-inch snowfalls.

Erratic growth gave the company a diverse group of commercial clients, all with varying degrees of snow removal tolerance. To begin managing for smart growth, the focus shifted from indiscriminant growth to acquiring "perfect" customers. While the perception of the good customer is one who pays on time and doesn't grip about service, the Hittles raised their standards for who they wanted as clients. "The perfect customer works with us and trusts us to start when we want to and when the time is right," Ron Hittle says. "They also are willing to pay for the major services required to keep their properties clean - salt, snow removal and sidewalks."

Customers to avoid, the Hittles determined, were those who want to retain the right to decide when services, such as salting and sidewalk cleaning, were performed.

Increasingly, local property managers are trying to do much more with much less. Retaining the right to say when snow contractors should plow and salt shaves some costs off of expenditures. Likewise, clients have become increasingly demanding. When they call, managers want services performed immediately.

"It's just not practical to think we can pull that off so fast on such short notice," Jeremy Hittle says, "It's hard to be responsive when you don't know what to expect from one snowfall to the next."

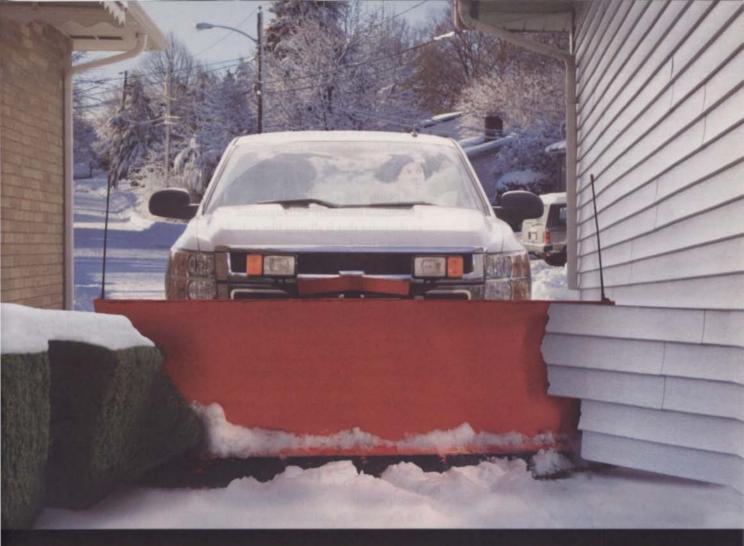
These are the property managers Ron Hittle wanted to wash his hands of. "It's better for everyone involved if we just do it all for the client and we have total control over these services for each event," he says.

Since clients demand faster and better services, the Hittles educate their clients on the long-term value of placing all of the snow removal decisions into their hands. For example, granting them the ability to choose when to salt a property will reduce slip-and-fall accidents. Or, allowing the firm to decide where to pile bulk snow, in the long term, reduces dangerous refreeze conditions.

"By educating our clients we try to make their jobs easier," Ron Hittle says. "If we can gain their trust we can do a more complete job for them, and if we can accomplish that we've made their jobs (as property managers) easier because we can provide them cleaner, better looking properties."

smart systems. Snow Contractor Tom Canete learned the hard way the rigors of poor planning and storm management. Early in his snow fighting career, Canete, owner and president of Canete Snow Removal and Canete Landscape & Garden Center in Wanye, N.J., overextended himself, committing to more jobs than his resources and sub-par systems could possibly handle.

"It was a nightmare," Canete says.
"When it snowed it felt like I was out
there for days. I knew there had to be
a better way to do this."



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So the next time things get tight, look to the Meyer Drive Pro - The Small Plow with the Big Attitude.





#### **SNOW TIPS**

"In Winter 1995-96, my region received in excess of 100 inches of snow. With all of our obligations, we didn't have enough heavy equipment to move and/or relocate snow from our clients. Since then, I make certain that for the rare cases of a seasonal snowfall of more than 72 inches I have the back-up equipment available."

Michael Labriola III Michael Labriola Inc. Armonk, N.Y.

"My greatest mistakes have been not staying hungry, overspending because money was good and failing to replace key accounts."

David Dudash Green Estates Russell, Ohio

"The greatest mistake I made was being under educated on insurance matters and contract performance. This was vital because we encountered a blizzard our first year in business."

> Jack Mancione The Werks Westmont, III.

"What has been my greatest mistake? There's the lack of planning and organization of the work schedule and allowing for too much last minute planning. Not having 100 percent of my snow removal equipment fully ready to go by Nov. 1, and during a snow event not having the crew on site before it starts to snow."

Daryl Schauss Cedar Run Landscaping Brambleton, Va.

"I have overpromised and overbooked myself and lost good clients thinking I was capable of getting more done than I actually could. Do not overextend yourself, your equipment, your capital or your ability. Let's face it. We are all guys who make the impossible happen on a daily basis. Unfortunately, if you can't meet a customer's needs but say you can, he will be dissatisfied. Be honest, up front and promote good two-way communication. Sometimes the best contract is the one you turn down. Sometimes the best piece of equipment is the one you don't buy. This controls costs and ensures the quality of your work."

Mike Bacon RM Bacon Hoosick, N.Y. When he returned to his office, the volume of angry client messages overwhelmed Canete's answering machine. "It took a lot of years, mistakes and problems to get them to this point," he says. "But we have our procedures extremely well organized to the point that it all runs like a clock during a snow event."

At the core of Canete's snow removal system is the philosophy that everyone one on staff plays an instrumental role in managing a storm, both before, during and after the event plays itself out.

A few days before a sizable snow storm approaches, Canete's weather service gives him the heads-up and his crews spring into action. Canete uses this time wisely because solid preparation can take the fight out of a storm.

"Every little thing you can think of we're doing," Canete says, adding his snow crew consults a master list that details everything to review to prepare for the storm. In addition, drivers and shovel crews are contacted two days prior to an event to make sure they're ready and healthy for when the snow begins to fall.

Joe Porta is Canete's central command during a snow event. Porta knows nearly every client and is the point person to troubleshoot their needs during a snow event.

Lastly, before the snow event is under way, customer call sheets, containing storm notes and client comments or requests, are distributed to drivers.

As soon as three-quarters of an inch of snow accumulates Canete's trucks are out salting. At 2 inches, Canete's crews start pushing snow according to their assigned routes. Once a property is clean the driver radios Porta at headquarters with a status report before leaving for the next site.

While on site, drivers complete a detailed check list. Also, each driver is outfitted with a yard stick to record snow depth at the property.

"Each time a driver visits a parking lot we went them to tell us just how much snow there was on the ground when they arrived," Canete says.

"It protects us if a client wants to question a snowfall. For example, you have a customer who is paying you a certain rate to come out and blow when it snows between 4 and 7 inches. Sometimes the local weather guys will ballpark their weather reports and the client hears that less than 4 inches fell. By taking the measurements we have proof that in that particular area more than 4 inches did fall. By not being able to prove that, that could mean a lot of money."

From there, Porta dispatches one of four quality control chiefs, who arrives and inspects the property. Site inspectors make sure there is no snow against the curbs, no snow on sidewalks, parking spaces are clear, there is no ice and snow hasn't been piled in front of dumpsters or fire hydrants. Likewise, any special service needs are checked and at this time potential property damage is noted.

When the snow event subsides, drivers return to headquarters and check in with Porta.

Similar to pre-storm preparation, Canete relies on a post-mortem checklist to review the recent snow event. The day after the storm, five employees inspect each truck, snowplow and piece of equipment. Everything is power washed, cleaned and inventoried.

"We take the time to go through everything so thoroughly so that when we get the next storm we can concentrate on the snow and not on whether the equipment might fail," he says.

As for client relations, after a storm, office members fax service slips – detailing the event's activities – to clients who request them. Other clients are billed at the end of the month, Canete says.

www.lawnandlandscape.com

Visit the October Online Extras for details on branding your snow removal operations.

cozing, ppr. [prob. from LL. causare, to plead, debate, from talk; chat.

pp.; cozening, ppr. kindred for advanto defraud; to de-

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rustaceans conira, order Decatail, which is ont pair of feet common large us Cancer; the Carcinus; the Corystes; the urus, and the

complicated; dimcult; perplexing; as, a crabbed author or subject.

4. very intricate or irregular; hard to read because cramped; as, crabbed writing. crab'bed ly, adv. in a crabbed manner. crab'bed ness, n. the state or quality of being crab'ber, n.

1. one who fishes for crabs. 2. the boat used in fishing for crabs. 3. [from crab (apple).] a person who con-

stantly complains or finds fault. [Colloq.] crab'bing, n. crab fishing.

crab'bing, n. a process by which cloth is given a finish that prevents its wrinkling. crab'bish, a. inclined to be cross or surly.

crab'by, a. difficult; peevish; ill-tempered.

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rad plov'er, Dromas ardeola, an East Indian bird resembling the plover. crab'si"dle, v.i. to have a sidewise movement.

a, distinguished crab spī'dēr, 1. a spider of the division Lat-

erigradæ, moving laterally. 2. a scorpion.

crab'stick, n. 1. a walking stick made of the wood of the crab tree; hence, a stick of any

2. a crabbed, ill-tempered person. crab tree, a tree bearing crab apples.

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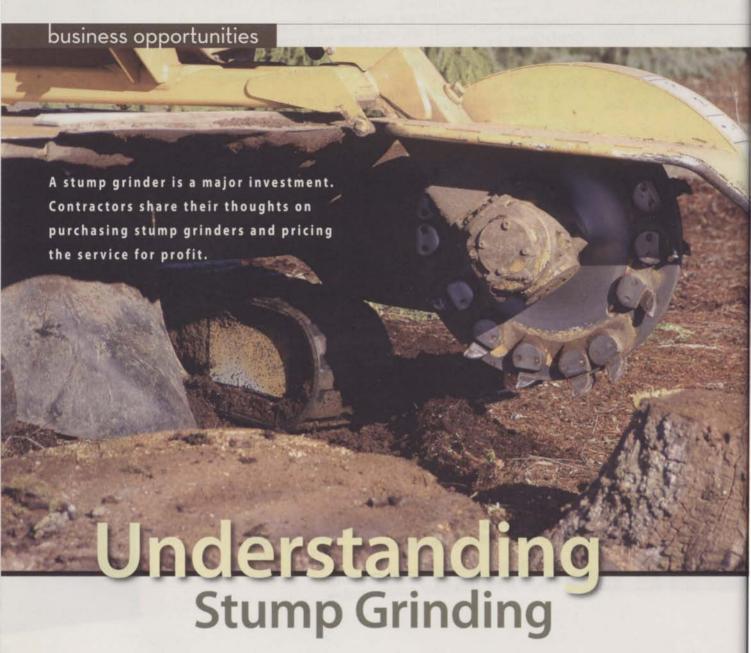
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Photo: Matt Richard



ny company that's added a new service knows bumps in the road are probable. Stump grinding is one area that can be particularly dicey because of the costly capital equipment needed to get the job done.

Considering contractors may already have the customer base, and there are businesses out there devoted solely to stump grinding, it begs the question: Is purchasing a stump grinder and adding this service a profitable proposition for lawn care and landscape businesses?

The answer depends on a number of factors, contractors say, including customer base and – most importantly – the volume of work. "It's a good add-on service, but you have to have the work to justify it," says Shawn Cress-

man, president of Cressman's Lawn & Tree Care, Hellertown, Pa. "If you can't operate a stump grinder three days a week, it won't pay for itself."

Adding stump grinding may be beneficial to a company that already does a considerable amount of tree work, Cressman says. Most of his company's stump grinding jobs come from its existing tree work, like when a crew will already be on site pruning or removing a tree. Only about 20 to 25 percent of its stump grinding jobs take place when a property owner calls specifically to remove a stump.

Companies that perform a lot of landscape work, too, might consider investing in a stump grinder for the efficiencies it creates when doing renovations, says Todd Patten, president of

by marisa palmieri | associate editor

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Professional Property Maintenance, Haymarket, Va. "It's a lot faster to just grind them out instead of trying to unsafely yank them with a chain and a truck," he says. "We make so much money on the labor savings – not having to sub it out or do the running around to rent the machine."

Also, there may be subcontracting work. Because stump grinders are no small purchase – ranging from \$15,000 for a small version to more than \$40,000 for a large machine on tracks – many tree and landscape companies subcontract the work, which presents an opportunity for contractors willing to make a capital investment in a stump grinder.

**COST CONCERNS.** Another thing to consider before purchasing a stump grinder, Patten says, is whether your insurance provider considers stump

removal to be tree care work. If so, it may increase your liability and workers' compensation rates considerably.

For example, Cressman says his workers' comp rate for tree care workers is 25 cents on the dollar; it's 9 cents on the dollar for landscape employees. However, Tim McCoy, who operates stump removal-only firm The Stump Man in Gwinnett County, Ga., says his insurance company does not consider him to be a tree care company. But circumstances vary by region and provider, so prospective purchasers should consult insurance professionals.

As with any large equipment purchase, maintenance costs are a concern, too. Major maintenance includes oil changes as dictated by the equipment manual, hydraulic fluid changes, periodic belt/drive tightening and teeth maintenance and replacement, Cressman says.

Depending on quality, a set of teeth can cost \$120 and may last several months, depending on frequency of use. "Teeth can usually be sharpened three to five times, depending on how long you wait in between sharpenings," Cressman says. His company rotates three sets of teeth between being used, sharpened and in reserve in the event one is broken. "One might spend \$300 a year on teeth, not including the cost of any sharpening, which can be outsourced or done in house," he says. Another cost is the replacement of the pockets that hold the teeth to the cutting wheel. "They last much longer than the teeth but must be replaced about once every two years as they become damaged or worn out," Cressman says.

In addition, consider the cost for purchasing and maintaining a trailer,

#### grind stumps safely

Contractors should put safety first during stump removal operations and equipment maintenance.

Because stump grinding involves heavy machinery penetrating the ground, it's important for contractors to call utility companies to mark underground lines before grinding stumps on any property.

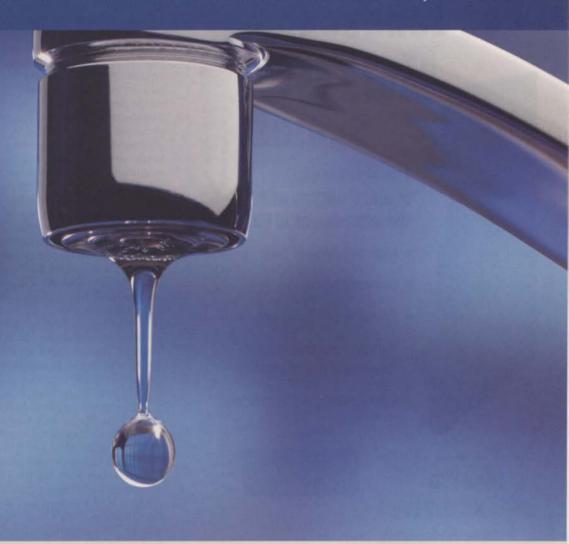
"That's the biggest thing – because it's about safety," says Todd Patten, president of Professional Property Maintenance, Haymarket, Va. Contractors should call their local "call before you dig" numbers, or dial 811 – the national phone number created to prevent professionals and homeowners from unintentionally hitting utility lines.

Just the same, safety apparel is essential during stump removal. At the very minimum, stump grinding crew members should wear hard hats, gloves, safety goggles, ear protection, long pants and steel-toed boots, says Shawn Cressman, president of Cressman's Lawn & Tree Care in Hellertown, Pa.



## "When the well's dry, we know the worth of water."

- Benjamin Franklin





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#### business opportunities

contractors say. Many smaller models come with custom trailers, Cressman says, but larger machines may require a double-axle trailer and tie-down straps, which could add \$3,000 to \$4,000 to the purchasing cost.

PRICE IT RIGHT. A proper pricing strategy is the trick to profitability in stump grinding. Stump grinding contractors typically price their services one of two ways. The first method is by visiting the property and giving an estimate based on the time it would take the crew to do the job, taking into consideration travel costs for the crew and estimator, the size of the stump, site conditions and the type of tree. It's common for contractors who give lump-sum estimates to set minimums. For Patten, that figure is \$200. "I always had a minimum of \$50 or \$100, but I finally didn't think it was worth the time to go for less than \$200," he says.

The second pricing method is the per-inch rate, where contractors measure the stump at its widest point and charge a set dollar amount per inch. Their costs for fuel, labor, equipment, etc., would be covered in that rate; minimums are common among contractors using this method, too.

Web searches show a wide variety of prices around the country for per-inch pricing. Smaller contractors with lower overhead and insurance costs, especially stump removal-only firms, often have the leg up on pricing, contractors say. In North Georgia, McCoy's stump removal company is able to charge less than most tree companies because his overhead and insurance rates are considerably lower than larger contractors' costs. His company charges a base rate of \$1.50 per inch with a \$75 minimum. Many tree companies in his area advertise \$2 per inch, he says.

Some small companies in the Bethlehem, Pa., area charge \$5 or \$6 per inch, Cressman says. Though he bases his company's rates on time and materials, Cressman's price works out to about \$7 per inch. Cressman's Lawn & Tree Care fetches a higher price because of the additional service it delivers to differentiate itself from competitors. "Other companies will come in, grind the stump and leave, leaving a huge pile of grindings for the customer to take care of," Cressman says. "We'll haul away the grindings and rake the area flat." For an extra charge, Cressman's will plant grass seed in the area.

Cressman's firm shoots for a 30 percent profit margin on each job, but a number of factors challenge stump grinding services from hitting their targets, including the type of stump (old rotten stumps are removed much faster than a newly cut down tree, for example), site condition challenges and whether damage occurs to teeth during grinding.

One way to improve the profitability of a newly created stump grinding service is to schedule multiple jobs in one day, which boosts the productivity of the crew, contractors say. "Usually people aren't in that big of a hurry to have stumps removed, so they can wait a week or so," Patten says. "Then we'll schedule them all within a day or two and one crew will just go around doing stumps."

Contractors agree stump grinding can be an excellent business opportunity, but adding this capital-intensive service takes careful consideration to ensure it's the right fit. As Patten says, "It can be a really good side business if you can get enough homeowners or the right contractors who don't own stump grinders as customers."

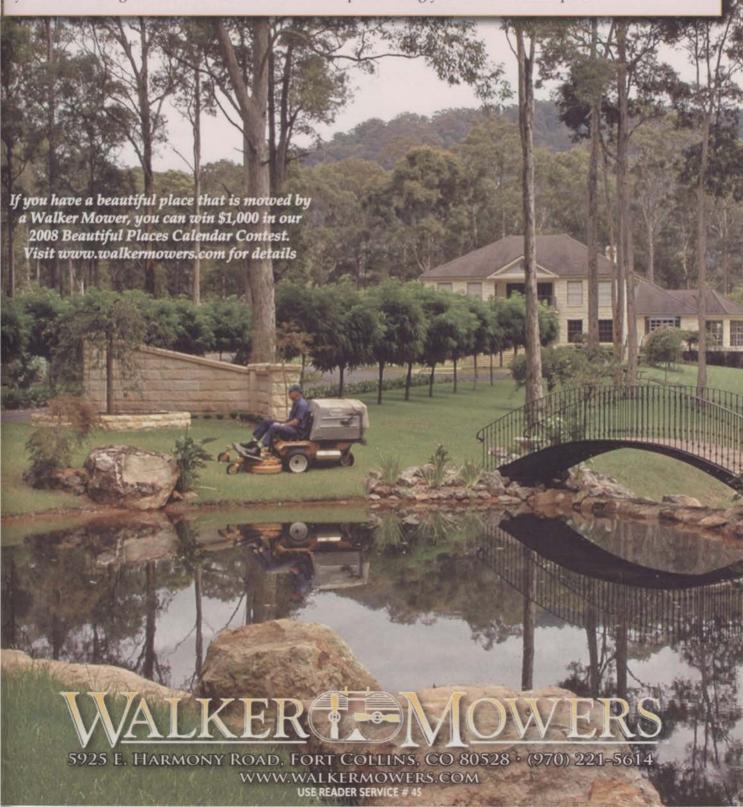
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Visit the October Online Extras section for tips on buying stump grinders.

# Beautiful Places

At Walker Manufacturing this is how we think about what we do--we don't make lawn mowers, we make beautiful places. That thought has inspired us for nearly 30 years on our quest to design and build the best possible machine to make a beautiful place. And the Walker is made for landscape contractors who have the same thought--we don't "mow grass", we make beautiful places. Ask to see a Walker demonstration if you are not using Walker and would like a little help in making your own beautiful places.



# Message Board participants attempt to find a solution to their collective troubles in dealing with their employees.

Lawn & Landscape

# Million-Dollar Ouestion

ealing with employees is Paul Wieting's greatest challenge in running a land-scape business. "Is there a better way to learn how to be a boss than the 'School of Hard Knocks?" asks the owner of Seagull Lawn Services in Houston.

Over a series of postings to the Lawn & Landscape Message Board, Wieting queries his contemporaries about how they deal with employees. Some landscape contractors agree that their labor pool – from site workers to back-office administrative personnel – gives them an ulcer faster than non-running equipment. How to effectively manage employees is the green industry's "million-dollar question." In fact, according to recent Lawn & Landscape research, contractors cited the shortage of quality labor as an issue of concern for overall business success in 2008.

After 20 years of consuming a number of seminars and business books on the topic of human

resource management, Chuck Twist, the president of TNT Landscaping in Stillwater, Okla., posts he still hasn't figured out how to successfully deal with his employees. Twist, however, adds he has come to a few conclusions.

"No. 1, you've got to have the right employees," Twist says. "And I do believe that mutual respect between employee and employer is at the top of the list after having the right employees."

Todd McCabe, owner of McCabe Landscape Group in Wrightsville Beach, N.C., believes the term "employee" is incorrect and too general of a term. It clouds a business owner's ability to find resolution to boss and worker relationship issues.

"They are people, not employees," McCabe says. "And each one is different. You will have to learn how to manage each one and coach them as individuals. The fun part is coaching people on how to coach the people they manage."

Some contractors posted that not every busi-

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ness owner is able to manage employees effectively and never will be proficient at this task despite continuing education seminars and self-help books. For example, someone may want to be a doctor, but after reading a number of books they're no closer to being a doctor. If this sentiment is

Chad Stern, the owner of Mowing & More in Chevy Chase, Md., holds himself accountable for the mistake, figuring he must not have clearly communicated to his crew the task he wanted completed.

"Having clear objectives and standards to which you can hold people

"There is no such thing as a perfect employee. Until there is such a thing, I will not expect employees to be perfect. However, I will expect them to be responsible, productive, quality-oriented and safe." - Chad Stern

true, and some people don't possess the people skills and management savvy to deal with employees, then what is a landscape contractor to do?

MANAGEMENT KEYS. When something is done incorrectly on a job site, accountable eliminates much of the need to be angry with employees," Stern says. "There is no such thing as a perfect employee. Until there is such a thing, I will not expect employees to be perfect. However, I will expect them to be responsible, productive,

quality-oriented and safe."

In addition, frontline managers must possess patience, compassion and fairness, posts Andrew Aksar, president of Outdoor Finishes in Walkersville, Md.

They're traits almost identical to a personal relationship," he says, adding business owners often fail to realize this point.

Wieting posts he establishes reasonable quotas, standards and rules for his employees that he believes manage his people more effectively.

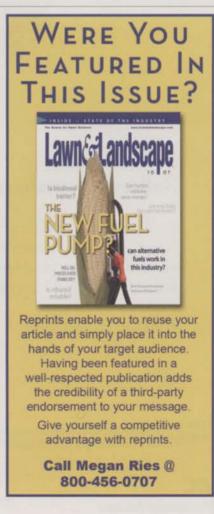
"If you perform within those parameters, great," Wieting says.
"If not, we need to talk. And if that doesn't help, then I have to take steps to protect my company."

Some contractors post that continuing education, especially to hone people skills, is crucial to managing a labor force. "You've got to have a canvas or you can't paint," Twist says.

continued on page 95



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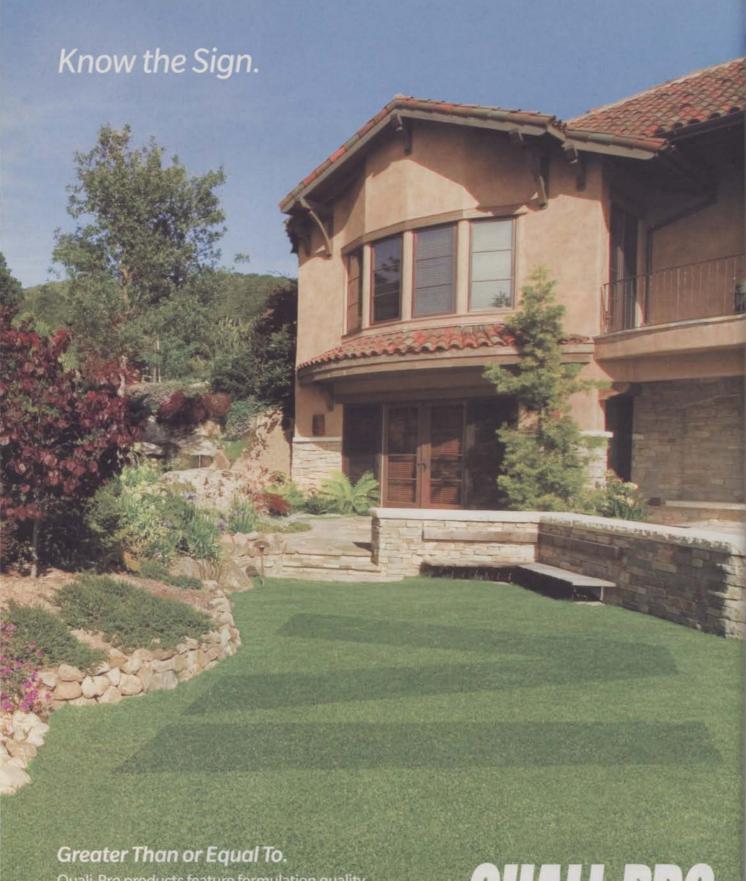
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continued from page 92

#### COMPENSATION CONUNDRUM.

It's difficult to find and retain skilled workers who will do landscape labor for \$8 to \$10 an hour, post many contractors. Others added they are resigned to the fact that landscape laborers with real talent and skill eventually realize they should be employed for themselves, rather than work for someone else.

"And therein lies the tensions between employer and employee," Twist says. "Most of us employers have already been in the other guy's shoes. Most of us started out as employees, poor and often thinking bitterly of those above us."

Outside of starting your own landscape business, working as a laborer in this industry is a dead-end job, posts Sal Mortilla, president of Landscape Unlimited in Long Island, N.Y.

"With rare exception, very few landscape business owners possess a ladder for laborers to climb that can provide the American Dream that these, or at least some of these, people are looking for," Mortilla says. "I have no ladder for anyone to climb, just the promise of pure labor as long as they want it or can do it, That's the nature of this business."

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Visit the online message board to start your own discussion on this topic.

### being the BOSS

Managing people is a daunting task for many small business owners. However, the first crucial step towards being a successful supervisor is bringing together the right people to work for you.

Chemistry is an important factor in a team's success and it's important to have the right match of people, from your administrative operations to your field workers. The National Federation of Independent Business offers small business owners some tips on how to implement that team correctly.

**JOB DESCRIPTIONS.** Start by detailing all the tasks required for each position as well as the crucial skills and training a person would need to carry out those duties.

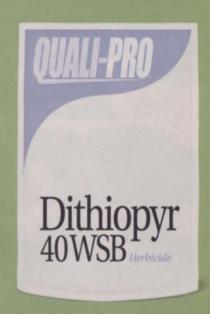
**CAST A WIDE NET.** Increase your chances of attracting quality candidates by opening your search to individuals from outside your industry. In addition, develop relationships with local technical and trade schools, professional associations and college placement offices.

**PROMOTE YOURSELF.** Be enthusiastic about the prospects of working for your company. Promote the benefits, including the challenges and opportunities available within the position.

**TAKE TIME.** Don't rush the hiring process, especially one-on-one interviewing. These are people you'll be entrusting to carry out aspects of your business. Make sure they're the right hires.

**ARE THEY TEACHABLE?** Consider a candidate's skills, knowledge base and affinity for learning. A candidate who will require constant retraining most likely is not a good match.

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#### Photo: Sca

### **Fleet Figures**

Contractors need to do their homework to determine the right mower fleet for their businesses.

very lawn maintenance company is different. Some service residential properties, while others tend exclusively to commercial. Some operate with two crews of three guys, while others have 20 crews of seven guys. Regardless of client base or composition, they all have one thing in common – mowers get the work done.

The type and quantity of mowers to purchase are considerations contractors face to determine the right fleet size for their businesses. These are also issues contractors should pay attention to as their businesses grow or shrink. "If equipment is not being used, get rid of it," says Jim Huston, president of consulting firm J.R. Huston Enterprises, Denver. "Equipment can make you a lot of money, but you're not married to it. You have to make sure you're turning it over and keeping it in good shape to really benefit from it."

Avoiding idle equipment and maintaining quality machines are two things contractors can do to ensure they're getting the most for their mower money. By doing their homework, and with a little help from manufacturers and dealers, contractors can keep their fleets productive

by emily mullins | assistant editor

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and in top-rate condition. "There are a number of factors that help determine the right size mower fleet and, quite frankly, there is not a perfect formula," says Tim Cromley, marketing manager, Walker Manufacturing Co., Fort Collins, Colo. "Each fleet needs to be customized to best suit a contractor's needs."

DEALER DECISIONS. The chosen manufacturer is important when purchasing a mower for various reasons, Huston says. First, contractors should purchase their mowers from a company in close proximity so they can easily have it serviced when problems arise. "With a lot of my clients, this is their primary concern," he says. "Contractors can buy a great mower, but if there is no support for it, it can be a detriment."

Some contractors like to choose one manufacturer for all of their mowing needs. Mark Smith, president of Environmental Design Landscape, Charlotte, N.C., initially purchased mowers from three different manufacturers to find out which he preferred. Some factors Smith considered were user friendliness, productivity and serviceability. "We put them head-to-head and settled with one and now that's all we use," he says.

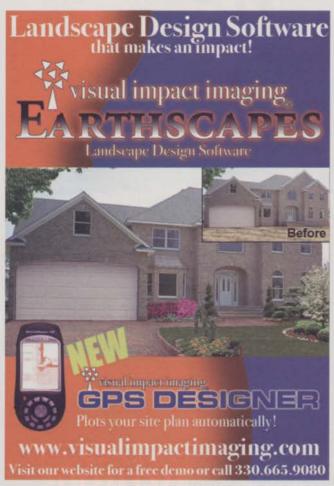
Douglas Zepp chooses his mowers from the same manufacturer because the parts are interchangeable, but he branches out to different companies when shopping for other equipment. "Once I find something good, I stick with it, no matter what brand it is," says the owner of Douglas Lawn & Landscape, Westminster, Md.

Contractors should do their homework before choosing a manufacturer because they're not just buying a mower, they're buying service that should last for years. "Customers need to understand when they buy a certain brand they are buying into that dealership," Cromley says. "They are buying into their parts supply, customer service and all of their professional capabilities."

Contractors shouldn't hesitate to ask to see the dealer's parts supply and product inventory, and also ask specific questions like whether or not the dealership has a loner program to avoid lost productivity when machines are down. "This will give the customer some information about whether this dealer will be around when you need him," Cromley says.

Edric Funk, marketing manager for Toro, Bloomington, Minn., says contractors should purchase their mowers from a dealership that takes used equipment. Many contractors find trading in their mowers on a consistent basis is the best way to get the most out of each machine.

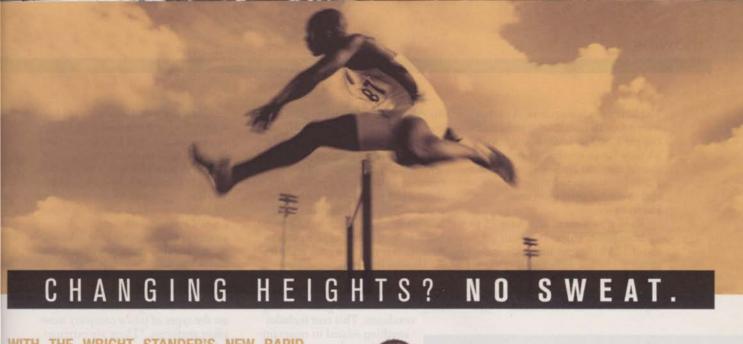
When to trade in a mower depends on the type, Huston says, but a good rule of thumb is to trade in a mower once it's reached 75 percent of its useful life in hours. The useful life of a gas engine mower is usually about



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100 hours per horsepower. A mower with 14 to 16 horsepower technically can get 1,400 to 1,600 hours before it's time for an overhaul. Contractors should consider trading it in at about 1,200 hours to avoid major repairs and to receive maximum resale value, Huston says.

Riding mowers usually have 25 to 27 horsepower engines and can get about 125 hours per horsepower, or about 3,250 hours, before it's time for an overhaul. Following Huston's logic, contractors should think about trading it in at about 2,400 hours. "Typi-

his mowers to make them desirable trade-ins. This involves everyday tasks like washing the machine, greasing the joints, sharpening the blades and refueling. "We take care of them because, if you do, the resale value is there when you're done with them," he says. "Some people believe in running their machines into the ground, but then you're buried in a piece of junk mower that you can't trade in."

Huston suggests contractors budget to spend between 3 and 6 percent of their yearly total sales to keep their mowers in good working

condition. This cost includes anything related to maintaining and purchasing a mower, including depreciation value, fuel and repairs. Of course, this cost can vary depending on the size of the company. Smaller companies (less than \$1 million) should expect to spend closer to 3 percent, while larger companies should expect to spend 6 percent or more, Huston adds.

Monitor financial statements to track how much is spent on mower repairs, Huston suggests. "It can be difficult to break it down this way," he says. "But if a contractor notices he's spending more than 1 or 2 percent of sales on mower repairs, it's time to take a good, hard look at that machine and think about getting rid of it."

usually has about 10 mowers on-hand – six riding and one walk-behind that run everyday and at least one or two spares of each mower type.

Smith also adds to his mower fleet as needed, currently operating with 100 employees and 45 or 50 mowers, 70 percent of which are riding mowers and the rest walk-behind. "The amount of mowers we have is based on the number and types of contracts," he says. "We didn't buy them all at one time; we just need to have the equipment to suit our needs."

Needs are largely determined based on the types of jobs a company most often performs. "There are extremes when it comes to site conditions," Huston says, "If a contractor has a lot of jobs in park settings where there are trees everywhere, they need a mower that is versatile and maneuverable. Contractors who mow athletic fields need a mower that is fast and powerful with a wide deck."

Contactors can make bad purchasing decisions if they follow word-of-mouth advice strictly. "One of the biggest mistakes contractors make is buying a mower just because someone they know used it, especially if your business differs from theirs," Cromley says. "Word-of-mouth is great, but each company needs to research what is best for them."

Bigger and faster is not always better when it comes to purchasing a mower to produce a great-looking cut. Many of today's commercial riding

mowers can reach double-digit speeds, which appeal to contractors who want to get the most work done in the least amount of time. This is a common misconception, Cromley says. "The fact that a mower goes at double-digit miles per hour does not always

account for a nicely finished mowing job," he says, adding the neatest cut is usually achieved at around 3 or 4 miles per hour.

contractor combo. While the bulk of the decision making is left to the contractor, most agree purchasing a mower is a joint effort between contractors and dealers. "Once a contractor has made the decision about what his fleet will look like, most dealers are very capable of directing him toward the right machine," Funk says.



"Some people believe in running their machines into the ground, but then you're buried in a piece of junk mower that you can't trade in." – Douglas Zepp

cally mowers will last three seasons," Huston says. "At that time you want to think about trading it in."

Smith makes sure not to hold on to his mowers for too long, a mistake he admits making in the past. He finds a two- to three-year window works best for his company, and aims for a 50 percent resale value – about \$7,000 to \$8,000.

Zepp also trades in his mowers after two or three years and usually receives a similar trade-in value. But he realizes he has to take care of EXPANDING THE FLEET. Most contractors determine when to increase the number of mowers in their fleets on as as-needed basis. Zepp's company started out as a "two-man show," and now operates with 16 employees. "As business grew, I would add a new mower when we weren't getting all of our work done in time and we had enough work to keep the new mower busy," Zepp says. Another way Zepp knew when it was time to add a mower was when his spare was being used on a daily basis. These days he

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Because of this, contractors should form a relationship with a commercial equipment dealer, which pays off in the long run. Zepp always works with the same dealer, because not only does the dealer ensure he makes smart purchases, but he also knows Zepp's trade-ins will be valuable machines.

"An honest dealer will take the time to get to know a contractor's needs and direct him to a piece of equipment that is beneficial for his business," Cromley says.

While most contractors today go to a dealership with some kind of plan for the type of fleet they need, it's not always the best laid plan. For example, some contractors rely more on word-of-mouth advice than on their own knowledge and experience, as Cromley mentioned.

Many clients let their budget, rather than their business's needs, determine which mower they purchase, Funk says. "It's understandable that contractors only have so much money to work with," he says. "But some don't look at the return on invest-

ment and realize they could actually make more money if they put a little extra money into a more productive mower."

Some contractors don't do their homework as often or as thoroughly as they should, Huston says. This can result in costly, unnecessary mistakes. "I recently met with a client who changed his snowplow operations by switching to a 14-inch pusher," he says. "That one change in equipment saved him \$25,000 is expenses last year."

Huston's best clients study equipment and its uses prior to making any final purchases. They are also proactive in talking with people within the industry at trade shows and association meetings and, perhaps most importantly, they aren't afraid to ask questions, he says.



Photo: Walker

One of the best ways landscape contractors can determine the appropriate mower fleet is by talking with other contractors and observing the setup of their businesses, Funk say. And when doing so, it's important to onsider size and location in that evaluation, he adds.

"Each contractor needs to look at his personal situation because there is no magic formula to decide what to do when it comes to mower fleets," he says. "But although each situation is unique, there are none so grossly different that a contractor couldn't find a similar company to use as a model." III

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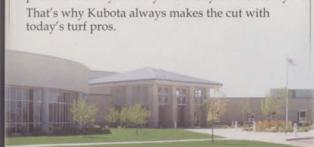
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- Walk the perimeter of your chemical storage areas daily and look for signs of tampering.
- Remind employees to report any unusual activity to their supervisors.
- · Lock and/or secure all application equipment when not in use.
- Be suspicious of unusual purchases and odd behavior by employees or customers.
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by mark phillips | associate editor

### ex-ceptional performance

Excavators enable landscape contractors to take on jobs they normally aren't equipped to perform.

or Chris Matthews, an excavator's usefulness comes down to simple math: He needs to operate his one or two days to make the payment for the month.

It's that productivity Matthews, vice president of Dublin, Ohio-based Builder-Scape, and other landscape contractors have found in excavators and mini-excavators. Contractors laud the machines' low frequency of servicing, versatility on the job and productivity as some of the reasons they invested in these useful machines. For landscape contractors, adding excavator-based services adds to the bottom line.

Home builders, for example, are looking for landscape contractors who are able to perform tasks other than those they normally do. "When you're already on a job site, they like to see that you can do lots of different tasks," Matthews says. "I've dug footers for builders. I would have never even thought of doing that before. With excavators, we can do those things."

There's very little an excavator can't do, says Bill Rusch, product manager for Oregon, Ill.-based Woods Equipment, which manufactures excavator attachments. "If you're working in a rocky area, you could use an excavator to move large rocks," he says. "There's hardly any job site that couldn't make use of an excavator."

Whether it's irrigation work, installing water gardens, decorative stone work or installing trees, excavators complement a contractor's other machines. "They open the door to



Photo: Caterpillar

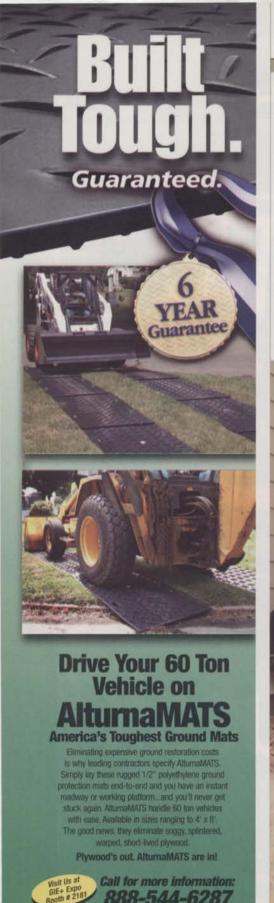
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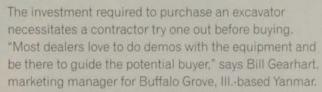
many different types of jobs for landscape contractors," says Steve Kabay Jr., sales manager for Hudson, Ohiobased Coyote Loaders. "If landscape contractors want to be more things to more people, adding an excavator will do it."

**TOUGH JOBS.** Digging irrigation trenches, shoveling dirt for tree installation, contour grading and lifting and setting down boulders and trees are just a few of the myriad tasks excavators perform, as are cutting drainage swales, digging ponds and setting cisterns. "The contractor's creativity and imagination are really the limita-

tion to an excavator's versatility," says Matthew Hendry, product consultant for Cary, N.C.-based John Deere. Many contractors use the excavator in conjunction with other equipment. The excavator assumes the primary production role, while the loaders, skid-steers and backhoes work in support roles, Hendry says.

"The excavator is used more as a precision tool for focused removal, and is not designed for the load-carry applications more suited for the skidsteer," says Darren Wilson, product manager for Peoria, Ill.-based Caterpillar. While the name of the game might be to quickly perform duties

#### try before you buy



If a landscape contractor is renting a machine 30 percent of the time, he should consider buying one, says Matthew Hendry, product consultant for Cary, N.C.-based John Deere. "It's critical for the contractor to discover if the particular excavator is the right machine for him, before he makes the investment," Hendry says.

Demonstrating the excavator on a job site is preferable, but if not possible, an off-site demo will work, Hendry says. "I recommend the contractor take his best operators with him to the off-site demo area," he says. "Have the operators put the machine through its paces and listen to their input."

Often a rental is enough to encourage a purchase, says Steve Kabay Jr., sales manager for Coyote Loaders, Hudson, Ohio. "I've had guys who have used them for a few days and realized they needed to buy one," he says.

Contractors should pay attention to cab comfort, controls and length of the machine's arm when deciding if it is appropriate for them. Aspects such as track width and bucket type aren't as important because differing size buckets and wider or skinnier tracks can be bought. Hendry suggests contractors investigate what type of auxiliary hydraulics, quick couplers, thumbs, rakes and compactors are available for a particular machine.

The most important question is what are you trying to accomplish, followed by how deep do you need to dig and how much does the machine weigh?" Gearhart adds.



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#### construction equipment

they're already doing in other ways, contractors quickly find they can add service offerings.

"The contractor can expand the types of projects he undertakes by using an excavator. Whether the machine is a mini, compact or full-size unit, the contractor can pick up significant amounts of work from other contractors," Hendry says. "The contractor will see a significant reduction in hand labor as he learns all the capabilities of the machine,"

Similar to other hydraulic equipment, attachments make the machine more useful. Experts cite the thumb as the most common attachment, with the breaker being another very popular tool for excavators.

"Attachments such as thumbs allow you to grab material you normally wouldn't be able to pick up with a bucket," Rusch says.

With an excavator, Matthews easily replicates the work of four or five employees, which provides him a



competitive advantage in his market.
"I'm trying to get our company to
where we're not a labor business,"
Matthews says. "I don't want to have a
lot of guys running around. Machines
don't take sick days."

Excavators have been able to shed preconceived notions about their usability, Rusch says. "Historically, people thought of using excavators only to dig basements and trenches," he says. "But they've become a lot more flexible with the introduction of the quick couplers."

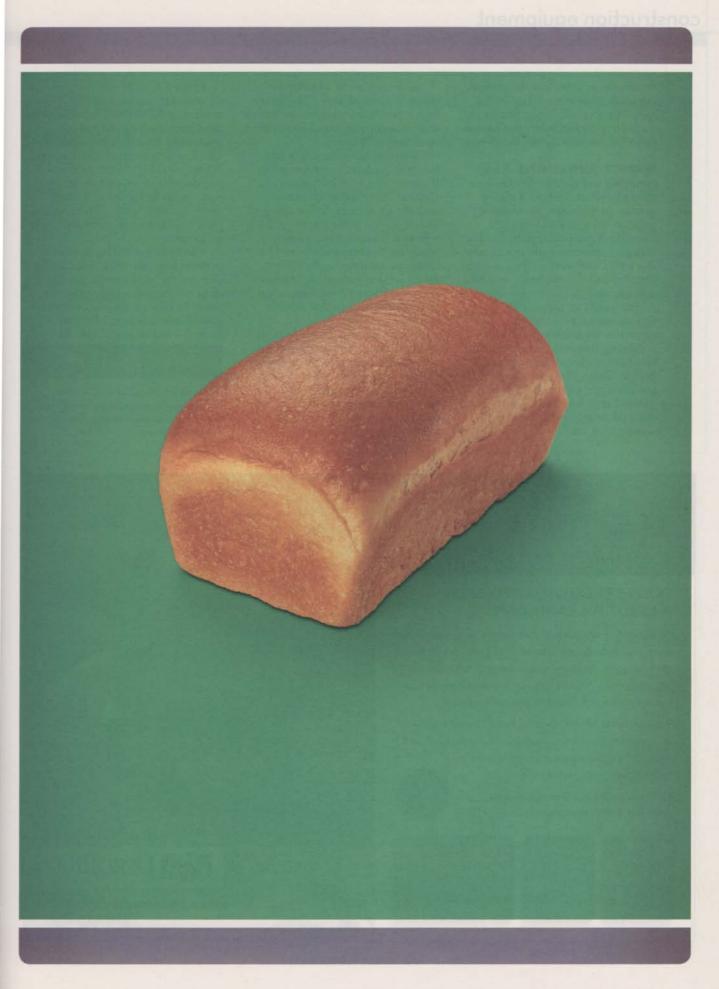
Quick couplers are mechanisms that interchange between the various attachments. Before the advent of the quick coupler, operators had to use tools and assistance to remove pins and replace attachments. On a busy job site, quick couplers are a time-saving mechanism. Now, many attachments can be switched solely by the operator without leaving the cab. The operator can put down one attachment, release it, then quickly attach another tool and get back to work.

Besides an excavator's wide range of abilities, there are other important aspects. Serviceability, for one, is a strong selling point. Matthews' machine, for example, requires an oil change two times a year, or at 500 hours. "That's one less thing I have to worry about. And that's great," he says. "Serviceability is a big issue, especially for smaller companies that don't have their own mechanics."

An excavator tends to have less un-



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#### construction equipment

dercarriage wear because the machine can reach so far while sitting in one spot. "They can sit in one area and reach 20 to 30 feet before you have to move the machine again," Rusch says.

PERFECT COMPLEMENT. While excavators and their smaller brethren, mini-excavators, perform a variety of tasks on their own, the machines make an intriguing addition to a contractor's equipment portfolio. For example, contractors will pair excavators with a skid-steer on the same job site or spread the equipment out over multiple sites.

Excavators are adept at picking up large amounts of material. "The excavators are much more efficient at digging than skid-steers," says Bill Gearhart, marketing manager for Buffalo Grove, Ill.-based Yanmar. "It's good at digging and moving within its small area. But a skid-steer is much more efficient at quickly moving around a job site."

Skid-steers are in a market by themselves, Rusch says. "They're trying to move material from one area to another and would travel farther than an excavator," he says.

While an excavator might take longer to get from point A to point B, they're chock full of features and options. Many feature electronic monitoring, control pattern changers and, regardless of the size of machine – from 1.7-ton to about 24-ton, which are most commonly used by landscape contractors, the controls for all are nearly identical. Machines up to the 10- to 12-ton range often feature swing booms that enhance their performance.

Contractors can choose from steel tracks, the most durable, to rubber tracks, which tread lightly on finished surfaces. Some of the smallest units have hydraulic expanding undercarriages that grant access to narrow job sites and then expand the tracks for grater stability, Hendry says.

In the 1.7- to 24-ton range excavator costs vary from about \$30,000 to as much as \$270,000. Cost differences stem from machine size and configurations, with the most expensive unit featuring an air-conditioned cab, Wilson says. The 20-ton excavator is popular among contractors, Rusch says. "It can be hauled on a truck easily," he says. "Larger than that and you'd need special permits, depending on the area."

Matthews has used excavators to perform large tree work, install irrigation and for patio installation. For the most comfortable working environment, he suspects contractors choose cab controls that switch between backhoe- and excavator-style.

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For some insights on the most common mistakes landscape contractors make when purchasing excavators, visit the October Online Extras section.



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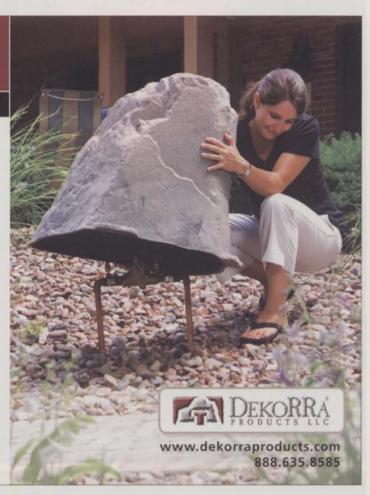
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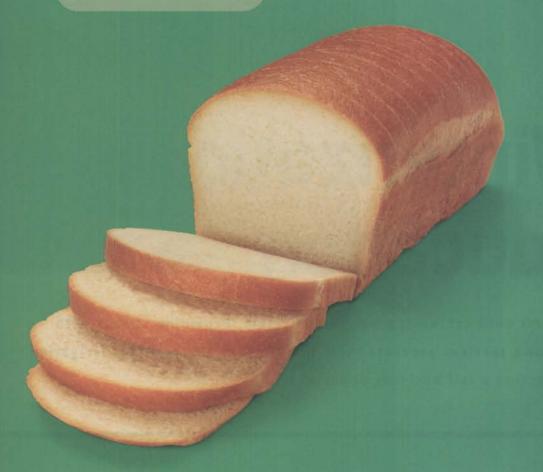






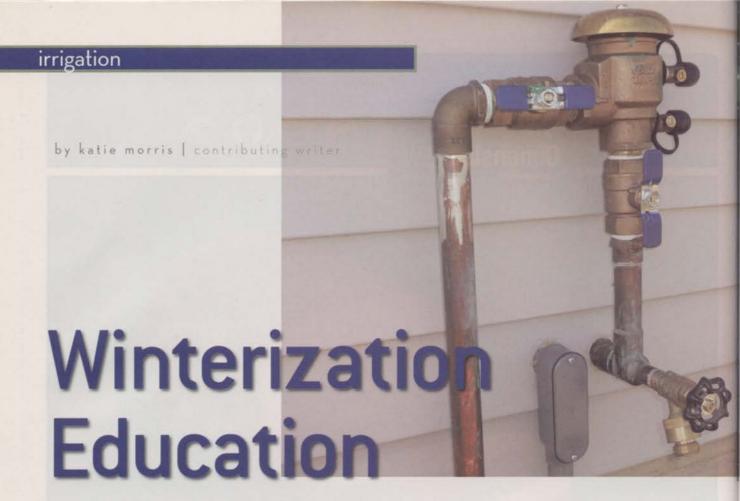






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Winter's chill can kill an irrigation system. Providing clients with shutdown services protects their investments and provides irrigation contractors a fall business opportunity.

ave you ever left a can of soda in the freezer? As the soda solidifies the liquid expands and bursts the can leaving a sticky mess. Frost on the ground has the same affect on the water inside an irrigation system, but this situation requires costly repairs.

Contractors must educate their clients about the importance of winterization and how seasonal irrigation shutdown service ensures peak system performance when spring rolls around. In addition, having winterization on a service menu can increase a contractor's profitability and reduce the amount of work necessary to fix improperly shut down

irrigation systems.

**WHY WINTERIZATION.** Even though irrigation pipes, also known as lateral pipes, are installed 8 to 12 inches into the ground, when the surface freezes its not uncommon for frost to reach 3 to 4 feet below, says Steve Schepers, contractor account manager for Azusa, Calif.-based Rain Bird.

If systems are not shut down before temperatures drop below 32 degrees it can start a catastrophic chain reaction. First the backflow preventor freezes and then water left in the system solidifies, ultimately causing the pipes to burst. When installing an irrigation system it is up to the landscape contractor to inform customers about these consequences.

Irrigation winterization is a necessity for areas in the Northeast and outside the Sun Belt where temperatures drop well below freezing, says

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Mike Merlesena, Southern California sales representative for DIG Corp. in Vista, Calif. "In the Southern states, such as Georgia, Tennessee, Louisiana and the Carolinas, selling irrigation ers that the price of the service will be less costly than the price of repairing a damaged system. Ultimately, it's better to be safe than sorry.

"In the Southern states... selling irrigation winterization is harder because there is less of a chance of freezing weather." – Mike Merlesena

winterization is harder because there is less of a chance of freezing weather," he says.

Contractors in these warmer regions have to convince their custom**IRRIGATION SHUTDOWN.** Winterizing an irrigation system in September or October is not a complicated procedure, however there are a number of details irrigation technicians

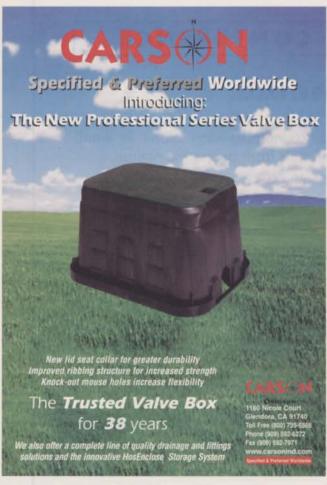
should keep in mind to perform the service properly.

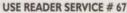
Bob Farrington, irrigation supervisor at Jetstream Landscape and Irrigation in Grand Blanc, Mich., sends two technicians to a job site. "This way one guy can talk to the homeowner while the other one can hook up the air compressor," he says.

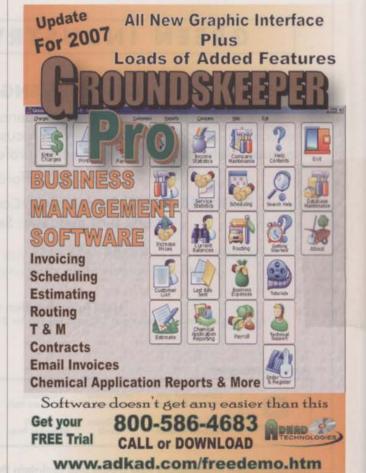
Technicians have three winterization methods to choose from: manual drain valve, automatic drain valve and compressed air blow out.

Regardless of the technique, though, the first step is to turn off the main water supply. If this is not done, then the pressure in the system can force the water back into and contaminate the municipal water system.

The manual drain valve method is not used very frequently since the invention of the automatic drain, Schepers says. If an irrigation technician happens to encounter one, they must first turn off the mainline shut-off valve then proceed to open one of









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the irrigation system's control valves to relieve pressure on the system's mainline. From here, he must slowly open the manual drain valves one at a time to release water from the mainline.

The automatic drain valve method requires no manual intervention. The

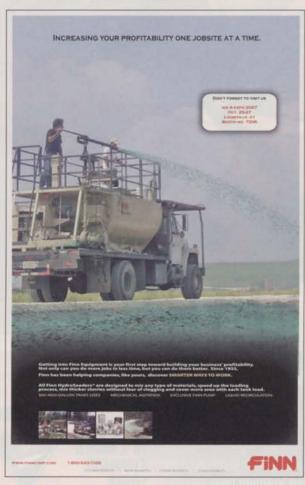
system will drain itself every time the system is shut off. The downside of this method is the technician can't tell by looking at the valve box if it is an automatic system. The only way of knowing is if the contractor has prior knowledge of the system. This

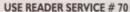
is why installing the systems you are currently shutting down is helpful. As for what they should do if they are not 100 percent sure the system is automatic, Schepers says it is best to blow out the system with air.

Mike Todd, owner of Milwaukee

#### time saving tips

- 1 Start irrigation shutdown services earlier in the season, around mid-September, to avoid last-minute jobs.
- 2 Develop a time line that includes how many customers you have and how long you estimate each job will take.
- 3 Schedule houses in the same area to reduce driving time.
- Call your customers to let them know when you will be in the area.
- 6 Consider using diesel compressors vs. gas compressors because they are more fuel efficient and economical.







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Lawn Sprinkler Corp., Menomonee, Wis., used to manually drain systems until the late 1970s when he read about winterizing with compressed air. He used a golf course as a guinea pig and was so pleased with the outcome he started offering blow out services along with his other irrigation services. Now he uses the blow out method to winterize all his commercial and residential customers.

Winterizing irrigation systems with compressed air is efficient, fast, eliminates auto-drains and saves water," Todd says.

The compressed air blow out method involves attaching an air compressor to the discharge side of the backflow preventor, which is found in the yard or near the water meter. The compressed air clears water out of the mainline pipe, lateral pipes, sprinkler control valves and the sprinkler heads.

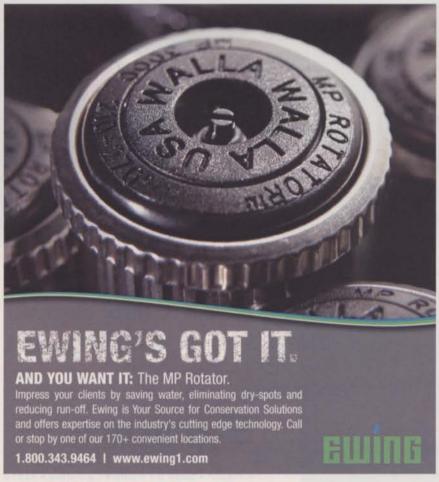
It's vital that all zones are open. "One of the key mistakes irrigation technicians make is providing air to the system before opening up the zones," Schepers says. Turning on the compressor before opening the zones allows pressure to build up and when finally released it can cause severe stresses on the system.

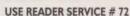
After the water sprouting from zone one's sprinkler heads has turned into a fine mist the irrigation technicians can turn the zone off and continue to the next one. To efficiently blow out a system it is important for technicians to cycle each valve for two to three minutes, and they are advised to turn the stations off and on multiple times rather than leaving the valve open for the full allocated time. Going through each zone twice will also ensure water has been pushed

For the irrigation technician's safety, when the last zone is completed the compressor needs to be shut off before closing the last zone or else pressure will build causing the compressor hose to disconnect and hit the irrigation technician. Irrigation technicians must also pay close attention to how much pressure they are sending through the system. "It's best to winterize at the systems current operating water pressure but never to exceed 70 pounds per square inch (psi)," Schepers says. Excessive pressure will damage the valves and the

One air compressor is all an irrigation technician will need on a residential job site. A common misconception contractors have about compressors is they think the pressure pushes the water out when actually it's the volume of air that pushes water through the pipes. Irrigation technicians should use a compressor that can provide 10 to 25 cubic feet per minute (CFM) of air pressure. Irrigation technicians can purchase bigger compressors for bigger sites as long as the pressure is regulated to 70 psi.

After all the valves have been cleared and closed there is one last







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task an irrigation technician must attend to and that is winterizing the backflow preventor. "You should first and foremost check with the manufacturer for the winterization techniques," Schepers says. Typically the manufacturer's process includes leaving the "ball" shut-off valves at a 45-degree angle for the remainder of the winter, and if extreme temperatures occur irrigation technicians might consider insulating the backflow preventor.

#### WINTERIZATION PROFITABILITY.

For many contractors the irrigation season – including the winterization and spring start up – is the second busiest time of year. "Between 30 to 40 percent of a company's overall profit comes from irrigation shutdowns and spring startups," Schepers says.

Pricing for irrigation winterization varies on the region the contractor works in. Most contractors, though, price on how large the system is or the number of zones a system contains. Todd quotes a fixed rate for both winterization and spring startup on the customer's service proposal, which he sends out in February. All the customer has to do is sign and return it.

When charging customers, consider a technician's gas, mileage, labor rate and the amount of work they can accomplish in a day. "In the current market, irrigation winterization contractors charge anywhere from \$50 to \$75 for residential and \$65 to \$95 for commercial," Farrington says.

One mistake contractors make is waiting too long to start winterization. "Give yourself a time line and expect the unexpected or you're just playing with fire," Merlesena says.

Another factor contractors should consider is the lasting impression an irrigation technician's shut down performance leaves on a customer. Todd understands the importance of this service to his company and to his customers. His company couldn't

function as a full-service irrigation company without its irrigation winterization service. "Our customers depend on us to maintain their systems at least twice a year, which is also a reliable revenue source," he says.

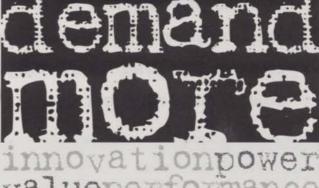
Irrigation contractors need to understand customers only see them twice a year when technicians come to shut off and turn on their systems. If an irrigation technician is a little sloppy in the job and the system is damaged because of it, the customer has no attachment to the company and will look elsewhere.

"This is the only time the customer is going to get an in-depth perspective of your company," Schepers says. "The impression you leave is what differentiates yourself from your competitors."

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#### product focus

by emily mullins | assistant editor

# THE LOWDOWN LOW YOLTAGE

Promoting energy efficiency and maintenance agreements can make contractors' profits shine.

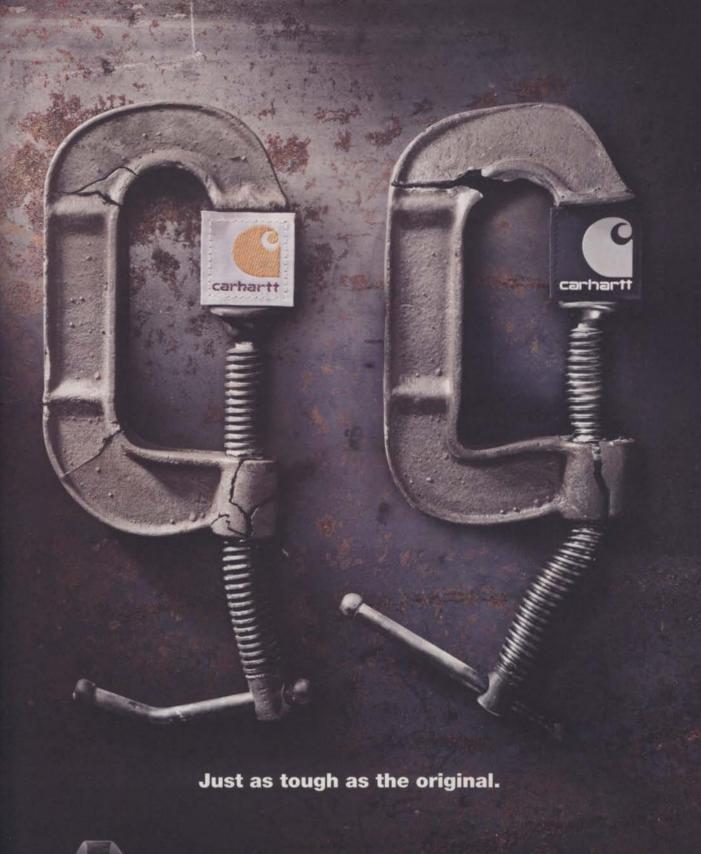
ost homeowners love lush lawns, neat ornamentals and tidy shrubs, and landscape contractors dedicate hours of work each week to keep these homes in tip-top condition. But when the sun goes down, all that hard work goes unseen. That's where a contractor's knowledge of landscape lighting comes in handy. "Some homeowners put so much money into their homes and landscapes and then at Photo: CAST-Light

Huntersville, N.C. "You have to convince the customer that actually being able to see the beauty of the home and landscape at night is a good investment."

Contractors and manufactures agree that landscape lighting is an effective way to make a client's home shine. Unlike mowing, trimming or edging, illuminating a home is a more personal way to establish client relationships as well as let contractors unleash their creativity. "Many contractors see landscaping lighting as fulfilling, rewarding work – especially after experiencing homeowners' reactions," says Steve Parrott, media and marketing director, CAST Lighting, Hawthorne, N.J. "They mow a client's lawn and the client is just glad the job's done. But they light up a home and the client's hugging them afterward."

night they lose it," says Jim Poplin, owner of Nightscapes Landscape Lighting and Design,

But there is more to landscape lighting than simply installing light fixtures. Contractors need to stress the importance of system upkeep and maintenance to ensure this sometimes





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significant investment doesn't get lost in the dark.

"Every contractor who installs a system should try to get a maintenance agreement with the client," **GETTING STARTED.** "The beauty about low-voltage landscape lighting systems is they're easy to assemble and easy to maintain," says Keith Isley, manager of business development for

"Every contractor who

installs a system should

try to get a maintenance

ally nonexistent. In fact, there is no possibility of electrical injury when working with fewer than 30 volts, Parrott says.

Poplin uses the safety of low voltage, as opposed to the more dangerous line voltage, as a selling tool when discussing a client's options.

"If a client stresses a desire for line voltage rather than low voltage, we stress the safety issues of children," he says, adding low voltage produces just as much light but with a warmer feel. "It's safe around water, and if lines get cut you can't get shocked and if kids pull them up they're still safe."

Low-voltage landscape lighting also requires very little training. Most manufacturers offer one-day training sessions that quickly show contractors the nuts and bolts of what they need to know to install a system correctly.

Some manufacturers provide on-site training representatives for in-house assistance. Poplin shows his employees a training video that



- Steve Parrott

Parrott says. "They should discourage homeowners from maintaining their professional systems because it takes a trained eye and it benefits everyone to have that ongoing relationship."

Ambiance Lighting Systems, Seagull Lighting, Snow Camp, N.C. Most all landscape lighting is low voltage, usually 12 to 24 volts, meaning safety issues during installation are virtu-



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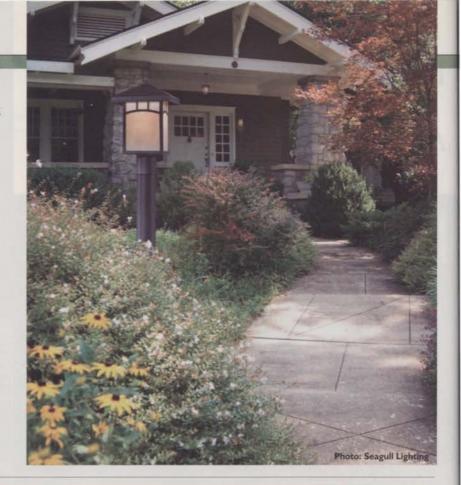
explains how to break down a lighting system, and also has demo systems set up in the office for hands-on practice.

Manufacturer and contractors agree the most training is needed not for the installation but for the design of a landscape lighting system.

"The installation is fairly simple," Parrott says. "The design requires more experience in terms of picking appropriate fixtures, knowing where to position them and learning the different effects they can achieve."

Some manufacturers offer advanced design courses and have reps that will join contractors in the field for hands-on design interaction. (See Aesthetic Ambiance on page 134).

**THE ENERGY FACTOR.** Installing energy-efficient lighting systems is another way contractors can strengthen a client's investment. While the client communicates the ambiance they wish to see, deciding on the pieces and parts falls to the contractor.







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"Low-voltage lighting can be good for the environment because it can use less power than other forms," Poplin says. "Anything that saves is a plus."

There are five main steps contractors can follow to install an energy efficient lighting system, and most are as simple as choosing one component over another, Parrott says.

The first is choosing a toroidal over an EI-type transformer because less energy is lost through a toroidal transformer's ring-shaped core than an EI-transformers flat core. This choice can increase system efficiency by 10 percent and save an estimated \$63 over the course of a year, Parrott says, citing a CAST Lighting system case study.\* Toroidal transformers cost about \$40 to \$50 more than EI-types, he adds.

The second step is choosing the system's wire size. Most energy in low-voltage systems is lost through the wire, Parrott says. The heavier the wire, the thicker the gauge and the

more energy is conserved. In landscape lighting, two primary wire sizes are used: the thinner and less costly #12/2 and the thicker, more expensive #10/2. By choosing #10/2 over #12/2 wire, contractors save their clients an estimated \$32 in energy costs each year, according to the case study. However, #10/2 wire costs about \$45 more than #12/2 wire, Parrott says.

But #12/2 wire is not all bad, Parrott says. It's fine for short runs with a low-wattage load, he says.

A good rule of thumb is for runs with more than 100-watt lamp loads or for runs longer than 100 feet, use #10/2 wire, and for runs with less than 100 watt-loads or for runs shorter than 100 feet, use #12/2 wire, Parrott says.

Step three involves connecting an appropriate number of fixtures to each run. Energy is lost when too many fixtures are attached to too few runs. The more runs with lighter loads, the better the system. For example,

distributing the case study system's 25 fixtures among seven, rather than five, wire runs save about \$42 a year in energy costs at an additional cost to the contractor of about \$24 for the extra wire runs, Parrott says.

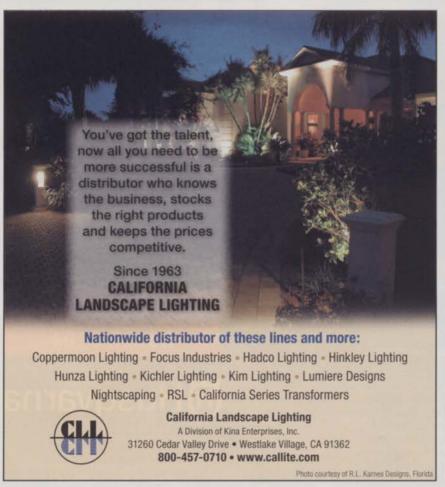
The fourth step is to use the correct wattage of lamp in the system.

"Many contractors have a tendency to light things too brightly," he says. "It's common for contractors to use 50-watt lamps, which are almost never necessary for nice lighting. Most can get by with 20- or 30-watt lamps and use half the energy."

Replacing half of the 35-watt lamps in the 25-fixture system with 20-watt lamps saves about \$111 a year in energy costs, Parrott says, at no additional cost to the contractor.

A final energy-saving strategy involves monitoring a lighting system's operating time. Transformers installed with both a time clock and a photocell save more energy than those

continued on page 136, sidebar on page 134



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# Photo: CAST Lighting

#### aesthetic ambiance

Understanding lighting design can be a different mind-set than most landscape contractors are used to. Below are the principles of landscape lighting design and how they contribute to the finished product.

- **1. Depth** The distance a viewer's gaze travels as he or she views a landscape lighting scene. A design with good depth has a starting point that naturally progresses throughout the landscape.
- 2. Perspective This principle defines a landscape as a three-dimensional canvas for a lighting designer, who strives to illuminate it from all points of view.
- **3. Focal Points** A landscape lighting design should consist of visual destinations that act as stepping stones for the eyes. Focal points should not be too far apart and there should never be total darkness between them.
- **4. Quality and Direction** Lighting quality sets the mood and includes beam spread and shape, level of diffusion and the overall appearance of lights relative to each other.
- 5. Symmetry and Balance Symmetry in landscape lighting highlights a home's balance.
- 6. Cohesion Ensures a home is illuminated as one cohesive unit rather than as a group of unrelated parts.



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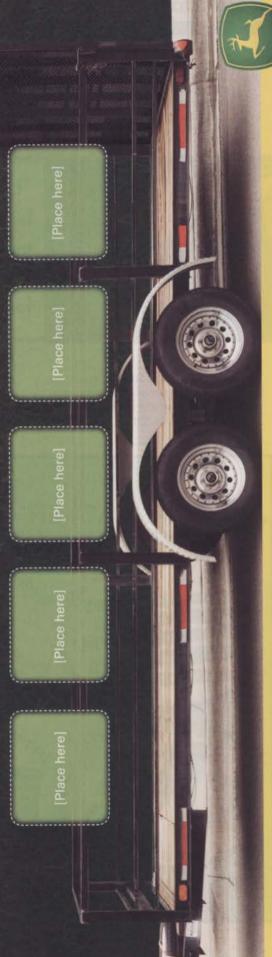




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JOHN DEERE

continued from page 130

installed with just one or the other, manufacturers say. A photocell turns the system on when the sun goes down, but a timer allows the homeowner to turn them on and off at not all landscape lights need to burn the entire night.

**KEEP IT GOING.** For many contractors, a good design and energy



"Low-voltage lighting can be good for the environment because it can use less power than other forms." – Jim Poplin

their preference. Separate transmitters and timers operate lights important for decorative and safety reasons at different times, Parrott says, adding efficient system installation is just the beginning of a landscape lighting job.

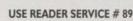
Maintenance contracts are a practical, and profitable, add-on service to keep lighting systems up and running all year. While maintenance can be difficult to sell to homeowners who believe they can upkeep their own systems, contractors need to explain the benefits to having a trained professional keep an eye on a project that can cost a homeowner \$2,500 or more to install, Poplin says.

"A lot of customers initially choose to do it themselves because they feel they are keeping costs down," Poplin says. "But usually within a year they call you back because they can't figure

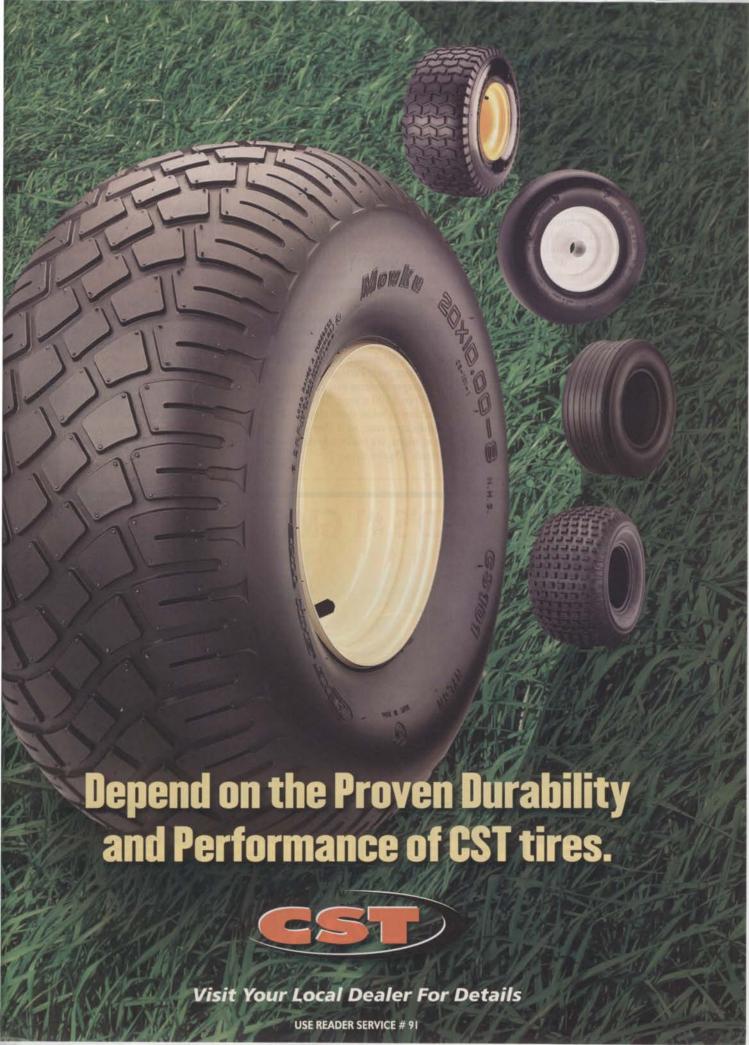
out what to do.'

Poplin has offered lighting system maintenance for the past 10 years, and his contracts include visits every six months, usually in the spring or fall. During these visits, Poplin's crews of one or two technicians check the whole system and replace any broken bulbs or fixtures. They also reconfigure lamp placement to accommodate for growing plant material, such as shrubs or roots.









Other maintenance services include lens cleaning and replacement, tightening of terminal block screws, replacement of fixture sockets and the re-aiming of fixtures, Parrott says. Contractors should replace all of a system's lamps about every 18 months, he adds.

"If one lamp burns out and is not soon replaced, it could cause the other lamps on a system to burn out more quickly," he says. When a lamp burns out, it reduces the voltage draw on the system and causes the others to burn brighter than normal, eventually causing successive burnouts, he adds.

When clients decide against a maintenance contract, Parrott suggests contractors recommend customers keep up with lens cleaning and lamp replacement and schedule appointments on an as-needed basis to check the system's internal parts like sockets and terminals.

Better yet, contractors should offer their new clients a year of free maintenance. "During that year, show the homeowner that it is significant work and they will most likely buy into the program," he says.

Contractors price their maintenance services differently. Poplin begins with a \$65 service fee and then charges per part, aiming for a 50 percent profit on each one. Prices of parts will also vary for different systems. For example, one lamp replacement can cost from \$17 to \$35, depending on the type of fixture. An average maintenance contract costs about \$300 a year, he says.

Some contractors price based on system size and the number of transformers, and a typical maintenance fee for a 20-fixture system could be \$350 per year, Parrott says.

Larger systems can cost from \$400 to \$500 a year. "This price is a fraction of what most clients' actual landscapes cost, so if they get to enjoy it at night, it's really a good investment," Poplin says.

By thinking of the future - whether in terms of system maintenance or energy savings - contractors give their clients the best possible lighting experience, and even have some fun in the process.

Some contractors will get into lighting because they see the profit opportunity, but once they start doing it they become passionate about it," Parrott says. "If they focus on doing it well, the service's rewards will come on their own." III

\*Editor's Note: Case study was performed by CAST Lighting on a 25-fixture system with an EI-type 1200-watt transformer, #12/2 wire, five 80-foot wire runs, 35-watt lamps and all fixtures on a single transformer.

#### www.lawnandlandscape.com

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## Snow Tools

These products shine when the flakes fly.

compiled by mike zawacki | managing editor

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- Each moldboard section is mounted with polyurethane blocks that enable each section to trip over obstacles up to 3 inches
- Slip hitch enables the operator to drop plow down and go
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- · Quick-tatch hitch and universal bucket mount available
- Arctic Snow & Ice Control 888/242-3766, www.arcticsnowandice.com

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#### Avalanche Tailgate Spreader

- Includes an agitator
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- Cab protector and tarp roller kit
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- Includes a 2-year warranty
- Avalanche 905/465-4049, www.avalanchespreaders.com

Circle 201 on reader service card

#### Blizzard Speedwing

- Combines the productivity of Blizzard's multi-position blade design with the control simplicity of a straight-blade snowplow
- Defaults to A-scoop position for straight-ahead plowing
- When angled, the trailing wing falls in line with the blade while the leading wing maintains its forward position to reduce spillover and utilize the entire blade width for higher-capacity windrowing
- Heavy-duty spring and cable system maximizes productivity while simplifying operator involvement
- Wings can easily be fixed in a straight-blade position for back-dragging operations
- Blizzard 414/716-9433, www.blizzardplows.com

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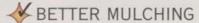


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#### product spotlight

#### The Boss Power-V XT Snowplow

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- Includes the fast and easy-to-use SmartHitch 2 Attachment System
- Features the SmartTouch 2 control and SmartLight package
- High-performance hydraulic package
- The Boss 800/286-4155, www.bossplows.com

Circle 203 on reader service card

#### JRCO Snowplow

- Attaches to mid-mount ZTR mowers
- Features a 60-inch-wide blade with a 5-inch UHMW cutting edge
- 7-angle blade is adjusatible from the seat
- Includes a foot pedal lift and lock
- · Blade trip includes springs
- IRCO 800/966-8442, www.jrcoinc.com

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#### Buyers Products - Snowdogg Snow Plows

- Features a stainless-steel, corrosion-free moldboard
- 1/4-inch steel ribs and heavy-duty channel
- Heavy-duty hydraulic power unit
- Buyers Products 440/974-8888, www.buyersproducts.com

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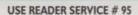
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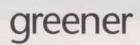
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#### product spotlight

#### **Daniels Onsite Plow**

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- · Designed for larger projects where transport from site to site in not needed
- Daniels Plows 847/426-1150, www.danielsplows.com

Circle 206 on reader service card

#### Fisher XLS - X-Pandable Length Snowplow

- Operator can expand and reconfigure the blade into a number of plowing positions without leaving the truck
- Features an 8-foot retracted straight-blade width, a 10-foot expanded width and a scoop width of nearly 9 feet
- · The XLS will fully angle while in the scoop position to maximize plow handling and capacity
- Ideal for carrying large quantities of snow or plowing around corners, congested parking lots, street curbs and sidewalks
- The leading wing angles forward to corral more snow into the moldboard, eliminating spill-off and effectively utilizing the entire blade width
- · Features a Trip-Edge design which maintains the load when an obstacle is encountered
- · Fisher's Minute Mount 2 attachment system is also standard
- Fisher Engineering 207/701-4200, www.fisherplows.com

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## product spotlight

## Hiniker Scoop Snowplow

- Concave shape provides greater capacity, less spillage and faster plowing
- · 20-degree fixed-angle outer ends capture snow
- · Available in 8- and 9-foot lengths
- · Includes a high-impact polyethylene moldboard
- 3-section trip edge with a 9-inch pivot point provides protection from curbs and parking barriers
- Hiniker Co. 507/625-6621, www.hiniker.com

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## Hi-Way Super P Deicing Spreader

- Mounts on flat bed trucks or dump bodies
- Heavy-duty construction in 8-, 9- or 10-foot lengths
- Available in carbon steel or 304 stainless steel construction
- · May be hydraulic or engine driven
- · High-capacity specification available for chassis with a minimum of 20,000 gvwr
- Highway Equipment 800/363-1771, www.highwayequipment.com

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## **Kage Innovations Snow Containment**

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- Switch from angle plowing to pushing in seconds from the cab
- Moves snow 25 to 50 percent faster, makes cleanup neater and up to 75 percent faster
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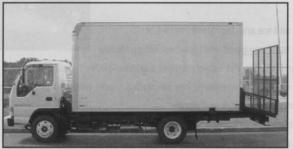
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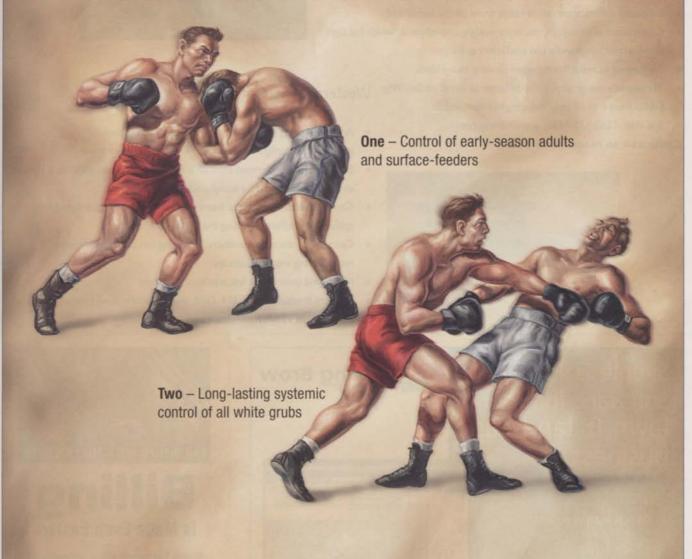
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## Sno-Way Snowplow Snow Deflector

- Deflector design rolls snow ahead of the plow for efficient windrowing
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#### Circle 214 on reader service card





## Western Wide-Out Snowplow

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Comparisons are based on 2008 Chery W-Series versus the previous 2007 model. Truck shown with equipment from an independent supplier. © 2007 GM Corp.

# Load Lighteners

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compiled by heather wood | web editor

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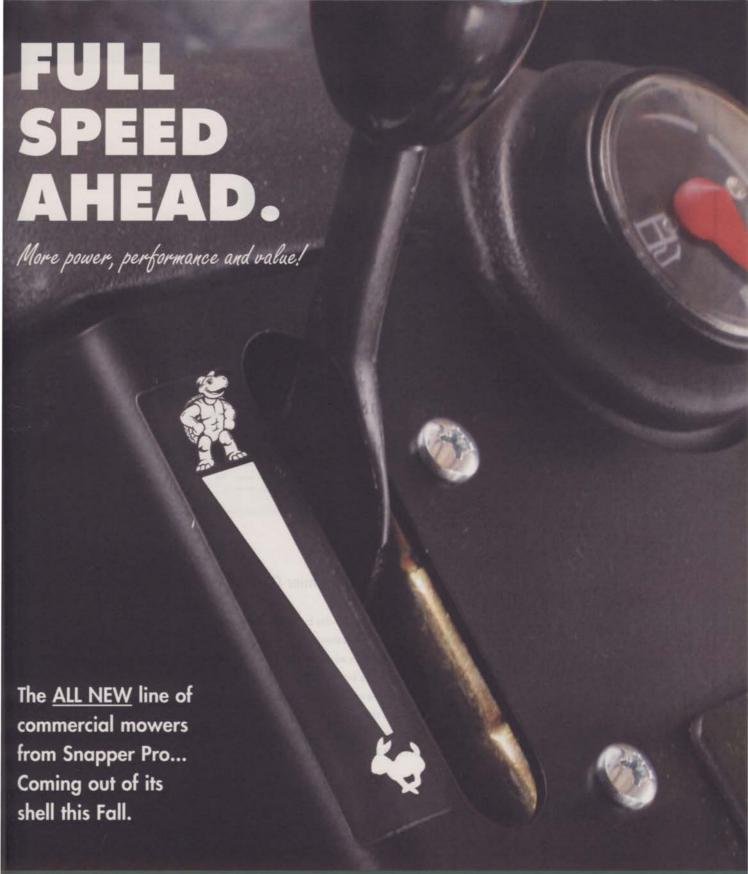


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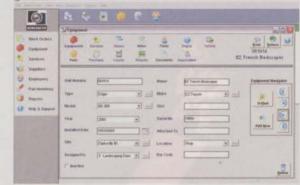
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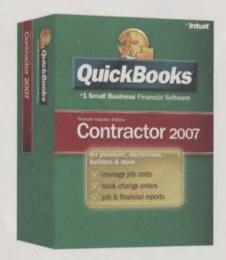
## MowerMeter

- · Equipment maintenance and repair tracking software
- Allows the user to enter equipment with its information and select a maintenance schedule
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# Bulb Abundance

Whether they're lighting a path or illuminating a home, there are several types and styles of landscape lighting available.

compiled by heather wood | web editor

## Cascade Lighting Fixtures

- · Wholesale full-line stocking distributor of outdoor and landscape lighting
- Carries most popular fixtures and accessories produced by major landscape lighting manufacturers
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## Frog Lights Paver Lights

- · Features LED lights
- · Last an average of 15 to 20 years
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## Hinkley Architectural Bronze Path Lighting

- · Made of cast aluminum
- · No. 912, 12-watt, wedge-base bulb included
- · Features 180-degree light output
- Measures 18<sup>7</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches long by 3 inches wide
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## Kichler Copper Collection

- Creates a classic look
- Offers high-quality, solid-copper construction
- · Line includes deck and stair lights and path and accent lighting
- · Features clean, uncluttered lines
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## Kim Lighting MiniBounce Luminaires

- Collection of pole-, surface- and ground-mounted architectural landscape lighting fixtures
- Maximizes downward light distribution to site and pedestrian zones
- Features a ribbed, die-cast aluminum fixture envelope that allows heat to easily dissipate, extending lamp life
- · Broad top hood ensures that maximum illumination is provided
- Fixtures are painted in a choice of five standard TGIC thermoset polyester-coat finishes
- Kim Lighting 626/968-5666, www.kimlighting.com

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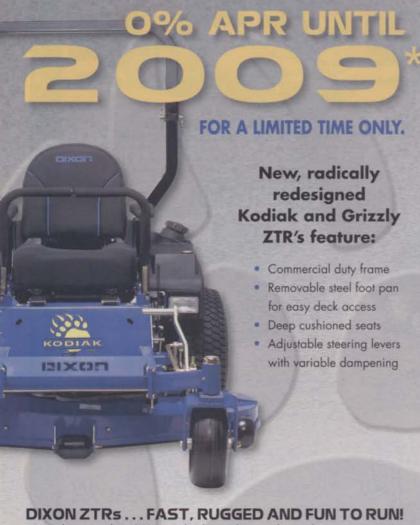




## product spotlight

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- · Made of cast aluminum
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## Ruud Luma GL80

- Rotates 360 degrees, tilts 125 degrees and locks with a hex head screw
- Includes a 50-watt max, MR16 bi-pin base lamp and stake mount
- Housing is made of low-copper, die-cast aluminum
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- Easily connects to Luma's self-sealing,
   10/3 cable and low-voltage transformers
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- Ruud Lighting 800/236-7000 www.ruudlighting.com

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liquid formulation that's easy to pour, measure and mix. So switch to Razor Burn this season. There's no faster way to eliminate weeds. Or unhappy callbacks. Contact a Nufarm representative or your local distributor for more information.

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## MystiCrete SuperStep

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"Hit'em where they ain't." —"Wee Willie" Keeler

## Wee Willie's Secret

One of the smallest men ever to play major league baseball, "Wee Willie" Keeler, racked up 2,947 career hits and a place in Cooperstown. Keeler did this using one of the shortest bats in baseball history. His secret? His ability to place his hits where there was no one to field them. We can learn from Willie when marketing our landscape companies.

Consider the ways contractors market their businesses. Most place an ad in the Yellow Pages or have their names on their trucks. Others mail postcards, advertise on TV or radio or pay for billboards. For each tactic the questions remain the same: Is it effective? Does it increase sales? Is it money well spent?

Based on industry research and my own experience, contractors spend about 1.6 percent of their total sales on marketing. Let's say your annual sales are \$500,000; this would mean you would spend about \$8,000 a year on marketing. But would you be maximizing the potential of this \$8,000 or would you be breaking even? Worse still, would you be throwing it away? This is where Wee Willie's advice can teach us about marketing. As he said, "hit'em (your ads) where they (your competition) ain't."

Say you have a choice between buying a billboard and placing an ad in an arts program. Though it would seem far wiser to pay for the billboard than the program ad, this is not necessarily so. Where is it located? Is it visible from the road? Are there competing billboards nearby? Now consider the arts program. It's fair to say most people who support the arts have the discretionary income to spend on cultural outings or, if your ad succeeds, their landscapes.

Remember, you want to advertise where your customers are and your competition isn't. Here are some more vehicles for doing that:

Sponsor a small business award. A business owner sponsors a small business award every year. His is always the only company of his type at the ceremony and he has the coveted opportunity to address hundreds of local business people, all of whom are potential customers and are connected to other potential customers. The up tick in business from this event outweighs the sponsorship cost.

Hire an ice cream truck and place a magnetic sign on the side with your company's name. Ride with the vendor through your clients' neighborhoods. Give out free ice cream along with your business cards and chat people up.

Chair a benefit dinner. This is a great way to get your name out while giving back to the community. After all, who do you prefer to do business with – the business owner who cares solely about maximizing his profits or the entrepreneur who contributes a portion of his profits to do some good in the world?

Now, can you hit'em where they ain't?

## marty grunder

is a speaker, consultant and author, as well as owner of Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at 866/478-6337, landscapesales@gie.net or via www.martygrunder.com.



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## benchmarking your business



## A Recipe For Disaster

Another estimating method used in the industry is the single overhead recovery system (SORS). I also call it the gross profit margin (GPM) method because it determines a price by focusing on the gross margin (price minus total direct costs).

**SCENARIO.** I'll use two examples to show why the SORS method for pricing your jobs doesn't work. True, the two are extreme, but they make my point.

#### THE SAMPLE COMPANY

 General and administrative (G&A) overhead costs: \$10,000 per month; \$120,000 per year.

- Entire field labor force with burden: \$13,000 per month; \$156,000 per year.
- Adds 30 percent gross profit to all of its direct costs for net profit and G&A costs.
- Goal for net profit is a 10-percent markup on all jobs.

Job A (material-intense, one-month job)

Material costs: \$100,000

Field labor with burden: \$13,000

Equipment costs: \$7,000

Subcontractor costs: 0

Subtotal: \$120,000

Gross profit markup x 1.3

Price for Job A: \$156,000

#### WHY SORS DOESN'T WORK.

How Job A should be priced? Total direct costs: \$120,000 1 month of G&A costs: \$10,000 Break-even point (BEP): \$130,000 10% net profit markup: \$13,000 Price for Job A: \$143,000

## Using SORS, at \$156,000, Job A is over priced by \$13,000.

How Job B should be priced?

Total direct costs: .......\$120,000
4 month's of G&A costs: .....\$40,000
Break-even point (BEP): ....\$160,000
10% net profit markup: .....\$16,000
Price for Job B = .....\$176,000

## Using SORS, at \$156,000, Job B is under priced by \$20,000.

If you're bidding by using SORS in a competitive market, guess which job you get. You get Job B because you underpriced it by \$20,000. If I am bidding my direct and G&A costs accurately, guess which job I get. I get Job A because I overpriced it by \$13,000.

**CONCLUSION.** Bidding work using the SORS method is a sure-fire way to lose money. It treats all direct costs the same and doesn't take into account the project's duration. You will load up with work that you underprice. And this is a recipe for disaster.

## jim huston

is president of J.R. Huston Enterprises, a Denver-based green industry consulting firm. Reach him at 800/451-5588, benchmarking@gie.net or www.jrhuston.biz.



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## Pass The Torch, But Don't Let It Go Out

The stage was set. The company's founder was ready to remove himself from the business and pass it on to his son. The son had been working in the

business for some time and both felt comfortable about the transition.

The business had grown slowly but steadily over 25 years. It maintained a

stellar reputation among its commercial and residential customers, many of whom relied on it for unique landscape installations no one else would touch.

The father had developed many solid, long-term customer relationships, and word-of-mouth referrals generated a steady stream of profitable new business

leads for the company.

Many of the crew members had been employed with the company for a long time. The father retained them, even in hard times, because they were skilled at their work and cared about his customers.

"It's yours now," he told to his son. Things changed shortly after the father's departure. The son forgot what it was that made the landscape company so successful.

He converted 4 acres of their property into a nursery operation. He looked at the equipment maintenance and repair

"The father began receiving complaints from his old customers. He was stunned since this was the first time he ever remembered getting these calls. Worse yet, they were phoning him and not his son."

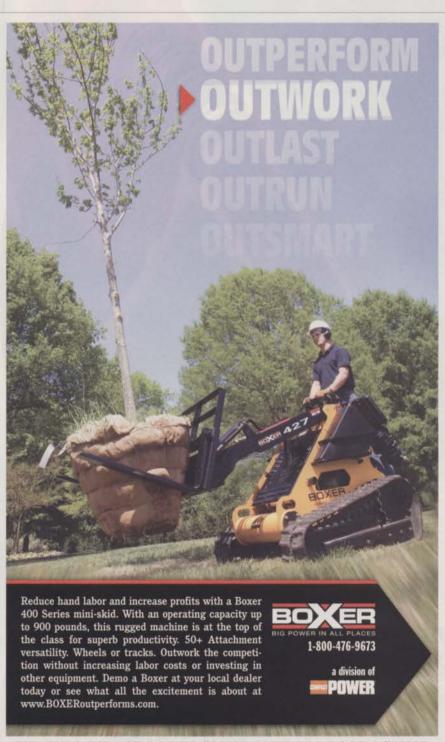
- Larry Fish

bills and made a snap decision to take it all in-house.

Before long, a 4,000-square-foot maintenance facility was erected on a freshly poured concrete slab.

A mechanic was hired and tools and equipment were purchased. Vehicles started stacking up in front of the shop awaiting parts and maintenance, and crews were relegated to inconsequential busy work.

Meanwhile, accounts payable started piling up with paperwork while accounts



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receivable stayed flat.

The father began receiving complaints from his old customers. He was stunned since this was the first time he ever remembered getting these calls. Worse yet, they were phoning him and not his son. A quick visit to the yard told him everything he needed to know about the situation. The place was a mess and his son was nowhere to be found.

This story doesn't end here. It actu-

ally gets worse.

The company's customer base began to deteriorate. New upscale sub-divisions were being built in another part of town. The company had been out flanked by their competition and was now in jeopardy of losing its market presence. The lack of focus and entry into other ventures had hurt the landscape company's financial strength.

The father learned a bitter lesson that his son was more interested in doing the work than running the business. When he should have been enjoying life, the father was involved with saving the business.

This little narrative is not a work of fiction. Unfortunately, it's true. Today, the company is in turnaround mode. Sadly, the loss of 25 years of momentum is the toughest blow to the company. Now it is forced to prove itself all over again, but this time from a diminished financial base.

Drive into the yard today and you will see a new general manager in charge. The GM spends a lot of time biting his nails and worrying about the company's day-to-day details.

The son . . . well, on most days he pulls into the yard at 10 a.m. in his brand new pick-up. Some things never change.

The father, well, he still comes in a couple of days a week and plays a little golf here and there.

He bites his nails, too.

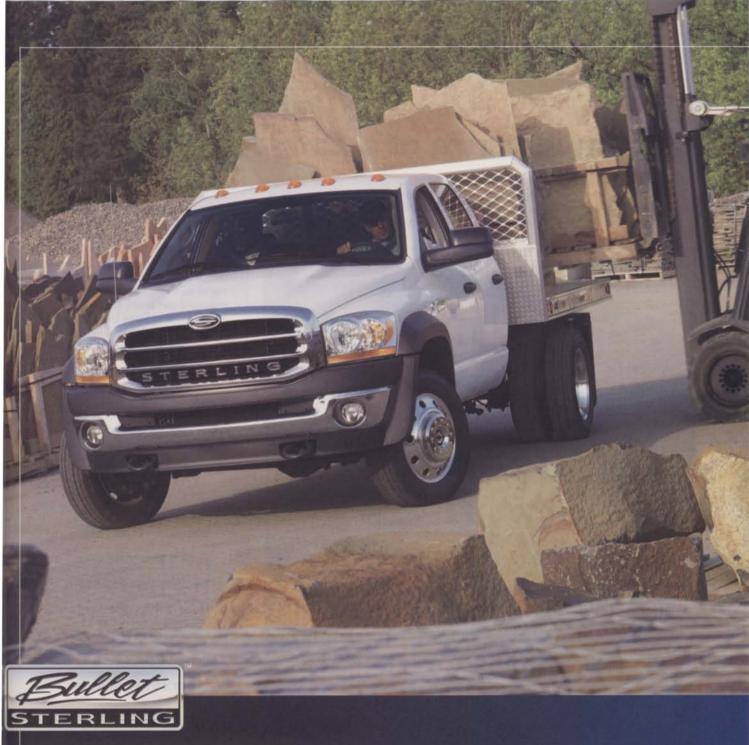
## larry fish

is president of GreenSearch, a human resource consulting organization. He can be reached at 888/375-7787, peoplesmarts@gie.net or via www.greensearch.com.

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## The Importance of a Late-Fall Feeding

t may seem contrary to logic, but if you want to ensure stronger more vibrant turf and healthier trees and shrubs next season, then take action today.

Arguably the most important or beneficial lawn application of the year takes place in late fall. These applications are beneficial to turf, or any plant for that matter, because the plant is reducing its top growth and increasing its root growth. All plants require a firm foundation (the roots) to thrive and grow. The fall is the time of the year when energy from fertilizer is directed to a plant's root system resulting in increased root growth and overall improved turf health and vigor. Some additional benefits of late-fall feeding include establishing healthy turf before the onset of winter stresses and an overall healthier plant with faster spring green-up capabilities.

So why so much concern about root development in the fall? A strong root system is essential for a healthy turf because the roots are responsible

"The fall application lays a good foundation for success in the following year's program. And a healthy plant is more tolerant to drought stress, insect pressure, disease pressure and other stress factors."

for transporting water and nutrients to the stems and leaves of the plant. Just because the above-ground portion of a plant is dormant does not mean the roots are dormant, too.

Actually, a plant produces more root growth in the fall than during any other time of the year.

GOOD CARBS. Urea will not leach when soil temperatures dip below 50 degrees F. However, root formation continues until the ground is frozen. Supplementing the plant with fertilizer in the fall helps increase root growth through the storage of carbohydrates (energy reserves). Due to less daylight and cooler nights the roots commence







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storing carbohydrates that were produced during photosynthesis.

Nitrogen plays an important role in plant function, but potassium is also essential to promote cell wall development to prepare turf for winter hardening. This is essential because cell wall development gives a plant its rigidity, which enables it to stand upright as

well as helps the plant to harden off and become stronger and less susceptible to pest problems. When choosing a fall fertilizer a 1:1 ratio of nitrogen to potash contributes to overall turf health.

DON'T FORGET. Fall is also a great time to prepare your trees and shrubs for next spring. Trees in a landscape

environment do not benefit from leaf litter nutrients like those in the forest.

Therefore, supplemental spring and/ or fall fertilizers will improve overall tree and shrub health and vigor.

Like all plants, trees and shrubs need light, water, oxygen and nutrients to remain healthy and survive. Although surface applications may provide adequate fertilization, root-zone feeding in the fall allows the nutrients to be immediately absorbed by the tree or shrub. This allows the trees and shrubs to continue growing and absorbing nutrients long after the leaves have fallen and temperatures drop.

Plants that do not receive adequate fertilization will generally become predisposed to insect and disease problems and will retain a generally unhealthy or unthrifty appearance. And, unlike a strong healthy tree, an unhealthy one poses potential hazard issues.

For trees and shrubs, a balanced, slow-release fertilizer (N-P-K) works well for fall applications. These applications can be made using various types of fertilizers, including liquid or soluble, granular and tree stakes. Selection is often based on a contractor's equipment capabilities.

The fall application lays a good foundation for success in the following year's program. And a healthy plant is more tolerant to drought stress, insect pressure, disease pressure and other stress factors. III

## j.b. toorish and brian kelley

are part of LESCO's Tech Services Department. They can be reached at fromthefield@gie.net or at 800/321-5325 ext. 6150 to answer technical questions.



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## Lawn&Landscape



THIS MONTH'S QUESTION: "How important are equipment demos in helping landscape contractors make purchasing decisions?"

#### THE DEALER:

Richard Miller, Owner, TriGreen, Mt. Juliet, Tenn.

We think the proof is in the fit for the customer. There's so much hype going on surrounding equipment. We're in the best position possible when we have someone on the equipment, using it. We've always felt in order to prove a machine's usefulness, we insist on letting them use it. You have to try it out. We try to control the demos somewhat. We encourage contractors to take the equipment to several different types of job sites. But we want them to understand the difference between a demo and a loaner. So we set a schedule to motivate them to really use the equipment.

I strongly encourage contractors to ask their dealers for demos. We get a lot of guys who are reluctant to ask because they think there's some type of catch to it. But we want to know why they like it or dislike it.

#### THE CONTRACTOR:

Dan Powers, Owner, Powers Landscaping, Chardon, Ohio



Demos are very important to me and I often make decisions based on them. I had a combination loader-backhoe that was a little cumbersome. You had to jump from one side to the other to perform different tasks. So, I considered an excavator to replace it. The dealer brought one out and left it for me indefinitely and I saw the capabilities it had. If it weren't for the dealer insisting that I demo it, I probably never would have tried it out. Once I had it and used it, I found its different uses. My dealer allowed me to demo it for as long as I wanted.

Once you demo something, you end up buying it because you see how much more productive you can be with it. Getting hold of a demo piece isn't difficult. Sometimes, I call the dealer and tell him I'm looking for something new. If he knows you have a need, a good dealer will fill it.

## say what's on your mind

If you'd like to share your thoughts for future issues, please call or e-mail Mark Phillips at 216-925-5008 or mphillips@gie.net.



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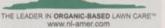
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1	What	is your	primary	busines	s
	at thi	s location	on? (choo	se only	one

I. CONTRACTOR or SERVICES

- CONTRACTOR or SERVICES

  1. Landscape Contractor

  2. Chemical Lawn Core Company
  (excluding mowing maintenance service)

  3. Lown Maintenance Contractor

  4. Ornamental Shrub & Tree Service

  5. Irrigation Contractor

  6. Landscape Architect

  7. Other Contract Services
  (please describe)

#### II. IN-HOUSE LAWN/CARE MAINTENANCE

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#### III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- 9. Dealer 11. Formulator 10. Distributor 12. Manufacturer
- IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:
- N. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE HELD:

  13. Extension Agent [Federal, State,
  County, City, Regulatory Agency]

  14. School, College, University

  15. Trade Association, Library
  Others (please describe)

## 2. What services does you business offer?

- 1. Landscape Design Landscape
   2. Seeding or Sodding
   3. Turf & Ornamental Installation
- 3. Turf & Örnamentol Installation
   4. Bedding Plants & Color Installation
   5. Irrigation Installation
   6. Landscape Lighting
   7. Hardscape Installation
   8. Water Features

- Landscape Maintenance

  9. Landscape Renovation

  10. Turf Fertilization

  11. Turf Aeration

  12. Tree &

  Ornamental Care

  15. Erosion Control

- Pesticide Application

  16. Turf Disease Control

  17. Turf Insect Control

  18. Turf Weed Control

  19. Tree & Ornamental Pesticide Application
- Other

  20. Mowing

  21. Hydroseeding

  22. Snow Removal

- 23. Interior Landscape Services
  24. Structural Pest Control
  25. Holiday Lighting
  26. Other

## 3. What is the service mix %?

Mowing/Maint\_\_\_\_\_ Design/Build\_ Chemical Application

## 4. How many full-time (year-round) employees do you employ?

5. Is Chemical Application work

## 6. What are your company's approximate annual gross revenues? 1.less than \$50,000 2.\$50,000 to \$99,999 3.\$100,000 to \$199,999

- 4.\$200,000 to \$199,999 4.\$200,000 to \$299,999 5.\$300,000 to \$499,999 6.\$500,000 to \$699,999 7.\$700,000 to \$999,999 8.\$1,000,000 to \$1,999,999

- 9.\$2,000,000 to \$3,999,999 10.\$4,000,000 to \$6,999,999 11.\$7,000,000 or more
- 7. What percentage of growth do you anticipate?

#### 8. What year was your business founded?

9. What is your business mix? (%) Residential \_\_\_ Other\_

## 10. Is this a Headquarters or

**Branch location?** 1. Headquarters 2. Branch 3. Single Office

- 11. What best describes your title?

- G8XLN



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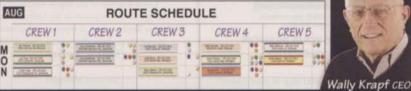


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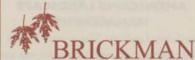
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#### About The Author

Tom Canete is owner and president of Canete Landscape and Garden Center in Wayne, N.J. He can be reached at 973/616-5008 or tom@canete.com.

# Canete Landscape uses alternative fuels for snow removal work.

he price at the pump for gasoline and diesel fuel is a major concern for many contrators working in both the landscape and snow removal industries. Last winter in Wayne, N.J., we experienced average fuel prices that ranged from \$2.75 per gallon to more than \$3 per gallon. While I realize that landscape and snow removal contractors in other parts of the country saw steeper prices, for Canete Landscape and Garden Center those prices translated to about \$100,000 in diesel fuel costs alone last year.

Rising fuel prices cut into my bottom line and, outside of limiting the routes and clients my company serves, I was powerless to do anything about it.

Or so I thought.

Two years ago, a heavy-equipment broker turned me on to the possibilities of converting some of my diesel engine trucks over to an alternative fuel mix, mainly using cooking oil in lieu of diesel fuel. I was intrigued by the idea, specifically the cost-savings potential.

Now, the process is not as simple as popping the top on a bulk-size container of Wesson oil and filling up the tank of a ¾-ton plow truck. But it's not far off.

Before I did anything I first conducted a thorough investigation of the concept and technology, as well as researched and sought out testimonials from business owners around the country who were using alternative fuels. Also, a colleague recommended the site www.dieselsecrets.com, which offered a lot of great information. I then talked one of my snow removal subcontractors into investing into the necessary equipment to convert two of his trucks from diesel to cooking oil for the winter. Seeing the potential in the technology, he agreed.

The conversion involved a \$2,000 investment for a secondary fuel tank, heating elements and electrical switching supplies to transfer from diesel to cooking oil while the truck was operating. With some additional searching on the Internet you may be able to find some of the same conversion systems and supplies for less. Besides the additional equipment, the conversion required I cut 20 percent of the cooking oil with kerosene and start and shut down the truck each day with diesel fuel. While this procedure may seem involved, the cost savings was intriguing enough to keep me interested in the technology.

However, after some additional research I located a company selling a specialized fuel additive for about 46 cents per gallon of oil. This additive eliminates the need for the additional conversion



Tom Canete, center, has been using cooking oil in lieu of diesel fuel for snow removal. Photo: Richard Bell



Canete Landscape, based in Wayne, N.J., estimates he will save as much as \$80,000 annually through the use of alternative fuels. Photo: Richard Bell

equipment. Instead, I can add the oil-additive mixture directly into my diesel trucks' fuel tanks. In addition, if I find myself out on the job and running low on fuel, I can pull into a service station and fill up with diesel without any adverse effects to my truck. This no-hassle solution is the way to go.

I did strike upon a bit of good fortune during this process. A local restaurant owner was paying an outside company to dispose of his cooking oil. I saw an opportunity here for a win-win situation for both of our operations. I approached the restaurant owner about a possible barter – snow removal services for his cooking oil. He was very receptive to the idea. I collect the oil with a truck equipped with a storage tank and transport it back to my shop where I

filter out the impurities so it can be used in my trucks.

This arrangement has proven so successful that in the coming year I plan to make hauling away used cooking oil a side venture in addition to my snow removal and landscape businesses. The side company, which will be run by my garden center manager, will contract with local businesses to collect their cooking oil for a fee – around 25 cents per gallon. I'll then use this oil as the fuel for my diesel fleet.

To date, I've had only positive experiences with using cooking oil as an alternative to diesel fuel in my truck fleet. When using cooking oil, as long as it is filtered correctly, I have witnessed no reduction in power or performance. Likewise, my equipment maintenance manager has

observed no ill effects on the trucks or their components.

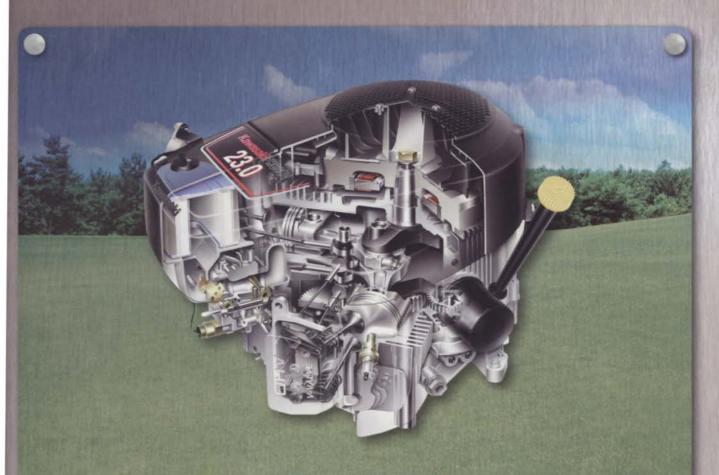
By next year I plan to convert all of my diesel trucks over to cooking oil and I estimate this move will potentially save my operation \$80,000 per year in diesel fuel costs. This cost savings will allow me to invest in future equipment upgrades as well as remove the fuel surcharge language from my service contracts, both of which will give me a competitive advantage in my market. And, at this time, none of my competitors are converting to or experimenting with an alternative fuel.

The only drawback, and a rather humorous one at that, is our truck's exhaust now smells like a cross between french fries and Chinese food, which, depending on your tastes, may not necessarily be a bad thing.

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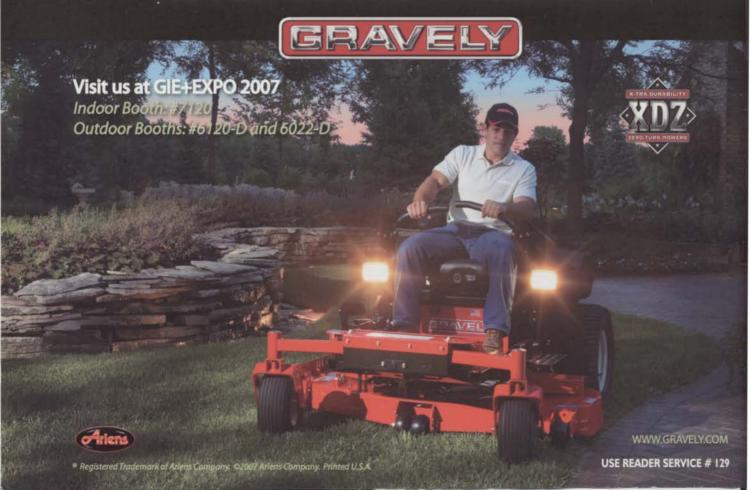
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#### DEPARTMENTS

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### CLASS OF 2007 LEADERSHIP PROFILES

#### 26 Leadership Honor Roll

A complete listing of the past winners and an introduction to the 2007 winners of the Lawn & Landscape and Bayer Environmental Science Leadership Awards.

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Work hard, treat customers and employees with respect and have good strong morals – these are the foundations of Tom Fochtman's leadership style.

#### 50 Ideas Into Action

Den Gardner envisions a better world for the green industry, then finds a way to make it happen.

#### 58 Living A Dream

Scott Jamieson helps others cultivate a passion for trees.

#### 64 All For One

Knowing that it takes more than one person to truly get the job done, Erica Santella leads with others in mind.

#### **70** Lifelong Learner

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#### Welcome Letter

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Understanding the fundamentals of business communication can improve how people hear you and how you hear others so your message is heard loud and clear.

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As a business communicator, you can react differently to what's being said to you by your peers, employees and even adversaries and, in turn, produce better, more worthwhile and rewarding communication.













# environmental stewards

The Green Industry embodies much more than simply the business of product application to combat harmful insects, weeds or diseases that plague our national landscapes. Green Industry leaders are concerned with saving that old, magnificent ash tree in your backyard that shades your home, protecting your children from fire ant attacks at recess, and enhancing the physical beauty of treasured historical landmarks.

We at Bayer Environmental Science, a business division of Bayer CropScience LP, are proud to support the Green Industry in its daily endeavors to uphold environmental quality and preserve our lush forests, manicured neighborhoods, beautiful golf courses, and spotless athletic fields.



Neil Cleveland

Collectively, we must resolve that education is instrumental in this vision of the future. Bayer doggedly works with its academic counterparts to gather the latest research, and through ingenuity and innovation, we are able offer Green Industry professionals the latest products and technology that help save time and money. For example, Bayer recently launched TopChoice® plus Fertilizer, providing two solutions in one application – fire ant control and turf nourishment. We also introduced Merit® Tree Injection Insecticide, offering flexibility of pesticide use where soil application is not feasible.

Bayer understands that often it is not enough to just provide these new products and technical training—green industry professionals want to learn

business strategies and tactics to grow their operations. In 2007, the Bayer Lawn Care Institute<sup>™</sup> hosted its inaugural Healthy Lawns, Healthy Business Summits to coach lawn care operators in the most effective business practices to support their bottom lines.

But it does not stop here. The trickle-down education must continue.

Green Industry professionals must relay their industry knowledge to their customers when selling their services. We must address public misconceptions about pesticide use head-on and promote the importance of services such as fighting invasive pests like hemlock woolly adelgid, emerald ash borer or bronze birch borer before they decimate our tree populations and create enormous environmental repercussions.

And most importantly, Green Industry professionals must educate the decision-makers at local, state and federal levels. I challenge you all to become vocal ambassadors for the Green Industry. As a group, we must exercise prudence and forethought, and we must be tenacious in our efforts to establish our presence on Capitol Hill.

Each year, Bayer is proud to participate in PLANET'S Legislative Day on the Hill. This event reinforces the message that the Green Industry strives to sustain our environment and our communities, and we require legislation that permits us to do just that. Additionally, Bayer is proud to support national organizations like Project Evergreen in efforts to collectively engage the Green Industry in touting to the American public the universal benefits of well-maintained green spaces and promoting the contributions of those who preserve and enhance these healthy landscapes. We must all work as one unified voice to prevent our beautiful landscapes from being reduced only to pages in the history books.

Neil Cleveland
Director, U.S. Green Business
Bayer Environmental Science

# ENVIRONMENTAL S T E W A R D S

Lawn and landscape professionals are the protectors and nurturers of all things green, making their daily jobs vital to everyone who enjoys and treasures the outdoors.

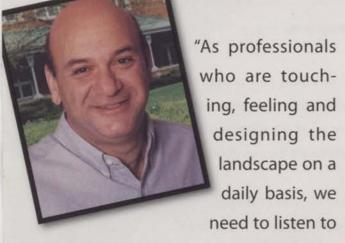
By the very nature of their daily jobs of installing plants, maintaining turf and tending to every aspect of the green spaces that are all around us, lawn care and landscape professionals are the true stewards of the environment.

So it's no surprise that throughout the past eight years of Lawn & Landscape Leadership issues, many of the leaders featured on these pages have expressed their thoughts on the environment – from creating it to preserving it to maintaining it to standing up for it.

This year, as part of our issue theme, each of the six Leadership Award winners shares their thoughts on how they view and contribute to the environment. But, in addition to this, we couldn't ignore the words of the previous 59 winners. Here, we showcase their wise words as a means of inspiration for you as you go out each day to protect and serve the environment that not only drew you into the business, but keeps you building and growing it and the industry each day.

#### NATURE IN ALL IT'S SPLENDOR.

The love of the outdoors and the inspiration it provides has lured many men and women into the industry.



clients and then challenge them with a multitude of ideas that meet the criteria and exceed what they have planned." – Frank Mariani, Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill., 2006 winner



"We don't talk enough about the psychological and physiological benefits of plants. In terms of economics, everyone knows that food is essential, but we have not learned enough about the economic benefits of non-food plants." – Connie Hom, Buckingham Greenery,

Buckingham, Va., 2005 winner

"I would call myself an urban environmentalist. I believe in recreating a beautiful side of

the urban environment, and I think there is a great benefit to that beauty for our own well being. This benefit is what draws people to go for walks in the park and work in their gardens." – Dave Hanson, Valley Crest Cos, Calabasas, Calif.,

1999 winner



"That love for nature is what drives us." -

Laurie Broccolo, Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care, Rochester, N.Y., 1999 winner

"There's such a variety in this business – you can pick and choose what you do everyday.

You can go out and see your work and be proud of what you've done. In this business, you can see the green lawns, you see the results." – Gary LaScalea, GroGreen Lawn, Tree & Shrub Care, Plano, Texas, 2001 winner

"I recognized that in whatever I did, if I did it well, I could have a positive affect on people and what I did had a positive impact on the world around me. If I took



care of a park or a plant or a tree, I helped create an environment that people could relax in and enjoy."

– Bill Arman, Landscape Development, Valencia, Calif., 2006 winner



"My happiest times are when I'm on the job or on a tractor and taking an ugly site and turning it into an aesthetic

beauty." – Lou Kobus, Fox Run Nurseries, Mount Vernon, Va., 2004 winner

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY.**

Through their work, lawn care and landscape professionals exhibit a tremendous sense of pride for their environment.



"Being an environmental steward means you have to think outside of the box. I've always fulfilled the role for my customers as the community turf doctor. When they have any kind of problem, I try to

diagnose it and find out how I can treat the symptoms in order to make the property easier to maintain.

"We are the people out there every day doing something to promote the environment. Promoting the environment is a challenge that makes us stronger." – Phil Fogarty, Weed Man/Crowley's Vegetation Management, Cleveland, Ohio, 1999 winner

"Some people think that because I apply pesticides, I am a bad person. I don't think they know or want to know what I'm really about. Working in the green industry, I have an opportunity to make an impact on the way a small

part of our world looks, and I take that responsibility seriously." – Tim Doppel, Atwood Lawn Care, Sterling Heights, Mich., 1999 winner





"Ultimately, environmental stewardship protects our employees, their families and the communities in which they work and live. Environmental stewardship means we must provide the training and skills to develop people at all levels in our enterprises. It requires that we utilize the very best equipment that can be provided for the use of pesticide applications when and where required. It also requires that we respect the concerns of our customers, neighbors and environment as we conduct our services on a daily basis." – Norman Goldenberg, TruGreen, Memphis, Tenn., 1999 winner

"I like taking a lawn that looked bad, and in a short time, making it look great. It's about creating an environment where there's pride of ownership." – Harold Enger, Spring-Green Lawn Care, Plainfield, Ill., 2005 winner



#### TAKING ACTION.

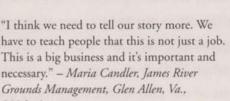
A passion for the outdoors and commitment to beautifying and preserving the environment leads many green industry professionals to defend their industry in order to affect positive change.

> "There is a risk associated with everything we do. But if we use the materials properly, we can reduce that risk and help

the environment. Recently, we started using a blower to clean the sidewalk after applying granular fertilizer and our customers liked the idea, forcing our competition

to do it too." - Tom Tolkacz, Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care, Denver, Colo., 1999 winner

> "I think we need to tell our story more. We This is a big business and it's important and necessary." - Maria Candler, James River Grounds Management, Glen Allen, Va., 2004 winner





"When you're walking on the turf, you're actually walking on the soil and on the earth - it's an amazing feeling." - Bill Leuenberger, The Chalet, Wilmette, Ill., 2003 winner

"The hardest thing I deal with - and I've taken it to heart sometimes, even though I try not to let it get to me - is how activists can just tear us down without any real proof or any real justification. I've had people tell me that their goal is to put us out of business. I know we will never

continue to provide green spaces and healthy lawns for customers, and I defend that." - Chris Lemcke, Weed-Man, Scarbor-

ough, Ontario, Canada, 2003

winner

go out of business and we will



"I've always been concerned about doing what's right for the environment.

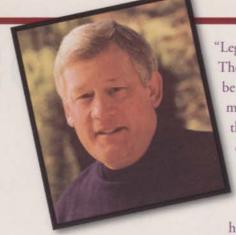
"Landscape managers are not just working with a commodity. We're stewarding living things that deserve our respect for the many values that they provide." - Linda Novy, past president of Gardeners' Guild, San Rafael, Calif., 2000 winner



"I think a way to profile what we do in the green industry is to the forefront." - Alan White, Turf Systems, Burlington, Ontario, Canada, 2006 winner



"If your research is good and you truly believe in it, then stick up for it. This process can take a long time, so you have to have patience. I think it would be worse to find out you could have changed something or that someone today figured out what you already knew yesterday, but had the guts to present it and defend it." - Joe Vargas, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Mich., 2001 winner



"Legislating is a worthwhile process.

The series of opportunities I've had to be able to represent our industry and my company in the industry and in the public, either in answering issues, describing our industry and trying to bridge good science and what we do as an industry vs. what might be misinformation or perception, has been valuable. I try to promote

our industry for the true benefits that we provide as a service and the value of turf and landscape." – Gary Clayton, Agriliance, Kennesaw, Ga., 2000 winner

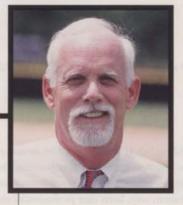


"Today, the assumption is that lawns don't provide value and that inputs we use to care for lawns and landscapes pose too much risk. What makes this theory palpable to civic leaders is that it makes people feel good when they act out against lawns in their communities. It's as if they feel like they're doing something positive for the environment but those 'feel goods' are based on misinformation. Current industry and academic leaders, as well as the leaders of the future have to get more engaged in public dialogues to challenge these assumptions." - Kurk Hurto, TruGreen, Delaware, Ohio, 2004



"Giving back is an obligation of a business that's successful, particularly when you've learned so much from the business. You can't be in an industry that many years and survive without giving back. You can't just keep taking." – Dale Amstutz, Northern Lawns Corp., Omaha, Neb., 2001 winner

winner



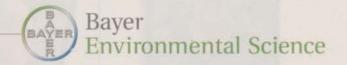
"The image of our profession is not the best in the world, and there is a need for people to

learn and develop skills to project a good image to their customers, the community and the legislature. We have to act responsibly and put our best foot forward.

"Also, there is so much misinterpretation in politics and the regulatory and legislative process that you have to go down there and offer yourself as a source of information. We make our living off of the land. You can't sweep problems under the carpet." – Sam Lang, Fairway Green Lawn Care, Raleigh, N.C., 2001 winner



"You have to go out there and you have to keep singing your song and telling your story over and over again. You can't give up because those who are against us won't, and if we get tired and quit, we lose." – Bob Ottley, One Step Tree & Lawn Care, N. Chili, N.Y., 2005 winner



### IT'S ALL RELATIVE

Lawn Master uses TopChoice® insecticide to battle fire ants in Florida.

cheduling family vacations can be an occupational hazard when you manage a family-owned business, but when a surprise visit from out-of-town ants turns into a permanent stay, lawn care professionals are challenged to control these pests.

Last year, the Red Imported Fire Ant hit a little too close to home for Scott Williams, vice president of Lawn Master, a lawn care business that he manages with his father, Joe, and brother, Jeff. During a rainy summer soccer game, Williams' son was attacked by a colony of fire ants when he accidentally disturbed a mound in the middle of the playing field.

"I guess the rain stirred up the ants," says Williams. "My son fell down right onto a fire ant mound and didn't realize it until a couple minutes later when he had more than 70 bites all over his body. It was a real eye-opener for me."

Scott Williams' father, Joe, founded Lawn Master in Pensacola, Fla. in 1981. Scott worked for his father's business during college and summer vacations. Soon after graduation from the University of West Florida in 1985, he joined the Lawn Master family operations. "My dad offered me the opportunity to use my degree in accounting to manage our finances, and I've been here ever since," says Williams. "My older brother, Jeff, graduated with a degree in turfgrass science from Mississippi State University. It works out great because I'm the inside guy, and he's the outside guy."

Williams and his 30 employees, six of whom are family members, service the Florida Panhandle from the Alabama state line to Destin, Fla., where the fire ant is an infamous insect.

UNWELCOME VISITORS. With more than 3,500 lawn care accounts, Lawn Master services customers from mid-Feb-





Twenty million people are stung annually by fire ants, and 10 to 15 percent of the population is allergic to these stings. Photos: April Noble, Antweb.org, www. forestryimages.org

ruary to early December with six annual lawn treatments, three shrub care treatments, and one application for fire ant control. Although 90 percent of the clientele is residential, Williams says the 5 percent of school athletic fields his crew services tend to be the most difficult because they require year-round attention.

"Most fields are multi-purpose," says Williams. "They are shared between the baseball, soccer and football teams and the marching band. Fire ants are a big problem in Florida, and school districts have zero tolerance for mounds on their properties because they have to keep the students safe."

Four years ago, Williams was looking for a professional product that would efficiently control fire ants. He quickly took notice of TopChoice® insecticide, which offers protection from fire ants for up to a full year. Unlike other professional treat-



The imported red fire ant. Photo: April Noble, Antweb.org, www.forestryimages.org

ments, TopChoice remains in the soil to prevent new colonies from forming and is impervious to the habitual rainfall in Florida. Lawn Master applied the insecticide to a local campground, and after the product eliminated the fire ant problem, Williams incorporated the fire ant application as part of his standard lawn care package. He now enthusiastically promotes TopChoice to customers who have children or pets frequenting the outdoor areas.

Fire ants, with colonies comprised of approximately 100,000 to 500,000 workers, are extremely aggressive by nature and will attack when disturbed. Unlike most other stinging insects, they have the ability to sting multiple times. Twenty million people are stung annually by fire ants, and one-third of fire ant victims are under the age of 13. Ten to 15 percent of the general population is allergic to fire ant stings, which can cause severe swelling, epileptic seizures, respiratory problems and, in some cases, even death. Children are at high risk because they don't pay attention to where fire ants may be foraging in a playing field or sandy area.

ADDED FAMILY VALUE. Lawn Master has grown rapidly since its infancy, but when market competition intensified, the company was forced to search for new, innovative ways to bolster the efficiency of the overall operations. Most recently, Williams was one of the first lawn care operators to purchase TopChoice<sup>®</sup> plus Fertilizer, ordering 50,000 pounds of the new combination pesticide and fertilizer product at the 2006 Green Industry Expo (GIE) in Columbus, Ohio in November.

Williams first began investigating the formulated product when he realized that his crew could be saving time and money by applying fertilizer and fire ant control products together. Previously, Lawn Master did not make an insecticide application until the middle of the lawn care season, which required employees to make three separate trips to each property – one for fire ant control, one for fertilizer, and one for herbicide. He believes the new pesticide and fertilizer combination will increase productivity and also eliminate the time crunch his company faces every year with last-minute fire ant applications.

"Knowing we have a product we can put out there once a year for fire ants saves us repeat service calls. We expect to save money on the time and labor to go back out there and re-treat," says Williams.

#### HONORARY FAMILY MEMBERS.

When adding new products to their service cache, Williams stresses the importance of extensive employee training to allow them to share product information with customers. Lawn Master coaches its technicians with classroom-style instruction and hands-on field training, sends them to local, state, regional and association meetings, and brings in manufacturer representatives to discuss new products and cutting-edge lawn care techniques for pest and weed management.

"It's good for our crews to receive training from experts outside the Lawn Master office," says Williams. "We want our employees to feel like they are part of the family. We want them to have a vested interest in the company's success."

Although Lawn Master did not begin using TopChoice® plus Fertilizer until spring of this year, Williams' crews are learning the methods for application. Williams anticipates that the combination product will increase his company's annual revenue.

Williams notes, "Although it's challenging at times to work with your family and keep everyone from butting heads, it's nice to have success within the family."



All politicians know their voting constituents hold the keys to their political futures. Politicians, particularly on the local level, care about constituent concerns a lot—and have created elaborate mechanisms to track constituent's likes and dislikes.

Therefore, the best way to affect legislation is to directly and effectively communicate with your lawmakers. It is important to start with your own elected officials first. Then, if you wish to express your views to others who don't directly represent you, you can do so. E-mail makes that quite easy.

First, determine who is the elected Senator and the two assembly members from the area where you live and from the area of your place of business. Identify your legislators. Secondly, record this information and, if you are planning to participate in any mailing efforts, print sheets of labels with their names and addresses; save the e-mail information in the "favorites" site of your computer. Thirdly, as you will often not be speaking directly to your elected official but rather to a member of his/her staff, record the name and title, if any, of that staff person and record this information where you keep the information of the elected officials. (Contact with legislative staff is critical, as staff has important input with lawmakers and expertise in most issues on which legislators will vote – particularly tax related issues.)

Once you have this information, communicating effectively is the key to getting your message heard. Here are some tips on effectively communicating with your elected officials:

1. WRITE EFFECTIVE LETTERS. The written letter is one of the easiest ways to let lawmakers know your views on specific issues, encourage them to vote your way, and advise them that you, your family and friends will watch how they vote on these issues from now until Election Day. Letters present your position in a clear and concise manner, without interruption. Keep your letter short and to the point, with just enough facts and figures to make your statement effective. Only make statements you can support with evidence. State that this specific issue affects you personally, and make it clear that you live, work and vote in his/her district. Since

Effectively sharing your message with elected officials takes planning and having confidence in your position within your company and the industry.



you are writing as a local business person, use your company letterhead. If, in addition to a local business owner, you are also a volunteer fireman, a member of a civic organization or a PTA or church member, mention that as well in the course of the letter. Use anything you think will enhance your message and ensure your concerns are taken seriously.

Here are three tips to refer to when drafting your letter:

- How to address your elected representative: Address letters to "Honorable \_\_\_\_\_\_," and begin the letter "Dear Senator" or "Dear Assembly Member." If writing to a Committee Chair or Speaker of the House, address him as "Mr. Chairman" or "Mr. Speaker."
- Be brief, specific and always be courteous. Letters should not exceed one page, and the purpose of your letter should be stated clearly in the first paragraph. If your letter pertains to a specific issue, identify that as specifically as possible. To make sure your letter is as effective as possible, always be courteous, even if you disagree with your representative's position.
- Ask the legislator to respond in writing. Always ask for a response to your letter. This gives you a hard copy of your legislator's position on this issue for future reference and to document his/her position.
- 2. COMMUNICATING BY E-MAIL. Most local lawmakers can receive e-mail messages. Transmitting an effective e-mail message is similar to writing a letter, though this format is less formal and allows you to be brief in your message. Speed and brevity are the major advantages of e-mail. Be prepared for some lawmakers to "respond" to your e-mail message with a

canned reflector message that may not specifically address your concern. Whether you receive a specific response to your message or not, request your lawmakers' position in writing so you can document his or her position.

- 3. MAKE EFFECTIVE TELEPHONE CALLS. As bills move through the legislative process, there may not be enough time to write your legislators prior to a key vote. When you need to contact your lawmakers immediately, the telephone is the most effective means to communicate your views. Here are some telephone tips:
- Always identify yourself as a constituent. As someone
  who lives and votes in the district of the lawmaker being
  contacted, your phone call carries the most weight. Calls to
  representatives outside your home or business area can also
  be helpful, particularly if the elected official serves on the
  legislative committee that will consider the issue. However,
  always contact your own legislators first.
- State your point quickly and clearly. Limit your telephone call to one subject; be brief but specific. Your phone call should last at most only a couple of minutes. State the reason you are calling, giving a brief description of the issue. Remember, always be courteous.
- Be sure to give your name and home address and request that your legislator respond with a letter. You took the time to call, so politely ask the legislator to take the time to respond. Ask for his/her position in writing on this important issue.
- You should identify yourself as either a business owner or employee of a local business. By identifying yourself as a

voting constituent and as a business owner/operator/manager, as well as a volunteer fireman, civic group member or a PTA, VFW or American Legion member, lawmakers will find it hard to dismiss your call.

#### 4. PARTICIPATE IN PERSONAL MEETINGS.

The most effective way to articulate your views and to affect the outcome of legislation is to speak with your lawmaker face-to-face. While personal visits are extremely productive, they require planning to ensure success. When planning a personal visit, do the following:

- Schedule an appointment. Elected officials have extremely hectic schedules. To increase the chance that you will speak directly with your legislator, call in advance to set up an appointment. Most personal meetings will be scheduled at your lawmakers' District Offices, so contact these offices to make your appointment.
- Begin by explaining how the specific issue will directly affect you. Use specific examples to show how a tax will affect your business, your employees and your current occupants and future occupants, for example.
- Always be polite. Nothing will hurt your cause more that visiting a lawmaker and being rude or unpleasant. Even if you disagree with the position of your legislator, be courteous. Dress professionally to convey the seriousness of your visit. Always try to leave a written description of the issue and your position with the legislator.
- Follow up your visit with a letter. Regardless of how your meeting goes, send a letter to your legislator thanking him/her for his/her time, and reiterating the points you discussed. This gesture will go a long way, and possibly allow for future meetings.
- If your lawmaker is unavailable, meet with staff. Your legislator may not be available for a meeting; if not, schedule an appointment with the staff member who is responsible for your specific issue of concern. Legislative staff will bring your concerns to the legislator, have influence on legislators' voting decisions and often have helpful expertise on your issue. Send a follow-up letter to the staff member you met. Many legislative staff members later run for office themselves, so these relationships can be invaluable in the future.

 Bring sufficient materials to share with your lawmaker and staff. These materials bolster our position and serve as valuable reference materials after your meeting has concluded.

#### 5. ATTEND LOCAL COMMUNITY MEETINGS.

Lawmakers sometimes host community meetings in their districts – especially when particular issues like taxes become contentious – to solicit feedback from constituents. Political clubs, civic groups, churches and tenant or homeowner groups also host meetings. Such meetings are prime opportunities for you to publicly ask your lawmaker to state his/her position on the issues for the record in an open forum. These guidelines may be helpful when you are attending community meetings:

- Place your name on the attendance list and attend the meeting. Write your legislator and ask to be put on the invitation list for the particular community meeting. If they do not have such a list, ask for information on the next meeting; when you receive information that a community meeting is scheduled, be sure to attend, and share this information with your county coordinators, so that they can notify other landscape professionals to attend as well.
- Prepare questions ahead of time. Write your questions on index cards beforehand, such as asking for the legislators' position on issues and updates on those issues. You do not need to have a specific bill number, but merely refer to the issue titles.
- Get an answer. Ask your question clearly, and as simply as possible, e.g., "Do you support or oppose this issue?" If your legislator doesn't answer your question sufficiently, politely repeat the question.
- Follow-up with a letter. Whether you had the opportunity to ask your question or not, follow up with a letter to your legislator and tell him or her that you attended the community meeting. Ask your question in your letter even if you had the opportunity to do so at the meeting, or address his response to any issue another constituent may have asked. This letter will ensure your legislator takes you and your views seriously, and will allow you to obtain a written response addressing your concerns that you should also share with your fellow industry members.

Remember: every letter, e-mail, phone call and personal visit is logged by staff to show the legislator how constituents feel about an issue. – New Jersey Self Storage Association

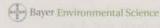
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# tips for talk

Understanding the fundamentals of business communication can improve how people hear you and how you hear others so your message is heard loud and clear.

Most of us communicate in a free-flowing style - we stay with topics for as long as they interest us, and we move on when they don't. That may be OK for everyday communication, but when it comes to business communication, it's a good idea to bring a map along so you don't get lost.

Communicating effectively can be one of your greatest assets when you're running a small business. Ineffective communication, conversely, can be your greatest liability. Once you understand just what someone is saying and how he is saying it, talking with one another becomes free and easy, with no need to guess or interpret what is being said.

THE THREE MAIN STYLES OF COMMUNICATION. The first step to becoming a more effective communicator is to learn about the three main "voices" or styles of communication - one-under, one-up and equal. For business communication in the U.S., the optimal voice to use is equal. In other parts of the world, one-under or one-up may be more appropriate.

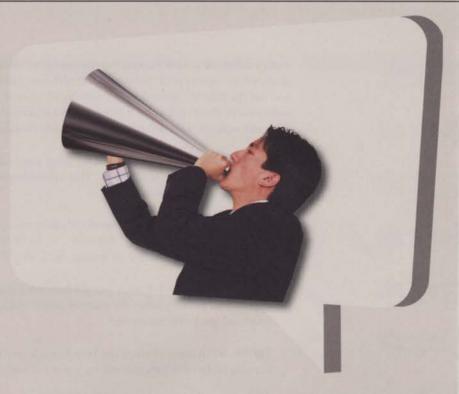
- 1. One-under communication is a style that is typified by minimizing what you are saying, or putting yourself or your words "one-under" in importance to another person's. The intent here is to focus on the other person in order to gain greater clarity about what he or she is saying. "Seek first to understand than to be heard" is an axiom that would apply here. This style of communication is great for diffusing stressful situations when communication is going awry and people are frustrated because they are not feeling heard.
- 2. One-up communication is an aggressive style that is often accompanied with raised voices and excessive reinforcements, absolutes and "you" statements. This type of communication is often considered a boundary-busting communication style. This is because the person speaking thinks what he or she is saying is more important than what anyone else is saying. This style of delivery will automatically shut down

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By Susan L.

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the avenues of communication or incite angry retorts. Not surprisingly, it should be used sparingly, if at all.

**3. Equal communication** is a style that is epitomized by direct and respectful communication and the use of "I" statements and reflective listening skills. Its purpose is to open up the avenues of communication and encourage dialogue. At its core is the understanding that each person matters and what he or she has to say is valuable. "Two heads are better than one" is the adage at the heart of this communication style. Here, all points of view are welcomed, considered and appreciated.

THE DIALOGUE. The next step to becoming a more effective communicator is to learn to practice "the dialogue." Good communication consists of three distinct parts – what the speaker says, what the listener hears,

Sometimes, what is perfectly clear to the speaker is heard another way by the listener. That is why it is so important to practice reflecting or repeating back to the speaker what was said. Here's how the dialogue works:

- The first part is for the speaker to articulate directly and clearly what he or she wants to say.
- The second part is for the listener to reflect back to the speaker what he or she heard. Useful phrases that help the listener put what the speaker said into his or her own

words include: "What I just heard is. . . " and "Let me see if I understand what you're saying. . . "

3. The third – and probably most important – part is for the listener to check with the speaker by asking, "Is that correct?" That one question will eliminate any misunderstandings or assumptions on the part of the listener. It will also give the speaker the chance to revise and clarify what he or she said.

Of course, it isn't necessary to have this kind of dialogue after every sentence or with every person. It is good to keep

#### **FOCUS ON THE BEHAVIORS**

you observe – not the opinions of others. Resist the urge to press your point by listing the scores of people who agree with you.

this dialogue in mind, though, when you are confused about or need to confirm what is being said, find yourself not being heard or know that something is "off," even if you're not sure what. In these cases, start the dialogue to check things out, gain clarity and get back on track.

**7 TIPS FOR TALK.** Finally, in addition to the dialogue, there are seven other things to consider during a conversation. Practicing even one of these seven tips will

make a difference in your business communication effectiveness. Consistently applying three or four of them will so improve your communication with your partners, clients and customers that you will see and feel the difference immediately. Practicing all seven of these "tips for talk" will make you a delight to be around. People will feel as if they have your undivided attention and that you really listen to them. That will make all of the difference in the world to the success of your small business.

Tip #1: Address issues as they come up. Don't piggy-back unresolved issues from the past onto the present topic of discussion. This will confuse the issue and emotionally charge the situation. Stay on point.

Tip #2: Use "I" statements and speak only from your perspective. Don't overload your speech with absolutes such as: "You never . . . "or "You always . . . " These kind of blanket statements are rarely true and are divisive. Stick with "I."

Tip #3: Focus on the behaviors you observe - not the opinions of others. Resist the urge to press your point by listing the scores of people who agree with you and your point of view. Stand and speak only for yourself.

Tip #4: When someone else is speaking, listen. If you're interrupting or forming your response as the other person is talking, you're not listening. Give the speaker your full attention.

Tip #5: Check in from time to time to make sure everyone is on the same page. Don't assume the other person is in agreement with you or what you are saying. Check it out.

Tip #6: Follow the bouncing ball. Don't change the subject without a nod in the direction of the previous topic of discussion. Mind your segue.

Tip #7: Be open to the possibility of another perspective. There is no absolute truth. Truth is relative.

Practicing being an effective speaker and attentive listener will go a long way toward keeping the avenues of communication open and relationships productive. Taking time to communicate effectively and in an equal voice will help ensure a smooth exchange of information with partners, clients and customers.

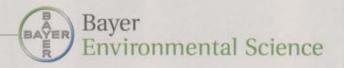
The author is a small business startup coach and author of "The Accidental Preneur: Discovering Your Inner Samurai." For ideas and tips, sign up for her free e-Zine at http:// successfulsmallbizowners.



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### PREVENTIVE CONTROL

Armada™ protects trees from diseases with a 28-day residual control.

al Rao, Ph.D., manager of research and technical development for The Davey Tree Expert Co., headquartered in Kent, Ohio, has treated his share of ornamental diseases over the years. From rust and scab to leaf spot, Dr. Rao is among the industry leaders in research for methods to control these destructive fungi. Through the years, one of the key components to Rao's research has been determining the best timing for fungicide applications.

PREVENTIVE VS. CURATIVE. Rao has seen best results with ornamental disease control when products are used on a preventive basis. "Control of ornamental diseases is difficult when using a curative application," says Rao. "To ensure the health and continued growth of a tree, a preventive application offers the best chance of success."

Recently, Rao and his team studied the benefits of a preventive fungicide application on plots of crab apple and hawthorn trees with scab and rust problems. Rao and his team used a control group of untreated crab apple and hawthorns and a group treated with preventive fungicide applications for the trial.

The untreated crab apple test plot showed visible infestation of scab - a fungal infection identified by discolored lesions on the leaves

and fruit. Similarly, the plot of untreated hawthorn trees suffered significant rust growth - a fungal infection identified by discoloration of the leaves, typically from yellow to orange. In both untreated groups, more than 70 percent showed signs of infection.

While some fungicides can be used for curative control, once a disease or pest has infested a tree, there is not much time for action," stresses Rao. "If no fungicide has been used, disease will lead to defoliation."

"In both cases, the fungus is clearly visible through discoloration of the leaves and fruit, leaving it unsightly and resulting in a reduction in the leaf-count of the tree, making it vulnerable to winter injury or other diseases."

To protect itself and maintain photosynthesis, the tree must produce new leaves before the season is complete. But, to do this, the tree must exert additional energy, leaving it susceptible to additional diseases in the process. This is where the value of preventive application is evident.



Diseased tree leaves before fungicide treatment,

The test groups of crab apple and hawthorn trees were treated with a preventive application of Armada™ fungicide. Applied by foliar spray, the fungicide was used at rates of 3, 6 and 9 ounces per 100 gallons. The product was applied about every 28 days for the crab apple trees on April 17, May 17 and June 7; and twice for the hawthorn trees on May 25 and June 26.

As rates increased, researchers noted a correlation to the disease controlled. "Results at the rate of 3 ounces yielded fair control, much better than that of the untreated ornamentals. However,

> the success rate increased dramatically at the higher application rates," says Rao. (At higher rates, some trees displayed no symptoms at all.)

28 DAYS OF CONTROL. A typical fungicide has between a 10- and 21-day residual control, leaving trees with a gap in coverage. If the tree produces new growth following residual control, it receives no additional fungicide protection, making it susceptible to new diseases. This is where the benefit of a product with a longer residual, such as Armada fungicide, becomes apparent. "The 28-day residual achieved with Armada is ideal for protection in the early growing season, when ornamental diseases like scab and rust are at their most destructive stage," notes Rao.

With protection against disease early in the season, the tree is less susceptible later when diseases can be just as damaging if the tree is already injured.



"The 28-day residual achieved with Armada fungicide is ideal for protection in the early growing season for ornamental diseases." - Bal Rao

# COMMUNICATION CHAIN OF REACTIONS

As a business communicator, you can react differently to what's being said to you by your peers, employees and even adversaries and, in turn, produce better, more worthwhile and rewarding communication.

By Susan L. Reid

uclear reactor — it's an intentional play on words used to describe how someone feels inside when they are reacting to what is being said or heard—nuclear. Once something is said, the spark ignites a chain of reactions that feed on each other and then, "boom," you're into fight or flight mode.

There are, however, three things you can do to curb your nuclear reaction. The first step is to actually understand what is going on, the second is to identify when you are in reactor mode, and the third is to follow the advice of your local firefighter and stop, drop and roll.

**REACTION VS. RESPONSE.** Here's how people talk about the difference between a reaction and a response:

- . We react out of emotion and respond out of wisdom.
- A reaction is a knee-jerk, automatic action. A response is more thoughtfully considered.
- · We react emotionally and respond mindfully.

The difference between react and response is pretty black and white. We all know, by how our body responds, when we are in reaction mode – our gut clenches, chest constricts, breathing gets shallow, jaw gets tense, blood pressure increases, and our face gets red. Sometimes, even our fists clench as our body gets ready for fight or flight. While that may be appropriate when an actual, real threat is at hand, in most cases when conversations get heated, the threat is perceived. After all, folks, words don't kill – people do.

WHAT IS A REACTION? The most important thing to understand about a reaction is that when we react, we are teacting to something

REACTORS	RESPONDERS		
Make assumptions from an iron-clad point of view.	Remain open to other perspectives and opinions.		
Defend themselves.	Explain situations.		
Often repeats themselves, getting louder and more animated each time.	Are clear and direct communicators, preferring not to escalate the situation.		
Use judgmental and defensive phrases such as: "What did you do?" or "You never told me that."	Use inviting, open-ended questions such as: "Could you tell me more about that?"		
Need to be right.	Want to be heard.		
Place blame outwardly by using "you" statements.	Take personal responsibility by using "I" statements.		
Are concerned about outcomes.	Are open to possibilities.		
Make emotional, impulsively rash decisions.	Make considered, well-reasoned decisions.		
Use judgmental language like: "You always do this." or "I never thought you would."	Use non-judgmental, non-inflammatory languag like "I perceive" or "It seems to me that"		
Get angry when you don't agree with them.	Make considered, well-reasoned decisions.		

from our past that is still unresolved and causing us pain. Often called "hot buttons," when these points of pain are activated, we move out of calm, rational self and into an automatic fight or flight mode. The defensive, reactionary response is a way of protecting that unresolved issue being re-activated. It's like putting a thick, 10-ply steel bandage over a little cut in order to protect it from getting bumped — a reaction that is out of proportion to the original event and the present issue.



Photo: Maksim Shmeljov/istock.com

In the chart above are the top 10 ways to identify if you are reacting or responding to a request.

**STOP, DROP & ROLL.** Once you are able to identify when you are in reaction

mode, the next step is to stop, drop and roll. Fire fighters use this strategy when talking with people about what to do if they find their clothes on fire, and it is good advice when you feel your five-alarm bell go off, too. Here's how it works:

1. If you are in a fire situation and find your clothes on fire, stop. Don't flame the fire by running or increasing energy. Good advice for reactors, too. Though your natural instinct may be to fight for your position, defend yourself or run from conflict, resist the urge to do so.

2. If you are in a fire situation and find your clothes on fire, the next thing firefighters tell you to do is drop. Since noxious fumes and heat rise, the importance of dropping is so you can breathe cooler air and not burn your lungs. Great advice for reactors, too, who can go from zero to 60 in three seconds. By dropping you step back and allow yourself time to calm down. Drop and go for a walk, write in a journal or listen to soothing music.

3. Once you are down on the ground, the next thing firefighters tell you to do is roll. Rolling is the best way to smother and put out the fire. For reactors, that would be to put out the internal fire. Then, when the internal fire is out, ask yourself these questions:

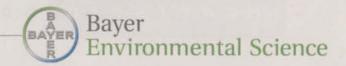
- What was the spark that ignited me?
- · What's the real source of my fire?
- How can I deal with this situation differently?

When rolling, consider these tips:

- Be willing to suspend judgment for a moment and just listen. This puts you in response mode.
- Know it is never too late to stop, drop and roll whenever you find yourself reacting when you want to be responding.
- Figure out your "hot buttons" and adopt a "keep calm" strategy for when they get pushed.

By adopting the firefighter method, you can deal with stressful situations and conversations in a more positive and productive manner. As your skills increase, your sense of empowerment and confidence will also increase. Instead of feeling as if you are controlled by other people and the situations around you, you will see you can be in charge of your responses. Keep in mind that though you may not be able to control what people say or how they say things, you can control your responses to them.

The author is a small business startup coach and author of "The Accidental Preneur: Discovering Your Inner Samurai." For more tips, sign up for her free e-Zine at http://successfulsmallbizowners.com



# CHANGING FOR THE BETTER

Royal Turf relies on Allectus® for season-long control of turf insects.

ith 20 years of lawn care experience, Lawrence Neville of Royal Turf Custom Lawn Care in Stirling, N.J. has seen many changes in the industry. "From employee retention to new product developments to new application techniques, I've seen every aspect of this industry evolve." As president and owner, Neville focuses on industry trends by staying abreast of emerging pests and new treatments for habitual offenders, such as chinch bugs. A blend of customer service and competitive know-how has allowed his company to provide top-rate service to a growing clientele.

Royal Turf is a family-owned business that has serviced high-end residential properties in the Stirling area for 35 years. Once Neville took over the business in 1987, customer satisfaction governed his business model.

After Neville purchased two neighboring lawn care companies in 1999, his client base rapidly expanded. Most of his customers, however, remain within a 20-mile radius of his office due to high fuel costs, inefficient labor costs incurred for driving time, and wear and tear on the company vehicles. His six certified, licensed technicians maximize efficiency by working from the road, utilizing laptops, PDAs, cell phones and GPS systems.

To keep pace with the ever-changing industry, Neville provides year-long training to his employees, encourages them to take classes at nearby Rutgers University, promotes attendance at nearby seminars and conducts regular safety meetings and check-ups.

With sales reaching more than \$1 million in 2006, Neville plans to purchase, or possibly build, a new facility later this year.

"In many ways, I've revamped my business over the past few years," he adds. "I've offered new, customized application programs, branched out to service commercial properties, developed my advertising tactics and offered add-on services such as tick control and shrub care."

**SEEING IS BELIEVING.** Each season, particularly during the warmer months, Neville and his crew face a new set of challenges. Along with the heat, the New Jersey summer brings a wealth of insect problems, including annual chinch bug outbreaks.

Fine fescue and perennial ryegrass lawns are often targeted by



Lawrence Neville, the president of Royal Turf Custom Lawn Care, believes in staying proactive and constantly adapting to meet the needs of his customers.

hairy chinch bugs, the most common chinch bug species found in the region. Most prevalent in hot, dry turf areas, the insects insert their beaks into grass blades and suck the plant juices. As they remove the fluids, they release a toxin that causes yellow or brown patches in the turf. Damaged areas often resemble those of drought stress or brown patch. In 2006, Neville began searching for a new product to control these outbreaks.

After researching Allectus® insecticide, which provides effective pest control both above and below the surface, Neville tested it on a 50-acre condominium site. "We had awesome results," he recalls. "We sprayed the front and sides of each lawn in the complex, and there were virtually no brown spots. We've continued to use Allectus insecticide and have been extremely happy with the outcome."

Neville relies on the product for season-long, residual control of chinch bugs and other insects, such as Japanese beetles.

**LOOKING AHEAD.** As Neville looks to the future, he expects his business to parallel the changing trends in the industry. With the help of a growing advertising budget, a recently re-vamped business plan and sales structure, and an improved image – complete with a new logo and re-designed trucks – he is confident in the company's evolution over the coming years.

"Change – especially in this industry – is inevitable," he says. "It is my goal to always stay proactive, constantly changing and adapting to help anticipate and meet the needs of our customers."



LAURIF BROCCOLO Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care Rochester, N.Y.



DAVE HANSON ValleyCrest Cos. Calabasas, Calif.



DAVEY TREE INSTITUTE Kent, Ohio



MICHAEL KERNAGHAN Weed Man Mississauga, Ontario



TIM DOPPEL Atwood Lawn Care Sterling Heights, Mich.



MARK SCHLOSSBERG Pro-Lawns-Plus Baltimore, Md.



PHIL FOGARTY Weed Man/ Crowley's Vegetation Management Cleveland, Ohio



CHRIS SENSKE Senske Tree & Lawn Care Kennewick, Wash.

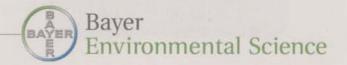


NORMAN GOLDENBERG TruGreen Memphis, Tenn.



TOM TOLKACZ Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care Denver, Colo.

## The Class of 1999



# WITHSTAND THE TEST OF TIME

Finale® herbicide helps Tomlinson Bomberger battle tough turf weeds.

ike Ferro, operations manager for applications at Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care & Landscape, Lancaster, Pa., says the most rewarding part of his job is developing and maintaining client relationships. "We refer to our customers as clients. We have come to believe that the word 'client' represents an ongoing and long-term relationship," he explains.

"With about 85 percent client retention, we feel that we are doing the right things to satisfy their needs and meet their expectations," he adds. "It gives me great satisfaction to be able to answer a client's question or resolve a concern. Keeping each one happy and on board with our company is the most fulfilling part of my job."

Prior to joining Tomlinson Bomberger three years ago, Ferro held a similar position at a J.C. Ehrlich branch located in Montgomery County, Pa. With his customer-oriented attitude and more than 15 years of experience in tree and shrub care, lawn care and vegetation management, Ferro has become a "go-to" person for professional advice on any lawn or landscape issue.

Founded by business partners Clark Tomlinson and Dave Bomberger, the full-service company remains steadfast in its philosophy built on honesty, trust and complete client satisfaction. Located in the sprawling Lancaster farm country, Tomlinson Bomberger is locally owned and operated, and has been since its inception in 1981.

This rich farmland country is home to many rambling lawns and beautiful landscapes. During the warm season, common weed pests, including white clover, oxalis, dandelions, smartweed and mile-aminute, quickly spread across entire lawns and often "pop" along driveway and sidewalk edges. "An ongoing challenge in maintaining these properties is finding the best, most efficient ways to keep them weed-free," explains Ferro.

MAINTAINING HIGH STANDARDS. Ferro is responsible for ordering all application products and materials, scheduling deliveries and overseeing production. A large portion of his time is spent researching and selecting products from the huge assortments of chemical formulations offered by multiple distribution companies.

"My biggest business challenge is staying on top of what is going off the market and learning about new products being offered," he



Mike Ferro prides himself on his company's 85 percent client retention rate.

explains. "It is my responsibility to maintain our high standard of quality products."

While some products have been quickly replaced due to ineffectiveness or inefficiency, others have endured. For 10 years, Ferro has used Finale® herbicide and Roundup® grass and weed killer for fast-acting, postemergent control of annual and perennial grasses and tough turf weeds.

Depending on each customer's needs, Tomlinson Bomberger technicians usually begin postemergent applications of Finale herbicide in April, providing either blanket, spot or edging treatments. Finale is an excellent tank mix component, compatible with many popular herbicides, and can be applied through a wide range of spray equipment.

"When our clients see weeds, they want an immediate solution. It's very hard for them to be satisfied when they still see weeds on their properties," Ferro says. "We've really come to rely on the convenience of the Finale herbicide and Roundup combination because it provides quick, visible knockdown within one to four days. And that is what our clients are looking for – fast results!"

A KEY PLAYER. From selecting the most effective, quality products to providing knowledgeable advice to fellow coworkers to extending excellent customer service to clients, Ferro continues to play an integral part in the success of the thriving business. "I love my job," he says. "I work with a great group of people and interact with a wonderful client base. I'm looking forward to many more years at Tomlinson Bomberger."



BOB ANDREWS The Greenskeeper Carmel, Ind.



TOM LIED Lied's Landscape Design & Development Sussex, Wis.



GARY CLAYTON Agriliance Kennesaw, Ga.



GEORGE MORRELL ValleyCrest Cos. Atlanta, Ga.



RUSSELL FRITH Lawn Doctor Holmdel, N.J.



LINDA NOVY past president Gardeners' Guild San Rafael, Calif.



RON KUJAWA Kujawa Enterprises Cudhay, Wis.



J. LANDON REEVE Chapel Valley Landscape Woodbine, Md.



WAYNE RICHARDS Cagwin & Dorward Novato, Calif.



DALE **AMSTUTZ**Northern Lawns Corp.
Omaha, Neb.



KURT **KLUZNIK** Yardmaster Painesville, Ohio



TOM **BLAND**Bland Landscaping
Cary, N.C.



SAM **LANG**Fairway Green
Lawn Care
Raleigh, N.C.



BILL **HOOPES**Grass Roots Training
Delaware, Ohio



GARY **LASCALEA** GroGreen Lawn, Tree & Shrub Care Plano, Texas



BRUCE **HUNT**The Brickman Group
Long Grove, Ill.



BETH **SEME** Elizabeth A. Seme Latham, N.Y.



ADAM **JONES**Massey Services
Maitland, Fla.



JOSEPH **VARGAS**, Ph.D. Michigan State University East Lansing, Mich.



IOHN BUECHNER Lawn Doctor Holmdel, N.J.



TERRY KURTH Weed Man Middleton, Wis.



TOM DELANEY Professional Landcare Network Marietta, Ga.



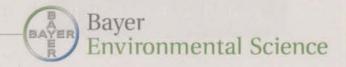
JOE REYNOLDS Black Diamond Lawn Care Toledo, Ohio



SAM FARISON Farison Lawn Care Louisville, Ky.



BARRY TROUTMAN ValleyCrest Cos. Calabasas, Calif.



# CONTROLLING TREE PESTS JUST GOT EASIER

There's a new addition to the Merit® insecticide family.

ayer Environmental Science, a business division of Bayer CropScience, LP, announced that Merit® Tree Injection insecticide is available for immediate sale. The product offers arborists and lawn care professionals a new weapon in controlling pest infestations and contains more active ingredient than other injectable products on the market. Applicators can inject a higher concentration of imidacloprid with less volume, allowing for improved efficiency.

Injected directly into the tree trunk or root flare, the product is translocated throughout the tree to provide systemic protection, making it the fastest way to get Merit into the tree and to the pest. The new formulation allows professionals to choose their preferred method of delivery – either through traditional application, such as soil drench or soil injection, or through this new method.

Merit Tree Injection offers faster curative action and the flexibility to use the product where soil treatment is not feasible. The product's preventive capabilities also make it a valuable tool in keeping healthy trees pest-free.

Merit Tree Injection is designed to work in commonly available trunk injection application equipment and can be purchased in 1-pint bottles. Tree Tech Microinjection Systems will offer the same product as Merit Injectable in pre-filled 3 and 6 milliliter capsules that are essentially ready-to-use.

With one application, Merit Tree Injection can provide yearlong control of a variety of insects including invasive pests, such as the Emerald Ash Borer, Asian Longhorned Beetle and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, as well as aphids, borers, Japanese beetles, lace bugs, psyllids, leaf miners, leaf beetles, leafhoppers and scale insects.



A closer look at the difficult-to-control, invasive Emerald Ash Borer.



MARTY ERBAUGH longtime business owner, former LESCO chairman of the board Strongsville, Ohio



CHRIS LEMCKE Weed Man Scarborough, Ontario



GERALD GROSSI Arborlawn Lansing, Mich.



BILL LEUENBERGER The Chalet Wilmette, III.



TOM HOFER Spring-Green Lawn Care Plainfield, Ill.



CHUCK MCINTIRE Marietta, Ga.



SCOTT **BRICKMAN** The Brickman Group Gaithersburg, Md.



MARIA CANDLER
James River Grounds
Management
Glen Allen, Va.



KIRK **HURTO** TruGreen Delaware, Ohio



LOU **KOBUS**Fox Run Nurseries
Mount Vernon, Va.



JACK **ROBERTSON**Jack Robertson
Lawn Care
Springfield, III.



DAVID **SNODGRASS**Dennis' Seven Dees
Landscaping and Nurseries
Portland, Ore.



DAN FOLEY D. Foley Landscape Walpole, Mass.



DAVID SHETLAR The Ohio State University Columbus, Ohio



JIM MCCUTCHEON HighGrove Partners Austell, Ga.



CONNIE HOM Buckingham Greenery Buckingham, Va.



BOB OTTLEY One Step Tree & Lawn Care N. Chili, N.Y.



HAROLD ENGER Spring-Green Lawn Care Plainfield, III.



BILL **ARMAN** Landscape Development Valencia, Calif.



ED **WALTER**Washington Tree Service
Shoreline, Wash.



GERRY **MCCARTHY** Mac's Landscaping Stoneham, Mass.



ALAN **WHITE**Turf Systems
Burlington, Ontario
Canada



JOHN **GIBSON** Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care Denver, Colo.



FRANK **MARIANI** Mariani Landscape Lake Bluff, III.

# INTRODUCING...

Lawn & Landscape magazine and Bayer Environmental Science are proud to announce the winners of the ninth annual Leadership Awards. These individuals embody the essence of leadership, whether it's in their tireless industry involvement, pioneering spirit, dedication to education, commitment to personal improvement or environmental stewardship. We congratulate and thank them for their outstanding contributions to the lawn and landscape industry.



DEN GARDNER Project EverGreen/TOCA Valencia, Calif.



TOM FOCHTMAN CoCal Landscape Denver, Colo.



ERICA SANTELLA TruGreen Orlando, Fla.



SCOTT JAMIESON The Care of Trees Wheeling, Ill.



RICK BRANDENBURG Turfgrass Entomologist North Carolina State University Raleigh, N.C.



TOM SHOTZBARGER Tomlison Bomberger Lancaster, PA



## Solutions that fit any ornamental pest problem.



When it comes to nasty ornamental pests and diseases, Bayer has the solution—products that will prevent or control every sorry insect or fungus that you may come across, quickly and effectively. Therefore, keeping your customer's landscape healthy and lush and your business healthy and in the black. And all our products are Backed by Bayer<sup>™</sup> and all the support and science that come with it. For more information ask your Bayer Field Sales Representative or visit us at BackedbyBayer.com.









Armada



FORBID



# living proof

Rick Brandenburg manages one of the top turfgrass research programs in the country, working daily to make jobs easier for local lawn care operators, and he's a supportive father and husband to boot. He proves balancing a multifaceted career and versatile life go hand in hand.

potting Rick Brandenburg at a turf industry event is easy. "He's the one who's always smiling, laughing and fooling around," says industry colleague Sam Lang, president of Fairway Green, Raleigh, N.C., describing Brandenburg, professor of entomology, North Carolina State University, as one of the most laid-back guys he's ever met - always arriving in shorts and a polo shirt with his hands in his pockets, never carrying remnants of a stressed or furrowed brow on his tanned complexion, and ready to tell a good joke at a moment's notice.

For a turfgrass entomologist who is known for providing detailed insect research compiled from hours of field work and studies, this isn't typical behavior, Lang explains. "Most turf researchers are not accessible or even funny, for that matter," he says. "And they don't think about a lawn care operator's greatest worries. Instead, they focus on research that is hard to understand, let alone implement in the field. Rick doesn't think like that. If we need him to stop by one of our training meetings to educate our guys on fall armyworms, he'll be there. He understands the immediacy of our jobs and he is also someone who is just so easy to get to know with such an engaging personality."

Brandenburg also doesn't embrace other typical bug doctor traits. "I'm sorry, I don't have an insect collection," he explains, laughing. "And when I get home from work I don't look at the plants in the front of my house to see if bugs are chewing on them. I'm sure my crepe myrtle has Japanese beetles, but it really doesn't bother me."

Indeed, when the business day is done, Brandenburg tries to leave work at work. And he's convinced that this is what makes him a better entomologist during the day.

No one can argue this because the facts support him - in 22 years, he's helped transform North Carolina State University's turfgrass research program from a decent one to No. 1 in the



Name: RICK BRANDENBURG

Age: 52

Title: Professor of entomology **Organization:** North Carolina

**State University** 

Location: Raleigh, N.C.

#### **Career Highlights:**

- · Received his bachelor's of science degree in entomology from Purdue University in 1977
- · Received his Ph.D. in entomology from North Carolina State University in 1981
- · Worked four years as a faculty member at the University of Missouri in Columbia before accepting his current position as professor of

entomology at North Carolina State University in 1985

- Received tenure in 1993
- · Helped establish the Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research and Education in 2001
- · Received the William Neal Reynolds Professorship in 2007
- · Has written several books and book chapters, numerous scientific articles and hundreds of trade journal articles on turfgrass entomology
- · Has lectured on turfgrass insect management in more than 30 states and in foreign countries

country, in addition to stacking up a list of industry achievements that fill a 30page curriculum vitae.

Can a leader in the turf industry also be a leader in life? Brandenburg is living proof this is viable.

WORK ETHIC & EMPATHY. Brandenburg spent his youth on a 100-acre farm in Wabash, Ind. His parents - Frank and Betty - raised vegetable crops like snap beans and sweet corn, as well as some fruits, including raspberries, for a living in addition to Frank's work at a local factory. Consequently, after school and weekend hours for Rick and his older sister, Cindy, were spent tending the farm. Awake and outside by 6 a.m. was a daily way of life, weekends included.

"I'm still that way today," Brandenburg jokes. "I'm a morning person - up and at the office by 6 a.m. If I have to do anything that requires a lot of thought, I need to get it done by noon."

Though the early hours could be tough, especially on Saturdays and Sundays, this mandate wasn't something Brandenburg remembers his father pushing. Instead, watching his parents work so hard, particularly during a depression where the work meant more because it was necessary to feed the family, created a sense of farm ownership for every household member. "It wasn't so much of

my dad saying that I had to get up, but he just created this environment where I felt like I was an integral part of the operation and that really motivated me," he says. "I realized it was important to get up in the morning because if I didn't there were negative consequences for the overall benefit of the family. I was part of the team that made the place go. I knew what I did made a difference."

While Brandenburg got his work ethic from his father, he credits his mother for giving him an overall empathy for others. "There's a place in our lives to be considerate of others even in the midst of industry activity when you're motivated to be the best at what you do," he says. "You can talk to your staff about who they are as people and how their kids are doing and what they have going on in their lives and still do a good job."

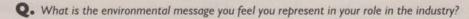
Though Brandenburg didn't realize this until later in life, one story from childhood really reminds him of how his mother influenced this attribute in him. "I can remember there was this family at church and the father was laid off of work from a factory in town and they had four young boys, so for weeks my parents would take them fruits and vegetables from the farm to help out," he shares. "Then at the end of the summer, even though he was laid off of work, the guy bought a brand new camper trailer, and I remember thinking,

'How could this guy who is unemployed and taking free food from my parents that they could be selling go out and buy a camper?' I thought my mom would feel the same way, but instead she said she hoped taking them all this food allowed them to buy a nicer camper. I just realized what an incredible person she had to be to have that attitude. Most people would say, 'I wish I hadn't taken them all of that food.' But looking back, I don't think that thought ever even crossed her mind."

Throughout childhood, Brandenburg didn't think too much about insects, but he knew he wanted to be a scientist of some sort. He credits a high school biology teacher for showing him that bugs were a tangible area of scientific study. "He encouraged me to participate in Future Farmers of America weed and entomology competitions where I had to learn and identify different species," Brandenburg says. "Also, one Saturday when I was a sophomore or junior, he drove me to Purdue and we went to the entomology department and I met a lot of the professors. That was the first time I realized this was an area in which people could make a living. I still didn't understand or comprehend the impact insects could have on plants or an industry, but I did start considering entomology as an option for the future."

Brandenburg received his bachelor's of science degree in entomology at Pur-

## rick brandenburg on environmental stewardship...



A. "In the past 20 years, I have been involved in incredible improvements and advancements in how lawn care operators manage turfgrass pests. As we look at the changes in products and how we use them and the rate at which we use them, unbelievable progress has been made. We have an incredible success story to tell."

Q. What is the industry's role in the environment today? Where do you see your role?

A. "Despite the strides we've made as an industry, there are more restrictions on pesticide use and is more pressure on a lawn care operator's daily work practices. And because we are scared of any backlash, instead of telling our story we continue to try and hide, apologize and come up with excuses. That's a mistake. We need to tell everyone what we are doing and tell them about the progress that's been made.

"I see myself as a spokesperson for turfgrass insecticides. I am someone who is willing to step up and speak the facts about what the products do, where we are as an industry in dealing with turf grass insects and what we have to be proud of in our research, and there's a lot of it."

Q. Where do you see the industry's role in the environment in the next five to 10 years? What are your goals for improving your organization's environmental focus in the coming years?

A. "What we do in maintaining green spaces will become more critical to preserving the environment and quality of life 10 years from now. We have to work each day thinking about this future."

Q. Why is it important for industry professionals to be stewards of the environment?

A. "Their careers depend on it. Their pocketbooks depend on it. If the industry is to remain profitable, then we have to make sure everyone is doing their jobs correctly and looking at the future, including using good conservation practices and encouraging others to do the same. These things will end up coming together for the long-term viability of the industry."

Q. What do you do on a consistent basis to make your voice heard and support the industry?

A. "I take advantage of opportunities to speak nationally and internationally about pesticides and turf grass research. I also write a lot of articles on these issues so people have information they can pass on to others. I'm getting information out there so people become more aware of the facts."

due University in 1977 and his Ph.D. in entomology from North Carolina State University in 1981, where his advisor, Dr. George Kennedy, served as a positive influence. "I was so impressed with his professionalism, ethics and commitment to doing things the right way," Brandenburg says. "He taught me how to take what I do seriously and do it well and correctly."

In 1981, Brandenburg took a position teaching at the University of Missouri. He stayed there for four years and says the highlight of this time was meeting his wife, Janice. "And she's been the black sheep of her family ever since," Brandenburg jokes, adding that in fact her mother was integral in getting the two of them together. "I met Janice at church and she pursued me like it was going out of style. Her family and I get along very well."

In 1985, Brandenburg brought his new family back to North Carolina to return to his alma mater to teach entomology, and he's been there ever since. This year, Rick and Janice celebrate 22 years of marriage. They have three children – Chris, 18; Ashley, 15; and Caleb, 12. Chris begins his pursuit of a communications degree at North Carolina State University this fall – "he has visions of working for ESPN," Brandenburg says. "They grow up so quickly – you hear that and you think, 'Yeah, yeah, yeah...' But then you find as they get older there were never truer words said to you. It seems like yesterday he was just born."

None of his children have an interest in insects – "the kids think it's goofy that dad kills bugs for a living, but when they were younger they thought it was cool," Brandenburg says. But dad has taken an active role in something they all can enjoy together - sports. Over the years, he's coached his children's basketball, softball and baseball teams. "I think sports have a positive influence in children's lives by teaching them the value of teamwork."

Though entomology is "not a 40-houra-week job," Brandenburg says he's been able to make time for coaching because Janice "has been so supportive. She was a school teacher for nine years and when we had our first child, she abandoned her career and stayed home with the kids. She's been incredibly supportive to give me that chance to focus on what I do and to recognize how important it is to me."

CENTER OF THE CENTERE. Being in North Carolina, Brandenburg is truly at the center of turfgrass research. Because the area is considered a transition zone and has both warm- and cool-season turf. research done on the turf varieties there can have a much broader regional impact, showing applications to treat Northern and Southern insect problems. This is why Brandenburg takes his job - particularly the extension aspect - so seriously.

This extension role includes being approachable for the turfgrass industry and responding in a timely fashion. For extrovert Brandenburg, this has always been a favorite part of his job, and Lang says it shows. "The really good industry researchers interact with the industry and are easy to get along with," Lang says. "Rick is like that - he stands out. The first time I sent him an e-mail with a question I remember being surprised by how quickly he got back to me. He takes the extension aspect of his job very seriously."

For Brandenburg, being accessible is important because "I'm the go-to person when it comes to turfgrass entomology," he says. "I know lawn care operators are in a position where they have to deal with problems quickly or it's costing them money. So I do the best I can to try and respond as quickly as I can in some fashion – whether it's by phone or e-mail – so I can help them when they are in a bind. I see it as my responsibility."

Brandenburg also spends enough time

talking with and listening to lawn care operators that he comes up with research projects that have instantly usable solutions in the field vs. ones that take weeks to put into practice, Lang adds. "Many times scientists come up with hard-toimplement answers for the industry and that doesn't help us day to day," he says. "Rick comes up with tools we can use and implement immediately to deal with every day problems. It's a godsend."

This happens to be what Brandenburg considers a job perk. "What I like about the type of research I do is it's short-term problem solving research rather than basic research that provides insight and may provide something of significance 10 to 15 years down the road. I would rather think, 'How can we work today to make life easier next year for lawn care operators? Can we find a short-term solution to make their work more productive?' And when those lawn care operators come back and say we've helped them put out some fires, I enjoy that - it's a good feeling when you make an immediate impact and they appreciate it and say thanks."

In addition to conducting necessary research and fielding regular phone calls and e-mails, Brandenburg and his team send industry members alerts through his Web site - www.turffiles.ncsu.edu - and these have also proven invaluable for LCOs like Lang who use the information to proactively deal with problems on clients' sites. "The alerts tell you what the current problems are on turf and what vou have to do to deal with them - I couldn't live without them," Lang says.

Much of this activity stems from NC-SU's Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research & Education (CENTERE), which Brandenburg started in 2001 along with two center codirectors Fred Yelverton and Tom Rufty, who are both professors of crop science at NCSU. Yelverton and Brandenburg are also specialists with the North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service. The goal of the CENTERE is to find better ways to manage North Carolina's 2.2 million acres of turfgrass. The trio was able to create the CENTERE by

securing \$600,000 for environmental research and educational programs related to turfgrass via a North Carolina General Assembly bill. The funds come from taxes on the sale of fertilizer and seed to people who are not farmers - such sales had previously been exempt from the sales tax.

"This was absolutely huge for turfgrass research in North Carolina," Brandenburg says. "We went from being a good program to being one of the top and highest funded programs in the country."

Looking at Brandenburg's list of accomplishments, it's easy to see how he was named a William Neal Reynolds Professor at North Carolina State University this June - one of the highest distinctions available to NCSU faculty members, recognizing and supporting outstanding achievement in research, teaching and extension.

In fact, one may wonder where Brandenburg finds the time to do it all. For Brandenburg, every day is different, but answering industry inquiries is certainly a priority. "Some days I'm analyzing data and writing manuscripts. Other days I'm preparing a PowerPoint presentation for an upcoming talk, writing grant proposals or traveling to an industry event. I give a lot of talks around the country at various conferences. Every day I'm answering e-mails." In fact, Brandenburg has addressed turfgrass insect management to audiences in more than 30 states and in foreign countries, including Australia, South Africa, Canada, Singapore, Argentina and Indonesia.

Even though Brandenburg prides himself on not making his career his life, he says his wife Janice would say he works too much because he's constantly responding to e-mails from home. But, he sincerely declares, "I try to remove my entomologist hat when I leave the office.

"What's unique about growing up on a farm is you never escape from it - you are there 24 hours a day and there is always something to do staring you in the face," he adds. "But when the day was over at 6 p.m. and it was time for dinner, we typically didn't do anymore work. Sure, we could have worked into the night



many times, but we developed a lifestyle where each workday had to come to an end. I try to keep that mind-set today. Even though I take great pride in what I do and I hope I have an impact and am valued and appreciated by others, I know I won't end my life saying, 'I wish I spent more time in the office."

PEOPLE BEFORE PROJECTS. In the research world, owning a project and having your name stamped across the top is a huge feat. The goal of every researcher is to publish their data. This is also part of what secures a professor tenure down the road. Once a professor earns their tenure by meeting certain criteria, he or she can focus on what they love to do and really frame their roles in a university and an industry.

Since he gained his tenure in 1993, Brandenburg has been able to focus more on two roles - what he enjoys doing, which he believes naturally increases productivity on those project types, and what the industry really needs. Both of these charges are part of his job responsibilities, which amount to 70 percent extension and 30 percent research. However, Brandenburg notices there is an odd thing that happens as a professor goes through the tenure process. "So much about gaining your tenure is about focusing inward, and in some ways this process has a tendency to disrupt the flow of teamwork," he explains. "So if you spend the first part of your career looking out for yourself, then that works against you when you finally gain tenure and have a staff you need to work with.

"And, today, this process has become more challenging for young people - the bar has been raised," Brandenburg adds. "In some ways, I'm glad I'm not going through it now - it would cramp my style."

Brandenburg's style is a combination of the concern for others he learned from his mother and the teamwork approach he insists should be a priority over individual accomplishments on the job. The latter he has tried to perfect by garnering tips as he watched colleagues become successful at building teams whose members respect each other and work together.

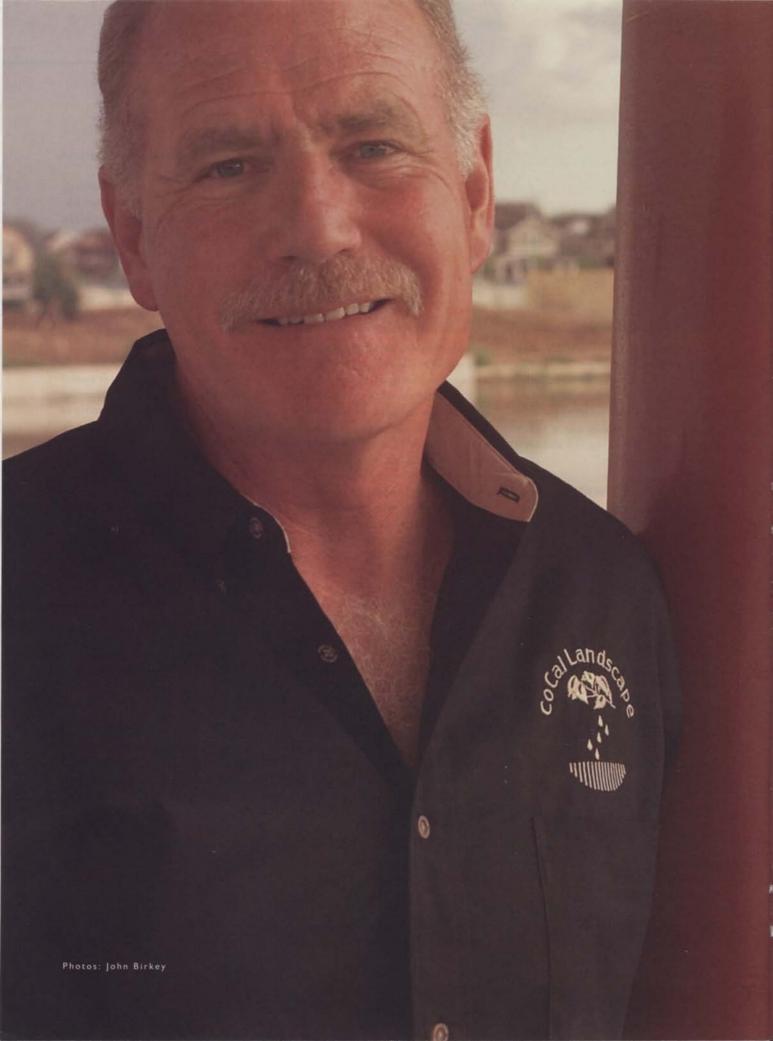
The greatest lesson Brandenburg learned regarding teamwork comes to him from Mike Villani, his grad school buddy, colleague and co-author of his 1995 book "Handbook of Turfgrass Insects." In 2001, he passed away at the age of 48 from pancreatic cancer. "He was an outstanding turfgrass entomologist - I viewed him as one of the best in the industry," Brandenburg says, adding that what he'll never forget are the conversations that took place at Villani's memorial service. "No one talked about what a great entomologist he was or how many books and research reports he published. Instead, they talked about what a great person he was - what a great father, husband, friend and colleague he was. Even though he was one of the best, he didn't let that in any way drive his decisions or affect his motivation. While most people take great pleasure in being successful themselves, he took great pleasure in letting other people be successful. He put people before projects. His name was almost always the last author on any project even if he managed the whole thing. He wasn't the boss, he wasn't the head scientist - he was a coordinator. I think this is

why he was remembered in such a personal way."

What does this mean for Brandenburg? "It reminds me there is an incorrect perception out there that putting people first makes you less productive," he says. "In this career, I truly believe the opposite is true. You can have an impact and be more productive if you take the approach of putting people first. Then people are willing to step up to the plate and help you out. They cooperate with you and you get more loyalty. And then you're remembered in the way you want to be remembered."

How does he emulate Villani's model? He believes teamwork means each member of your team feels they have ownership of a project so they feel they are integral to its completion - the same way Brandenburg felt fundamental to the family farm growing up. "It's about creating an environment where people do things because they want to do them," he says, adding that his team includes three full-time technicians, in addition to graduate students he hires during the summer months. "I let them run various areas of projects and let them be the lead communicators on those areas. By doing this, I give them responsibility and, sure, there is one more opportunity for something to fall through the cracks this way, but I'm willing to accept that. This gives people empowerment and a sense of accomplishment. It makes the team better and more productive and it makes the end results better in the long run.

"And, in our roles, there are always people demanding answers from us," Brandenburg continues. "And for the first few years on the job I remember freaking out about getting tests out on time, but that just made things miserable for everyone. Now, I realize there is no reason to stress. If there is something affecting when research needs to be done, such as rainy weather, in most cases there is nothing we can do about it. So we just have to be good communicators on these facts and realize the work will still get done - and it will get done right, which is the most important part. We still get a lot of contracted research operating this way, so we must be doing something right."



# the secrets of my

success

Work hard, treat customers and employees with respect and have good strong morals - these are the

foundations of Tom Fochtman's leadership style.

in 1981 with a degree in landscape architecture

 Worked for Environmental Care Industries for eight years

 Started CoCal Landscape in December 1992 with partner Chuy Medrano

· Graduated from Michigan State University

Name: TOM FOCHTMAN

Company: CoCal Landscape Location: Denver, Colo.

Age: 51

Title: Co-owner

**Career Highlights:** 

- Became part owner of Madison Valley Ranch, a fly fishing lodge, in 2003
- Became AEF Ambassador in 2006
- · Celebrates 25th wedding anniversary with wife Pam - October 2007
- CoCal Landscape has won more than 30 national and state awards for its work. Some memorable moments for Fochtman include: 1993 Excellence in Landscape Award from Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, 1995 Environmental Improvement Award from PLANET, 2000 National Green Star Award from PGMS, 2000 Contractor of the Year Award from American Society of Landscape Architects, 2003 Environmental Distinction Award from PLANET, 2006 Decade Award from PLANET

om Fochtman is not your stereotypical contractor. The 51-year-old co-owner of Denver-based CoCal Landscape would never enter a client meeting wearing a T-shirt, jeans and boots. Rather, Fochtman enjoys Italian wool slacks, button down shirts and the occasional tie.

"I prefer bold but not bright colors," he says, adding the attire puts him on par with his customers and not on the same level as his competitors. "I've always fancied myself as one with a diverse business mind vs. just a landscape contractor."

Fochtman is very competitive, though he'd rather not admit to it, and he dislikes the thought of being average or mediocre. He's always a body in motion, whether it's out meeting customers, working on acquisitions or spending time with his family. He conveys strength, focus and confidence - attributes that are all part of a leadership attitude he has used to build success at his landscape company and brand him an industry leader.

An opportunistic view on business is what Fochtman credits for enabling him to grow in his career. If an opportunity arises, he considers taking it, but not without looking over the details first. In this way, he is a perfectionist who believes the details keep a company from looking sloppy. In fact, Fochtman admits he would be disappointed in himself if he walked into a meeting and the customer asked a question

By Katie Morris

### "If we work hard, are honest and ethical with customers and good with employees, then good things will happen and profit will follow." - Tom Fochtman



he didn't know the answer to.

As for the industry he loves, Fochtman sees landscape contracting as an area that will always be necessary because it's a key component to a property's image. People always need their lawns mowed, he says, and because of this reason CoCal will keep its place as a quality landscape company in the industry.

EMERGING LEADER. Fochtman inherited his entrepreneurial spirit from his father, a self-starter and self-made man who taught Fochtman at a young age growing up in Petoskey, Mich., that reward is wrought from sweat and toil, and that hard work brings success.

After graduating from Michigan State University in 1981 with a degree in landscape architecture, he spent a year with a Chicago-based contractor working in the field learning how to build landscapes. He remembers his first job with them was installing the landscape for Northern Illinois University.

From there Fochtman joined California-based Environmental Care Industries, which is now part of Calabasas, Calif.-based ValleyCrest Cos., to work as a sales representative. The ECI opportunity served as the catalyst for meeting his friend and future business partner, Jesus "Chuy" Medrano.

"My first thought was, 'Oh, man, here's this kid fresh out of college and it's my job to train this Gringo," Medrano says, adding the two quickly hit it off as friends and colleagues. As part of the sales team Fochtman knew nothing about landscape maintenance, and as the maintenance supervisor Medrano was able to teach him a thing or two. And, in return, Fochtman was able to teach Medrano a thing or two about handling customers.

During Fochtman's tenure, ECI grew from a \$14 million company to a \$100 million company in annual sales. He also grew, and in 1988 was promoted to vice president of marketing and sales for the company's Los Angeles office.

"At 31 years old, I was the youngest person at the time to be promoted to that position in the company," he says. "It was a proud moment for me."

But despite his professional success Fochtman was ready for new challenges and left ECI and the landscape industry in 1990 to work for a roofing company as vice president of marketing and sales.

He was burned out on the green industry and was looking for a change when Davie Roofing contacted him.

However, in 1992 Fochtman returned to the industry to open his own business. He knew he couldn't do this alone so he asked ECI buddy Medrano to join him. Medrano knew they worked well together, and the decision to become partners was a no-brainer.

Those close to Fochtman thought he was nuts to uproot his family and relocate from California to Colorado to start a landscape business. But Fochtman had a plan in mind, and with dogged determination he pursued it.

'The California economy was worsening and unemployment was high so my wife and I had to look at our options," Fochtman says. "Option one was to follow her career, option two was to move back to Michigan and option three was to go back to Colorado and open a business and we choose to go with the third option."

It took six months for Fochtman and Medrano to create CoCal Landscape's business plan. They both were working full-time so they only had their nights and

## tom fochtman on environmental stewardship...

- Q. Describe the environmental message you represent through your role in the industry? Why is it important for a landscape contractor to think about the environment in his/her day-to day business dealings?
- A. "As a commercial landscape contractor we are somewhat stewards of the environment, at least as it relates to public open spaces. We need to recognize that we are role models to the general public, our fellow employees and to our peers within the green industry.

"We are in a unique position to install and maintain outdoor environments that bring great joy and satisfaction to people. Very few people chose a career in a field where your canvas is a living environment that grows, changes colors, goes dormant and comes to life every spring. We need to conduct ourselves and our businesses in an environmentally responsible manner to ensure that future generations can enjoy the outdoor world as much as we have."

- Q. Describe the industry's role in the environment today? Where do you see your role specifically as a part of that?
- A. "The industry has done a good job of regulating chemical use over the years. I tell our customers that everything we buy today is pretty safe. When I say safe I mean it doesn't bother people, pets, the air or the environment in any way. Most of what we use can be purchased at the local garden center in some sort of formulation.

"Because our customers believe our products are safe, it is my role to promote and support that within our company and make sure we adhere to it. It's a role everyone should embrace and it would help if you include this thinking in your company's mission statement."

- Q. Where do you see the industry's role in the environment in the next five to 10 years? What about your role what are your personal and professional goals for improving your company's or employees' environmental focus in the coming years?
- A. "We're not really a green company per say. We use a normal amount of chemicals that is standard and safe. We don't overuse, overspray or overfertilize. We are very conscious about water usage in the West since water is a huge resource that is dwindling everywhere. We all need to become water experts and we need to embrace xeriscape in all parts of the country.

"We currently recycle here in the office and we are going to use our oil to heat the shop and minimize our use of natural gas. We also use a recycling service that takes away all of our green waste and turns it into a mulch and soil conditioner, but I still think we can always do more. I am quite interested in converting our building to solar and maybe using hybrids for company vehicles where we can."

- Q. Why do you think it's important for green industry professionals to be stewards of the environment?
- A. "Since we work with landscapes and the outdoor environment, all of us in the industry are stewards. So it's important to be conscious of that and to use common sense with the products we use. Don't overuse. Be aware of the equipment we run. Most equipment emits some sort of pollution in the air so be aware of this and keep your equipment in good shape. If you use heavy duty oil for any piece of equipment, get rid of it. I think it's wrong to emit more than we should."
- Q. What do you do on a consistent basis to make your voice heard and support the industry?
- A. "Our industry can mandate watering three times a week. Today in Colorado we can water everyday if we want, but the thing is we don't need to. We put on a seminar for property managers about four years ago when the drought in Colorado was really bad. We explained every other day watering is fine. We let managers know to not worry about the plant material; it does not require daily watering. CoCal Landscape has embraced three-times-per-week watering of all of our accounts, and most of our customers have responded positively. We violate this self governance on occasion for special circumstances, but generally speaking we believe we are doing our part to conserve water."

weekends free to put the plan together.

The time Fochtman devoted to the business plan didn't surprise his wife, Pam, who describes her husband as having a get-out-there-and-get-it-done mentality.

"He is successful because he is aggressive in his growth plan," Pam says.

Fochtman and Medrano have an ideal partnership that compliments one another. Fochtman finds the work and Medrano gets it done. Fochtman is the inside man working on projects and talking to clients while Medrano is out in the field leading work crews.

"He has a higher tolerance for our customers than I do," Medrano says. CoCal's first five to six years demanded a lot of energy from Fochtman. His schedule was littered with 18-hour days and weekends to make the fledging company grow. As a result, it took him some time to find a balance between business and family.

"My wife has been more accessible for my children than I've been, and part of me regrets that," he says. "I really respect fellow business owners who have done a better job of spending quality time with their families as they have built their businesses."

But for Fochtman, the landscape business is not just a job; it's a passion that motivates him to get up every day.

"I enjoy the unique "living" aspect of the green industry, allowing us to work in an outdoor environment that is ever changing in size, color, scale, etc., which makes our industry unlike any other," Fochtman says. "Regarding the business itself, I am driven to have CoCal Landscape be a profitable, industry leading organization that provides a great service to our customers and a solid career path for our employees."

This passion and dedication has rewarded CoCal with more than 30 awards since its inception. One accolade, though, still stands out - the Excellence in Landscape Award from the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) in 1993 for the company's work on "The Breakers," which was the largest luxury apartment complex in Denver at that time. It was CoCal's first honor and the company had

only been in business for less than a year.

Texas after they won the first ALCC honor.

He remembers sitting in a Fort Worth,

The award rested in its own chair as if it were a third partner.

"It was funny because when we won the award no one had heard of us since we were less than a year old," Fochtman says. "At the bar we had no one to celebrate with or brag to so we toasted each other."

COMPANY MOTIVATOR. Fochtman sees himself as a motivator for those around him. He learned early on that a company and its people are only as efficient as their leader. If the leader has a pessimistic attitude toward work and performs his tasks halfheartedly, then his employees will mirror this work ethic. His job is to push himself to inspire others to do the same.

Fochtman attributes most of his skills and leadership ability to Bruce Wilson, the

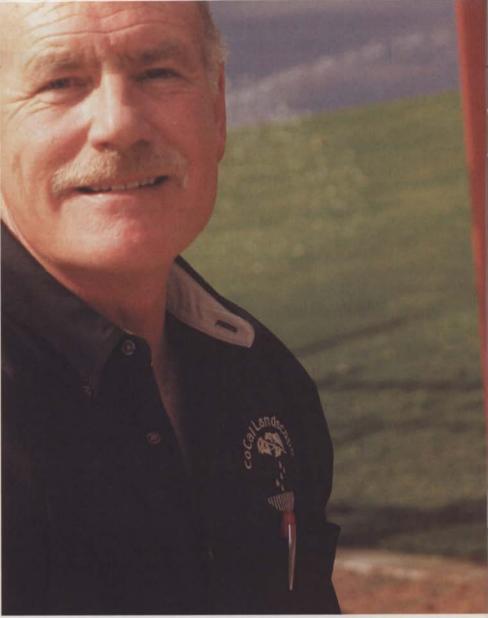
former ECI president and mentor to many landscape business owners. Wilson, along with ECI's management team, he says, taught him not only about the business, but the importance in becoming a leader.

"They helped create me," Fochtman says. "Bruce taught me patience, how to read people, how to size up a situation and a lot of the nuts and bolts of the industry."

As a leader, Fochtman is not a hand holder, but rather a ball hander. He delegates responsibility and points employees in the right direction. His management style separates the strong from the weak. CoCal's fast-paced environment is meant for those who share Fochtman's traits - confident, aggressive and risk taking.

"We have a Git-R-Done work environment," he says. "Self starters thrive here."

By design, Fochtman gives future leaders plenty of room to grow. He recognizes that while employees are an organization's



foundation, great people are the foundation of a successful business. "Your goal is to get enough good people on board so you can focus on going after business opportunities," he says.

The value he places on relationships with those around him, especially with his employees, makes him an effective leader. "He has a genuine interest in everyone's lives and this makes him unique," Medrano says. "He is a natural born leader."

Fochtman is open, personable and not intimidating – all traits CoCal's employees respect. If someone has a question or a problem, Fochtman's door is always open, says Susan Beno, his executive assistant.

When asked about his attention to employees, Fochtman says years ago he realized how the company impacted the lives of not only its workers, but their immediate families as well. Likewise, the majority of CoCal's employees are Hispanic and come from very family-driven cultures. By providing sustainable jobs CoCal impacts the families of its employees, both locally and in their home countries. In turn, Fochtman feels a deep responsibility to his people to help them provide for their families.

"We have a lot of great people we love, are very fond of and go to war with us everyday," he says. "These are true friends we will have for the rest of our lives."

He attributes a lot of CoCal's success to the core values he has lived by his entire life. The basic tenants to this include working hard, being honest and ethical with customers and treating employees fairly. From there, good things will happen and profits will follow.

INDUSTRY ROLE MODEL. Fochtman views his company as a role model for others in the landscape industry. He has helped build a company that has impacted the lives of its employees, as well as the landscaping industry.

"We have a great passion for our business, industry and people," Fochtman says. "Our people are the life-blood and the foundation of our company."

Fochtman's involvement in local and

national events defines him as an industry leader in Medrano's eyes. Fochtman takes time to attend the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Career Days every year and has participated in events for both ALCC and the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS). He has also spoken at events including the Landscape Contractors Association (LCA) conference and GIE Breakfast of Champions.

Involving himself in industry events has given him the opportunity learn more about the industry and build relationships with his peers. "I attend events for educational and networking purposes," he says

He doesn't attend these events out of obligation. He wants to converse and become a role model to those just starting out in the business. He is the perfect example of what contractors strive to be—successful, business savvy and relationship oriented. With all this experience under his belt he has been asked a couple of times to speak at these events. His reactions to these requests are always the same. He is flattered and honored to share his stories with others in his community.

"I want others to gain a better understanding of whatever it is I am talking about," Fochtman says. "I also want to get them on a comfort level where they will call me for some one-on-one time."

Spending time with his peers allows him to exercise his talent of networking, Beno says. Fochtman has a knack for making connections and nurturing those connections into relationships.

"He knows how to sell the company," Medrano says. "We don't let him do a lot of the employee interviews anymore because he dominates the conversation talking about the company and doesn't learn much about the candidate."

Industry events have inspired Fochtman to give back to his community. In 2006, CoCal became a Academic Excellence Foundation (AEF) Ambassador after making a donation of \$25,000 to the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA, now PLANET) Educational Foundation scholarship fund.

This was a memorable moment for Fochtman, who strongly supports the education of young landscape professionals. He believes the future of the landscape industry lies in the hands of the young professionals coming out of school.

"With all of the labor and immigration reforms going on we may need to become a lot less dependant on the Hispanic workforce," Fochtman says.

Fochtman also believes recruiting should take place in high schools. It seems the industry is more focused on acquiring student's right out of college, he says, but what about those kids in high school who have no interest in going to college? "We need to do a better job of letting these 18-year-olds know that there are viable careers in the green industry," he says.

His mission to help educate young landscape professionals begins within Co-Cal. In August 2007, he retained recruiting consultant Jennifer Buck to coordinate career days, internships and employee placement for CoCal. Fochtman's goal is to one day have his five companies function as a national organization.

As a leader Fochtman stretches his generosity beyond the industry and into his own community in Denver and the state of Colorado. He has recently become a sponsor for Brokers Benefiting Kids, has made donations to charities such as the United Way and participated in a program for homeless kids in the Denver public school system.

Fochtman's love and enthusiasm for the industry can be seen in everything he does from hiring employees and participating in industry events to speaking with students and helping out in his local community. He is a true leader who uses his experiences and successes to give back to the industry and the people around him. He believes his success comes from the core philosophy he and Medrano built their organization upon: "If we work hard and treat our employees and customers well and with respect, then we will be successful," Fochtman says. "So if you do those things, good things will happen and profits will follow. We believe that, and that is the driving force behind our success."



# ideas into action

Den Gardner envisions a better world for the green industry, then finds a way to make it happen.

Name: DEN GARDNER

Age: 55

Title: Executive director

**Organizations: Project EverGreen and** 

**Turf & Ornamental** 

**Communicators Association** 

Location: New Prague, Minn.

#### **Career Highlights:**

- College Minnesota State University
   Mankato; 1973; majored in jounalism
- Executive director, Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association, established it in 1990
- Executive director, Project EverGreen; became organization's development director in 2003, and then executive director later that same year

o understand what drives Den Gardner, you have to be transported back to 1950s Minnesota to a 50-acre hobby farm outside of a town called Delano. There, you'll find Den and his twin brother, Dan, age 9, working diligently to spruce up the yard around their home. During the summer, the boys would use a riding mower and push mower to carefully cut the grass. They'd get down on their knees with grass trimmers to manicure around the barn and other buildings on the farm.

Then they'd turn their attention to the baseball field. Oh, the field. Picture a full-size, regulation Little League baseball field with iron posts and wire fencing for a backstop, bases made of concrete that were flush to the ground so no one got hurt, and a snow fence that acted as the left-field fence. To Den and his brother, this was Heaven. This was the stuff of dreams. And it was a lesson that Den learned early on: If you work hard, you get to enjoy the fruits of that hard work.

"It was a great, great memory to me of green," Gardner says. "I understood, even at that tender age, how important it was to have a manicured field. My father instilled in us how important it was to have a well-maintained green space."

Building a baseball field on a farm can be fraught with "hazards"

By Mark Phillips

## "The land was here before we were born and it will be here after (we hope). We're just temporary holders of the responsibility for stewardship of green spaces for home, work and play." - Den Gardner



that only made the game more interesting. The farm's pig pen, for example, housed about 50 pigs. It happened to be near right field. "If you were a left-handed hitter and you hit a home run, the ball actually went into the pig pen," Gardner recalls. "Then you had to climb into the pen - the hogs were harmless - to retrieve the ball and clean it off if it needed it. It certainly made things very interesting."

Gardner describes his dad as having been "a baseball fanatic." His father, Ken, never played the game, because he had suffered leg injuries that prevented him from playing. "But he always encouraged us in an incredible way to enjoy and play sports," Gardner says. The baseball field not only taught Gardner the value of hard work, but it taught him teamwork as well. Teams would come from across town to play at the Gardner family field. "It was special," he says. "But it wasn't that I felt special; it was just a special and unique experience to have this in a small town. It's something you never forget."

Working on a hobby farm wasn't Ken Gardner's only occupation, because it was just that - a hobby. During the week, he'd labor at his dry cleaning store and work extra hours so he could take off time on the weekends to work the farm with his sons. It was something he didn't have to do, just like Den didn't have to found The Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) or Project EverGreen (PE).

"He and my mom both taught me to strive to get what you want accomplished - that there's no dream that can be attained without working for it," Gardner says. "Their inspiration to me is invaluable. With the limited education they had, they were able to achieve what they

did. It literally inspires me every day."

Indeed, his father went until sixth grade in school, while his mother used a high school education to eventually manage a bank.

Gardner's father understood very well the balance of hard work and fun that was needed to give his sons a balanced upbringing. For the most part, except on weekends, he'd let Den and his brother sleep in because they'd have to go to school. "We would always have chores when we came home. One of those chores in the summer was taking care of the grass," Gardner recalls. "Dad was so proud of the little farm he had. Even though it was this little hobby farm, he wanted that place to look great. We learned early on the importance of a well-maintained yard and what it did for you for your pride and for the enjoyment of working outside."

GETTING TO WORK. When Gardner graduated from college, he went right to work in a place that will make you or break you - a small-town daily newspaper. These are the places where young journalists perform myriad duties, many of them behind the scenes, hurried tasks that certainly aren't glamorous. It can be editing wire stories, taking photographs, writing news stories or going to sporting events and even writing editorials. It's fast-paced work that rarely leaves time for reflection. And Gardner relished it. It's where he learned and honed the most important of those modern-day workplace skills - multitasking.

"To this day, even though I'm old," the 55-year-old says, laughing, "I tell people if they want to get a great experience that can really prepare you for the future, go to work for a daily newspaper. Those

## den gardner on environmental stewardship...

- Q. What is the environmental message you feel you represent in your role in the industry? Why do you think it's important for you to think about the environment in your day-to-day business dealings?
- A. "We all are consumers and we all have a responsibility to care for the environment. When you create an organization like Project EverGreen you learn one thing in a hurry. If the companies and organizations sitting around the board table have only their own interests at heart, none of us will win the hearts and minds of consumers when it comes to using products and services to maintain green spaces. Like my friend Bill Klutho of John Deere says so often: "When you come to a Project EverGreen meeting, you leave your hat at the door." Whether it's groundwater contamination or emissions issues, or a host of other potential environmental problems being addressed, the only real chance to affect public opinion on stewardship is to do it together. The green industry needs to be one voice. If we don't unite, more restrictions will come our way and change the way business is conducted today. Together we can change attitudes and convince consumers we are part of the solution to environmental stewardship and leadership."
- Q. Where do you see the industry's role in the environment today? Where do you see your role specifically as a part of that?
- A. "As an industry we need to show what we've been doing for decades taking care of the environment in a responsible way, while at the same time providing lifestyle benefits consumers expect and enjoy every day. My role, especially through Project EverGreen, but also through the TOCA publications that reach our industry, is to articulate the positive aspects of what end-users do every day using the tools provided by suppliers who realize how important it is to create products that are environmentally sound. None of us is capable of doing it alone. That's why Project EverGreen was started. We have to maximize the opportunities we have through the funding we receive to show the public environmental stewardship is one of the major reasons green matters."
- Q. Where do you see the industry's role in the environment in the next five to 10 years? What about your role what are your personal and professional goals for improving your organization's environmental focus in the coming years?
- A. "The industry's role is to help consumers understand that how they care for their lawns and landscapes will have a direct impact on climate change. Whether you believe in global warming or not is almost irrelevant. The bottom line is we all need to show in our words and in our deeds that the actions we take for ourselves and our customers go far beyond the silly idea that it's all about aesthetics. It's ridiculous to answer the critics who say those things. We need to tell the story of the environmental benefits of well-managed green spaces. And we need to mold consumer attitudes through education and information so they can make informed choices. My goals are to encourage more dialogue through organizations like Project EverGreen and TOCA, and hopefully the voice of reason prevails in the end."
- Q. Why do you think it's important for green industry professionals to be stewards of the environment?
- A. "The land was here before we were born and it will be here after (we hope). We're just temporary holders of the responsibility for stewardship of green spaces for home, work and play. Think of it as one pitch to one batter in one inning of one baseball game. Doesn't seem like much, does it? But if everyone throws one pitch to one batter, then ultimately we can make a difference all around the world on the importance of managed greed spaces. Let's hit a home run when we throw our pitch."
- Q. What do you do on a consistent basis to make your voice heard and support the industry?
- A. "I write or speak everyday to someone inside or outside the green industry about the benefits of managed green spaces. I speak with the media several times a week (both trade and consumer). Through Project EverGreen and TOCA, I've been given a bully pulpit to spread the gospel of green, and I'm going to take every advantage I can to be persuasive and reach consumers one blade of truth at a time."

were some of the best experiences of my life. What a kick-start to my career."

Working at a newspaper taught him at an early age how not to get flustered when he has a lot of work to do – which is often. He also learned how to do a variety of work. "I learned that even though I didn't know squat about all the different facets of newspaper publishing, it was amazing how fast you could learn on the job."

It was that ability to quickly grasp the problem at hand and find a solution that has aided Gardner in building things. It's his passion. He often starts with an idea, bounces it off of people he trusts, and continues to mull it over. Oftentimes, those ideas turn into something big - really big - and are things that fill a void. "When I first started to talk about TOCA, people would say to me, 'Huh? We're going to get editors who are competing with each other, and PR agencies who are competing with other agencies and equipment and chemical companies to sit down in the same room and talk about their issues? And we're going to do it to help each other?" he recalls, discussing the green industry communications association he started in 1990. "They said, 'We'll never get it off of the ground.' Of course, that's all I needed to hear."

His wife, Sandy, says he's an endless source of ideas. "He's got a lot of creative ideas. But some ideas aren't doable sometimes. But he just keeps going," she says. "I think if he truly believes in something, he'll push it pretty far. It's like Project Evergreen – I'm almost astounded he was able to get it off of the ground."

Phil Fogarty, owner of Crowley's/ WeedMan, Euclid, Ohio, first met Gardner when he was invited to speak at a TOCA event about 10 years ago. "The first thing I was impressed by was the fact that TOCA existed," he says. "When I found out Den was the guy who brought it all together, I was very interested in working with him." Fogarty describes Gardner as an innovator, a humble leader, and "the Guttenberg of our industry."

While he's always coming up with



ideas, there's no way for one person do to it all alone. "He knows a lot of smart folks and he networks and calls upon them for their help," Sandy says. "He talks to the people he knows and bounces ideas off of them. With TOCA, he just said, 'This is something the industry needs and let's see if it'll work,' and sought out people who could help him."

It's never been Gardner's goal to get credit for the things he does. It's just not important to him. "I think it's because my parents were very humble people. They never stood up and raised their hand and said, 'Look what I did,'" Gardner says. "They always taught me that what was important was the project at hand – getting it done and getting it done right."

Gardner describes that "eureka" moment when he envisioned TOCA. "I thought, 'We need something like this. There needs to be professional development in the industry," he says. "My first inclination is to bounce it off of a few people – you can't do these things by yourself. Maybe the seed came from me, but I know it doesn't work without the tons of people who give me support." In 2003 when he imagined Project Evergreen, a national non-profit organization representing the green industry, he took a step back and pondered: "Who can help me get this thing off of the ground?" I used that as a jumping off spot to build the organization," he recalls. "Building things is a rush – it hits you, and you can't wait to get it off of the ground."

WORKING WITH OTHERS. When it comes to leading a team, Gardner has learned some important lessons. He knows that not everyone is going to like him. "In fact, maybe a lot of people aren't going to like you, so don't worry about



it," he says. He knows that micromanaging a project isn't the way to get it done, but to instead allow the talented people he trusts to work through problems. "I am totally hung up on getting great work done and figuring out the best way to get it accomplished," he says. "I've always been a person who doesn't like to look over someone's shoulder. I'm not hung up on laying blame, thinking I'm smarter than anyone (because anyone who knows me knows I'm not). I just want to fix things and get on with the next thing."

More than 20 years ago, Gardner opened a fortune cookie that read: "You can undertake and complete anything." He pasted it to his desk and reads it every day as a reminder. "It was as good back then as it is today," he says. Great leaders aren't only those born to lead, he believes. "That's too simple." He believes that while you should take your work se-

riously, you shouldn't take yourself too seriously. Being strategic is a trait of a good leader as well as the ability to have a plan and adapt to change when needed.

He believes good leaders should be confident and display that confidence, but not be afraid to fail and to rely on others for help. "Don't think you have to do it yourself," he says. "Bounce ideas off of people who aren't afraid to tell it like it is." For future leaders of tomorrow, he has some simple advice. "Believe in yourself or have someone constantly yelling in your ear to do it," he says, adding that where there's no passion, there's no leadership. "And never give up—sometimes give in."

Leadership is being able to corral your passion and infuse it in others. "Leadership is knowing when to hold 'em and knowing when to fold 'em," he says. "Leadership is managing from your head, but letting your heart come along for the ride for those most crucial decisions."

Gardner marvels at the young talent he sees working in the green industry. "When I look at the skill level I had when I graduated from college, I shutter to think that I could even call myself prepared," he says. "These young people today are so much better prepared for the business world than I was. And that's fabulous." But if he has one bit of advice for young people, it's this: Slow down and be patient. "The word 'patience' has left their vocabulary if it was ever there," he says. "It's just a different society today - not necessarily better or worse - but there's a different mentality today about how you get from step A to step B."

**HOW HE WORKS.** Gardner actually starts his day in the middle of the night. Armed with a pad of paper and a pen at his bedside, he makes lists – all the time. If an idea strikes while he's sleeping, he

jots it down when he wakes up. In fact, everything is written down. "My first boss told me never to go into any meeting without paper and a pen. Today, maybe it's a laptop," he says. "But he taught me preparedness. If you're prepared, you will succeed."

It's that type of preparedness that his friend and colleague Norm Goldenberg, who serves on the board of directors of Project EverGreen, says helps Gardner succeed and reach out to others. "He's able to boil down all kinds of info and present it to us in a way that's easy to read and understand," Goldenberg says. "He's just a great communicator. That's what he does. He's a very friendly, amiable guy. He meets new people very quickly and he's just a wonderful person."

Fogarty describes Gardner as someone who doesn't take the status quo as the way it has to be. "He found a way to organize the hundreds of people who write about our industry, when everyone told him he couldn't do it," Fogarty says. "I think it was an incredible thing he did."

Gardner's goal every day is to return messages promptly. If he's in the office, his goal is to return any phone call within two hours. If it's an e-mail, he'll reply in 24 hours or less. "With young people today, there's not anything that even resembles that," he says. "You can not only go days without hearing from them – you may never hear back from them. From a business courtesy standpoint, there are things I've learned I can share with young people. And, in turn, I can learn from their talent, so it's a two-way street."

Gardner says he starts off every day knowing that if he's not around tomorrow, there will be someone to take his place. "I'm only as important as the people I work with and communicate with every day," he says. "I'm not curing cancer. I'm not teaching 6-year-olds how to read. I'm one bead on a rosary of people trying to do the best we can to help others do their jobs better and understand the importance of what this industry is all about."

Says Sandy, "With Den, what you see







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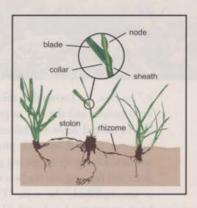
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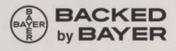
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# living a dream

Name: SCOTT JAMIESON

Age: 45

Title: President & CEO

Company: The Care of Trees

Location: Wheeling, Ill.

#### **Career Highlights:**

- College DePaul University; 1994; MBA;
   Michigan State University; 1985; masters
   in urban forestry; Purdue University, 1984,
   bachelor's in urban forestry Mankato;
   1973; majored in jounalism
- President and CEO, The Care of Trees, 1998
- Instructor on tree care for homeowners,
   Morton Arboretum; instructor on tree planting and care, Chicago Botanic Garden
- Organizations: Tree Care Industry Association; Illinois Arborist Assocaition; International Society of Arboriculture; Mayor Daley's Landscape Committee; Open Lands Project; Greater North Michigan Avenue Association

Scott Jamieson helps others cultivate a passion for trees.

ever underestimate the importance of a tree.

This has never ceased to amaze Scott Jamieson in the two decades he's worked in the green industry. Regardless of culture or economic background, a tree is much more than a coarse trunk, outstretched limbs and green leaves.

"I teach this class for Tree Keepers, which is part of the Open Lands Project based out of Chicago," Jamieson says. "I was teaching on the city's south side, which, if you know Chicago, is a pretty rough area. This woman said to us – and I'll never forget it – 'Taking care of my trees now makes me want to clean my windows."

Educating people about tree care enlightens them on the importance of trees. "When people have a sense of ownership with their trees, those trees, even in a tough neighborhood like Chicago's South Side, they survive," Jamieson says.

And this wasn't an isolated incident. Throughout his career people have demonstrated time and again their emotional attachments to trees. Caring for trees is much more than making an environment look pretty. There are strong social aspects, as well. "I've had clients break down in tears if we had to remove a tree from their backyards," he says. "It was literally a part of their family."

Those are the types of clients Jamieson and the 500 people at The Care of Trees tend to work with – those with passionate, emotional connections to trees who see their true value.

And as the president and CEO of the Wheeling-Ill.-based arbor care company, Jamieson has seen it as his duty to not only relay this message to the people his company serves, but also to make sure his employees appreciate the fact that they are not just taking care of trees. They're protecting an important piece of many people's lives. "People put a lot of

By Mike Zawacki

## "You don't always get it right and sometimes people will fail. But that's one of a leader's main responsibilities - to put the key in the ignition, turn it on and see if they can go." - Scott Jamieson

emotional investment in trees," he says. "For me, the satisfaction is preserving the trees that have survived for generations and still remain standing. To preserve that is quite a legacy."

ASCENSION. Gary, Ind., in not often associated with the great outdoors. Set in the shadow of steel factory smoke stacks, Jamieson's hometown of suburban Miller was a tough place to grow up. But mechanized progress

hadn't yet caught up with this enclave and the region's lakefront area remained relatively preserved. The interplay between pristine beauty and industrial pollution fascinated Jamieson.

"I remember standing on a sand dune and looking off to the left you could see the belching smoke from the steel mills," he says. "Yet, here was one of the best preserved ecosystems in the United States."

He was determined then to take back the areas destroyed by progress and bring them back to healthy, sustainable settings. Spurred on by this passion for the outdoors, Jamieson wanted to make a career out of understanding the natural environment. He attended Purdue University where he majored in urban forestry. "Scott was in the very first arboriculture class I thought in 1983," says Harvey Hold, a professor of urban forestry at Purdue. "He was an exceptional student."

Jamieson's early perceptions changed as he immersed himself further into his education.



## SCOTT jamieson on environmental stewardship...

#### Q. What is the environmental message you feel you represent in your role in the industry?

A. "I got into this profession because of a love of the environment based on the environmental struggle and balance I witnessed growing up in Gary, Ind. Today the "environment" isn't simply the rural countryside or the forests. It's in our backyards, where we go to work; it is something we interface with each and every day. Even those bound to an office have an environment to care for and make better.

"As CEO I really do see myself leading our organization in growth in a service business that makes a difference in the world. As an arborist it might be easy to take for granted that we can make a positive difference in the world by the work we do. We care for trees and most of us know trees are vitally important to the health of this planet. On a small scale, in that small environment, a single tree can be vitally important to that ecosystem and the sustainability of the site. When an arborist climbs into a tree, he or she suddenly witnesses an entirely different ecosystem up in the branches and canopy of the tree. There is a complete world there and that world is connected to other trees, other plants and animals and ultimately back to us. How we run a business and how we teach our people to treat the environment shows up in the day to day. One of our values is "environmental stewardship." We call it out. We let our people know that a value of our company is being a steward for the environment."

#### Q. What is the industry's role in the environment today? Where do you see your role.

A. "As an industry leader I must be involved in our industry associations to help foster work with the environment. It is a responsibility of an industry-leading company. Our industry is in a unique position of positively impacting the environment. We don't sing that song enough to our clients and the public in general. The industry also has the ability to shape legislation that will benefit the environment as well as our businesses. They are not mutually exclusive."

#### Q. Where do you see the industry's role in the environment in the next five to 10 years? What are your goals for improving your company's environmental focus in the coming years?

A. "Fuel and the use of alternative fuels is key. Reducing the emissions of our vehicles makes sense. We need to lead this. Isn't it a win-win when we can be caring for the very trees that clean our environment using trucks, saws and chippers that have zero emissions and even run on a renewable resource? That is where we all need to be heading. At The Care of Trees we are utilizing hybrid technology in our sales vehicles. We aggressively recycle in all offices. We are replacing incandescent lights with compact fluorescent lights where possible. We are very active in environmental conservation/sustainability groups in all of our markets. Having our people involved in the communities they serve for causes they believe in like the environment keeps their internal fires burning."

### Q. Why is it important for green industry professionals to be stewards of the environment?

A. "This trend of environmentalism and sustainability is not another fad - it is truly a trend and a trend we should be leading. Without 'green' would we have a 'green industry?' Our green industry professionals have a very awesome position in this world - an opportunity to make money doing something that makes a positive difference in the world. Like Warren Bennis said to me, 'Wow, you do good for the work and make money at it.' Isn't that what making a 'living' should be about?"

### Q. What do you do on a consistent basis to make your voice heard and support the industry?

A. "Never enough. I have been on boards, will be on boards, will continue to be involved in meetings and programs. I write articles. I sponsor and send personal money for political action committees that can help drive the change we need in Washington. In my current role one of the best things I can do for our industry is to grow our company in a manner that makes our teammates, clients and the industry proud. If The Care of Trees can be noticed by the business world outside of our industry as a place that employs a team doing good things for the world, that certainly helps support our industry."

"Early on I wanted to be out in a ranger's tower away from everybody," he says. "Most students, when we go out to recruit, that's what they want to do, too. But I discovered it was cooler to be able to work with nature in the city where people lived and where most of the population is. I still have this attraction to make tough urban places better."

Following his undergraduate work, Jamieson attended Michigan State University where he earned a master's degree in urban forestry in 1985. Some years later Jamieson returned to school for an MBA, which he earned from DePaul University in 1994.

Following his masters work at Michigan State, Jamieson worked as a tree and shrub specialist for ChemLawn. He worked in the company's Hickory Hills, Ill. office during the summers while in school. Helater became sales manager of the company's Mokena, Ill. office overseeing a fleet of 60 trucks. "I'd worked my way up the ChemLawn ladder and got away from trees on the lawn care side, which was what they were all about," he says. "But that wasn't where my passion was."

Jamieson returned to tree care when he accepted a position as an arborist for Hendricksen, The Care of Trees in 1989. The company was being led by two industry icons, Larry Hall and John Hendricksen. "They had just merged their companies and had a laser focus on arboriculture," Jamieson says.

Jim Kielbaso, a professor of urban forestry at Michigan State while Jamieson was working on his master's degree, facilitated the meeting between Hendricksen and Jamieson.

"These two were a just a good fit," Kielbaso says. "Scott's a can-do guy. He's a forward thinker with all kinds of ethics, values and responsibility. I knew he was good and capable of almost anything, but I admit I didn't really know how good he would become."

At The Care of Trees Jamieson returned to his roots spraying and fertilizing trees while at the same time learning how to climb. He soon was leading a pruning crew, an experience he says prepared him for future management roles because it gave him a greater appreciation for field operations and the estimation process. Most importantly, though, he learned how to deal with people,



especially with work crews, which were largely staffed with Hispanic workers.

"When you're out in the field, and you work alongside of anybody, one of the best languages is hard work," he says. "If you can work hard alongside someone and support and care about them, you can gain their respect without knowing the language."

Jamieson advanced to become a sales arborist for the downtown Chicago market. "Selling tree care in downtown Chicago was a dream," he says. "What could be better than caring for trees in an urban environment?"

After a few years of cutting his teeth in Chicago sales, Jamieson became district manager in 1991, regional vice president in 1994 and chief operating officer in 1995, where he was responsible for all operations in the Chicago operating unit.

Jamieson excelled at each new assignment, which was propelled by a desired to better his management and sales skills. "I kept moving along," he says, "and I kept taking advantage of training and opportunities to learn. Circumstances occurred and suddenly I'm vying

for certain positions in the company."

In 1998, Care of Trees named Jamieson its president and in 2003 the company added the title of CEO.

Jamieson's advancement up the corporate ladder had as much to do with seeking our opportunity as it did with the synergy between him and the company.

"It so happened my values and the values of the organization matched up really well," Jamieson says. "I really believe that in life what you do is match up your values. If there's a match then magical things can happen. People call it a lot of things – The Secret, The Laws of Attraction – I think it's a harmonization of your values, and that's what has lead to my success within the organization."

The year The Care of Trees named Jamieson its president the company reported about \$26 million in revenue. This year revenue should near \$53 million and the company will employ at 25 locations more than 500 people, a number that's nearly doubled during that same time period.

LEADERSHIP. Jamieson doesn't envision



the traditional pyramid structure when he contemplates his role at The Care of Trees. Instead, he sees himself as the center of a ring of circles. Each circle in that structure is a constituent he, as CEO, must satisfy. Each is linked to the others in that same circle. "I have to serve a board of director," he explains. "I have to serve the employees in the organization. I also have to serve the community and the industry. And then there are our clients.

"At times it's very difficult to serve all of those constituents equally," he adds. "For me, as a leader, I go back to that question of what's the right thing to do right now for whatever constituent I'm dealing with. Ultimately, though, it comes down to what's the right thing for the organization."

Jamieson's leadership is evident not only in his company, but also within the industry, says Cynthia Mills, CEO of the Tree Care Industry Association. "Scott lives out his values as a leader and he does not accept the status quo," Mills says. "He shows through his leadership that no matter how successful

you are there is always room for improvement. These are not only the values he holds his company to, but he also holds himself to."

Being an effective leader also means encouraging and developing leadership. Typically a group identifies its leaders as the charismatic and outgoing people with followers. Jamieson disagrees. "You don't build a successful company with only stars," he says. "You build a successful company with ordinary people who you help create extraordinary results. Bringing out the full expression of people, their skills and talents in the workplace is what leadership is all about."

A little bit of confidence is often all that's needed to unlock the seeds of leadership. "I've seen a lot of people in our organization think they don't have much potential," he says. "Then you invest a little bit of time in them and a light goes off. The next think you know they're some of the most successful managers in your organization."

Jamieson remembers running the Chicago region and having a difficult time finding a district foreman. He wondered why a crew leader at another office, a prime candidate for the position, hadn't applied. Jamieson drove to a job site and, taking the crew leader aside, explained he would be great at the position. "He looked at me as if he'd never heard anything like that before," he says. "He applied, got the job and it was as if someone put the key into his ignition. He just took off. You don't always get it right and sometimes people will fail, but that's one of a leader's main responsibilities — to put the key in the ignition, turn it and see if they can go."

COMMITMENT. Family is another of Jamieson's passions and he enjoys sharing his love for the natural world with them. He recently lead a field trip for his 8-year-old daughter's class to the Morton Arboretum. "I'm committed to preventing nature deficiency syndrome in children," he jokes, but adds an all too serious issue is a generation of children who don't have the same exposure to the outdoors previous generations did. "It's so easy for kids today to spend time in front of the computer instant messaging or playing video games. There isn't as much open

space where they can just run in the woods and explore."

Remembering his own childhood, he sought the outdoors to escape living in a broken family and in a poor neighborhood. "It's not a sob story, just the opposite," he says. "That experience empowered me to create something different for myself."

Part of that is fostering an appreciation for the natural world. To achieve this Jamieson has devoted himself to a number of professional and community service groups throughout his career, including the Illinois Arborist Association, Chicago Green Corps., the Greater North Michigan Avenue Association and the Chicago Botanic Garden, to name just a few.

He also devotes himself to guiding the next generation of tree-care workers. Jamieson serves as an instructor at Michigan State and Purdue, the Morton Arboretum and the Chicago Botanic Gardens. He's also a mentor with the Elmhurst College Mentoring Program.

With regard to the industry, Jamieson is committed to increasing safety standards in tree care. As its top executive, he's made safety a mission of paramount importance at The Care of Trees.

Tree care is one of the most dangerous professions in the nation. According to industry statistics, in 2006 tree care had about 53 fatalities per 100,000 workers – that's roughly one death per week. "As the company's new president Scott took the initiative for increased safety and he's taken it to new levels at The Care of Trees," Mills says.

The industry has a responsibility to ensure every worker comes home at the end of the day, Jamieson says. That's why he has made safety a vital mission for The Care of Trees. However, the safety program's success is only as effective as the leadership that carries it out, he says. "We view safety as a function of leadership," he says. "It starts with me. If I am not credible or approachable, our safety program will not generate the benefits we want and our people will be at risk.

"Good, bad or otherwise, what happens throughout the organization is the direct result of senior leadership," he says. "And, in my case, that comes down to me."

## all for one

Knowing that it takes more than one person to truly get the job done, Erica Santella leads with others in mind.

hen Hurricane Andrew devastated most of South Florida in 1992, many of the area's TruGreen branch managers found themselves in desperate situations. Julie Jesse, then manager of the Ft. Lauderdale branch, received countless calls from corporate managers who were mainly concerned with the disaster's impact on company revenue. Tired and frustrated, Jesse then received a call from Erica Santella, region technical manager of the Orlando branch, who asked what she could do to help. Twelve hours later, Santella arrived in Ft. Lauderdale driving a trailer loaded with the equipment and supplies Jesse needed to get her branch back up and running. "Her response was amazing," Jesse says, adding that the two women barely knew each other at the time. "When everyone else was concerned about revenue, Erica was concerned about the people."

Thinking of others comes naturally to Santella. Whether it's spending her days off shopping for new materials to better train 24 branches worth of crews, to adopting homeless dogs (she and her husband, Noel, have taken in more than a dozen over the years) to donating platelets to the American Red Cross as often as she's allowed (she recently hit the 55-gallon mark and is aiming for 100 gallons in the next decade) she is ready and willing to help when and wherever she is needed. "People in the industry call her if there's a problem because they know she'll always be there," says Jesse, who today is Santella's best friend. "She's approachable and she's reachable, and that's an important part of leadership."

**LEADING THE WAY.** Many who know her agree that Santella's accessibility is one reason she is such a respected leader in the lawn care industry. Other reasons are her patience, fairness and her ability to communicate and get things done. "Her personality is very ef-

By Emily Mullins



Name: ERICA MARIE SANTELLA

Age: 50

Title: Region technical manager

Company: TruGreen Location: Orlando, Fla.

#### **Career Highlights:**

- 1978 —Earned a Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture from the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana
- 1983—Earned a Master of Science degree in agronomy from the University of Arkansas
- 1983—Joined Chemlawn as a research associate
- 1985-Moved to Florida to open ChemLawn's Central Florida Research branch
- 1987— Appointed to Florida region technical manager position
- 1995— Was named TruGreen-ChemLawn's Florida region staff person of the year
- 2000— Became the first female president of the Florida Turfgrass Association
- 2000— Served as chair for the "Green Industries Best Management Practices" reference guide
- 2003— Was appointed to the Florida Pest Control Enforcement advisory council
- · 2006— Received the President's Award from the Florida Pest Management Association
- · 2006— Received the Wreath of Grass Award from the Florida Turfgrass Association
- 2007— Was appointed to the Dixon Research fund committee by the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

fective when it comes to communicating," says Kirk Hurto, vice president of TruGreen technical services. "She can decide the right thing to do and then convince others why it's the right thing to do. They're confident in the decisions she makes because they know she has their best interests at heart."

But unlike some leaders who influence others with force or even intimidation, Santella leads with a level-headed hand and realizes that you can attract more bees with honey. "There are some leaders who have very boisterous, driver personalities," Hurto continues. "Erica knows how to get other people to work with her because she's more of a coaching leader than anything else."

Santella's leadership capabilities span beyond crews and colleagues and into her day-to-day dealings with clients, association members, industry volunteers and politicians. In addition to her role at TruGreen, she is also extremely active in the quest to protect Florida's water quality and quantity. In fact, she says her participation in writing the Florida reference book "Green Industry Best Management Practices," which she describes as "the bible when it comes to water quality," is one of her biggest career accomplishments to date. Santella was chair of the project, a joint effort between the Department of Agriculture, the University of Florida and various water management districts.

Being an effective communicator is important when interacting with such a wide variety of people - especially high-profile people to whom time is always a factor. "A professor I had during my graduate studies stressed that good writing does not have to be difficult to read. It should be easy on the eyes and get the point across in as few syllables as possible," Santella says. "Members of local governments have so much on their plates - what do they want and need to know about slow vs. soluble fertilizer? You have to be able to boil it down for them."

Santella credits the bulk of her leadership capabilities to what she's learned from Jesse over the years, and both women agree that their roles at TruGreen brought them together and put them in the positions to learn from each other. "Leaders used to be the hard-nosed men, but these days they can come in many different forms," Santella says. "True leaders have to be respected and there is a big difference between fear and respect."

Being a respected woman in a male-dominated field can be difficult, and even intimidating. But if you're good, you're good, and true expertise is a gift whether coming from a man or a woman. "It's hard to be a woman in this industry, especially 20 years ago when Erica started out," Jesse says. "Clients expect a man to come and help them with their problems and here comes Erica - but she has no trouble getting down and dirty with the best of them."

Santella's minority status in the industry has never really bothered her, she says, even though it spans all the way back to undergraduate school when she was usually the only female in her classes. "I never felt intimidated when I was the only woman in a class," she says. "In fact, I wondered why more women didn't enter this field."

GETTING THERE. As a young girl growing up on the Southwest side of Chicago, Santella's first love was animals, but severe allergies directed her attention to the next best living thing; plants. "She always loved plants and took a real interest in the yard," says her mother, Rita Miller. "And she always had some sort of project going, like nursing a sick bush until it was healthy again or planting a patch of gourds just to watch them grow."

She attended undergraduate school at the University of Illinois, Cham-

### erica santella on environmental stewardship...

- Q. What is the environmental message you feel you represent in your role in the industry? Why do you think it's important for you to think about the environment in your day-to-day business dealings?
- A. "As we grow and develop new communities, turfgrass has a role to play as nature's best water filter. Training of employees and customers is an on-going process. You can't give a message once and expect it to sink in. We are the conscience for the public. Most of our customers don't understand (or want to understand) the negative effects that can happen if lawn and ornamental care are not done properly. The average person is concerned about the environment, but really has no idea how to make a positive impact. As lawn and ornamental professionals, we have the opportunity each and every day to educate them on the value of what we do."
- Q. Where do you see the lawn care industry's role in the environment today? Where do you see your role specifically as a part of that?
- A. "We are educators. We must teach our customers, the general public and even university researchers what lawn and ornamental service companies do to help protect the environment. Invite a regulator, extension agent or university researcher into your facility to let them see that making a profit and being a sound environmentalist can both be accomplished by the same company. Whether it is an approved materials list or untreated buffer zones around water, I encourage other Florida TruGreen managers to get as educated as possible and to get involved in the local community."
- Where do you see the industry's role in the environment in the next five to 10 years? What about your role what are your personal and professional goals for improving your company's or employees' environmental focus in the coming years?
- A. "We have to play an active role in the regulatory process. This means going to meetings and having our voices heard. It can sometimes be difficult to determine which meetings to attend. Personally, I will continue to be involved with the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Department of Environmental Protection and the University of Florida. I will be an active member of professional associations, such as the Florida Pest Management Association. From this involvement, you often make contacts that you have no idea will be important. Never underestimate the value of the people you know."
- Q. Why do you think it's important for green industry professionals to be stewards of the environment?
- A. "We are in the public eye each and every day. There is always someone watching what we are doing, and there are those who don't appreciate our positive impact on the environment and economy. We have to show that we are concerned about the environment. And why wouldn't we be? We live here, along with our families and pets."
- Q. What do you do on a consistent basis to make your voice heard and support the industry? What special things do you do?
- A. "I attend a lot of meetings, and I listen and read. I read every professional magazine that comes out to see what I might be missing. I'm not shy about calling up a competitor to ask if they have heard about an issue. I encourage our local facilities to stay involved in local issues. Our Ft. Lauderdale location, for example, participates in an annual Water Matters Day. The first year, some attendees were somewhat taken aback to see a lawn care company at an environmental event. They shouldn't be! Our Vero Beach location has had informational booths at the area's county fair at the request of an extension agent. We need to appear in places where we are not expected to be."

paign-Urbana, where she "floundered though and dabbled in several majors," including computer science, forestry and botany before finally settling on agronomy. Santella's parents were strong proponents of education and expected all of their children (Santella is the third of four) to attend college. However, what they studied while they were there was strictly up to them. "My dad was a chemist and my mom was a math teacher – I was bound to be a geek," she jokes. "They just assumed all of us would go to college, but there was never a time I was told, 'Oh, you don't have an agricultural background, why are you going into that?"

To earn money during college she took a job performing field work for a soybean breeder where she gained an appreciation for applied research. Upon graduation, she responded to an advertisement for a research associate at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville where she could work full time while earning a master's degree. "I applied, got the job and headed West with my two dogs, my fish and whatever else fit into my Buick Skylark," she recalls.

For five years, Santella worked under Professor John W. King, who "hired her when all she had was potential." Here, she and the three students working under her experienced the gamut of the lawn care industry – she ran turf plots, worked with spray equipment and learned about mowing, irrigation and weed control. In addition to her station in Fayetteville, she also had one in Little Rock, and worked at both while earning her master's degree in agronomy.

Santella loved her work in the applied research field, and swore to many she would never leave it. After graduating from the University of Arkansas, she began searching for a job with a chemical company that would

allow her to continue applied research - a tall order considering there were few companies that offered that type of work, specifically for lawns and ornamentals, back in 1983. ChemLawn, the company's name prior to its 1992 merger with TruGreen, was one such company, and Hurto hired Santella as a research associate in Douglasville, Ga. Soon after, she was transferred to Orlando, Fla. to help expand the company's Florida market. In the late 1980s, Hurto suggested Santella take on the position of region technical manager, a job that initially focused on the training of employees. She accepted and has worked at TruGreen in that position ever since. "Once I began to do training with our branch's employees, I was hooked," she says. "My mom was a teacher, so maybe it's in my blood."

Though she certainly had the educational background and the "genuine interest" in the line of work, Hurto says Santella was a quiet and rather shy person when she started at ChemLawn 24 years ago, which is ironic when thinking about the fairly pubic position she's currently in. "She was so focused on the research and she thought that would be her primary goal," he says. "When I first suggested she take on the role of region manager, she was reluctant to the idea. I still tease her to this day because she can't imagine not doing the work she's doing now."

COMMON GROUND. What Santella does now varies considerably from day to day. "While the title has not changed, the responsibilities certainly have," she says. "Training still remains a key job, but the regulatory process has also entered into view." For example, in a week's time, she'll conduct field visits, perform regulatory work, track chemical use, meet with county commissioners, lead



safety training meetings and determine the cause of a client's patchy lawn. Other times, she'll participate in state and local association meetings to discuss current water and fertilizer regulations. The one predictable day of the week, Monday, is usually reserved for "catch-up type work."

"Training is her forté," Jesse says, and it currently takes up about a third of Santella's time. Knowing how important well-trained employees are to the future of the industry, she strives to come up with innovative ways to make learning interesting and fun. Her mentor program combines online, visual, hands-on and formal classroom training to provide new employees a well-rounded educational experience.

Santella's array of responsibilities requires her to interact with people from all walks of

"It sounds strange now, but I used to think to myself that my ideas were weird and not of any value.

Then one of two things would happen — either someone else would bring up the same idea or after the meeting someone would say, 'Why didn't you say that earlier!'" — Erica Santella



life, her favorite aspect of the job, she says. "Everyday I learn from the people around me – whether it's the guys in the warehouse, a company president, a client or a politician," she says. "Plants are a big part of it, but the people part is what I enjoy most."

All of this diversity, combined with controversial issues like pesticides and water use, means conflict is almost inevitable. Santella has dealt with her fair share of opposite-minded individuals, but never lets it interfere with her mission. "When you're sitting across the table from a Sierra Club member discussing pesticide use, some people ask why I even bother," she says. "But my mother always said that when you're working with people with very diverse viewpoints you must find some common ground."

Like her mother, who was active in Chicago's civil rights movement in the 1960s, and her grandmother, who fought for a woman's right to vote, Santella knows that her efforts are works in progress, a philosophy that has been particularly helpful when dealing with city, county and state regulatory agencies. "You have to take your successes as they come and build upon them — there is no point where you have 'won,'" she explains.

"Digging in your heels and being bitter and ornery won't get you far. If my mother could work successfully with a racially polarized group on the Southwest side of Chicago, we can work through our issues too."

Despite all she does, Santella is the last to take credit for any of it. In fact, she gets a bigger thrill out of seeing a newcomer participate at a meeting for the first time or find the courage to speak up and share an idea. Perhaps this is a reflection of her once reserved ways. "I wish I would have learned earlier the value of speaking up when you have an idea," she says. "It sounds strange now, but I used to think to myself that my ideas were weird and not of any value. Then one of two things would happen — either someone else would bring up the same idea or after the meeting someone would say, 'Why didn't you say that earlier!'"

Miller agrees that her daughter's presence has always been strong, yet silent. "Erica's quiet, but once she talks, it's worth listening to," she says. "I imagine that's how she is during meetings too. She doesn't talk just to have the floor."

Hurto says this ability to let others have the floor is part of what makes Santella such a successful leader. "She gets people to open up because they know she'll listen to what they have to say," he says. "The nature of her personality has won over many people who were once averse to trying new things, and her can-do attitude has helped people become better at what they're doing."

After all these years, Santella still strives to be better at what she does – and sometimes forgets when to stop. "We live a few hours apart but we make the effort to get together once every few months," Jesse says. "On these days she's supposed to take the day off, but, really, she's always working. She is so involved in her career and in the industry that sometimes it's hard to separate herself from it."

But Santella has clear ideas of what industry professionals like herself need to do to direct the industry where it needs to go in the future. One of the first tasks at hand is improving the training and education of industry employees, she says, stressing the fact that math and interpersonal skills are just as important as application skills.

Santella adds that the ornamental side of the industry also presents a huge challenge for those who are unfamiliar with all the different terminology. "People tend to learn lawn care relatively quickly and then become afraid of trees, shrubs and palms," she says. "We need to think of them simply as other plants and build upon our knowledge of grasses."

The pesticide debate and water use restrictions will continue to plague the industry in years to come, Santella says, and everyone needs to be prepared to do their part. "I've heard that 10 percent of the population is at the extreme ends of any debate, and our debates are no different," she says. "As an industry, we need to target our efforts to the middle 80 percent of the population to better inform them about the value of what we do."

Nobody is more aware than Santella that these feats can't be accomplished by one individual. But she is living proof that one individual can inspire and encourage others to think, participate and contribute to a common cause. "Erica's a real example of someone who knew her own strengths at an early age," Miller says. "I'm very proud of her professional accomplishments because they are all hers."

# lifelong learner

A education-filled career guides Tom Shotzbarger in advocating for the industry.

Name: TOM SHOTZBARGER

Age: 52

Title: General manager

Company: Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn

Care & Landscape

Location: Lancaster, Pa.

#### **Career Highlights:**

- Appointed by Pennsylvania's governor to serve on the Pesticide Advisory Board, 2007
- Committee chair of Renewal & Remembrance at Arlington National and Historic Congressional Cemeteries, 2007
- Bachelor's degree, Applied Psychology/ Organizational behavior, Albright College, Reading, Pa., 2001
- Reviewed well-know pathologist Alex Shigo's book "Modern Arboriculture" prior to publication

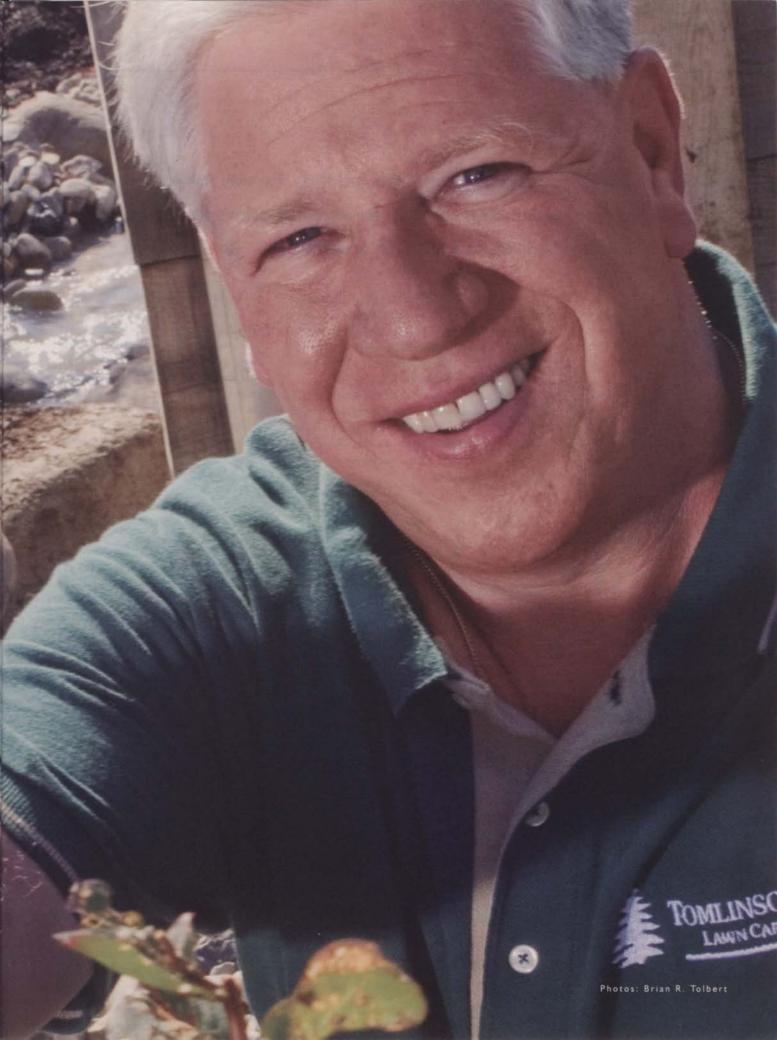
rofessionals in the landscape industry are typically categorized in one of two ways. You're either a "plant guy" who's had to learn about sales, management and finance, or you're a "business guy" – an entrepreneurial type who's accrued horticultural knowledge along the way.

Tom Shotzbarger is neither. Or he's both, depending on which way you look at it. Though the general manager of Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care & Landscape in Lancaster, Pa., doesn't fit into one of the typical green industry "types," one thing is for sure – Shotzbarger is an education guy. And it highlights why his 34-year-long career in the green industry has been both fulfilling and successful.

"Tom only has one degree, but he probably has enough education to have two and a half by now," says Joan Shotzbarger, Tom's wife of 30 years.

In addition to continually pursuing his own education, Shotzbarger has been on the giving end, too, serving as an instructor at several community colleges and conducting talks and training sessions at countless industry events over the years. If you need evidence of Shotzbarger's commitment to education, take a look at his signature. He lists his professional certifications after his name, which isn't notable in itself, as it's a common practice among professionals. But most professionals don't have eight certifications flanking their names like Shotzbarger does. "He has to be the reigning champion in all of PLANET in professional certifications," says friend

By Marisa Palmieri



"A positive image for the green industry is critical, and things like more training, better education and professional certification help foster and improve the public's perception that what we do is create and maintain the quality of life in communities." — Tom Shotzbarger

and former colleague Fred Haskett, managing partner of U.S. Lawns West and St. Charles County in St. Louis. (See sidebar below to learn about Shotzbarger's eight certifications.) "I have two and I thought I was doing pretty well," says Haskett, jokingly.

Though the alphabet soup may seem like overkill, Shotzbarger doesn't promote his certifications for self-serving reasons. Certification is one of his "causes." He believes it's one of the factors that will contribute

to improving

public perception of the green industry.

"A positive image for the green industry is critical, and things like more training, better education and professional certification help foster and improve the public's perception that what we do is create and maintain the quality of life in communities," he says. So when clients and peers notice the eight designations after his name, they ask about them. "It really adds value to not only my career but the whole industry."

Continually seeking opportunities to better the industry and himself through education and volunteerism are the hallmarks of Shotzbarger's career.

#### THE ROAD OUT WEST.

Shotzbarger got his first taste of the green industry during his senior year of high school in Philadelphia. After three and a half years working part-time at a card and gift shop, he felt the urge to work outdoors. He asked around, and a friend of a friend got him a job with Liam Ferns Landscaping.

Shotzbarger enjoyed the job mowing lawns and continued to work there during the summers when he attended Haverford College in Haverford, Pa. At the time, Shotzbarger pursued a liberal arts degree, but he didn't yet have a clear goal for his education.

After two years he decided to put it



## tom shotzbarger on environmentalism...

- Q. What is the environmental message you feel you represent in your role in the industry? Why do you think it's important for a green industry professional like yourself to think about the environment in your day-to-day business dealings?
- A. "Always consider the impact on the environment and not just profit opportunity. For example, it is unnecessary to damage trees by drilling holes to deliver materials directly to the trunk or roots when non-invasive, non-damaging methods are appropriate and effective. Landscape professionals are in the public eye and need to set a good example."
- Q. Where do you see the industry's role in the environment today? Where do you see your role specifically as a part of that?
- A. "We need to improve the public perception that we are educated and scientifically competent to be environmental stewards. We need to be more proactive in delivering a positive message about the advantages and benefits for the public to use professional lawn care and landscape firms Project Ever-Green provides a perfect vehicle for us to deliver the positive message. Also, there is a position of reality and functionally, environmentally appropriate treatment somewhere between the extremes. Those who want to ban all pesticide use by professionals and not regulate the potential abuse by homeowners are misguided. There needs to be recognition that do-it-yourselfers are generally not as knowledgeable and conscientious about pesticide use as licensed, green industry professionals, who are trained, skilled and conservative in their use of pesticides. That issue is rarely addressed by the environmental extremists."
- Q. Where do you see the industry's role in the environment in the next five to 10 years? What about your role what are your personal and professional goals for improving your company's or employees' environmental focus in the coming years?
- A. "I see the future role of the industry as using appropriate trees, shrubs and groundcovers that are best for the location, using insect- and disease-resistant varieties, advocating and training for integrated pest management and plant health care and more training on the cultural practices necessary to create and maintain landscapes that add to the quality of life."
- Q. Why do you think it's important for green industry professionals to be stewards of the environment?
- A. "We should know more about the environments we create and maintain. Knowledge and professional practices create value and beauty."
- Q. What do you do on a consistent basis to make your voice heard and support the industry?
- A. "I support industry associations PLANET, LCAP, PLNA, TCIA, ISA and others, serve on the state of Pennsylvania's Pesticide Advisory Board and serve as committee chair for Renewal & Remembrance. I also like to write, train, educate and advocate."

on hold until he mapped out a future.

Though unsure about the type of degree he'd seek, Shotzbarger knew from his experience mowing lawns he wanted to work outdoors. Shortly after he married his wife, Joan, in 1977, the young couple moved across the country to Oregon, where Shotzbarger could pursue year-round employment in the green industry.

With the understanding that he needed a crash course in Northwest plant material, Shotzbarger sought employment at one of the Portland area's best retail nurseries. Within a week he secured a job at Drake's 7 Dee's, a nursery and landscape services company.

During his 12 years in Oregon, Shotzbarger established himself as a student of the industry, taking horticulture classes at local community colleges and business classes at Portland State University. He also began his career as an educator in Oregon, teaching plant identification and landscape maintenance courses at Clackamas Community College.

It was here, too, that Shotzbarger got the opportunity of a lifetime - the chance to work alongside pathologist Alex Shigo, considered by many to be the father of modern arboriculture. The two conducted tree biology training sessions together in the early 1980s. "He looked to me as not only a commercial practitioner, but also as an educator," Shotzbarger says. "Spending a week out in the woods with Al Shigo was a remarkable opportunity to learn about the whys and hows of trees and arboriculture." He lists the privilege of previewing Shigo's renowned book "Modern Arboriculture" as one of the significant accomplishments of his career. "It was truly an honor," he says.

MOVIN' ON UP. The foundation for Shotzbarger's professional leadership style also was laid in Oregon. The credit for that feat goes to Bill Owen, owner of General Tree Service in Clackamas, where Shotzbarger worked for seven years.

Shotzbarger credits Owen with introducing him to the science of arboriculture and teaching him the value of a leader's ability to own the decisions he makes. "There was an expression he used," Shotzbarger recalls, "There are three ways to do things. There's the right way, the wrong way and my way," he would say. I learned there was a black and a white in many circumstances, but occasionally you do what the boss wants because he feels it's important. I learned an aspect of ownership – that the leader takes responsibility for the decision he makes."

Shotzbarger has carried that lesson throughout his career, and it's clear he's done something right. After leaving General Tree Service to move back East, Shotzbarger changed jobs frequently – he just kept getting recruited. "Once I advanced my education and experience, it seemed a natural progression to change things up and I was getting offers on a regular basis," he says. "I've always been one to follow opportunity."

Follow he did. After a short stint in New York, Shotzbarger moved back to Pennsylvania, where over a nine-year period he worked as division operations manager for Ehrlich Green Team, as regional horticultural specialist for The Brickman Group and as general manager for McFarland Tree & Landscape Services.

These promotions presented some of the greatest challenges of Shotzbarger's career, which he tackled in the way you'd expect him to — by pursing education. His first major transition was moving from a production role into a sales position. It required a whole new mind-set, and Shotzbarger became a voracious reader of everything related to sales. The next big change — becoming a general manager — was Shotzbarger's motivation to complete his bachelor's degree. This time around, at Albright College in Reading, Pa., Shotzbarger chose the field of organizational behavior — a key ingredient of which is learning about the interactions between people.

"One aspect of that is realizing more and more that life is not black and white – there's an awful lot of gray," Shotzbarger says. "I acquired a greater appreciation for other peoples' perspectives."

In 2001 he was recruited again by Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care & Landscape. President Clark Tomlinson remembers hearing about Shotzbarger for the first time. "One



of our sales managers said, 'Hey Clark, if you're ever interested in being on the golf course a little more, I found a guy who could run the company in his sleep,'" Tomlinson says. "It was interesting enough, so I pursued having a conversation with Tom."

Two years after than meeting, a consultant told Tomlinson and his partner Dave Bomberger it was time to hire a general manager. Tomlinson knew he had his man. He called on Shotzbarger to develop a job description for the position, and at the end of a several-hour long brainstorming meeting, he offered Shotzbarger the job. The company hasn't looked back since. Shotzbarger doesn't exactly run the \$8 million-plus, full-service firm in his sleep, as he frequently works 13-hour days, but he does bring to the company a wealth of experience and the value of volunteerism.

Doing what a great general manager should do, Shotzbarger fills in the gaps for some of the owners' weaknesses by applying his planning and organizational management skills, which have translated into significant growth for the firm.

"He's very strong in budgeting and revenue growth," Tomlinson says. "He helped us make a four-year plan to meet revenue growth. We put the plan together and it happened."



#### man of the house

Friends and colleagues note a number of reasons Tom Shotzbarger has the strong character and leadership qualities he does today. His wife mentions his upbringing; his boss names his integrity. Friend and former colleague Fred Haskett, however, has a different philosophy: "The poor man has three daughters and for a very long time lived in a small house in Reading, Pa.," Haskett says. "That's been a big character builder."

Haskett laughs, conceding he's being facetious. Nevertheless, he remembers working with Shotzbarger at Erlich Green Team in the early 1990s. "I used to get into work at 6:30 a.m. and Tom would be there already halfway through a pot of coffee," he says. "One time I asked, 'Why do you get here so early?' And he said, 'I've got one shot at the bathroom very early – I take it and get out of there. It gets pretty ugly around there after that."

Haskett jests because he knows how close the family is. Shotzbarger's wife, Joan, says he always enjoyed following his daughters, Katie, 29, Julie, 28, and Jillian, 20, in their educational and athletic pursuits over the years. "He either coached or was the best – loudest – cheering fan at many basketball and lacrosse games and cross-country meets through the years," she says.

Though Haskett was joking about "the poor man with three daughters," Joan acknowledges that her husband enjoys having some male camaraderie now that two sons-in-law have joined the family. "Tom is thrilled to spend time with the guys," she says.

Tomlinson adds, tongue in cheek, "Surprising – you plan for something and it happens."

In addition to his business and technical acumen, Shotzbarger brings to the company a strong value of integrity. "His integrity is unwavering," Tomlinson says. "He'll always ask, 'Is this the right thing to do?' The people who work under Tom are very aware they have a lot to learn from him."

Shotzbarger understands that he's in a position to make an impact. His leadership style is one of setting an example and guiding coworkers to make the right decisions, though it hasn't always been that way. "Leadership isn't something that's a gift – it's an acquired knowledge," Shotzbarger says. "Over time, my leadership skills have improved, but they're not yet to the point where they'll ultimately be. But if my desk is neat, if I'm on time for meetings and pursuing a certain level of professionalism, than others learn it and get to practice it as well."

Shotzbarger makes it a point to set the example, even on a seemingly micro scale. For example, he instituted the practice of calling Tomlinson Bomberger staff members "co-workers" and referring to customers as "clients." "Employee' sounds like a subservient position; 'co-worker' is more parallel,"

Shotzbarger says. And he prefers "client" over "customer" because "customers walk in once, buy something and leave. With clients, you have an on-going relationship," he says.

Though he says the results are intangible, there is something to be said for the company's 85-percent client retention rate and 80-percent co-worker retention rate.

GIVING BACK. Shotzbarger calls himself an eternal optimist, and that characteristic shines through in most everything he says and does. "I feel I've been very blessed, with my wife, my children and the companies I've worked for," Shotzbarger says. "I feel like I need to spread it around."

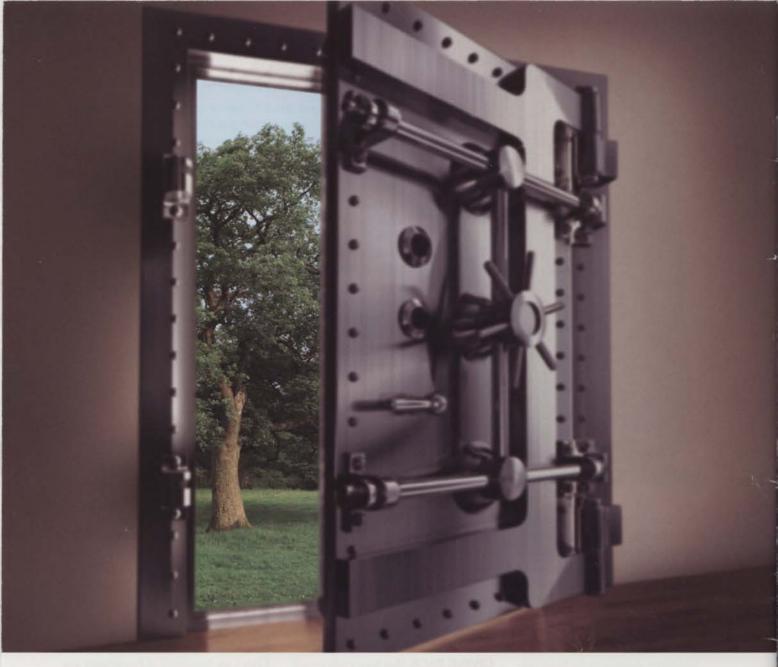
Over the years, that's exactly what he's done. Shorzbarger sits on PLANET's certification committee, he's served as an official observer for the CLT exam and has given a number of presentations at industry-related conferences, seminars and training events. "One thing I love to do is training – whether it's the technical or business end," Shorzbarger says. "It gives me a chance to give back some of the knowledge and wisdom I've gained from many of my mentors, associates and colleagues."

This year Pennsylvania's governor ap-

pointed Shotzbarger to serve on the state's Pesticide Advisory Board, a group of 17 representatives who advise the state department of agriculture. "I feel uniquely honored to have been chosen to sit on the board and represent our industry in a way that can have an impact," he says.

Also this year, Shotzbarger served the first of a two-year term as the president of the Lawn Care Association of Pennsylvania and took the reins as committee chair for Renewal & Remembrance at Arlington National and Historic Congressional Cemeteries. He considered the opportunity to organize Renewal & Remembrance, the PLANET-sponsored national landmark beautification event with more than 400 volunteers, a privilege. "I was honored by [event founder] Phil Fogarty to be asked to step in where he was stepping down," Shotzbarger says.

The industry should be thankful for one of Shotzbarger's weaknesses – his inability to say no to volunteering for his passions. He's so often called on to serve because he gets things done, Haskett says. "Tom can put a set of blinders on and just focus really aggressively," he says. "He's truly a remarkable person – he's disciplined and passionate about anything he gets involved in."

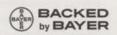


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