

March 2008

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Cover Photo: David Sandberg



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This is the second month of *Lawn & Landscape's* three-part Work Force Series. The extensive coverage of the industry's labor situation continues at lawnandlandscape.com. Look for the section title "Work Force Series" on the homepage.

TOP FIVE WEB STORIES

- 1. ON THE ROAD: New England Grows' Changed Format Offers Something for Everyone**
A series of "Master Classes" and a keynote address were among the new features.
- 2. Georgia Governor Eases Outdoor Watering Restrictions**
The state will provide exemptions to Level Four drought response.
- 3. INDUSTRY BUZZ: Fuel Management**
Basic steps can be taken to improve fuel cost.
- 4. ANLA Graduates Garden Center University Class**
The two-year program teaches business operations and efficiency.
- 5. GIE+EXPO Online Registration is Open**
The Web site for this year's show was launched.

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The Month Ahead | lawnandlandscape.com

INDUSTRY BUZZ

Log on March 17 as Project EverGreen gives us another reason greens spaces are beneficial.

ONLINE EXTRA

At the bottom of the homepage, under "current issue," read the companion to this month's article about preemergents.

E-NEWSLETTER

To receive the latest news and product information in your inbox weekly, visit lawnandlandscape.com/newsletter and sign up.

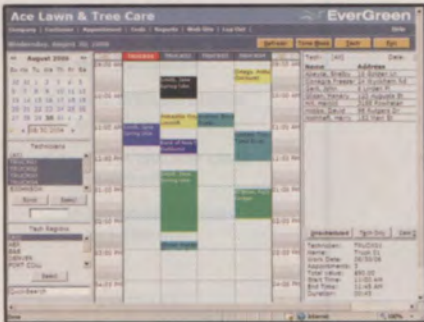
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Log on to lawnandlandscape.com for the latest acquisition, legislation and other industry news that affects your business.



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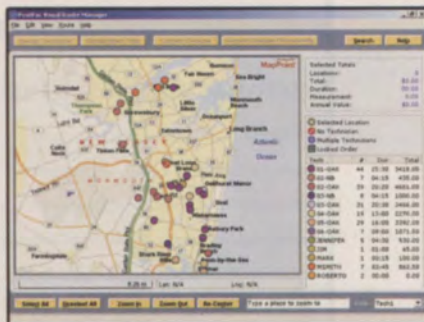
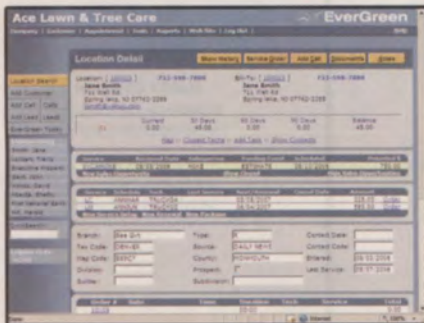
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Expanding Our Work Force

The landscape industry suffers from an image problem. It's really quite hard to believe considering the beautiful landscapes that contractors bring to life.

Consider the intricate design/build projects that spring out of dirt. Or, the manicured grounds that border corporate campuses across the U.S. How about the theme parks, sports fields and gardens that contribute to the entertainment and serenity of Americans living much too hectic lifestyles?

Yet, stop to contemplate the obstacles contractors face in trying to grow their businesses. Challenges include raising both wages and pricing, lack of available labor, price-cutting competition and activist interference prompting tiresome legislation. Enterprising business people have successfully built million-dollar landscape companies, yet the seasonal schedules generally isn't enough to attract most American workers. Despite this, the government refuses to take action on the H-2B returning-worker exemption program.

The landscape industry has a serious labor problem that needs to be addressed. Last month, we began a three-part series on the labor crisis facing the landscape industry. The first article focused on H-2B and the predicament that business owners face without an adequate number of workers. Without workers, jobs won't be completed. With fewer jobs, less money will be spent on new and replacement equipment.

With or without the H-2B program, the landscape industry must take steps to expand the work force from which it draws its workers. In addition to the tried and true recruitment principles, contractors must think outside the box and enlist new groups to the industry. Early retirees, part-time firefighters, laid-off auto workers just to name a few. This month, the second in our labor series focuses on unique recruitment techniques and systems.

But that's only one part of the solution. Long-term, the landscape industry needs to attract a whole new generation of people to the industry. Think students. High school, vocational and college students. The next generation needs to be the primary target of workers and future business owners. The outreach needs to be proactive and engaging. Students need to know about the great opportunities that await them in the landscape industry. They need to be told about the effect great landscape installations bring to families and communities. They need to hear it from you.

PLANET's Student Career Days is one chance to interact with students. Visit www.studentcareerdays.org for more information.

To portray the landscape industry in a new light to students, *Lawn & Landscape* is launching a new student edition. This publication will be distributed to students and professors at two- and four-year colleges across the country. The issue will illustrate the expansive careers and opportunities that await students in the green industry. It will also help to start a dialogue between students and potential employers.

Spring is a time of new beginnings. Let's communicate loud and clear about the benefits of working in the landscape industry. **LL**

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Through its business management content, *Lawn & Landscape* provides its readers with pertinent, practical information on how to become more productive, efficient and profitable in your businesses.



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372:16
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Total hours: Placing Sod

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Hours Bill Owen worked last week

611:05

Total hours to date:
Crestview Job

WEEKLY TIMECARD

NAME: *Bill Owen* DATES: *14-18*


	START	LUNCH	END	JOB CODES	JOBSITE/PROJECT	HOURS
Mon.	7:00	1/2	3:30		Brentwood	8
Tues.			3:30			8
Wed.			4:00		↓	8 1/2
Thurs.			4:00		Crestview	8 1/2
Fri.	↓	↓	4:00		↓	8 1/2

SIGNATURE: *Bill Owen* TOTAL HOURS: *41 1/2*

GUESSWORK

Employee Time Card

Displays the total time worked by each employee


Mountain View Landscape

Bill Owen

Time card for: Monday, April 14, 2008 - Sunday, April 20, 2008

Jobsite Name	Cost Code	4/14	4/15	4/16	4/17	4/18	4/19	4/20	Total
Brentwood Job	Irrigation	7:38	7:35	3:31					18:44
Crestview Job	Placing Sod			4:22	7:58	7:49			20:09
		7:38	7:35	7:53	7:58	7:49			38:53

Signature: *Bill Owen* Bill Owen

Total Regular Hours:
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Sales Ingenuity



I was reading through your recent article about Noon Turf Care [January 2008] and I truly enjoyed the ingenuity that those brothers have shown. Having been in the lawn care industry for

13 years now, I've watched technology change rapidly. It's always educational and interesting to read a story like yours that highlights an interesting way in which another company is exploring new technologies productively.

*Christopher J. Brown
Teed & Brown
Norwalk, Conn.*

Design/Build

I received *Lawn & Landscape's* new design magazine this week. Perfect timing for my business. Nice touch *Lawn & Landscape*.

*Ryan Holt
Driftwood Lawn Care & Landscape
Rising Sun, Md.*



Editor's note: Are you a design/build contractor interested in receiving *Professional Landscape Design*, *Lawn & Landscape's* bi-monthly special issue? If so, please send an e-mail to mberendt@gie.net to subscribe.

Work Force Series

Survey results published in your February issue cover story "Who Will Do the Work" stated "...survey respondents said they will raise wages, increase benefits...."

We as an industry need to be careful with saying things like that. That will give our opponents more ammunition. They will say that raising wages is all landscape companies have needed to do to attract American workers. They want higher wages for American workers, and they think that foreign workers are holding down wages of American workers.

With the low unemployment rate in most areas, raising wages will only cause already employed workers to move from their current job to the higher paying job. This does nothing to help the labor shortage problem.

YES, we might be forced to pay higher wages and increase benefits to try and attract American workers, but 1. I doubt it will help; 2. It will put a strain on most small businesses who are already struggling to make ends meet; 3. It will leave many businesses with no financial means to advance employees; 4. The consumer will have to pay more money for the goods and services; 5. Many businesses won't be able to recover the extra expense and will shut their doors; and 6. The employees will leave every time a higher wage and better benefits are offered.

*Chuck Twist
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WATER RESTRICTIONS

RALEIGH RESTRICTS WATER

The Raleigh, N.C., city council voted Feb. 12

to ban hand watering with a hose and continue the ban of all automatic irrigation beginning Feb. 15. The new ordinance is an extension of the irrigation ban implemented last October as result of the state's severe and lengthy drought.

Several hundred members of the Green Industry Council were on site to voice their displeasure with the decision, said Ed Buchan, water conservation specialist for Raleigh's public utilities department. The ability to water with a hose had provided some relief to contractors

since the October irrigation bans. "Most landscape professionals are pretty disconcerted that we're moving to stage two, our most restrictive ban," Buchan said. "Hand watering is off the table now, so they're obviously going to be affected by that."

As an alternative, many contractors are utilizing bulk reuse water available in Raleigh and neighboring cities. After taking a free, 30-minute certification class, contractors with means to transport reuse water have unlimited access to. "Unfortunately we don't have in ground distribution, so it can create some logistical problems for people who don't have some sort of tank," Buchan says, adding the num-

ber of contractors interested in the reuse water has skyrocketed in recent weeks. "But one of the few bright spots in this situation is that people are aware they have access to the reuse water and there is increased interest - we certainly applaud them for that."

As of press time, there is no end in sight to Raleigh's restrictions, and unless there is "an unusual rain event" this spring, Buchan doesn't see one any time soon. "We don't ever get much rain in the summer, so if don't get rain this spring it could create a real crisis," he said.

As of now Raleigh doesn't even have stage three water restrictions, so a whole new system will have to be created if things get worse. According to Buchan, that is when other commercial businesses, like restaurants, could be affected. "We wish we would have been able to prevent this earlier, but no one can predict drought of this magnitude," he said. "Unfortunately this isn't going away any time soon."

-Emily Mullins



GEORGIA LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS SEE WATER USE RELIEF

Georgia's severe and lengthy drought made headlines in 2007

as the worst drought in the state's history. But residents saw relief when the state voted Feb. 13 to ease the level four restrictions, which banned virtually all outdoor watering in 61 counties, to level two restrictions, which allow hand watering of plants for 25 minutes every other day for three days a week, as long as local water regulators sign off on the rule. It also allows homeowners and professional landscape contractors to water newly installed landscapes up to three days a week for 10 weeks once they pass an online certification program that will start in April.



WATER-SAVING TIPS:

New Plantings:

- Group plants according to water needs
- Use smaller plants
- Use soil amendments properly
- Use proper planting techniques
- Mulch liberally
- Create water basins
- Use low-volume irrigation

Established Plantings:

- Prioritize water use
- Control weeds and replenish mulch
- Avoid fertilizer during a drought
- Delay pruning
- Water wisely

Source: The University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension

A 10-percent reduction in water consumption ordered last year by Gov. Sonny Perdue is still in effect, and lawmakers also adopted Georgia's first statewide water plan, which calls for three years of assessments to measure Georgia's water supply and needs, and creates 11 regional councils to create their own water plans.

The restrictions were lifted largely on account of pressure from green industry groups, like the Georgia Urban Agriculture Council, news sources say. GUAC stressed the economic importance of Georgia's \$8.12 billion green industry during meetings with the governor and Environmental Protection Agency members. "The landscape industry has been most largely affected by the bans," says GUAC member Tony White, operations manager of T. Lake Environmental Designs in East Dublin, Ga. "So far, about 14,000 jobs and almost \$2 billion have been lost as result of the drought [according to GUAC research]. That's significant."

While the lesser restrictions don't really affect the counties already experiencing level two restrictions, it will prevent them from reaching level four restrictions, White says, adding that each county has the ability to tighten the restrictions as they see fit. "The state is just the outside perimeter, making sure everyone is on the same playing field," he says. "The decisions of individual counties can create whole new issues."

While progress has been made, White says this is just the beginning. "No matter what the water conditions are, we as landscape professionals must be good stewards of our water resources," he says. "Drought or no drought, we must take ownership and responsibility to manage our water wisely." — *Emily Mullins*

info

For more information about current water restrictions, see "Now or Never" on page 70.

Photos: Dreamstime.com

permagreen Gives Back

We're raising \$150,000 to help orphans in a small East African village so they can have food, water, clothing, medicine and education. PermaGreen is pledging \$75,000, plus we will add 50¢ to every dollar you donate. Together, we can make a huge impact! Donate online at permagreen.com or CaringPlaceMinistries.org or by phone.

*up to the \$150,000 goal



Aaron T. Jessen, Director of Marketing & Sales at PermaGreen, and his wife, Kendra, have founded a grassroots, 501(c)(3) non-profit, Christian organization called CaringPlace Ministries International to help HIV/AIDS affected and infected orphans in Bugonzi Village, near Masaka Town in the East African country of Uganda. CaringPlace absorbed a struggling orphanage in this poor village, which serves as a home and drop-in facility for 75 children.

Aaron & Kendra have already raised enough money to conduct HIV testing, install a 10,000-Liter fresh water tank, build a more adequate latrine and expand the children's diet to include meat and more fruits and vegetables. But the need is still great!

The children currently sleep 3 or 4 to a bed, and the only means for cooking is an open fire, which is difficult to maintain during Uganda's 9-month-long rainy season. The facilities have no electricity and there is no transportation to the nearby town. And there are hundreds of children in the area who still need a home and the chance for a bright future. CaringPlace needs your help to provide these children with the basics of survival!

Robert Luwalira, the native Ugandan that founded the orphanage, is the Director of Operations in Bugonzi. He provides proper management over the activities on the ground and ensures that every dollar is spent for the benefit of the children.

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\$50 provides a child with food, water, medicine, education and housing for a month

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SALES

TIPS FOR TOP-NOTCH ACCOUNT MANAGERS

CONTRARY TO COMMON THOUGHT, landscape companies don't actually have to sell their services to their customers, says Tom Oyler. The client already knows they need their grass mowed, beds mulched or whatever it may be. All contractors really have to do is suppress their competitors.

Doing so, it turns out, comes down to the all important role of the account manager, attendees learned at the Wilson-Oyler Group Success Series seminar in Atlanta last month. About 35 professionals attended the event, titled, "Foolproof Methods to Develop World-Class Account Managers," which was sponsored by Husqvarna. *Lawn & Landscape* was the media sponsor.

If account managers are effective, they'll move up their customers' value chains to be more than just the "landscapers," Oyler says. Doing so makes a firm "strategically relevant" to its

CREATING VALUE. Good account also understand each customer's values. For example, a private developer of a high-end office building with triple-net leases has different priorities than a third-party manager of an apartment complex. Oyler recommends landscape companies develop "value chains" for every type of customer. These lists depend on a client's market and individual circumstances. Account managers can better understand these details by reading magazines relevant to their customers and their businesses, attending their meetings and joining their organizations (consider reading *Real Estate Portfolio* or joining the Building Owners and Managers Association). The goal is to understand "what the customer thinks of when they wake up," Oyler says.



The Wilson-Oyler Group's Tom Oyler addresses about 35 landscape professionals at an Atlanta seminar. Photo: *Lawn & Landscape*

clients, thus allowing it to suppress the competition. Oyler and his colleague Drew St. John outlined how account managers can achieve such success.

BUSINESS FIRST. First, account managers must possess a business mindset. While technical knowledge may be important, key business criteria like the ability to lead and inspire others, good organization/time management skills and self confidence are necessary, St. John says.

Effective communication is vital, too. St. John recommends account managers come right out and ask clients how they prefer to communicate – e-mail, phone or in person. Another tip: After a phone call or meeting, send a follow-up e-mail, St. John says. "Just ask them, 'Did I capture everything we talked about?' What you heard is not always what the customer meant."

Beyond the basics, the best account managers have a thirst for knowledge about their territory, Oyler says. "They become hyper-vigilant about their area, seeing new buildings and opportunities to improve density," Oyler says.

Once the account manager has market knowledge, he or she is equipped to create and retain "lifetime customers," Oyler and St. John say.

After the customer signs a contract, the account manager develop an operations plan, establish time lines, coordinate with the support team and inform the client, all while keeping the value chain in mind.

Within the first 30 to 90 days, the account manager should photo document current job conditions, evaluate the condition of the landscape, determine a 90 to 180 plan for curb appeal, turf care, water management, etc., and discuss long-range plans. During this process, an account manager should be prepared to defend his or her plan and provide supporting documents, keep the customer informed and seek counsel when necessary. It's all part of becoming a "subject matter expert," Oyler says.

The Wilson-Oyler Group continues its Success Series on the following dates: March 6, Los Angeles; March 20, Denver; April 3, Chicago; April 17, Columbus. –*Marisa Palmieri*

LABOR

SHARE YOUR H-2B STORIES

THE PROFESSIONAL LANDSCARE NETWORK

is appealing to landscape contractors to provide their stories on how not receiving the H-2B workers they need this year will impact their business operations.

Because of the grim outlook that Congress will act on this issue, Tom Delaney, PLANET's director of government affairs, says he wants to share industry stories with legislators, the media and others to continue to lobby for a legislative fix for the returning worker exemption. The group has been distributing questionnaires seeking contractors' views on topics such as how much income will be lost as a result of not getting workers and what hardships will result from a

failure to approve this year's exemption.

"Congress has said several times, 'What's the impact?' and we haven't been able to show it," Delaney says. "This is our opportunity to do that."

Delaney would like to send Congress as many as 100 contractor stories. He believes this number provides a sufficient snapshot of the diverse ways people use and depend on these guest workers. To date, Delaney says the response has been disappointing.

The government caps the H-2B program at 66,000 annual visas, split for each half of the federal fiscal year. In 2005 and 2006, Congress passed a temporary provision allowing workers who participated in the program



for any of the three previous years not to count against the cap. Congress has not yet approved the exemption for this year. As a result, it's likely only 66,000 visas will be issued, eliminating an estimated 100,000-plus workers from the labor force.

At this point there's too much uncertainty surrounding this issue, Delaney says, and the green industry needs to use its collective voice to press for a resolution with regard to the foreign worker visa program.

"Some companies may get their workers on time, other may have to wait until April and some many not get

them at all," Delaney says.

PLANET, which is appealing to both members and non members, will be accepting contractor stories through this month.

Interested contractors may contact Delaney at tomdelaney@landscarenetwork.org. —Mike Zawacki



Professional mowing demands **durability.**

08-2812

USE READER SERVICE # 15



ValleyCrest
COMPANIES

ACQUISITIONS

VALLEYCREST BRANCHES OUT IN THE SOUTHWEST

VALLEYCREST'S LATEST ACQUISITIONS have expanded the company's reach in the Southeast, where it most recently acquired Hilton Head, S.C.-based Second Nature Landscapes, a landscape maintenance company.

The acquisition follows the news last December that the company acquired Scapes, a \$16 million-plus landscape maintenance and design/build firm in Atlanta. Neither transactions' details were disclosed.

The geographic location wasn't the primary reason these companies looked attractive, says Roger Zino, president of ValleyCrest's landscape maintenance division.

"Our approach is that when we're interested in company, we're generally interested in the people and the teamwork," Zino says.

Because of this interest, ValleyCrest will retain Scapes' and Second Nature's employees. ValleyCrest also benefits from the customer base the acquired companies bring.

"Great relationships in the marketplace are the cornerstone of business," he says.

With the Scapes acquisition, ValleyCrest ventures more into the residential design/build business, an area that has been limited to only a few ValleyCrest locations, including Southern California and Dallas. The company sees potential for more growth in that market, Zino says.

Scapes, founded in 1982, ranked 88th on *Lawn & Landscape's* list of the nation's Top 100 landscape companies in 2007. Second Nature Landscape, formed by Steve Clark and Ed McCullough in 2003, performs landscape maintenance for homeowner and property owner associations, resorts, hotels and other commercial properties on Hilton Head Island.

The landscape maintenance portions of the companies will become part of the ValleyCrest Cos. brand.

On the design/build side of the business, Scapes will retain its name. —Heather Wood

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USE READER SERVICE # 16

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY IN NEW YORK TO OFFER TURFGRASS MANAGEMENT DEGREES

THOSE LOOKING TO PURSUE A DEGREE in maintaining recreational fields have another option. That State University of New York (SUNY) Cobleskill has been given the green light to offer bachelor's degree programs in turfgrass management.

Starting with this spring's semester, the school offers the following degrees in this field:

- Bachelor of technology in sports turf management – focuses on the cultivation and management of specialty grasses for sports fields and recreation areas.
- Bachelor of technology in golf turf management – focuses on the production and maintenance of different specialty grasses for the greens, fairways and tees of golf courses.

The programs, once closely related, have evolved into distinct fields with different cultural practices and now have separate professional organizations, says SUNY Cobleskill Professor of Turfgrass Management Zhongchun "ZJ" Jiang, Ph.D. While SUNY Cobleskill has always offered turfgrass management courses, the field was previously treated as a concentration under plant science. The new bachelor's degree programs include rigorous coursework in the field not required in the concentration under Plant Science, Jiang adds.

To apply for the program, go to www.cobleskill.edu/admissions.html or www.suny.edu/Student/apply_online.cfm. –Heather Wood



Professional mowing demands productivity.

08-2812

USE READER SERVICE # 17

GIE+EXPO

ONLINE REGISTRATION OPEN FOR 2008 SHOW

GREEN INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS CAN NOW REGISTER ONLINE FOR THE 2008 Green Industry & Equipment Expo at www.gie-expo.com. The event will take place Oct. 23 to 25 in Louisville, Ky.

Many features from last year's show will return, including the three-day outdoor demonstration area, free concerts, the Dealer Club and the

Green Industry Conference, said Warren Sellers, expo director. Features from the Green Industry Expo and the International Lawn, Garden



& Power Equipment Expo, the two industry events that merged to create the

GIE+EXPO, will be incorporated as well. "Last year we were a bit limited on space because an exhibit hall adjacent to our show floor was under construction," Warren said. "This year we will have unlimited space for the 650 exhibiting companies

and attractions like the New Product Showroom, on-site workshops and receptions."

GIE+EXPO is sponsored by the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, the Professional Landcare Network and the Professional Grounds Management Society. For more information, call Sellers Expositions at 800/558-8767. *-Emily Mullins*



For an up-to-date schedule of speakers and exhibitors, visit www.gie-expo.com.

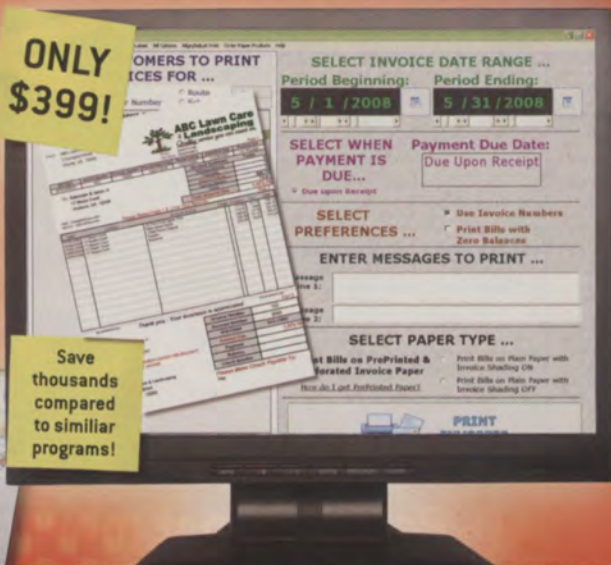
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USE READER SERVICE # 18

EXECUTIVE FORUM RECAP

EXECUTIVES FOCUS ON PEAK PERFORMANCE



A panel of professionals shared succession planning experiences at PLANET's Executive Forum. From left: Bruce Moore, Phil Allen, Joe Kujawa, Gary Thornton, George Gaumer and Rick Doesburg. Photo: Lawn & Landscape

ABOUT 125 LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS EXPLORED THEIR INNER "POWER TO PERFORM," at the Professional Landcare Network's Executive Forum in Scottsdale/Fountain Hills, Ariz., in February.

The annual education and networking event took a detour from its typical management- and operations-heavy format, and focused this year instead on "the soft side of the hard stuff," as speaker/moderator Paul Sessions said. In addition to Sessions' talks on succession planning and how executives can navigate difficult conversations in their businesses, other speakers addressed executive wellness, coaching strategies and how to manage stress through relaxation techniques.

PLAYING IT SAFE. Sessions, the director of the University of New Haven's (Conn.) Center for Family Business, led Executive Forum's two general sessions about creating a "safe place" to discuss difficult topics and succession planning. A product of a family business himself, Sessions also operates a consulting business that focuses on family business succession planning,

interpersonal communications and conflict resolution.

Nearly every close-knit business has "a gorilla in the room" – the thing nobody wants to talk about, Sessions said. These topics often center on money, retirement, succession, substance abuse, death, incompetence and change. "What if you could talk about those things freely? How much better off would you be?" he asked.

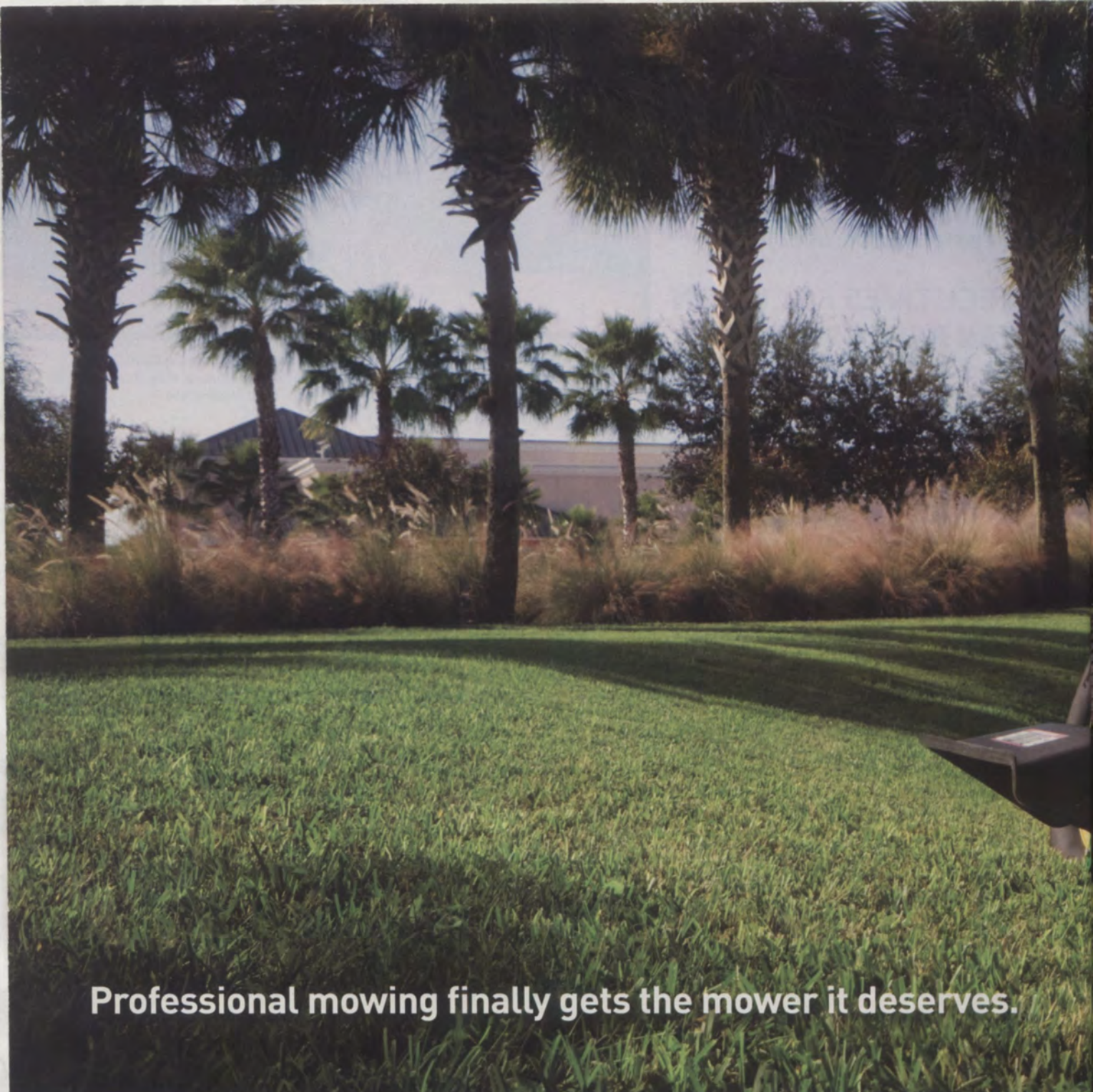
He offered the following strategies for creating an atmosphere where it's comfortable to discuss the hard topics:

- Consider "filters." Everyone sees the world through a different lens, Sessions said. Being conscious of one's own history, biases, prejudices and beliefs – and considering others' – is the first step to creating "safe spaces."
- Take stock of your emotional responses. "Pay attention to your body," Sessions said. Know your body's emotional reactions to anger, fear, etc., and before you respond to these emotions, exercise a "pattern interrupt." Stop, take a deep breath, lower your shoulders and think for a moment. Then, Sessions advises, "Choose a behavior of the kind of person



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USE READER SERVICE # 22

you want to be." And then act on that choice.

- Choose a "safe place." When selecting a meeting place, Sessions encouraged choosing a meeting place that reinforces good communication. Choose a neutral location (not the CEO's office), an agreeable time and consider air, light and noise.

- Consider "checking in." For effective meetings Sessions suggests instituting a "check in" policy, where attendees go around the room and give a brief explanation of their emotional state and what they expect to get out of the session. "It's just to let everyone know, 'Who's here today,'" he said.

PASSING THE BATON. After laying the ground rules for how to initiate tough conversations, Sessions' second presentation focused on one of the most difficult topics a business owner must conquer – succession planning. "The best succession is one that nobody even notices," Sessions said. "It happens with such grace and such care that it's seamless."

To achieve a graceful transition, it's important for the firm's leader to bring up succession and help the company address it, Sessions said. A panel of industry executives who've experienced a number of different types of exit plans weighed in, too. Gary Thornton, former owner of Thornton Landscape in Maineville, Ohio, said it's never too early for an executive to start thinking about how and when he or she will make an exit. "You have to start early because it's going to go really fast," he said.

Executives also should realize that succession doesn't always mean retirement, members of the panel said. It may mean taking on a lesser role in the company, starting a new business, pursuing hobbies or teaching.

"A succession plan is not a succession plan when it's only in your head," Sessions said. A good, written succession plan includes a strategic plan, a development plan for future leaders, a transition time line and possibly an estate plan.

To kick start the planning process, he recommended business owners create "transition councils," or a group of advisers to guide an executive through the preparations. It may include staff members, peers, and members of the company's board of advisors or directors.

Sessions peppered his presentation with real-life stories of family businesses, with both good and bad succession plans. One thing's for sure, Sessions said: "You don't want to be like the story of the 88-year-old father whose 65-year-old son retired before him because knew he was never going to get the chance to run the business."

FIRST THINGS FIRST. In his keynote speech, Dave Zerfoss, president of Husqvarna Forest & Garden Co., put it plainly to the attendees: "We don't pull in the pits to do the necessary maintenance on ourselves often enough," said the avid NASCAR fan, using a racing analogy.

"Many of us believe we've won because we have mastered the art of multitasking," Zerfoss said. "Multitasking may be a winning strategy, but is it at a cost of mediocre performance and burn out? Even the best juggler can only keep the balls in the air for so long."

To create better work/life balance, leaders must first determine all of the roles he or she fills in their life, Zerfoss recommends, crediting one of his favorite business books, *First Things First* by Stephen R. Covey. These roles may include but are not limited to "manager," "spouse," "parent" and "coach." To perform better in each of these roles, Zerfoss recommends all leaders create a decision-making framework each week. Assign specific appointments for completing the tasks involved in each of these roles ("schedule an

occasion") – and keep them. This process is more than just creating a to-do list, Zerfoss emphasizes. "This exercise is not about prioritizing your schedule; it's about scheduling your priorities."
–Marisa Palmieri

WWW

For more of the latest green industry news, visit lawnandlandscape.com and sign up for the weekly e-newsletter or RSS feed.

READER FEEDBACK

SHARE YOUR GREEN SUCCESSES

THE PROFESSIONAL LAWN AND LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY is the green industry. Every day, contractors are responsible for improving the environment through commercial, residential and municipal installation, maintenance and renovation jobs.

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As the "green" movement heats up, lawn and landscape professionals are using their knowledge and their influence to set sustainable and responsible horticultural trends and standards for businesses across the country.

In future issues of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine, we will initiate a dialogue on green initiatives and share ideas, projects and concepts that landscape professionals are introducing into their communities. We'd like to hear about the projects that you're working on. Please send your specific ideas and plans to Editorial Director Cindy Code at ccode@gie.net. Please include your name, company name, contact information and photos. We'll publish as many projects as possible in future issues of the magazine.

–Cindy Code



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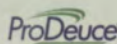
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Extreme Weather

Weather extremes almost always result in more business; yet it can throw curve balls too. Based on last season and winter patterns, researchers in the regions below share some insight into what this year may bring.

NORTHEAST: Last season was a particularly easy year for turf managers in the NE. The fall growing season for turfgrass was favorable, so repair and recovery of damaged lawns should have been successful, says Richard Buckley, Ph.D., Rutgers University. A relatively warm winter followed, with plenty of precipitation. If it continues, early emergence of some insect pests – chinch bugs/billbugs – are expected. Consider earlier application of preemergent herbicides. It's not too late to soil test so nutrient levels and pH can be adjusted during the season.



Pay particular attention to nitrogen input. Grass that never went dormant last year, and was actively growing into the winter may need an extra shot of nitrogen. Under-fertilized turfgrass is more susceptible to dollar spot and red thread diseases.

In the landscape, warmer winters usually increase the incidence of mite activity. Spruce spider mites and hemlock rust mites were active in the fall and more are expected on susceptible coniferous hosts this spring.

MIDWEST: With uneven rainfall patterns throughout much of Southern Ohio into parts of Indiana and Kentucky, many lawns were severely damaged by drought, says Joe Rimelspach, The Ohio State University Extension. As a result, summer seed work was never successfully completed resulting in thin turf prone to weed pressure. It will be a challenge to complete spring renovation work before crabgrass, foxtail and broadleaves set in. Likewise, seeding and patch-up work will likely result in diseases such as gray leaf spot which is a killer to perennial rye. On the ornamental front, evergreens – particularly hedges and arborvitae – are collapsing from drought stress. Shade and ornamental trees will show losses this year and for years to come. The trees are so weak they're susceptible to pests such as bag worms, mites and caterpillar feeders, and diseases such as cankers, scab and anthracnose depend on the temperature and moisture in the spring. Root decline and root rot is also a concern especially if a wet spring ensues.



SOUTHEAST: In areas of the SE, the persistent drought is at the center of all current turf management decisions and programs, according to Rick Brandenburg, Ph.D, North Carolina State University. Areas from Raleigh to Charlotte, N.C.,

to Atlanta and to Birmingham represent some of the hardest hit regions. Fall seeding was delayed and spring seeding looks questionable. Water restrictions threaten both hand watering and drip irrigation which has serious implications for lawn care as well, particularly if products require watering in following application. The stage is set for numerous challenges unless weather patterns change dramatically this fall. Expect problems with Southern chinch bugs on St. Augustinegrass, and if grubs and mole crickets survive, controlling them is going to be more difficult under dry conditions. In dry soils, most insect pests reside deeper and make control more challenging. Dry weather may also make armyworm problems more severe. Weed and disease control will also be challenging under these conditions.



WEST: Southern California is currently experiencing close to normal weather conditions, while the Pacific NW is wetter, according to Leonard Burkhart, Ph.D, technical adviser for The Davey Tree Expert Co. If heavy precipitation continues through the spring, brown rot on cherries and more foliar-type turf diseases will be prevalent. Of concern in the West is the expansion of exotic and invasive pests. Root weevil (*Diaprepes*), similar to black vine weevil but more eager, and Thrips *Myoporum*, making this low maintenance landscape plant not worth planting, are two new pests challenges. Professionals in the West are trying to keep the Japanese beetle from establishing there, and are keeping an eye on the Eucalyptus tortus beetle in Southwest Nevada and Arizona. Other invasive pests to watch are: erythrina (coral tree) gall wasp currently in Mexico but not too far from SW California; light brown apple moth in the San Francisco bay area; pink hibiscus mealy bug in Southern California; and cycad scale before it wipes out the sago palms.



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USE READER SERVICE # 25

Business:

57%

U.S. businesses that expect to increase their prices in 2008 in anticipation of a possible recession.

Source: infoUSA

QUOTABLE:

"If all you do is add to their cash flow in a weak economy, you're not going to get much extra spending out of them."

– Chad Stone, economist, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities

Stone was referring to whether the final economic stimulus package, approved in mid-February, would actually help small businesses or encourage them to invest back into their operations.

Source: Fortune Small Business

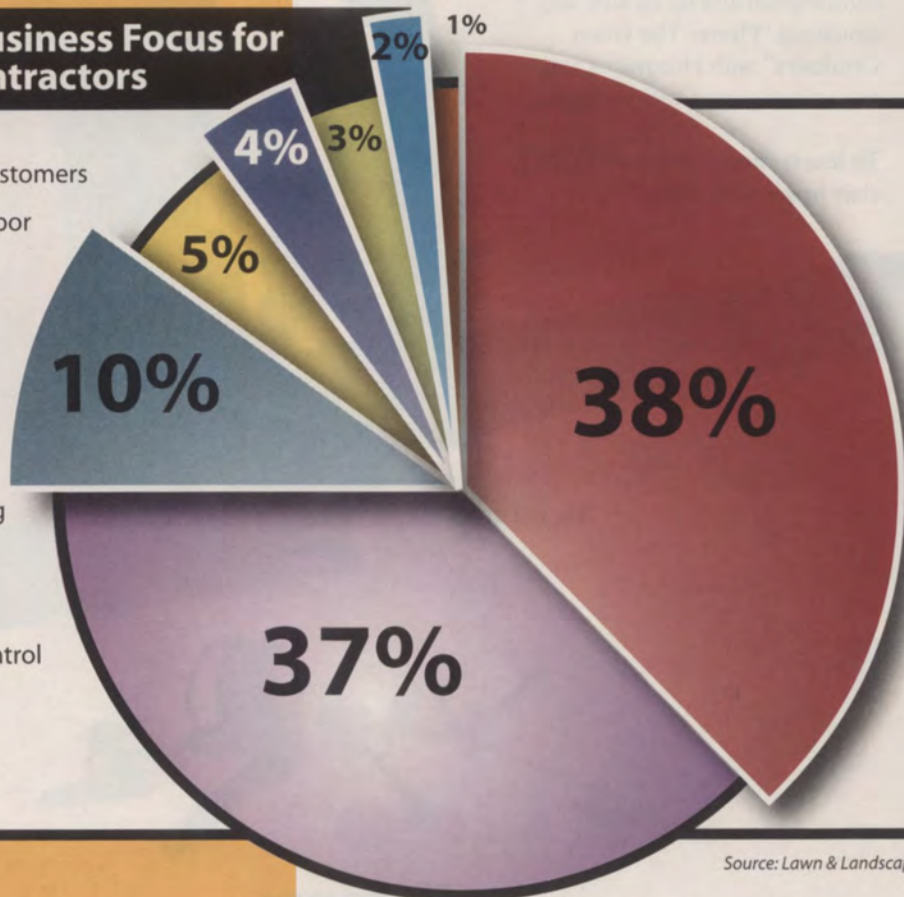
54.2 degrees Fahrenheit

The average U.S. temperature for 2007, which was 1.4F warmer than the historic norm, making it the 10th warmest on record.

Source: National Climatic Data Center

2008's Main Business Focus for Landscape Contractors

- Attracting new customers
- Finding quality labor
- Keeping current customers
- Updating the equipment fleet
- Improving employee training
- Adding new services
- Better growth control
- Other



Source: Lawn & Landscape Online

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Tried and True



JOY CEBALLOS, owner of Color Concepts Landscaping in West Palm Beach, Fla., usually chooses drought-tolerant, low maintenance plant material that can withstand the area's tropical conditions. Some of her favorites include 'Mexican sage' (*Salvia leucantha*), 'Green Island' (*Ficus microcarpa*) and 'Shrubby Whitevein' (*Sanchezia speciosa*).

"I mostly use plants I know will be successful if they are being installed for the long term," she says.

To keep things interesting, Ceballos makes it a point to incorporate new

plants, but does so with caution. "I am trying to branch out, but it's risky if you don't know what a plant will do," she says. "I recently installed some 'Double Knock-out' roses – in small quantities – and they seem to be doing great."

To help make educated decisions, Ceballos collects information from nursery experts, research books and old-fashioned trial and error. "I learn more and more as I go," she says.

Above are four tried-and-true trees landscape contractors can incorporate in their landscapes. **LL**

1. NORTHEAST

Name: Alberta blue dwarf spruce

Genus: *Picea glauca*

USDA Zones: 2 to 8

Plant Type: evergreen tree

- Grows 5 to 7 feet tall, spreads 18 inches to 2 feet wide
- Grows best in full sun
- Extremely cold hardy
- Silvery-blue evergreen that does not revert to green

2. NORTHWEST

Name: 'Stellar Pink' dogwood

Genus: *Cornus x 'Rutgan'*

USDA Zones: 5 to 8

Plant Type: deciduous tree

- Grows 25 feet tall and wide
- Grows best in full sun to partial shade
- Disease and borer resistant
- Bears soft, shell pink flowers in early spring followed by a show of autumn foliage

3. SOUTHEAST

Name: 'Forest Pansy' redbud

Genus: *Cercis canadensis*

USDA Zones: 5 to 9

Plant Type: deciduous tree

- Grows 20 feet tall, 25 feet wide
- Grows best in full sun
- Regular watering schedule during first growing season helps establish deep, extensive root systems
- Has scarlet-purple foliage that matures to maroon – pink flowers bloom on bare branches between winter and spring

4. SOUTHWEST

Name: 'Palo Alto' sweetgum

Genus: *Liquidambar styraciflua*

USDA Zones: 6 to 9

Plant Type: deciduous tree

- Grows 40 feet or more in height, 15 to 20 feet wide
- Grows best in full sun
- Provides reliable fall color, even in warm winter areas
- Has maple-like leaves that turn brilliant orange-red or bright red in fall

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Shon and Tell

Steve Hansen's half-acre show yard is an effective sales tool, but his backyard can close a deal.

BY MIKE ZAWACKI/MANAGING EDITOR

Welcome to Steve Hansen's backyard. If someone has made it this far, then he's a pretty special prospect.

By this point, Hansen has seen something unique in this individual. Maybe it was something he mentioned to Hansen when discussing his vision for a landscape project, like placing an environment's aesthetics above price concerns.

Then again, maybe he clicked with Hansen's choice in music — Ol' Blue Eyes reverberating from the faux-rock speakers spread throughout Hansen's half-acre outdoor showcase.

"The folks who hire us, once they tour the grounds and become comfortable with our process and design style, I don't feel these folks are putting projects out for competitive bid,"





Hansen Landscape Contractor

OWNER: Steve Hansen

INCORPORATED: 1979

EMPLOYEES: 16 year-round, 20 seasonal

SERVICE BREAKDOWN:

15% Mowing/maintenance

78% Design/build

4% Irrigation

3% Installation only

CLIENT BREAKDOWN:

99% Residential, 1% Commercial

REVENUE:

2008.....\$2.5 million (projected)

2007.....\$2.25 million

2006.....\$2.37 million

MARKET CONDITIONS: There are more than 150 landscape companies throughout the East Bay area, many with hands-on owners. Hansen Landscape focuses on high-end clients who place quality first and price second.

CONTACT INFO:

4600 Crow Canyon Place

Castro Valley, Calif.

PHONE: 510/773-1003

FAX: 510/537-2183

E-MAIL: hansen.steve@comcast.net

WEB: www.hansenlandscape.com

he says. "For the most part, once they go through that tunnel with us, they're pretty much going to work with us all the way through."

Hansen caters to clients who aren't looking for cost-conscious functional landscape designs. Instead, they're transforming their private spaces into unique living environments. "They want the icing on the cake, the above and beyond," he says. "Big boulders, tremendous water features...outdoor kitchens, arbors and extensive lighting."

Hansen's show yard, which is located at his home, is a functioning sales machine alive with the various design flavors that whet the appetites of high-end residential clientele. Sometimes, though, they need a little extra cajoling to focus on their vision. "People who I feel are looking for something quality,

having a lean market in this area," Hansen says. "We're close to the dot-com stuff and to a lot of big business. Our clients continue to spend."

The region's average home price is in the \$700,000 range, with 80 percent of the average home's real estate allotted to the backyard. The average residential project site is between 1,500 and 3,000 square feet.

"Our target demographic is the person, age 40 through 60, who's been in their home for five to 10 years." Hansen says. "It's probably the second home they've owned and they're at the point now where they want to do something they've always wanted to do – something really nice. They want to work with someone who allows them to not worry about the process. And they're more concerned

"While this is a big area – almost a half acre – we're sharing with you the various components that we perform and we can conform them to any space that you have, whether it's 400 square feet or a few thousand square feet." – Steve Hansen, Hansen Landscape

I'll show them my backyard," he says, lifting the back gate's latch and beckoning them to his private refuge. "I share with them that this backyard is the place where family happens. This is the place everyone wants to come and congregate and enjoy."

THE MARKET. California's Castro Valley, located east of San Francisco, is prime for custom high-end design/build work. "I don't ever recall, at least when it comes to residential work, ever

with a quality job than they are price conscious."

Hansen's average design/build job is between \$40,000 and \$100,000. "We typically pick up one \$150,000 job per year," he says. "And we've got a lot of projects in the \$30,000 to \$60,000 range."

Hansen describes his 30-year-old, \$2.5 million company, Hansen Landscape Contractor, as small in stature even though it has enjoyed steady growth. In his first year in business the

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company cleared \$25,000. Ten years ago, it broke \$1 million in revenue and Hansen projects surpassing the \$3 million mark in 2009. The company employs 22 people, 40 percent of whom are seasonal labor, working for three divisions – Hansen Landscape (design/build), My Gardener (maintenance) and AAA Sprinkler Repair. The design/build division typically manages three projects at any given time and its work makes up nearly 80 percent of Hansen's overall business.

Hansen's company is on par with

about 150 or so design/build firms it goes head-to-head against in the market. Because of this saturation, the company needed to optimize its identity in the marketplace.

In the early 1990s, Hansen displayed the company's landscaping prowess during the annual county fair. It was an opportunity to catch the eyes of 100,000 prospective clients visiting the area during the fair. Many of the landscape contractors exhibiting had small-scale, minimalist displays, but Hansen constructed a 1,600-square-

foot landscape that showcased a complete hardscape setup.

"It raised the bar for the type of work we were doing and showed we were worthy of the type of work people wanted," he says. "That really made me think that we only really demoed this for two weeks and then we had to tear it down."

What if he could replicate this on a permanent basis, Hansen wondered. The notion harkened back to the marketing philosophy that people weren't necessarily buying an item; instead

Unreality Television

One of Hansen Landscape Contractor's biggest obstacles is overcoming unrealistic expectations brought on by home-improvement television shows.

Clients entering into a landscape project believe a yard can be completely transformed over the course of an afternoon, says Steve Hansen, owner of the Castro Valley, Calif.-based Hansen Landscape Contractor.

"What these shows do is bring in a crew of 100 people and boom it's done," he says. "In our world it doesn't happen that way. People see those home shows and it's misleading."

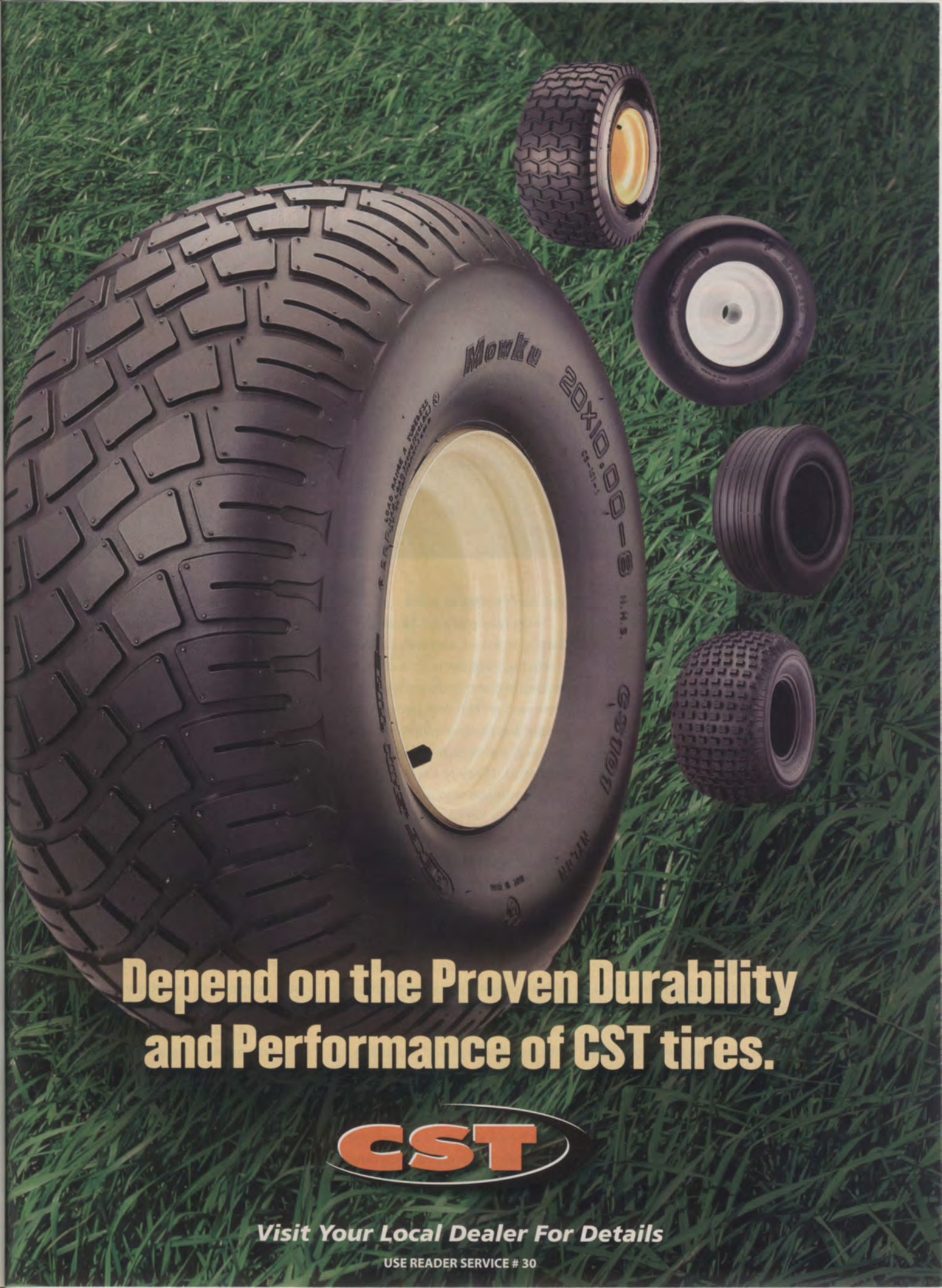
While those programs inspire people to invest in their backyards, they also create unrealistic expectations for how long a professional landscape job takes to go from concept to completion.

"We'll get a call from a prospective client that they're having a family reunion in a month and can we get the project done by then," Hansen says.

Instead, Hansen educates clients that, at the very least, the initial consultation, design portion and contract signing could take between four to six weeks. In addition, the average project may take an additional four to six weeks to complete, and as long as eight to 10 for more involved landscape designs.

Sticker shock is another issue, Hansen says. "Often those shows are only revealing the material costs for a project and they don't account for labor," he says. "The pricing is just not realistic."



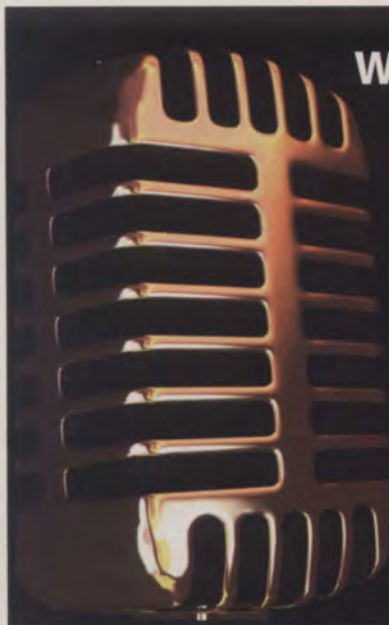


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Why Frank Sinatra?

Music is an important component to create mood and to relax people. Steven Hansen had tried different varieties of music to play in his half-acre show yard, but nothing seemed to click.

Then he called upon The Chairman of the Board.

From the first song on through the rest of the compilation CD, Frank Sinatra's voice and music sets a distinct tone and puts prospective clients in the right frame of mind, Hansen says.

"It just develops this whole feeling of what life could be," he says. "And I never get tired of it. It runs an hour, which is the average time people spend in the show yard, and some Saturdays I'll play that CD six or seven times."

they're investing in an emotional notion, and with residential landscaping that is unique intimacy. Hansen needed a way to match up clients with the end product they desired.

Inspired, Hansen transformed half of his one-acre residential property into a \$250,000 sales tool.

SHOW YARD. Hansen's first order of business is to get the prospective client into the show yard. "Then they're going to leave here and think either, 'Wow, this guy is way overpriced,' or 'Wow, no one else we've spoken to has anything like this.'"

Working with a client is contingent upon first visiting the show yard. Client leads come in either through a referral or through the company's full-page Yellow Pages advertisement and are followed up with an e-mail invitation. This serves the dual purpose of presenting an air of exclusivity to the client and to weed out tire kickers. "A lot of people who get this e-mail think it's more effort than it's worth," Hansen says. "They think it'll be a lot of froufrou and

they don't bother to follow up."

Tours take place on Saturdays starting at 9 a.m. and are scheduled in one-hour segments so a client has undisturbed access to explore the show yard at their own pace. Many people don't fully comprehend what they're in for when they visit Hansen's show yard. "They're not going to see a big landscape sign out in the front," he says. "By having people come to the show yard, which is also my home, they get the sense that we're real."

The show yard isn't row upon row of plant materials and hardscape samples. Instead, it's a walk-through environment that engages the senses. Interconnecting pathways illuminated by low-voltage lighting take visitors through a variety of scenarios bedecked with combinations of stamped concrete, boulders and mounding, flagstone walls, patios equipped with full-service outdoor kitchens, benches, arbors and privacy areas. Adirondack chairs tempt visitors to sit and lose themselves in the calming rhythms of one of five water features. Each out-

door vignette was designed to convey a sense of potential and possibility for the visitor.

Hansen cautions visitors to not become overwhelmed by the show yard's magnitude. "People see the show yard and think their own yard isn't that big," he says. "While this is a big area – almost a half acre – we're sharing with you the various components that we perform and we can conform them to any size space that you have, whether that's 400 square feet or a few thousand square feet.

"This is just the first step," he says. "We're going to baby step with you from here on out."

The space is constantly evolving to stay current with industry trends and clients' ever-changing outdoor tastes. By spring, Hansen hopes to enhance the ambiance by installing a propane fireplace. He's also planning a putting green for 2008. With the show yard, cost has never been an obstacle.

"Customers want to be inspired," he says. "So I've always felt 'let's go overboard on some things and spend


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It's proven to be a sound investment. Visitors end their tours at an open-air sunroom porch located in the show yard's center. Here visitors complete a questionnaire and contemplate whether they want to move forward with Hansen. Nearly 75 percent of

show yard visitors elect that next step and hire Hansen for an at-home consultation. At this time they must write a check for a consultation fee – \$250 for a hardscaping consultation and \$150 for a landscaping consultation. That fee is applied back and subtracted from the cost of the final base project. It's another strategy Hansen uses to qualify serious business prospects.

“I tell them in the e-mail invitation that they should bring their check books,” Hansen says.

Following the in-home consultation, prospective clients can then choose to have Hansen prepare a landscape design. He charges on a sliding scale based on project size. The fee is \$1 per square foot for the first 2,500 square feet, \$.50 per square foot for the next 1,500 square feet and \$.25 per square foot for anything over 4,000 square feet.

“The majority of our design fees will be between \$2,000 and \$3,000,” he says. “If they hire us to install the

Sweat Equity

It's a common conundrum: The client pays for the design but doesn't pull the trigger on a project. Often a minor price point is the seemingly insurmountable obstacle between contractor and client.

To troubleshoot this, Steven Hansen, owner of Hansen Landscape Contractor in Castro Valley, Calif., offers clients “sweat equity projects.” Hansen breaks down the project into components he believes the customer could do on his own. For example, a client can often handle demolition and site preparation work, or install laid out plants.

“We still charge the client for management of the project, but we're not charging the same for the labor,” he says. “A lot of times contractors feel like they don't want the client doing any work because it takes work away from them. I feel that if I don't get the job, then I've lost out on everything.”

Sweat equity work can knock about 25 percent off the cost of the project, Hansen says. He offers the sweat equity option for about 10 percent of his projects, of which about half of those clients elect to do some of the labor themselves. Hansen issues deadlines for the sweat equity work and to date has not had any issues with incomplete work or scheduling setbacks.

“It is work that, for us, is more taxing on my project manager's nerves,” he says. “But it means our client can have a much nicer landscape at a lower cost because they're willing to do some of the labor.”

“I share with them that this backyard is the place where family happens. This is the place everyone wants to come and congregate and enjoy.”

– Steve Hansen, Hansen Landscape Contractor

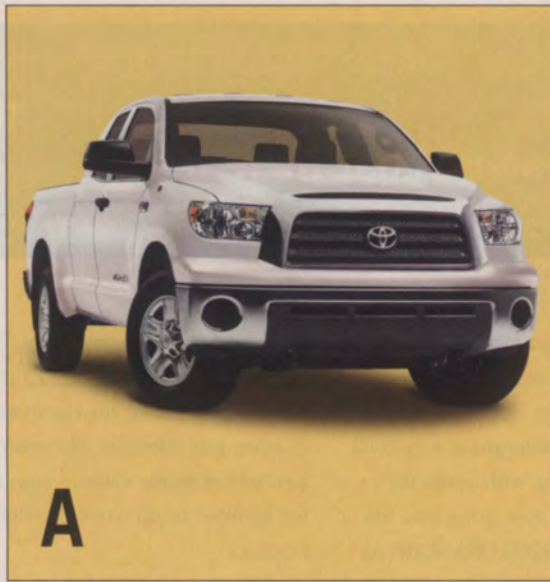
project, then the paid design fee is applied toward the project costs.”

Hansen follows a pricing strategy that allows the client to choose a simpler project without sacrificing quality. Hansen phases his designs to include a base project and additions that may span out over months or even years to accommodate a range of budgets.

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"There are no quality concessions or concerns with the base project," he says. "We don't offer two tiers of sprinkler systems or two tiers of soil prep to accommodate different budgets. Instead, page one is the cost of these items as a base project, and page two is all of the options that the client can pick and choose from."

Inviting people to his home is an intimate business philosophy, Hansen admits, but it's effective at pre qualifying serious clients.

"The people who come to the show yard are looking for a good quality contractor and they care more about the end visual results of a project than inviting three guys to their home for

his craft at its best.

While the show yard tends to be more of a fragmented museum to landscape materials, the backyard is more cohesive and representative of a design style brought down to a single final decision. "I have a lot of stone work and a wall with sheer descents and water that comes into a pool with a hot tub," he says. "There are sitting areas composed of flagstone and wood decking. It has my big table with six captain chairs around it and an umbrella over it. It's got chaise lounges and a propane heater over to one side. It has a masculine feel to it and it tends to be more tropical. I have a bunch of palm trees with little white

"By having people come to the show yard, which is also my home, they get the sense that we're real."

— Steve Hansen, Hansen Landscape Contractor

some ideas, some pricing and to get some landscaping installed," he says.

BACKYARD. The backyard is a special place. Hansen brims with pride because a lot of work has gone into his backyard – about \$200,000 worth of improvements. Hansen, too, appreciates the icing on the cake and the above and beyond.

"The backyard was never meant to be a sales tool and my wife especially didn't want to invite people into our backyard," he says. "My backyard has only been 'completed' for about four years, and it's only been in the last year or so that I've felt I can bring people into my personal backyard."

Bringing a select few to the backyard unveils Hansen's private side and

Christmas lights hooked up."

Hansen invites about 15 percent of his prospects into his backyard. It's exclusive, but effective. He estimates 95 percent of those visitors sign contracts for Hansen to do work on their own homes.

"The backyard takes many of those various components from the show yard which are spread out and not so intimate," he says. "When I bring someone into the backyard they're getting to see a 2,500-square-foot yard that is more in line with what their yard is going to be like. They get to see what they can have." **LL**

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00073



All in the Family

Lawn & Landscape message board participants weigh the pros and cons of hiring relatives at their companies.

Brian Klimek hasn't had much luck finding dedicated, year-round employees to fill out his staff. "In my area it is really hard to find someone that wants to work in the 'green industry' full time," says the president of Green World Irrigation Specialists in Monroe, N.Y.

Klimek looked for help a little closer to home – very close. He hired his brother as an irrigation technician. This is either a smart move or a decision an employer later regrets, depending on the family dynamic. Employers have to find a way to keep the business running without letting emotions cloud their better judgements.

Participants of the *Lawn & Landscape* online Message Board recently joined



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Klimek and weighed in with their experiences sharing their workspace with their families. For the most part, experiences with relatives are positive, but a few board posters found it's best for them to keep their home lives and their work lives separate.

KEEPING IT CLOSE. Some participants, say hiring a family member ranks up there with their best business decisions. Dave Reynolds, owner of Alpine Sprinklers and Landscaping in Kalispell, Mont., hired his wife, a retired nurse, more than 10 years ago to manage the office.

"I realized after the first year that I really wasn't the boss anymore," Reynolds posts. "She was. I swallowed my pride and got away from a lot of the day-to-day things and have had a lot more success."

This freed up some of Reynolds' time, allowing him to focus more on the big picture. As an added bonus, he has found the office has been better

Trumbull, Texas, also hired his wife to run the office. His son and grandson are part of the team as well. "I never get to tell anybody anything, never get to count money, can't write checks," Atwood says. "They just tell me where to go. I love this business."

Family members have an emotional – if not financial – investment in the company, giving them a reason to want to succeed at the job. This could be what makes them such dedicated employees at some companies. Janice Waterman, owner of Fairhope, Ala.-based Friendship Landscaping and Lawns, found this to be the case with her son, who has been working for her for four years.

"The one thing I was lucky with was I was able to train him and work with him to help him become interested and proud of his accomplishments and the work he does," she says. "Now he does all the irrigation installs and takes pride in it."

Dale Wiley has had similar good

the office and we are all happy and speaking."

Some posters have learned that if they want to keep emotions out of the workplace and to stay on task, they make sure they don't lose sight of what brought them together. "We all laid out the expectations in advance and we review the goals on a regular basis," Reynolds says.

WELL-CONNECTED. Daniel Hanson got his foot in the door by taking a route that's not uncommon in the green industry – working for his father. After working in the family business "for a long time," he now owns Laverne, Calif.-based SCLM Co. and his brother is the vice president of operations.

Hanson's mother used to be in charge of the books, and his sister also was employed at the company for a short time, and it never posed any significant problems.

"Some people can't seem to work

"Some people can't seem to work with family, but we have never had an issue with it."

— Daniel Hanson, SCLM Co.

organized, sales have increased and customers and employees have been happier since his wife took over the paperwork responsibilities.

The addition of his wife worked so well he decided to bring his daughter on board to manage the estimating and job costing. That hire has led to positive results for the company as well. "It again has been a good move," he says.

Bill Atwood, owner of Bill's Complete Lawn Care and Landscaping in

fortune with his son, 21, who has been working for the company since he was 16. "He is field supervisor and does an excellent job," posts Wiley, the owner of Landscape Specialty Services in Forest Grove, Ore., adding he employs his wife as the company controller and office manager.

Sometimes working with loved ones can present situations that are too close for comfort.

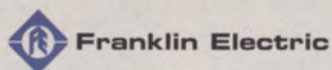
"We all get into it every now and then," Wiley says. "But it never leaves

with family, but we have never had an issue with it," he writes.

Will Sharp also has heard horror stories. He and his brother co-own Lawn Dawg Services in Matthews, N.C., and they employ the wife of a third brother. So far, Sharp has nothing negative to report about working with family, he posts to the message board.

Like others on the message board, Bryan Taynor of Bryan Taynor Landscape Design in Columbus, Ohio,

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was worried about what the dynamics might be like when he hired his brother, but says his brother has given him no reason to fret.

"He has prior experience and I have been training him to take charge of things in the field," Taynor says. "It's been nice to have someone in that position, and he understands that work is work.

"I'm not big brother at the office," he adds. "I'm his boss, and there have been no problems."

Matthew Schattner's employees might have a different story about their boss.

"At one time or another I've had my dad, both of my nephews, my brother, brother-in-law, wife and oldest daughter working for/with me," says the owner of Matz Snow & Lawn in Kansasville, Wis. "At this time I won't divulge who all is or isn't working for/with me anymore. I'm a tyrant!"

Other message board participants acknowledged they have tried the family approach to business and achieved less than positive results.

"Never again will I have family and business mixed," says Rick Brauneis, manager of Vision Designs in Orlando, Fla., without divulging how he arrived at this conclusion.

Kelly Tohill, owner of Tohill's Lawn Maintenance in Atlanta, previously contemplated bringing a family member aboard but says *Lawn & Landscape* message board participants talked him out of it.

A WAY IN. Some *Lawn & Landscape* message board posters who have had luck working with family have also seen the issue from the other side: as the one who's looking to get into the business. For those who are just starting to map a career path, family

members can provide the portal into that world.

"I learned the sod business at the kitchen table from my old man," says Steve Cissel, CEO and founder of 10-20 Media in Woodbine, Md.

Ryan Holt, owner of Driftwood Lawn Care and Landscape in Rising Sun, Md., gives his nephew an opportunity to see what the landscape industry is like by hiring him to mow during the summer.

Sometimes an employee doesn't start as a family member, but ends up that way, as Todd McCabe learned.

"I work with my wife," posts McCabe, president of Landscapes Unlimited in Wrightsville Beach, N.C. "I hired her in 2002 to handle pruning and seasonal color, somehow started dating her later that year and then married her."

In other instances, romance was found with clients. This was the case for Bob Keating and his wife.

"My wife was a 10-year client on a nice property," says Keating, president of Liberty Land Management in Palm Harbor, Fla. "We ended up friends, then 'poof!' She is now a property manager with another large company which we just started servicing."

Hanson also met his wife while on the job.

"We landscaped her house and while working on the project we hit it off and ended up dating and got married in 2005," he says.

"Funny how things work out sometimes." LL



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the great debate

Mulching, bagging, double cutting – what’s the best way to deal with lawn clippings?

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When it comes to clippings, Matthew Schattner has worst, better and best case scenarios.

The owner of Kansasville, Wis.-based Mat’z Snow & Lawn prefers to double cut his clients’ lawns because it’s time efficient and not labor intensive. His second choice is to mulch the clippings, which is often difficult on thick, Wisconsin turf and takes twice as long. Schattner’s third option – his worst-case scenario – is simply to bag and haul, a method he’d rather avoid. “We had one client whose lawn we bagged with every cut last season,” he says. “Of course, we charged him extra for the time involved to go slower and dump the bagger frequently. I really try to avoid these accounts, but if they’re willing to pay...”

Like Schattner, landscape contractors must determine their clippings collection and removal

Photo: Grasshopper

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m o w i n g

strategy before the first lawn can be mowed. As a rule, most contractors opt for a light-on-labor method that leaves a client's lawn looking neat and professional. As with any service, clients have different preferences and there's always an exception to the rule.

Fortunately, contractors have options when dealing with lawn clippings. "If there was ever a collection device that saved time and added value to my services, I'd definitely pursue it," says Chris Rubottom, owner of Vista

to get permission from the homeowner to leave the bags on the curb or haul them off ourselves and dump them someplace."

Rubottom now chooses to mulch his clippings back into the lawn, which saves 30 to 40 minutes per job. For \$100 to \$200 each, he purchased mulching kits that attach to his commercial zero-turn and walk-behind mowers. "In general, we've been just as successful mulching as we were bagging," Rubottom says. "We can



Landscape Solutions in Tallahassee, Fla. "Especially if it didn't involve stopping repeatedly throughout a job and hauling away debris."

MORE TO MULCH. Initially, Rubottom collected clippings in his riding mower's bag attachment, but found it cumbersome to stop and empty the bag multiple times during the same job. "Particularly when there were leaves on the ground we'd have to stop every two to three rows to empty the bag," he says. "Then we'd either have

leave the job site just as clean."

Most clients are content with Rubottom's mulching policy, and consider the clippings extra fertilization (see *Mulching Advantages*, page 60). On the rare occasion a client prefers the clippings to be bagged, Rubottom's crews hand rake the clippings and haul them away. This results in an extra charge of \$50 to \$100, depending on the weight and size of the load. "We try to avoid this extra work," he says.

Andy Carlucci, owner of AC Lawn & Landscape, Point Pleasant, N.J.,

Photo: Exmark



m o w i n g

also chooses to mulch clippings back into his clients' lawns. "We decided to mulch because of the time involved in collecting and dumping the clippings, plus the investment to dispose of them legally," Carlucci says. "Mulching saves us a lot of time and money."

For Carlucci, the biggest costs

he says. "We just can't recoup those costs."

New Jersey's Department of Environmental Protection is very strict when it comes to clippings disposal because of the potent smell and chemical residue, which limits Carlucci's options and reiterates why he

the tidy appearance of a clippings-free lawn. If potential clients want their clippings collected, Carlucci usually refers them to another company. "Mostly it's the higher-end clients who want clippings removed because they don't want them in their beds or tracked into their homes," he says. "We make sure

"We make sure homeowners are aware we don't collect clippings and, unfortunately, some do not sign contracts with us if this is a service they want."

— Anthony Carlucci, AC Lawn & Landscape

associated with clippings disposal are the manpower to bag them and the fuel cost to make the 45-minute round trip to the nearest landfill. The landfill disposal fee can also add up, starting around \$50 per ton. "Everyone knows what the cost of gas is right now,"

chooses to mulch. Contractors should check with their states' departments of environmental protection about similar regulations.

While Carlucci sells most of his clients on the idea that clippings are beneficial to the soil, some still prefer

homeowners are aware we don't collect clippings and, unfortunately, some do not sign contracts with us if this is a service they want."

As part of a routine mowing and maintenance job, Carlucci's crews make sure to blow clippings away from



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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

m o w i n g

walkways, decks, driveways and mulch beds. This extra service takes four to six minutes and leaves homes looking as neat as if the clippings had been collected. "Even our current high-end clients are OK with us not collecting their clippings because they see we are just as neat as the house next door that has its clippings bagged," he says. "Eventually I think every landscape company will mulch its clippings as it gets harder and harder to find places to dump them."

DOUBLE CUTTING. Schattner collects clippings only during fall cleanups. All other times he double cuts his clients lawns, which is more effective than mulching his region's thick turf, he says. His mulcher is attached to



Mulching Advantages

- Keeps nutrients in the soil, potentially reducing the need for fertilizer.
- Moisture in the clippings is kept in the soil, reducing the need for water. Leaving the moisture in the soil through mulching is especially important during hot, dry weather.
- Eliminates the need to dispose of clippings, which is significant in areas where ordinances dictate disposal methods and the associated costs.

Source: The Grasshopper Co.

Photo: Lawn & Landscape archives

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USE READER SERVICE # 44

m o w i n g

a 48-inch walk-behind mower, which he doesn't consider to be his "fastest or most efficient machine by far," but says is good for tight spaces. "For us, mulching is really only an option once we get through spring," Schattner says. "Otherwise, the grass is so thick a mulcher basically just makes things more difficult."

When he does collect clippings, Schattner hauls the debris to his father's 80-acre farm, where it serves as fertilizer. "This is an environmentally correct method of disposal, and my dad's farm is only about 20 minutes away from our furthest customer," he says. "There are many farmers out there who, if approached in the correct manner, would go along with having organic matter brought to them for free."

labor and fuel costs, he says.

Elliott disposes the remaining clippings at his shop. He sometimes rents a 30-yard Dumpster for about \$340 a month and \$60 to \$70 for each additional month to keep on site. Once it's full, the Dumpster supplier hauls it away and leaves an empty one. Other times, to reduce his monthly dump bin costs, he creates an on-site compost pile and rents a Dumpster only when he has enough debris to fill it. Elliott fills his dump bins four or five times a year.

"If you have space at your shop, I recommend keeping your clippings there and, when it's worthwhile, call a Dumpster company to come in and haul them away," Elliot says. "If it's a few months before you can fill a dump bin, make a green space or a compost pile in the meantime."

"If there was ever a collection device that saved time and added value to my services, I'd definitely pursue it."

— Chris Rubottom, Vista Landscape Solutions

Schattner charges three times the cost of a regular mowing job to haul clippings away, with bagging and hauling costs each comprising 1/3 of the final fee. This "rule of thumb" also serves as a rough estimate for the company's leaf collecting services.

A BIT OF BOTH. Benjamin Elliott, president and CEO of Oak Hill Landscape Group in Atlanta, says about 80 percent of his clients' lawns are mulched and the other 20 percent are bagged. Fortunately, most of these sites are large five- to six-acre properties that allow disposal of the clippings near the back of the lot, which cuts down on

Elliott has tried many disposal methods over the years. He used to take his clippings to his parent's lot and burn them, but Atlanta's burn bans as result of the region's drought have eliminated this option.

He also used to take his clippings to the county dump where he paid about \$100 per load, plus about 2½ extra working hours per employee to make the trip. When an independent company acquired the dump and tripled the fees, Elliott needed to find an alternative.

"Smaller landscape companies without a shop may have no other alternative than the county dump,"

he says. "But disposing of clippings at our shop cuts down on labor, gas costs and dumping fees."

No matter where he disposes of them, Elliott charges his clients for the extra time and effort. While he

has no set cost, he factors in the cost of bags, the time to haul them off the trucks and into the Dumpster, how much room the debris will take up, the cost of the Dumpster and how much debris a client accumulates over time.

"The cost largely depends on how big the property is and how much debris is produced," Elliott says. "A client we serve every week will produce many more clippings than a client we visit only seasonally." LL

Advantages of Clippings Collection

- Clippings, leaves, trash, sticks and other debris can all be picked up simultaneously while mowing.
- Where there are no ordinances regarding clippings disposal, grass catching mowers are easy to empty and require less labor than raking clippings.
- Clippings are an excellent source of compost for use in gardens, and nurseries.

Source: The Grasshopper Co.

Photo: Exmark

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USE READER SERVICE # 45

bug off



Lawn care operators need to know what they're dealing with to battle turf and ornamental insects.

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Insects and the outdoors go hand in hand. But some can cause serious damage to turf and ornamentals if not carefully monitored. That's when lawn care operators (LCOs) should step up and battle the bugs with their springtime pest control programs.

According to 2007 *Lawn & Landscape* research, 44 percent of landscape contractors offer turf insect control and 31 percent offer insect

control in trees and ornamentals. To get the jobs done, they spent an average of \$3,797 on insecticide products last year. A popular service, revenue from chemical and fertilizer services rose 13 percent from 2006 to 2007, as stated in the research. Regardless of what area of the country LCOs are located in, there's a variety of pests that should be kept under control which can create profitable opportunities.

continued on page 70, chart on pages 66, 67

Serious Chemistry. Sensitive Delivery.



Golf course superintendent, Joseph Galloway, and certified plant injection specialist, Latisha Galloway, examine Hemlock trees on the Connestee Falls Golf Course.



The pre-measured capsule is inserted into a small hole drilled at the base of the trunk, and the tree takes the solution up naturally.

"The longevity of the active ingredient, imidacloprid, was much greater with Mauget's Imicide than any other competitive product that we looked at. We see about twelve to fourteen months control, and have used Mauget for the last four years to control the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid."

"Mauget is a completely hermetically sealed system, so we can treat trees that are growing up out of the water. The systemic insecticide is injected directly into the tree and translocated throughout the tree's vascular system. It stays in the tree, so there's never any insecticide that can get into the waterway."

Joseph Galloway
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The Right Way To Treat A Tree

pesticides & fertilizers

PEST NAME	INFESTS	TYPES	DESCRIPTION	ACTIVITY
MOLE CRICKET	Turf	Tawny, Southern, Short-winged, Northern	Light brown; up to 1½ inches long; have short, stout forelegs, spade-like feet, large eyes	Adults lay eggs in the spring, which hatch in two to four weeks. Nymphs feed and grow through the summer, mature into adults in the fall. Spend winter deep in the soil – come to the surface to feed during warm periods.
WHITE GRUB	Turf	N/A	Plump, c-shaped insects with three pairs of legs; whitish in color with dark areas near the rear and a distinct, brown head	Feed at the thatch/soil interface in the fall and early spring.
CHINCH BUG	Turf	<i>Blissus hirtus</i> , <i>Blissus insularis</i> , <i>Blissus leucopteros</i>	Adults are ¾ inches long with a black body covered by white wings with two black spots; red legs	Mate early in the season when the temperature reaches 70 degrees. Females lay eggs on roots, stems, leaves, leaf sheaths or crevices in nodes and other protected places. Eggs are laid over a two- to three-week period.
APHID	Ornamentals	Various	Adults are ¼ to ½ inches long, may or may not have wings, body is bulbous with two tube-like projections near tip of abdomen; vary in color from gray, brown, pink, red, yellow and lavender	Most species overwinter as fertilized eggs glued to stems or other parts of plants.
FLAT-HEADED BORER	Ornamentals	Bronze birch, Flat-headed apple tree	A narrow, dark metallic, greenish-bronze beetle under ¾ of an inch long; short antennae and legs	Overwinter as larvae under bark or in galleries of infested trees. Produce one generation per year.
ADELGID	Ornamentals	Gall-forming (Cooley Spruce Gall, Eastern Spruce Gall), non-gall forming (Pine Bark, Hemlock Woolly)	Adults vary in size from ¼ to ½ inch long; come in winged and wingless forms; round; black or brown in color with white waxy covering	Varies depending on type
LACE BUG	Ornamentals	Azalea, Sycamore, Rhododendron, Hawthorn	Adults are ¼ inch long; transparent lace-like hood covering on head; lace-like wings on back	Eggs hatch during April or early May (two months earlier in southern states). Nymphs molt several times over a four to six week period.
SOFT SCALE	Ornamentals	Cottony Maple, European Fruit lecanium, Magnolia, Oak lecanium, Pine tortoise	Adults are ¼ to ½ inch long; immobile with rudimentary legs and piercing and sucking mouthparts; bud-like in appearance	Eggs hatch in mid-summer and crawlers migrate directly to leaves. Return to twigs and bark where they spend the winter as settled second-stage scales. Continue to grow on twigs in the spring.
SPIDER MITES	Ornamentals	Boxwood, Southern red, Spruce, Two-spotted spider	Extremely small – no more than ½ millimeter in diameter; adults and nymphs have eight legs – larvae have six legs; different types vary in color.	Overwinter as tiny round eggs on leaves or bark that hatch in March or April.
WEEVIL	Ornamentals	Black Vine, Northern Pine, Strawberry Root, Two-banded Japanese	Type of beetle, but differs by having mouth parts on a short or long snout, depending on type	Varies depending on type
BILLBUG	Turf	Bluegrass, Denver, Hunting	Adults are ¼ to ½ inches long; snout, head and prothorax are as long as wing covers; gray to black in color – wing color varies	Overwinter under a leaf litter and in turf – become active in April/May. Active all year in warmer states.









DAMAGE	PROMINENT AREA	COMMON CONTROLS	IMAGE
Feed on turf stems and roots. Burrowing loosens soil around roots, uprooting the plants and drying them out.	Southeastern and Atlantic coast states, port areas of Florida, eastern half of U.S.	Fipronil, imidacloprid, delta methrin, bifenthrin	
Feed on grass roots, cutting them off completely just below soil line. Grass dies in irregular brown, spongy patches.	Throughout the U.S.	Imidacloprid, clothianidin, thiamethoxan	
Destroy grasses by feeding on plant juices in stems and leaves. Damaged grass turns yellow, then reddish-brown as it dies.	Eastern, Southern and Central U.S.	Carbaryl, chlorpyrifos, bifenthrin, delta methrin, diazinon, talstar	
Suck plant juices from buds, leaf veins and tissues under bark. Damaged leaves appear stunted, deformed, discolored – some may die.	Throughout the U.S.	Imidacloprid, fipronil, chlorpyrifos, permethrin, capsaicin, soybean oil with surfactants, abamectin, oxydemeton-methyl, pyriproxyfen, S-Kinoprene	
Tunneling may cause bark to crack, branches to die. Dieback may occur in tree's infested areas.	Spreading throughout the U.S.	Imidacloprid, dicotophos, oxydemeton-methyl, acephate, dinotefuran	
Yellowing/twisting of needles, dieback may occur. Heavy infestations of Hemlock Woolly will kill tree in three to four years.	Eastern and Western U.S.	Imidacloprid, abamectin, oxydemeton-methyl, predatory beetles, dinotefuran	
Injure/destroy plants by feeding on plant juice on underside of leaves. Leave small white spots that turn yellow or bronze.	Throughout the U.S.	Abamectin, capsaicin	
Plants experience yellowing, stunting and dieback. Some infestations produce large amounts of honeydew and subsequent black sooty mold.	Throughout the U.S.	Fipronil, imidacloprid, dicotophos, soybean oil with surfactants, abamectin, pyriproxyfen, dinotefuran	
Cause small spots on leaves or needles. Heavy infestations cause leaves/needles to turn pale green to yellow and drop.	Throughout the U.S.	Bifenazate, spinosad, bifenthrin, hexythiazox, fenbutatin-oxide, capsaicin, permethrin, imidacloprid, cyromazine, abamectin, oxydemeton-methyl, S-Kinoprene	
Notch leaf margins and/or chew bark areas. Cause plants to wilt and die.	Throughout the U.S.	Diflubenzuron, bifenthrin, dinotefuran, imidacloprid	
Adults chew holes in stems/leaves. Larvae feeding in stem causes center of leaf to turn yellow and die. Small yellow patches may become larger throughout season.	Bluegrass: throughout U.S. and southern Canada; Denver: Rocky Mountain states; Hunting: southern U.S. and Hawaii	Imidacloprid	

Photo Credits:
 Mole Cricket – Johnny N. Dell, Bugwood.org
 White grub – Alton N. Sparks, Jr., University of Georgia
 Chinch bug – University of California Archive, University of California, Bugwood.org
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Source: Lawn & Landscape's Technician's Handbook



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continued from page 64

PEST PREVENTION. Darin Bowers, president of Pro-Mow Lawn Care, Charleston, Ill., says his most common springtime insect is scale that infests pines and euonymus. To treat the difficult pests, his one-man crews spray dormant oil just before early spring. "If we miss this application, the scale can be very hard to control during the rest of the season," he says.

After this early-season application, his crews treat ornamentals with broad-spectrum insecticides in May

repair the grub damage."

Bowers does limited marketing for his pest control services, spending about \$2,000 annually on newsletters and invoice inserts to help educate his clients. "Generally, a customer will have us fertilize or mow before they'll worry about insect control, so we really only market this service to our existing customers," he says.

Gil Grattan, president of Virginia Green Lawn Care in Richmond, Va., says grubs are by far the area's most

"We always have customers who won't spend the money for preventive grub control. It can be a considerable expense to repair the grub damage." – Darin Bowers, Pro-Mow Lawn Care

WWW

Reference the chart on pages 66 and 67 to help identify common turf and ornamental pests and for products LCOs can use to treat them through their own pest control programs.

and June to control bagworms and Japanese beetles.


Turf insects are rarely a problem until grubs arrive in the summer, Bowers says, and his crews begin preventive grub treatments in early June. "We guarantee successful grub control with one treatment per season, and we never have problems," he says.

In the fall, Bowers' focus shifts to indoor insect, like aphids, spiders and other household invaders. His crews perform perimeter pest control by applying broad-spectrum insecticide to the foundations and adjacent areas of their clients' homes.

This is also the time of year when his technicians tend to the grub damage in the lawns of clients who chose to forgo preventive grub control service. "We always have customers who won't spend the money for preventive grub control," Bowers says. "It can often be a considerable expense to

preventive pest, and are really the only ones treated for regularly. Grub treatments begin in late June with a liquid insecticide application that coincides with a fungicide application, as both products need to be watered in to be effective, Grattan says.

Grub control is part of the company's "Estate Lawn Care" package, a 10-step program that aims to prevent weeds, brown patch and grub problems. The company also markets grub control to its regular customer base, recommending clients get a grub treatment application every two to three years. "We do not really have a major insect problem in our area, so it's really a secondary concern for most of our customers," Grattan says. **LL**



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MOSQUITO MISTING: A Great Complementary Business

Hot, steamy days and mosquitoes go together in the southern United States like cookies and milk. But homeowners don't want mosquitoes to have their just desserts at their expense.

When one of Randy Eastep's clients asked him to investigate mosquito misting systems, he wasn't sure what he would find until he came across the MistAway® system.

The MistAway system sprays a very fine mist of a botanical insecticide through nozzles installed around the perimeter of a property. The mist settles on the grass and landscaping, killing mosquitoes on contact. The system is programmed to automatically spray for 30 to 45 seconds at dawn, and then again at dusk when mosquitoes are most active, and beneficial insects like bees and butterflies are not.

Eastep, owner of Metro Lawn Care in Dallas, says the misting system is reliable, easy to maintain and virtually sells itself. "Mosquitoes are a problem

in our area. When we sell one system, it perpetuates itself," he says. "The margins are good."

Leo Martinez, president of Land Resource Management in Spring, Texas, agrees, "It's a no-brainer. It's very simple to install and doesn't require a large capital investment."

Martinez dedicates one vehicle toward his mosquito misting business and has a crew of three who are trained to work with the system. He figures he'll have the truck paid off in two years. "It's a service our customers are open to because we've already gained their trust in the other services we provide to them."

The system can be installed on a residential property in one or two days with a margin of 20 to 30 percent depending on labor, he says. And the misting system is easy to schedule in between typical landscape installation

and maintenance jobs.

"Misting is a great service because it opens the door to the landscape outside so customers can enjoy their yards," says Timothy Felts, vice president of Crawford Landscaping,

Naples, Fla. "It really controls the insects and it's a great up-and-coming service for full-service landscape operations."

For maintenance firms that are on customers' properties once a

week, it's easy to keep an eye on

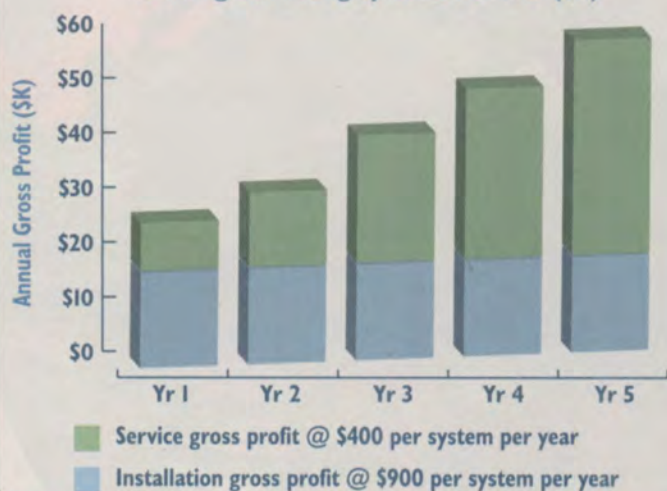
the system. However, it's not necessary to inspect weekly as its advanced control system will detect a problem – like a potential leak in the line – shut the system off and alert the customer with a rapidly-blinking warning light. ●



A PROFITABLE RECURRING REVENUE SERVICE

MistAway's business attraction lies in its installation profits and recurring revenue stream for lawn and landscape professionals. Contractors have found that a typical installation can net gross profits of \$600 to \$1,200, after equipment, labor and initial insecticide fill costs. Service can generate an annual gross profit averaging \$400 per customer (netting out insecticide costs, incremental cost of service call, provision for equipment replacement and wear). Because of this, the recurring nature of the service makes it possible to build up a significant source of incremental profits in just a few years with relatively modest effort. ●

Representative Gross Profits From Installing And Servicing 20 Misting Systems Per Year (\$K)



Now Is The Time To Get In

While mosquito misting is a relatively new residential service, it is not a fad. In Houston and Dallas, where the idea originated, the business has been around for nearly 10 years. It has taken a while to grow to noticeable size because it has been driven almost exclusively by word-of-mouth. But today, the systems have become part of a growing trend among people who spend time and money on their backyards, installing pools, backyard kitchens and firepits, making it the perfect time to get into the business yourself. It's early enough to get in on the ground floor, but most of the trail has already been blazed.

Consumer awareness is triggering market growth. MistAway estimates that in 2007, the industry added about 10,000 systems, growing the installed

base to around 35,000 systems. It expects the industry to add another 13,000 systems this year with continued growth at 25 to 30 percent per year for the foreseeable future.

"Consumer awareness of mosquitoes and the problems mosquitoes



cause are at an all-time high," said Scott Pinkerton, sales representative for Univar, the market's largest insecticide distributor. "Contractors who are already presenting themselves as protectors of the environment in other aspects of their businesses now have an opportunity to provide a valuable

mosquito management service to their customers and make a profit."

The growth is not exclusive to the longer-season southern states. Although more and more systems are being sold in the Southeast, awareness and interest are increasingly growing in regions such as New England and the Midwest where intense mosquito problems can ruin short summers.

And growth in this area can mean growth across the board for landscape professionals. "It opens the door to new business," says Leo Martinez, president of Land Resource Management, Stafford, Texas. "If customers trust you for this big-ticket item, they'll trust you for other services as well." ●



MISTAWAY® SYSTEMS: THE IDEAL PARTNER FOR SUCCESS

MistAway provides mosquito misting equipment for almost 40 percent of the U.S. urban residential market, reinforcing its position as the industry's market leader. The company has the experience of more than seven years in the business and almost 13,000 MistAway systems in the field, which provides a clear advantage for its customers.

With training and layout support for your first few installs, and high quality, personalized marketing materials available for your use, MistAway makes it a snap to quickly add misting to your landscape business.

In addition, MistAway's innovative, durable equipment

means higher profits for you. In 2007, MistAway introduced Gen III, an innovative, tankless batch-processing unit that blends a small quantity of precisely diluted insecticide each time the system is activated. Gen III's snap-in/snap-out cartridge of botanical insecticide dramatically reduces the time required to replenish and service the system. It also includes a number of other advanced features like leak detection, wind-sensor support and secure, field-programmable dosing, to lead the industry in both usability and safety.

Finally, industry leading service and support stands behind every unit sold by MistAway, with one- to two-day turnaround on orders, full-time dedicated tech support and on-demand design and layout assistance for large or complex installations. ●



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- Univar's Scott Pinkerton*



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USE READER SERVICE #48

BY EMILY MULLINS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Now or Never



As water restrictions increase, now more than ever contractors need to follow solid water conservation practices.

Since March 2007, Randy Bodine has teeter-tottered on two extremes of water restrictions. In his hometown of Auburn, Ala., the president of Bodine's Landscape Services is under voluntary water use restrictions. But north of Auburn to the Tennessee line, in bustling cities like Birmingham and Huntsville, all outdoor watering is banned. Period. "We do irrigation work all over the state, so this had made things really hard on us," he says.

Bodine's not the only landscape contractor whose business is wilting from a lack of water. The National Drought Mitigation Center maps abnormally dry to severe drought conditions in most of the Southeast and Southwest, and even in seemingly unexpected areas like Montana, North and South Dakota and parts of Wisconsin. Areas of exceptional drought span from parts of Alabama to the Carolinas. In fact, according to a Government Accountability Office survey of water managers,

irrigation

36 states anticipate local, regional or statewide water shortages by 2013, even under non-drought conditions.

With 48 percent of landscape contractors experiencing an increase in landscape watering restrictions over the last two years, how can they maintain their businesses? "Water restrictions have wide-reaching affects,"

rain and snowfalls are considerably lower, vital lakes are drying up and warmer temperatures are evaporating precipitation faster than it can fall.

The second is the booming population growth. For example, growth in Birmingham has doubled in the last 10 years, yet the holding capacity of Lake Purdy, the city's main water supply,

The third, and perhaps most prevalent, problem is lack of awareness about the need to conserve water and practice smart irrigation. According to 2007 *Lawn & Landscape* research, 91 percent, 73 percent and 80 percent of landscape contractors in the West, Southeast and Northeast/Midwest, respectively, use drip or low-volume irrigation. While those numbers are up from a few years ago, there is room for improvement when it comes to education. Research from the Irrigation Association (IA) shows there are more than 2,600 certified irrigation contractors, auditors and designers in a country of more than 40,000 irrigation contracting companies.

Robert Wade, owner of Wade Landscape in Laguna Beach, Calif., understands the value of education in the irrigation industry. A certified landscape professional from the Professional Landcare Network and a certified water manager from the California Landscape Contractors Association, he's also applied to be a WaterSense partner through the Environmental Protection Agency and expects to be accepted any day. "We talk to property managers who've been told their system was in great shape when in reality it's one of the worst systems I've ever seen," Wade says. "The industry as a whole needs more education, but we also need to educate clients about problems to look for."

THE BRIGHT SIDE. Wade is a rare example of an irrigation contractor who's embraced the need for water conservation and used it to his advantage. While parts of California are awaiting a mandatory 30-percent cutback in annual water use, Wade and his crews are busy replacing outdated irrigation systems with smart systems and maintaining them for utmost efficiency. For



"The basic argument coming from the landscape industry is a fair one, but it's hard to argue with the drinking water supply."

— Ed Buchan, Raleigh, N.C., public utilities department


says Russ Proffit, president of Precise Irrigation Design and Consulting, Winter Haven, Fla. "For example, the water problems in Atlanta have certainly impacted the nursery industry here in Florida. Conserving our water resources will benefit everyone – from landscape contractors to tax payers."

WHAT'S GOING ON? Most irrigation experts discuss three primary factors contributing to the country's water shortages. The first, and most unpredictable, is Mother Nature. Average

has remained the same, and levels started dropping last year, Bodine says. Unlike in Birmingham, lawmakers in Auburn anticipated growth and tripled the capacity of its largest lake 10 years ago, a precaution Bodine says many other districts should take.

"Growth in many areas of the U.S. is outpacing what municipalities are doing in terms of water capacity," he says. "When there's not as much water to go around as it is, and then Mother Nature cuts you 20 inches short, you have a real problem."

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the past three years, he has made a name for himself knowing the ins and outs of what he calls lean water management, which makes up about 40 percent of his total business. Commercial properties seek out the company and great word of mouth keeps the jobs coming. "It's gotten to the point where property managers know we do this kind of work," he says.

However, Wade's residential clients present a bit more of a challenge. Of the 10 to 20 installations his crews perform each day, every single client has to be convinced Wade's smart systems work and told why their current systems don't. "Most homeowners are skeptical from the start," he says. "Every day my guys have to educate

someone at their doorstep."

The cost of a smart system vs. a standard system is most clients' main deterrent, Wade says. However, many counties in California reimburse those who invest in efficient irrigation products like smart controllers and multistream, multitrajectory rotating nozzles. While Wade predicts the rebates will dry up once water-conscious irrigation becomes standard (California law mandates only smart controllers will be available for purchase by 2010), he's baffled why more homeowners and contractors alike don't utilize the program now. "I'm not sure if it's a fear of technology or a fear of the unknown," Wade says. "But contractors who are seeing the water crisis

affect their business negatively haven't taken the time to see what's available."

TURN FOR THE WORSE. But the situation isn't so optimistic in areas like Alabama where irrigation is currently not an option. For the past 23 years, Bodine has seen annual revenue growth of between 3 to 5 percent. That growth was flat in 2007. He historically adds about 20 to 25 seasonal employees, but had no need for them this past year. He's downsized his equipment budget by 20 percent, and is tightly controlling spending in all other areas. He has 15 jobs – \$500,000 worth of work – he's either lost or has had to put on hold because homeowners don't want to install landscapes

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they can't water. "We're at the point where we'll drive that truck or use that mower one more year until we see what happens," he says. "That's the mindset of a lot of contractors."

As a full-service company, Bodine is not only lacking on the irrigation side of things, but dry lawns also require less mowing. Tie that in with a shaky housing market and an economy on the verge of a recession and the outlook gets even bleaker. "How do you quantify how many millions of dollars have been lost in the Southeast's irrigation and landscape industries?" Bodine asks, adding Alabama's landscape industry generates \$9 billion a year.

Bodine firmly believes green industry professionals are suffering due to municipalities' lack of preparation. "Cities all over the country are simply unprepared for growth," he says. "They're not proactive - they're reactive. When lakes dry up and there's no rain on the horizon, you can't just restrict companies that need water for their livelihood."

UNDER CONTROL. Ed Buchan, water conservation specialist for the Raleigh, N.C., public utilities department, has felt the brunt of some angry landscape contractors who share Bodine's perspective. "We've eliminated lawn irrigation, which really puts an end to what lawn professionals are able to do," Buchan said in a January interview. "If we don't get a lot of rain this spring we'll probably end up prohibiting all lawn watering this year."

Buchan's predictions were correct. Raleigh City Council voted to ban all outdoor irrigation and hand watering with a hose beginning Feb. 15, and the rules may worsen come spring and summer. It's hard to argue the restrictions haven't had a positive affect on Raleigh's water supply. After the October irrigation ban, the city's water use dropped 35 percent compared with average summer months,

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offers to his customers. That's not to say Tony hasn't been on his fair share of competitive equipment. In the end, he felt that Exmark was the only way to go.

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Buchan says, adding the new restrictions should add another 5 percent savings, or 1 to 2 million gallons per day.

He says the most common argument from landscape contractors is the green industry is being hit harder than any other that uses water commercially. While Buchan agrees, the reasons why are just not that cut and dry, he says. "Few industrial users have the capability of limiting water use," he says. "Like a pharmaceutical company - they have to use a specific amount of water to operate. It's hard to make everyone understand, and even when they do understand, they don't like it."

Another controversial aspect of restricting water use is it's simply

easier to monitor the water use people can see, like irrigation systems and car washes. "The average fast food restaurant probably uses the same amount of water as a car wash, but you don't see that," Buchan says. "The basic argument coming from the landscape industry is a fair one, but it's hard to argue with the drinking water supply. Watering your lawn or washing your car is seen by many as a luxury."

It's true, most municipalities structure water restrictions in a way that makes them easiest to police, Prophit says. But many times, they result in the water not being used as efficiently as possible. He finds it impossible to properly irrigate many of his largest properties under Winter

Haven's current one-day-per-week irrigation schedule. "If everyone is only allowed to water on, say, Mondays, you use more water on that day than you would if you could stretch it out over seven days," he explains. "Implementing one-day-per-week restrictions is the best way to police rather than the best way to use the available water."

Prophit is spreading the word about the importance of smart irrigation and water conservation. As a state ambassador for the IA, he travels the country "talking to whoever will listen" about the industry's problems and where it needs to go. "The word is getting out," he says. "People are listening and understanding. The outlook is positive, but the process is slow." LL

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Does a happy medium exist between
landscape contractors and the general public
about backpack blowers?

Blow Out

BY MARK A. PHILLIPS/ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Caleb Auman can't imagine life without backpack blowers. These portable tools are an indispensable component of his operation, says the owner and president of Auman Landscape Co. in Lancaster, Ohio. In addition to his maintenance crew, his design-build crew uses these powerful portable cleanup tools. "I would hate to think what it would take to sweep off a sidewalk without a blower," Auman says. "The labor involved, especially with doing so many properties, would be overwhelming."

Recent scrutiny and legislative efforts, though, threaten to prohibit blower use as the issue over its audio impact on the general public is debated. However, conscientious self regulation by contractors may be the answer to strike a happy medium between the need to move light lawn refuse efficiently and the general public's desire for a noise-free environment.



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GOOD SENSE. Jo Solet, a Harvard Medical School researcher who studies the effects of noise on the body, claims in a recent *Boston Globe* article that the decibel levels emitted from leaf blowers are to blame for raising heart rates. But most studies on leaf blowers have shown that the bulk of the machines sold today produce decibel levels comparable to normal conversation (60 to 70 decibels). By comparison, a telephone dial tone is about 80 decibels.

"We need to draw the line that says we shouldn't have to put up with the noise and what's being put into the air," Solet says in the article. Should some sort of ordinance pass, commercial use of leaf blowers within 150 feet of residential areas would be illegal.

As backpack blowers' power and popularity in the green industry increase, complaints by some hom-

Larson says. Several blower manufacturers are actively working with local municipalities to develop responsible operator training programs. These training programs have been very successful in reducing and sometimes eliminating leaf blower noise, he says.

Interestingly, most of the high-pitched whine from high-performance blowers comes from the impeller, Larson says. Some manufacturers are producing blowers with a feature that temporarily reduces the engine's RPM around noise-sensitive areas.

Contractors like Auman can't afford to be noisy. As responsible stewards of their environment, Auman has strict rules about blower operating hours. "For any work we need to do before 7:30 a.m. we don't run the blowers, especially if we're in a residential neighborhood," he says. As a rule of thumb, it's time to put away the

toughest job site assignments, such as cleaning-up debris in large parking lots, moving wet-matted leaves and hedge clippings, Larson says. Smaller displacement handheld blowers perform lighter duties such as pushing dry grass clippings, bark dust and other debris from pavement surfaces.

"Personally, I prefer backpack whenever I'm out in the field, just for the power of it," Auman says. "One of my guys prefers a handheld because of the size of it, because he can get into little nooks on the job site."

Les Hart relies on blowers to remove debris after his crews have installed sod or laid seed. He tends to select machines in the middle of the power spectrum because they're mostly used for a quick cleanup tasks around a client's yard or job site.

"It has to be something that's easy to operate and lightweight," says

"Most operating do's and don'ts for blowers involve courtesy and good sense. These are things like paying attention to noise, avoiding use when people are sleeping or having meals and not running equipment early in the morning or late in the day." — Jay Larsen, Shindaiwa

owners have prompted regulations to limit sound levels produced and the hours or days of use, says Jay Larsen, marketing manager for Tualatin, Ore.-based Shindaiwa. Typically, regulations focus on elevated noise levels that purportedly affects the ears. But legislation under review in Cambridge, Mass., would for the first time cite blood pressure as the reason for an outright ban on blowers.

Most leaf blower complaints can be mitigated through operator training,

machines as night falls.

Larsen applauds this consideration on the part of landscape contractors. "Most operating do's and don'ts for blowers involve courtesy and good sense," he says. "These are things like paying attention to noise, avoiding use when people are sleeping or having meals and not running equipment early in the morning or late in the day."

BLOWERS IMPORTANCE. Commercial-grade backpack blowers handle the

Hart, the owner of Harts Landscaping, Paris, Tenn. "You must make sure it moves the volume of air you need for the job."

If backpack blowers are the leading choice for landscape contractors, then a quality commercial-grade handheld unit is an ideal supplement, Larsen says. "In a business where time is indeed money, a solid, commercial-grade handheld blower is a fantastic choice for those fast, truck-to-task jobs," Larsen says. **LL**

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Core Issues



Versatile, efficient and powerful, the right aerator can inspire landscape contractors to increase their business and profitability.

The days of backbreaking lawn aeration are over.

Long a lucrative but laborious ancillary business for landscape contractors, aeration has undergone a technological revolution during the past decade. The service, performed in the spring and fall, entails driving tines into the ground (almost always mechanically these days, although some contractors still use hand implements for small areas) to pull up cores of earth. This relieves soil compaction and allows lawns to better soak up and retain water and nutrients. As labor becomes scarcer in the industry, contractors demand easier-to-use and more efficient machines and manufacturers have delivered. While succeeding push models have served their owners well for decades, these classics have been joined by ride-on models and pull-behind units.

Photo: Turfco Manufacturing



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“With this aerator attachment, it’s so fast, and it pulls just great plugs. We’ve increased our productivity.”

— Curt Hughes, Hughes Landscaping

The results – more versatile, efficient and powerful aerators – have inspired contractors to increase this portion of their business, often to quick success. Depending on how often a contractor performs the service, a new aerator can pay for itself within a year. And even before it improves your company’s bottom line, it will improve the productivity of your employees. “The guy at 2 o’clock in the afternoon is going just as fast as he is at 8 o’clock in the morning,” says Bob Brophy, director of lawn products for Turfco Manufacturing, Blaine, Minn.

But this increase in options means that contractors have to make smart purchasing decisions. A contractor who doesn’t carefully consider the machine he’s buying could become stuck with a \$2,000 to \$8,000 or more tool that doesn’t fulfill his needs.

VARIETY. Chris Hurlow, the lawn care manager at Fast Eddy’s Grounds Maintenance in Mount Vernon, Ohio, raves about his new ride-on aerator.

“With the new ride-on machine, I did what would have taken me three weeks in one week,” Hurlow says. “We’ll pay it off in a year. That was the whole thing: If I could justify it by selling as much as the machine cost, we’d buy it,” and he says he’s confident he’ll be able to do that.

For big properties, a ride-on aerator is awesome, Hurlow says, adding he can cover about 100,000 square feet in 30 minutes using the unit. But that’s not all. It also includes attachments for spreading seed, lime and fertilizer as well as other functions. “It doesn’t just get used one time a year,” he says.

But while Hurlow is happy with his new purchase, it’s not the only aerator in his fleet. Fast Eddy’s serves a variety of lawn sizes, some of which are too small for a ride-on model. “I

have to have two or three different machines,” he says. “We take care of properties, 10 to 20 acres down to 5,000-square-foot lawns. I couldn’t live with one machine.”

This is in line with Brophy’s rule about buying aerators: One size does not fit all. Before buying a machine, contractors need to examine their business to determine the size they need. “What size lawns is he going to aerate? There are different sizes of aerators,” Brophy says. “If his customers have small back gates, he doesn’t want a big machine.”

Contractors should also look at the type of terrain they’ll be covering. “Your larger machines are great hill-side machines,” Brophy says, but “the machines that do well on hills won’t do well with the gates.”

Which means contractors who do enough business should consider diversifying their fleet. “Not every machine is designed to work on every property,” Brophy says. “He may be better served by spending the money on a smaller and a big one.”

Hurlow doesn’t have any complaints about his new aerator, but he wishes the machines in general would perform better on hills. “It’s just taxing to run the machines on hills,” he says.

VERSATILITY. Curt Hughes admires the tank-like quality of his walk-behind aerators. He just wishes his employees were as durable. “I still have some models that are, heck, 20 years old,” says the owner and president of Hughes Landscaping in Parker, Colo. “They have some problems but you could shoot the thing five times, and they still run.”

Over the years, Hughes built up a fleet of six walk-behind models, because he enjoyed the durability so much and because he was so used



When shopping for an aerator, pay close attention to the tines. Look for ones that are going to remove a core, not just punch a hole.

Photo: Lawn & Landscape archive



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to buying those machines. But as his business grew and the nature of his labor changed, he knew he needed to diversify. "It was tough because you have six aerators but you need six guys to get behind those dudes," he says. "Labor is getting tougher to find."

In the market for an aerator that could handle larger properties, Hughes came across one manufactured by a mower manufacturer that can be attached to the front of his zero-turn.

"Most yards we aerate twice a year. Some lawns three times," he says. "With this aerator attachment, it's so fast, and it pulls just great plugs. We've increased our productivity. Because you ride on it, you don't walk behind it. You just turn that zero-turning radius machine around."

While the front-mounted aerator attachment has allowed Hughes to increase the number of aeration jobs he does per season, it's not without its drawbacks. He points out that this type of aerator requires a specific mower. He's also learned that training is key for this type of equipment. "If you leave the tines in and back it up - bad things, man," Hughes says, referring to the damage done to lawns when tines move one way and the machine powering it moves another.

Employees who have used riding mowers before are used to quickly throwing the machine into reverse, and it's those employees who end up damaging the equipment. "I was the first one that bent the tines up," Hughes says. "We've figured out what to do and what not to do."

Training takes 10 minutes to teach somebody how to run a front-mounted aerator, he says. And within an hour they're pros, he adds.

FEATURES. Eric Johansson, plant health care manager at Landscape

East and West in Portland, Ore., has three push aerators. He's a contractor who knows what he needs from his equipment, and doesn't overbuy. "The push-behinds are more versatile, a little more compact," he says. "They allow us to use residential sites with stairs and grades to negotiate."

Johansson likes his smaller aerators to have removable weights that make the machines lighter and more compact for transport. Push-behind models have become better ergonomically designed in the past few years, he says, and the maintenance on them is minimal. "The machines don't have a long down time," Johansson says. "It's a no-brainer. We're doing a lot more of that in house. They're lasting a lot longer."

Another improvement to push aerators in the past decade has been to their turning ability, which amounts to a small revolution. Older models had to be picked up, or at least the tines had to be disengaged from the ground, when the operator turned the machine. This procedure but a drain on productivity. Then a split-drive push model debuted that allows turning without having to lift up the aerators, says Linda Beattie, public relations specialist for Classen Manufacturing, Norfolk, Neb. "That turning ability is essential," she says. "Since these are often one-man crews, this guy will have to use this unit by himself."

When shopping for an aerator, Johansson pays close attention to the tines. He says they should be at least at the standard diameter of three-quarters of an inch.

"Look for ones that are going to remove a core, not just punch a hole," he says. "They should do six to eight holes per square foot; if you're doing less than that you're going to have extra work for yourself." **LL**



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Productive preemergents

Nothing is absolute.

Lawn care operators will get more from their spring preemergent programs if they can bust some common client myths.

BY MIKE ZAWACKI/MANAGING EDITOR

Its flat, broad blue-green leaves are a blemish against the supple turfgrass, like a pimple on a beauty queen's face.

A complaint is placed with the lawn care operator: "How could this happen in my lawn when I paid for a preemergent herbicide program?"

It's an all too common question, LCOs say. Crabgrass and other broadleaf pests are opportunistic, waiting for the right combination of light, moisture and soil temperature to spring forth and wreak havoc. Preemergent herbicides are designed to stop weed growth before it begins, so a spring preemergent program is the most effective way to combat these weeds. However, broadleaf interlopers will still appear. It's just a fact. Knowing the reasons behind why these weeds flare up and passing this information along to lawn care clients set realistic expectations about a preemergent herbicide program.

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USE READER SERVICE # 67

One Tough Animal

TOTAL ERADICATION. The most common client misconception LCOs face is the belief that one application means no more weeds, ever.

"They expect it to work on every weed known to man when the preemergent primarily targets crabgrass, some broadleaf and a few grasses," says Dave DeLuca, president of DeLuca Brothers in Terryville, Conn.

"I run into this topic every single spring," adds Richard Carter, proprietor of My Lawn Guy, Andover, Mass. "I am always happy to sit down with a customer and set the record straight."

Despite some misleading advertising offering the "weed-free lawn," LCOs need to establish expectations with clients that no product provides total control, says Mark Urbanowski, senior product manager at Dow

the client on proper maintenance.

Timing is critical, LCOs say. Preemergent products should be applied before the soil temperature reaches between 53 to 58 degrees F at the four-inch depth, the threshold for crabgrass germination. Waiting for the forsythia to bloom, one of many common myths, is irrelevant because it doesn't account for soil temperature.

"In our region, many customers think the product needs to be applied before April 15," says Patrick Bucklin, owner of Atlantic Turf Care in Falmouth, Maine. "We try to explain that the product lasts for 90 to 120 days and if applied too early the control will run out prematurely."

Application rate is another key for a successful preemergent program. Product labels offer a wide range of



"It's critical for applicators and end users to understand that no preemergent product gives 100 percent control. It just doesn't happen. But by studying labels and local research, LCOs can do a lot to deliver the best control possible." — Mark Urbanowski, Dow AgorSciences

AgroSciences in Indianapolis. Rather, the realistic outlook for "acceptable" control that an LCO should convey to the client is anywhere from 85 percent to 98 percent weed control, he says.

"It's critical for applicators and end users to understand that no preemergent product gives 100 percent control," Urbanowski says. "It just doesn't happen. But by studying labels and local research, LCOs can do a lot to deliver the best control possible."

An acceptable level of control is possible if an LCO is vigilant about his application timing and rate and informs

rates that address various geographic and environmental differences, and it's important for an LCO to understand the rate he should use for the best weed control in his region.

Proper mowing practices following a preemergent application also improve weed control, says Harold Enger, director of training and franchise support at Spring-Green Lawn Care in Naperville, Ill. "If you mow at a higher setting from spring through summer the client will have less of a problem with crabgrass," he says. "Mowing high keeps the sun from heating up

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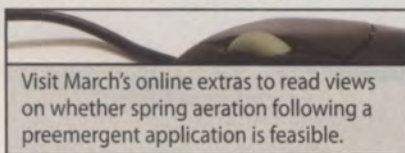
the seeds and getting them to germinate." Enger adds Northern turfgrass should be kept at a high of between 2 ½ to 3 inches in height, and Southern turfgrass from 2 ½ inches and as high as 3 ½ inches for tall fescue.

WASHED AWAY. Another misconception is that rain following an application washes away the preemergent agent, says Brad Johnson, president of Lawn America in Tulsa, Okla. "Rain will actually help in most cases as preemergents need to be watered into the soil within a few days," he says. "If the homeowner doesn't water the product, many common preemergents will breakdown from sunlight and

loose some of their effectiveness. So the sooner we can get the products watered into the soil the better."

The oil-based material needs water to spread, Enger says. It's important during a dry spring for LCOs to advise clients to water following a preemergent application and that there is little to no risk it will wash away.

"Once the product is washed in it's pretty much rain fast," says Ben Cicora, business manager for herbicides at Bayer Environmental Science, Raleigh, N.C. "It's designed to stay put."



Visit March's online extras to read views on whether spring aeration following a preemergent application is feasible.

RAKING. DeLuca had weed breakthrough on seven of 10 lawns in a neighborhood he serviced one year. He learned later the problem wasn't product failure or LCO error, rather the culprit was misguided maintenance. "It turned out that two weeks after I did my applications the lawns were power raked," he says. "Pretty much obliterated the barrier."

Vigorous soil disturbance will break down the preemergent barrier. "A light hand raking will not disturb the preemergent barrier," Enger says. "But running a power rake will destroy it."

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Leatherman Monologues

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have less of a problem with crabgrass. However, many lawns are far from perfect. Broadleaf seeds will find opportunities to germinate along high-traffic areas, patchy bare spots and stretches along curbs, driveways and sidewalks damaged by winter rock salt use.

Many LCOs hit the outbreak with a reliable postemergent product. "We only apply this when there has been crabgrass that has germinated and a customer has called about it," says David Williams, president of Williams Lawn Care in Lancaster, N.Y. "We don't charge for crabgrass control failures. In any case I try not to shift the blame but rather explain the reason for the failure and then tell the client I will fix it. I'll use a postemergent product and then check it in a week."

Ultimately, a preemergent program is one phase of a season-long regimen for a healthy lawn, says Ken Reis, owner of Turf & Shrub Management in South Dartmouth, Mass. "Think of the service as one leg of a three-legged stool," he says. "Any sturdy three-legged stool will support you if you sit on it. But if one of those legs fails, you can no longer sit on the stool. The preemergent program is one leg of that stool, with mowing as another and watering as the third." LL

Client Education

Lawn care clients often harbor misconceptions about the limitations and effectiveness of a quality preemergent weed control program.

"As a company we find ourselves as the educators of our particular market," says Todd Graus, owner of Green Turf Lawns in Worland, Wyo. "It's important to educate clients about the different ways preemergents fail."

To better inform clients and reduce the chances of conflict later in the season, lawn care operators offer some methods for disseminating information and better educating their customers.

BROCHURES: Printed materials produced either by the LCO or from preemergent suppliers offer valuable information to clients about their preemergent program and seasonal weed control.

WORK ORDERS: Many LCOs include detailed explanations in their work order's comments to educate clients on various topics, including how to differentiate crabgrass from other turf weeds and why certain environmental conditions are prime for an outbreak.

DIGITAL MEDIA: Regular e-newsletters and company Web sites can provide valuable real-time information and troubleshooting tips about seasonal weed control trends, the products used and additional weed-control services.

TECHNICIANS: The LCO in the field is the first line of defense. Technicians should be trained to handle one-on-one interactions with clients, including how to handle questions and accurately relay information and how best to diffuse a dissatisfied client.

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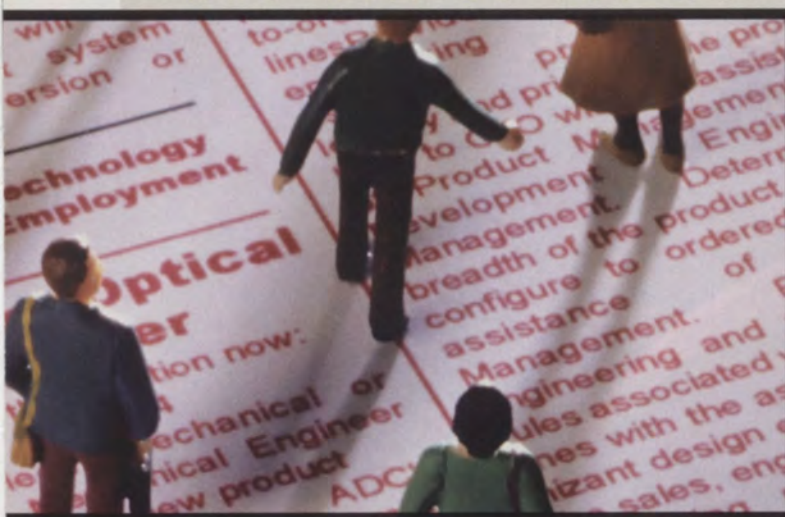
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USE READER SERVICE # 72

who will do the work? recruitment



outside looking in

Where does a contractor find the key people for his management team? Some ideal candidates may come from outside the green industry.

BY MIKE ZAWACKI/MANAGING EDITOR

Ask 20 landscape contractors from coast to coast to name their top business priorities for 2008 and the majority will place strengthening their management team with key people among the top issues.

David Gantt falls into this majority. Three years ago his company, Springdale Outdoor Service in Blythewood, S.C., began to concentrate on growth. Gantt knew to maintain the positive momentum he was building he'd need to transform from an owner working in the business to one that solely worked on the business.

continued on page 108

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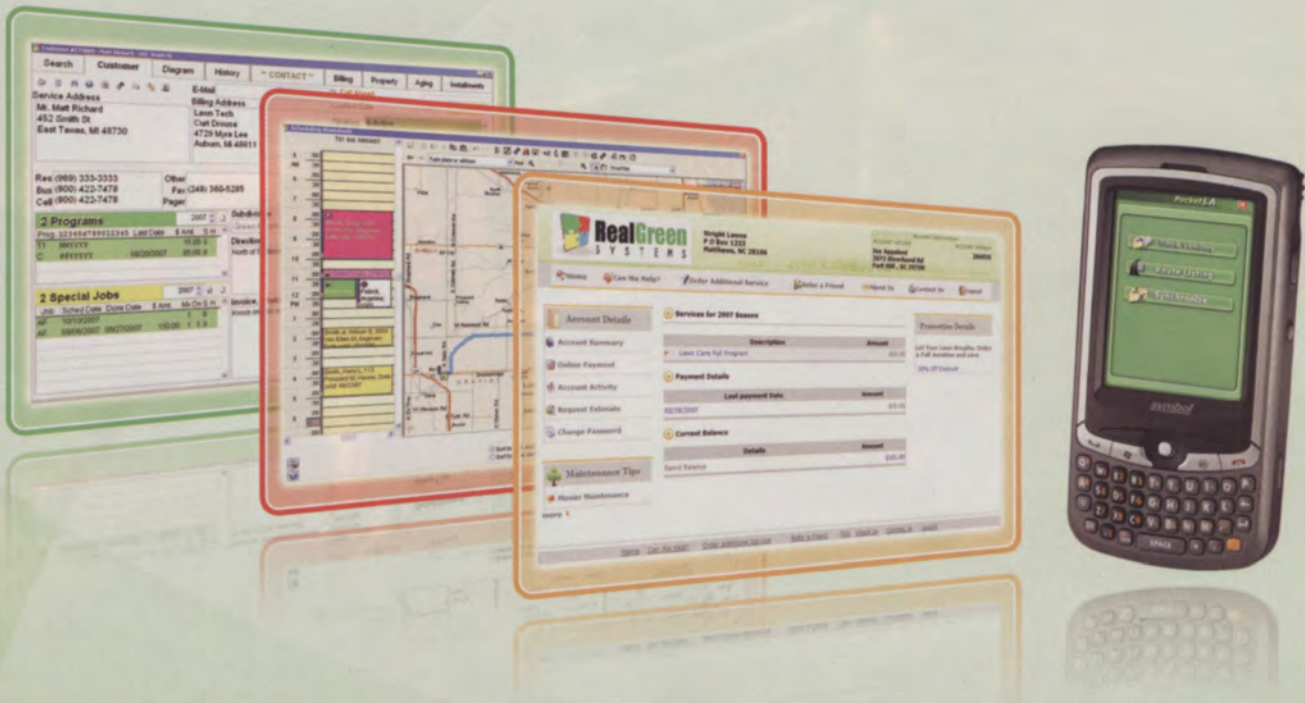
Labor has always been a top challenge for landscape firms. This month, in the second of a three-part Work Force Series, *Lawn & Landscape* looks at strategies for recruiting future leaders. In April, we'll present a training and retention guide.



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who will do the work? recruitment

continued from page 104

That was one tall order because it meant hiring a management team to share in the leadership burden that Gantt had shouldered.

"As growth started to take off I started to shed the many hats I wore," he says. At first Gantt looked internally, but then realized continued growth and success would only be sustained if he was able to infuse his business with new blood.

"I realized that I needed new ideas," Gantt says. "To get that I needed to bring in new people who had different approaches and who could bring a fresh perspective to my business."

When landscape contractors look to jump-start their operations they should consider looking outside their

business, and even outside the green industry, for an infusion of key talent.

LOOKING OUTSIDE. When approaching hiring, many landscape contractors have a narrow focus on potential candidates from within their industry. The common perception among some business owners is that filling a vacant position with a warm body is a job well done.

However, this couldn't be further from the truth, says Bill Arman, an industry consultant and co-founder of The Harvest Group. This mind-set has a certain complacency to it that leads to mediocrity instead of growth and excellence, Arman says. And it's an obstacle green industry business own-

ers must overcome, he adds.

"They think they can find this piece of the puzzle and simply move on," Arman says. "Instead it leads to most businesses getting stuck in a rut."

While it may seem like a safe choice, bringing in an individual with 20 years of industry experience to fill a management hole may not be the right long-term solution, Arman says.

"They may not be well trained for leadership," he says. "Instead, they may be bringing baggage, primitive ways and a mind-set that you're going to have to re-orient anyway."

Many markets outside of the green industry have solid employee candidates with the same set of coveted skill sets that landscape business owners

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are looking for to fill leadership and management positions, Arman says. However, while these candidates are ripe for the picking, outside the industry is often the last place an owner of a landscape business will look.

"They don't have the mind-set that someone from outside the green industry can be hired into the company and brought up to speed about this industry fast enough," Arman says. "The fact is it's easier to teach

someone technical skills than it is to teach them soft skills."

Scott Jamieson, president and CEO of Care of Trees in Wheeling, Ill., says his company has an active employee development program that grooms up-and-comers for management positions. While it's a vital mill for future leaders it's not always the best source to fill some management holes. For example, Jamieson recently looked outside of his company and the green industry when hiring his chief financial officer.

"Sometimes you must go outside, as I did for our CFO position," Jamieson says. "We needed outside thinking and bigger company experience to help us reach the next level."

Gantt agrees, adding of the six management positions he created and filled during his growth phase, four were filled from outside the green industry. Having people in place whose professional careers were not based in the green industry has provided a strategic advantage, Gantts says.

"It's good to have diverse backgrounds," Gantts says. "My main focus is to bring people in with solid management backgrounds, who will not only enjoy working in this industry but will also be invested in the future success of this company."

WHERE TO LOOK. Like with a solid employee development program, it's vital for a landscape business owner to understand his people needs two to three years into the future. For example, Gantt is always recruiting, even if he isn't necessarily ready to hire.

"I haven't had very good success advertising for managerial roles," Gantt says. "But I have had pretty good luck with my own head hunting, which I'm doing all of the time. It's good to have a few irons in the fire.

"I know that a year or two down the



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road I'm going to need to hire a financial officer," he says. "I recently came across a guy who'd be a good fit. So I told him that I'm not ready to hire now but maybe it was something that he'd want to think about so when the time came he could give it some serious thought."

So where can a landscape business owner find key people to fill his management needs? Various industries provide a variety of expertise, Arman says.

For example, to fill sales and sales manager positions, rental car companies have highly-trained sales personnel that would be ideal in the landscape industry. "These skills are valuable and highly sought after," Arman says. "It's difficult to teach people how to cold call or how to negotiate a service contract. I believe it's always easier to hire a professional sales person than someone with a technical background who will be doing sales."

Logistics companies such as UPS and Fed-Ex have employees who are highly adept at running sophisticated operations. "These are people who have been exposed to proven systems and programs," he says. "And these are skills they can bring to your landscape business."

Closely allied industries, such as property management companies and even big-box stores, are good sources for employees trained to manage and oversee certain levels of customer service and efficiency, Arman says.

In addition, the hotel industry has managers and sales personnel who could make a lateral move to the green industry. "These are fields that deal closely with customers and satisfying customer expectations," Arman says. "Also, the hotel industry deals with a lot of the same work force issues that green industry business owners have to deal with. Many times those managers can bring valuable skill set with them and the transition is relatively easy." LL

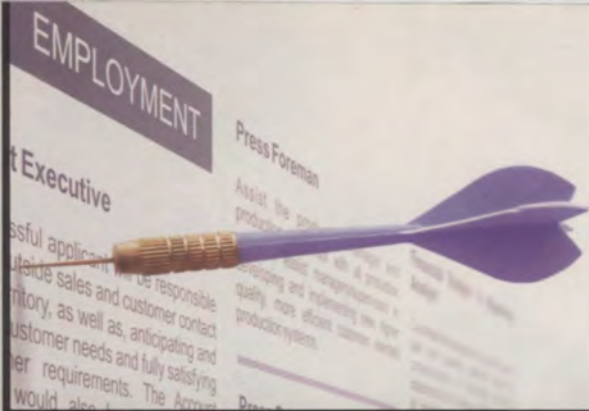


Photo: Olivier Le Moal

Making Key Hires

Putting the right personalities together to create a good team is critical, and when key management positions open up inside Kimball Property Maintenance, owner Russ Kimball fills those positions internally, but only if there's a strategic fit.

"I'm very careful not to promote someone out of their level of expertise," Kimball says. "We've done that before and had a great employee promoted to a management position and they were terrible. It was a bad situation because you had a one-time superstar that all of a sudden was a dog."

Having the wrong people in the wrong positions is a waste of resources, Kimball says, and it was a difficult lesson to learn. Now KPM takes its time, plans out its hiring and has brought on a professional recruiter to bring in qualified candidates from various industries around the country. The recruiter's fee is 10 percent of the value of the new hire's salary.

For Kimball, using a professional recruiter has been more successful than plucking talented employees from his competitors.

"I would never have looked outside the state for candidates, instead, I would have tried to hire locally," Kimball says. "Now I've found I'm not just getting people, I'm getting qualified people."

Kimball adds that his company's headquarters in Draper, Utah, is a premier area in the country for winter recreational sports. He's been able to leverage that as a powerful recruitment tool to prospective hires. But as a full-service maintenance company, it also means KPM is pushing snow in the winter, a fact that every new hire has to come to terms with before relocating and accepting a position.

"We just hired a sprinkler tech from Arizona," he says. "He's awesome, but he's never plowed snow a day in his life. But he knew coming in that plowing snow will be the biggest part of his job."

"He may be a sprinkler manager from Arizona but we're a snow removal company, too," he says. "He will learn how to plow and be responsible for educating himself to be ready for snow."

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- Produces air speed of 180 mph and airflow of 494 cfm
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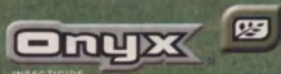


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www.efcower.com

- Powered by a 1.2-horsepower 25.4-cc engine
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Circle 202 on reader service card



John Deere BP65LE Blower

www.johndeere.com

- Powered by a 64.7-cc Kawasaki 2-cycle engine
- Features a low-emission, more fuel-efficient engine
- 190-mile-per-hour maximum air velocity at the tube moves leaves and debris quickly
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Circle 203 on reader service card



Kawasaki Handheld Blower

www.kawpowr.com

- Weighs 10.4 pounds
- Powered by a 26.3-cc engine
- Has a maximum air volume of 450 cfm
- Includes an air intake guard that fits over the fan guard
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USE READER SERVICE # 85

Nikko Tanaka THB-260PF Handheld Blower

www.tanakapowerequipment.com

- Features the "inspire" design based on the Hitachi Power Tools industrial design
- Features a 25-cc, 1.3-horsepower PureFire two-stroke engine
- Weights 9.3 pounds
- Nikko Tanaka Engineering U.S.A. – 888/482-6252

Circle 206 on reader service card



RedMax Strato-Charged Backpack Blower

www.redmax.com

- Blower moves 463 cfm of air at 131 mph
- Weighs 14.9 pounds
- Powered by a 29.5-cc Strato-Charged pure two-cycle engine
- Super e-START reduces pulling force needed to start the engine compared to previous starting engines
- Recoil pulling speed is also reduced
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Shindaiwa EB8510RT Backpack Blower

www.shindaiwa.com

- Provides output of 224 mph, 762 cfm
- C4 technology high-torque, 4-cycle engine delivers 4.5 horsepower
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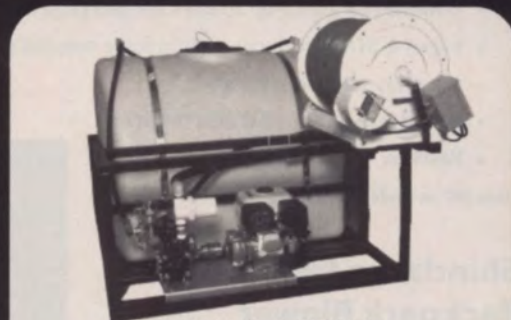
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- Provides long-residual preemergence control of 30 grassy and broadleaf weeds, including crabgrass, Poa annua, goosegrass, prostrate spurge, common purslane and knotweed
- Contains the active ingredient prodiamine
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BASF Pendulum AquaCap Herbicide

www.betterturf.com

- Provides economical, long-lasting, broad-spectrum, preemergent control
- For use on weeds including crabgrass, goosegrass, oxalis, henbit and spurge
- Reduces odor and staining while easing clean up
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Dow Agro Dimension 2EW Herbicide

www.dimensionherbicide.com

- Offers preemergence control of grassy and broadleaf weeds
- Contains the active ingredient dithiopyr
- Can be sprayed over the top of landscape ornamentals
- Available in a sprayable version in half-, 2½ - and 30-gallon containers
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Nufarm ProDeuce Herbicide

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Phoenix Harrier WDG

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- Broad-spectrum, preemergent herbicide
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www.scottsprohort.com

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www.fmcprosolutions.com

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LESCO Lifeguard Herbicide

www.lesco.com

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- John Deere Landscapes/LESCO – 800/321-5325

Circle 226 on reader service card



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LANDSCAPES

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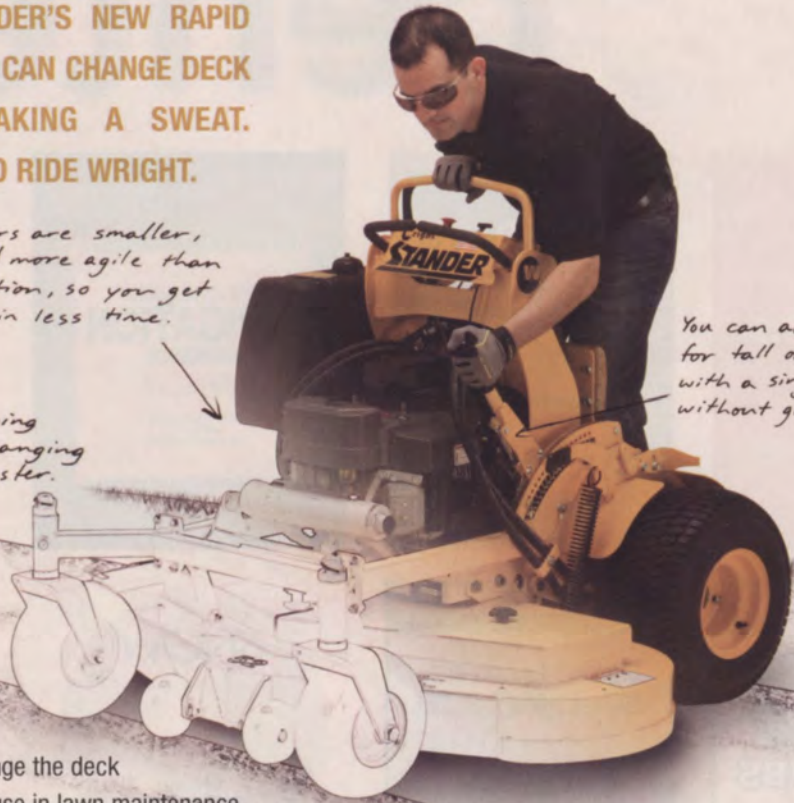
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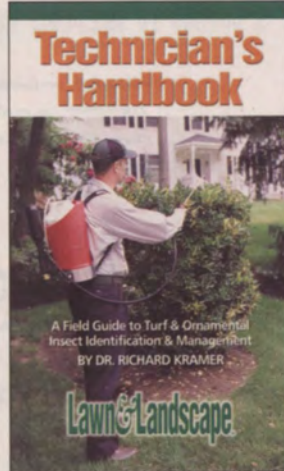
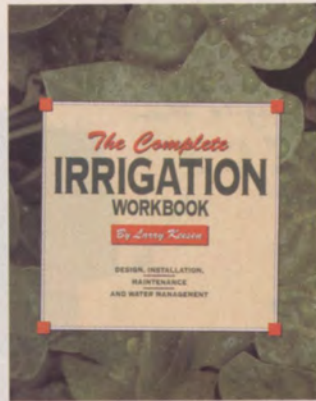
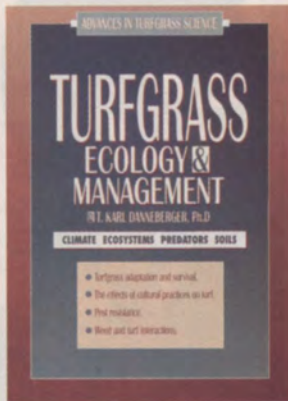


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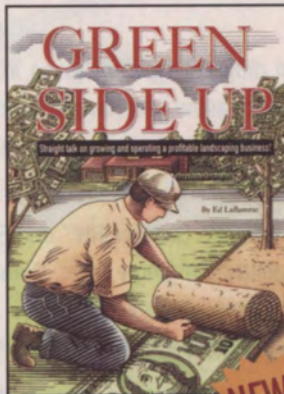


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The Science of Cost Estimating

Your company deserves the most accurate pricing system available. The economic uncertainty that your company is facing demands that you have a system that will not only allow you to price your work accurately, but also allow you to benchmark your pricing as well as your competitors. Companies that price their work accurately and consistently will outperform their competition, even in tough economic times.

The primary goal of cost estimating is to determine your costs for a project.

Direct cost, such as materials, field labor and equipment, are easy to calculate and include in your pricing. General and administrative (G&A) overhead costs – the indirect costs – cause the most confusion.

This is also the primary area where the six methods of cost estimating differ. Factoring, the single overhead recovery system (SORS), the dual overhead recovery system (DORS) and the multiple overhead recovery system (MORS) all use percentages multiplied by one or more direct cost elements to

calculate and allocate G&A overhead to jobs being priced. The fifth method, market-driven unit pricing, simply has you pluck common unit prices from the market.

Upon reviewing the pricing scenarios for these methods, we can draw two conclusions. First, calculating G&A overhead costs to allocate and put into a price by means of multiplying one or more direct costs by percentages is an automatic mathematical mistake – a false mathematical assumption.

Second, there is no correlation be-

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USE READER SERVICE # 101



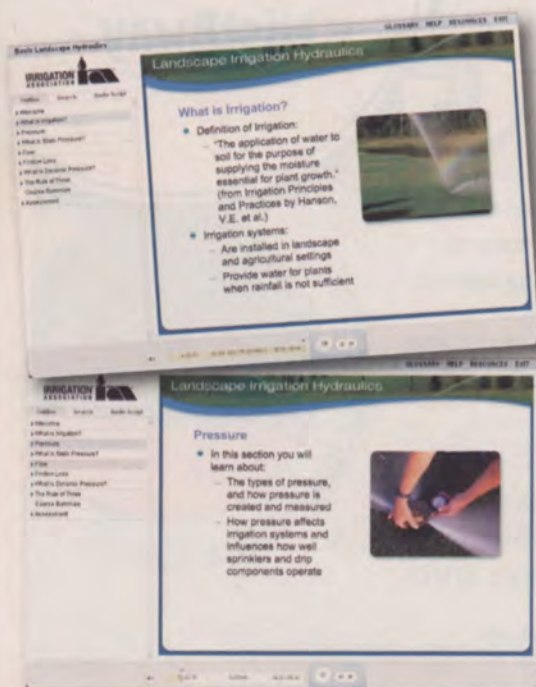
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The IA continues to seek out additional ways to provide education to the industry and distribute the most updated irrigation content available. Self-paced learning is the IA's newest tool in helping achieve these goals.



Landscape Irrigation Hydraulics

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Learning objectives of the course include:

- Understand water pressure and how it is created in landscape irrigation systems
- Use proper units for pressure and flow
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- Understand the practical value and application of the "rule of 3"

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USE READER SERVICE # 102

tween the amount of gross profit margin (GPM), G&A overhead plus net profit margin, you desire to see on your

calculating and allocating G&A overhead to your pricing creates inconsistencies and inaccuracies. As a result, you will

will win? The ones you under price.

This is why I use the G&A overhead per hour method to calculate and allocate G&A costs to my pricing. Of the six methods, it is the most accurate and consistent. Its merits can be proven and demonstrated scientifically quite readily. It is also the simplest of the six for calculating accurate costs.

Cost estimating and benchmarking are both sciences. As such, the merits or demerits of a cost estimating system must be open to scientific verification. Five of the six estimating methods do not pass the test. LL

“As a result, you will under price some jobs while overpricing others. And in a competitive market, guess which ones your company will win? The ones you under price.” – Jim Huston

financial statement at year's end and the amount of GPM that you should put on an individual job being priced. Cal-

under price some jobs while overpricing others. And in a competitive market, guess which ones your company

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USE READER SERVICE # 104



More Things Your Clients Won't Tell You

Last month I recounted some anecdotes related to what clients don't want to hear from those of us selling lawn care, landscaping and other services. Some of these examples included not bad-mouthing the competition, keeping technical explanations simple and showing the client that you want their business.

Since this is such an important topic to be cognizant of as we conduct business and grow our companies, I hope you are beginning to see some ways to improve your efforts through these examples.

Remember, pay close attention because these are your clients speaking:

IF YOU SAY YOU'RE GOING TO DO SOMETHING, THEN DO IT. I'm so sick of businesses that don't do what they said they would do, I'm actually surprised when someone does what they said they would do. Won't you please do what you said you would do? I hate yard work and don't know a darn thing about it either, so please give me what you said you would, and I'll be loyal to you.

If you do what you said you would do for me, I promise I'll tell others about you and help you grow your business.

PLEASE LISTEN TO ME. Why don't your salespeople listen to me? I tell them I

don't like red annuals, yet I get red begonias. I asked that you not trim around my privacy fence and damage it and yet your team still does.

Geez, you're a nice guy, but it doesn't seem like you care a whole lot about me and my satisfaction.

My mom always said, "God gave us two ears and one mouth, so we should listen twice as much as we talk." Can't you do that? Please listen to me; I don't have time to find another landscape contractor. I am busy, and if you'd just listen to me, we'll be just fine. I'm actually pretty easy to get along with, but understand this is my property, not yours; I want to



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know about your ideas and learn from you. I only ask that you consider my requests and treat me the way I'd want to be treated. What's so hard about that?

me I could take a \$20 tax deduction; don't be like him.

I'll pay you in a timely fashion and I'll treat you with the respect you de-

nance bill, but at least make me feel like I'm an important enough client to you that you will go the extra mile to make me feel special.

"Geez, you're a nice guy, but it doesn't seem like you care a whole lot about me and my satisfaction." – Marty Grunder

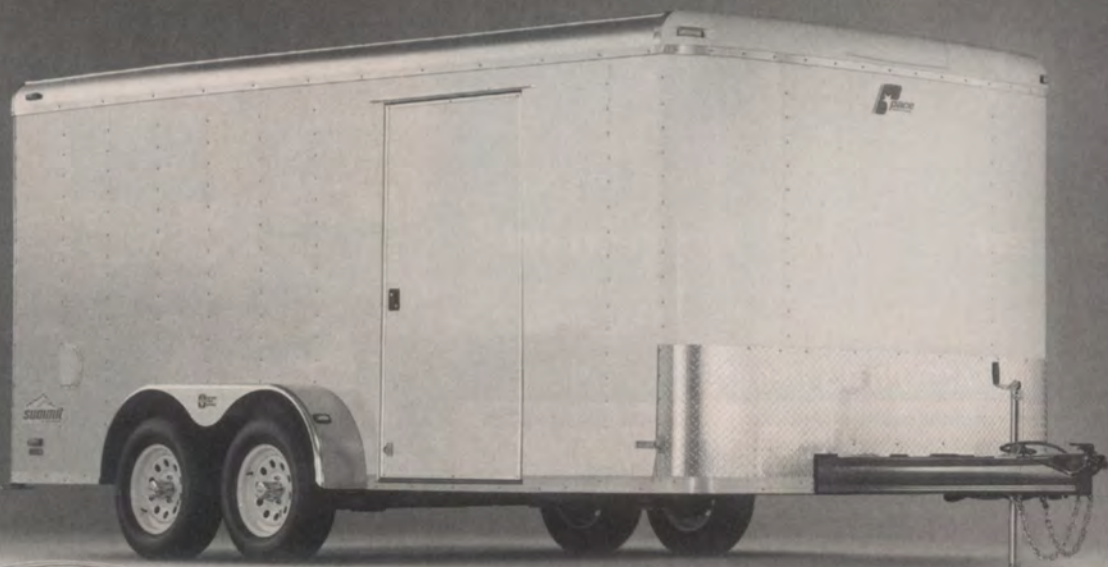
Please share this list with your sales team. By the way, that should include everyone because everyone in your company is a salesperson, right? Doesn't everyone play a role in a client or prospect buying from you?

WHEN I CALL YOU AND ALL I NEED IS SOMETHING SMALL, JUST DO IT FOR ME AND DON'T BILL ME. My accountant just billed me \$100 bucks to tell

serve, but if there's a limb down in my yard and I have a party in two hours can't you help me out? Heck, go ahead and sneak it in on my next mainte-

Also, please share with me any of your favorite examples that I may have missed or overlooked. I'd love to read about them. Perhaps I'll share them in a future column. **LL**

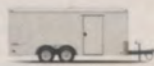
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it's about
people

Bill Arman

is a 32-year veteran of the landscape maintenance industry and is a founder of The Harvest Group, a national landscape business consultancy. He can be reached at 949/466-8837 or people@gie.net.



Recruiting Best Practices

We've discussed some of the key ingredients in building a successful recruiting program, including taking stock of what you have, identifying the target and gathering your tools. The next step is understanding and engaging some recruiting best practices. These are very important, so let's devote the necessary time to make certain these practices are used so you get the right people employed.

START WITH AN ATTITUDE. Establish the attitude that you are always looking for great people to become part of the organization. Understand that forming a candidate pool saves time and money.

The entire team should appreciate that recruiting is important and will affect them in a positive way. Recruiting awareness should become second nature for all of your employees.

GET YOUR "STUMP" TOGETHER. Know and communicate "who you are." Often the question will be asked "So what do you folks do?" Be prepared as you will need to come back with something that is quick to the point and compelling.

Have the stump speech or elevator speech ready to go. You have usually two minutes to deliver. This will be used over and over again trust me.

Answer the following questions and

you have the makings of your one-minute advertisement: From the customer's perspective, what makes the company special? Where is the company going? What is the vision? Is there a mission? What traits - behaviors, values and skills - will get us there? Finally, besides money, what can our people expect to get from this experience?

I have literally used this practice in elevators and have had unbelievable success. It must be delivered enthusiastically, passionately and be genuine.

BE ATTRACTIVE. Take a very good look at your operation and ask yourself, Would you work here?

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it's about people

Additional questions break this down further: Would you want your children to visit? Are your trucks and equipment presentable? Are your facilities clean with no inappropriate items hanging around? Are your people acting appropriately? Remember, being attractive draws the right candidates.

KNOW YOUR NEEDS. Clearly define the person you are seeking. You never know who may appear in front of you. If you know what is needed now and in the future you can keep some candidates warm until the need arrives.

Know what you are looking for: knowledge, experience, competencies,

desired results, behaviors and education/certifications/licenses.

Remember, anticipating needs reduces panic. Someone shared with me that they were looking for a mechanic/shop manager. So when I was early for a client appointment I went into a truck stop coffee shop for a cup of java. I struck up a conversation and started talking mechanic speak. Next thing I know he refers me to a mechanic/shop manager type and I give the lead to my friend. Done deal!

Because I understood the need and the target I was able to find a good referral for my friend. You never know when an opportunity will reveal itself.

LEARN FROM EMPLOYEES. You can learn so many things from existing employees, both performers and non-performers. By observation you can learn what you really like about some, for example good time managers, team players, communicators, responsible and dependable.

Conversely, we can learn what we don't care for in others, such as bad attitude, tardiness and whining. So now, can you learn from this and make adjustments on the hiring side during screening, interviewing, performance reviews, employee surveys or the departure side with exit interviews?

The answer is yes you can. **LL**

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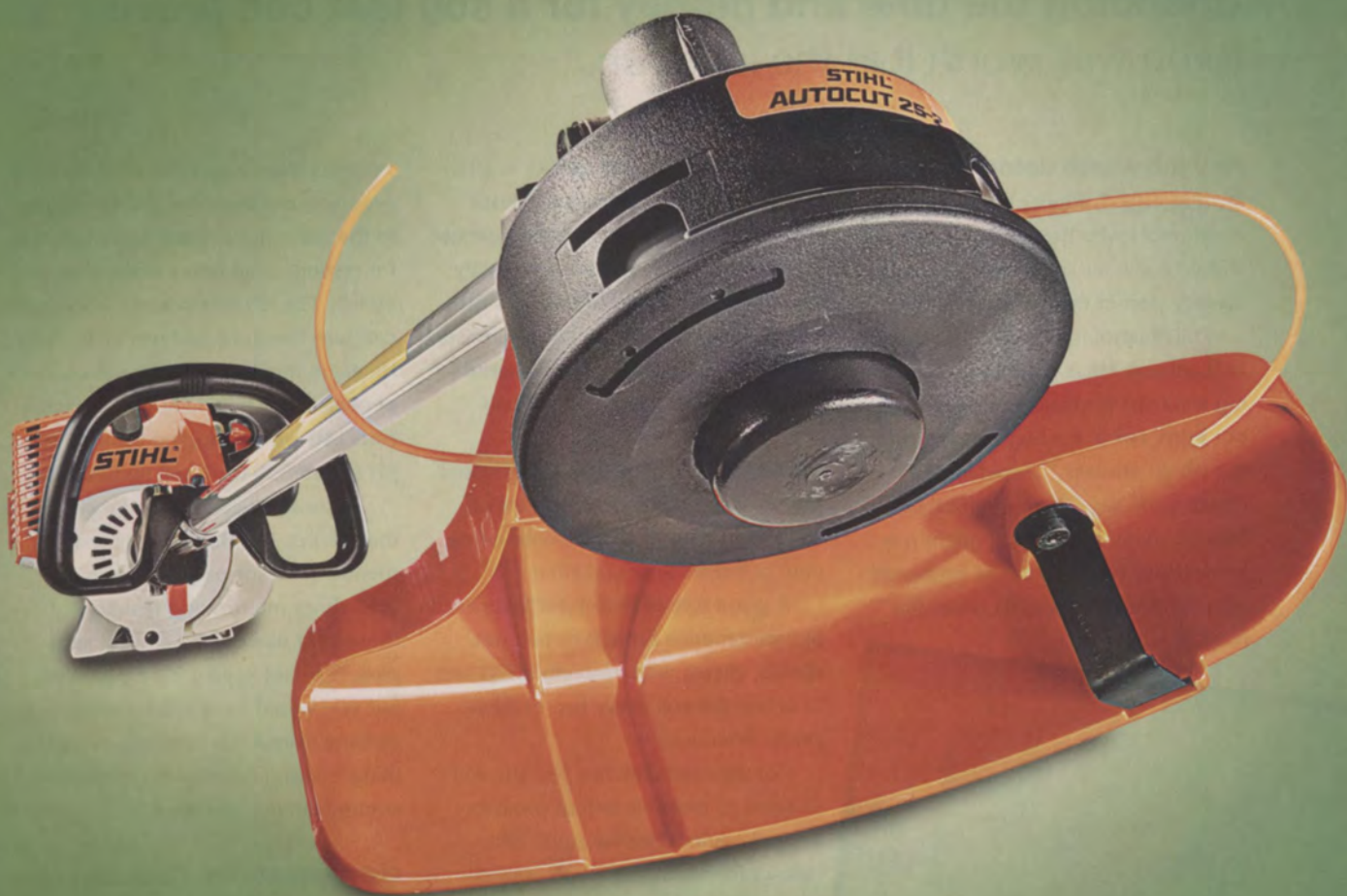
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Test Now, Save Later

Spending the time and money for a soil test can prove to be well worth it in the long run.

Any job worth doing is worth doing right. Right? Landscape contractors who believe in this saying should consider soil testing, if it's not already part of their routine.

Phil Mastroianni Tree & Landscape in Waltham, Mass., has been conducting soil tests for three decades. "In our eyes, soil is the factor that starts the whole process," President Phil Mastroianni says. "You might have a healthy plant, but the soil might not be healthy. That can cause problems with the trees and shrubs down the road."

Unfortunately, soil quality is often overlooked, even though soil tests allow companies to make the best use of their materials and prevent costly replacements in the future, says Steven Bodine, soil testing lab supervisor for the University of Massachusetts Soil and Plant Tissue Testing Lab.

WHEN TO TEST. The best time for soil tests is upon determining a new client's lawn care or lawn maintenance plan or before an installation.

A good rule of thumb for lawn care or maintenance firms is to test new clients, clients with problem areas and to re-test the soil every two or three years, Bodine says.

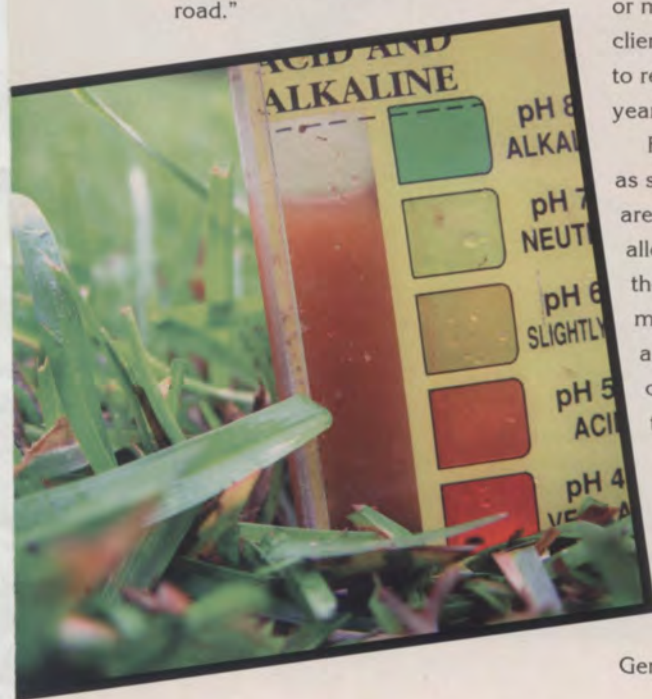
For new installations, test the soil as soon as possible before projects are scheduled, Bodine says. This allows for adding amendments to the soil or arranging different plant material if necessary. "If there's a project with a great deal of soil coming in, we'll send that in for testing when it's still in the supplier's hands," Mastroianni says.

HOW TO TEST. Most states' public universities have soil-testing labs, but there are also private labs that do soil testing. Generally, the contractor takes soil

samples from a number of spots on a property, prepares the soil according to the lab's instructions and mails it in for testing. Lead times and prices vary by lab. The lab Mastroianni works with can turn around a soil test in 10 days. He estimates the cost to be about \$45 per test. The University of Massachusetts lists prices ranging from \$4 for a pH test to \$50 for a soil texture test.

There are also self-testing kits on the market, but Bodine only recommends these for people knowledgeable about interpreting results and those who use quality control samples. "I'm not saying it's a bad idea, but you would have more confidence coming from a lab knowing everything is being done under controlled circumstances," he says.

CLIENT RELATIONS. Contractors often skip soil tests because of pressure from their clients to start projects quickly, Mastroianni says. Contractors should explain to clients the value of waiting for a soil test, he says. There are ways to begin work on larger scale projects before the soil test comes back and plant installation begins, Mastroianni notes. "To me, the soil is the foundation of the whole project," he says. "You need to know what it's lacking." **LL**





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Displays for All Seasons

Seasonal displays like annuals, containers and holiday decorating are nice additions to clients' landscapes – and your bottom line.

To make an aesthetic impact in residential customers' landscapes while growing their spending levels, consider offering them seasonal displays. "It's not that hard to succeed doing seasonal displays and you can make a good dollar," says The LaurelRock Co.'s President Burt DeMarche. "Plus, it makes a huge difference in the landscape."

Like many landscape companies, Wilton, Conn.-based LaurelRock offers "enhancements" – installing annuals in the spring, planting bulbs in the fall plus the bed preparation that goes with those services. LaurelRock takes its seasonal displays one step further, including container plantings, holiday lighting and other custom displays.

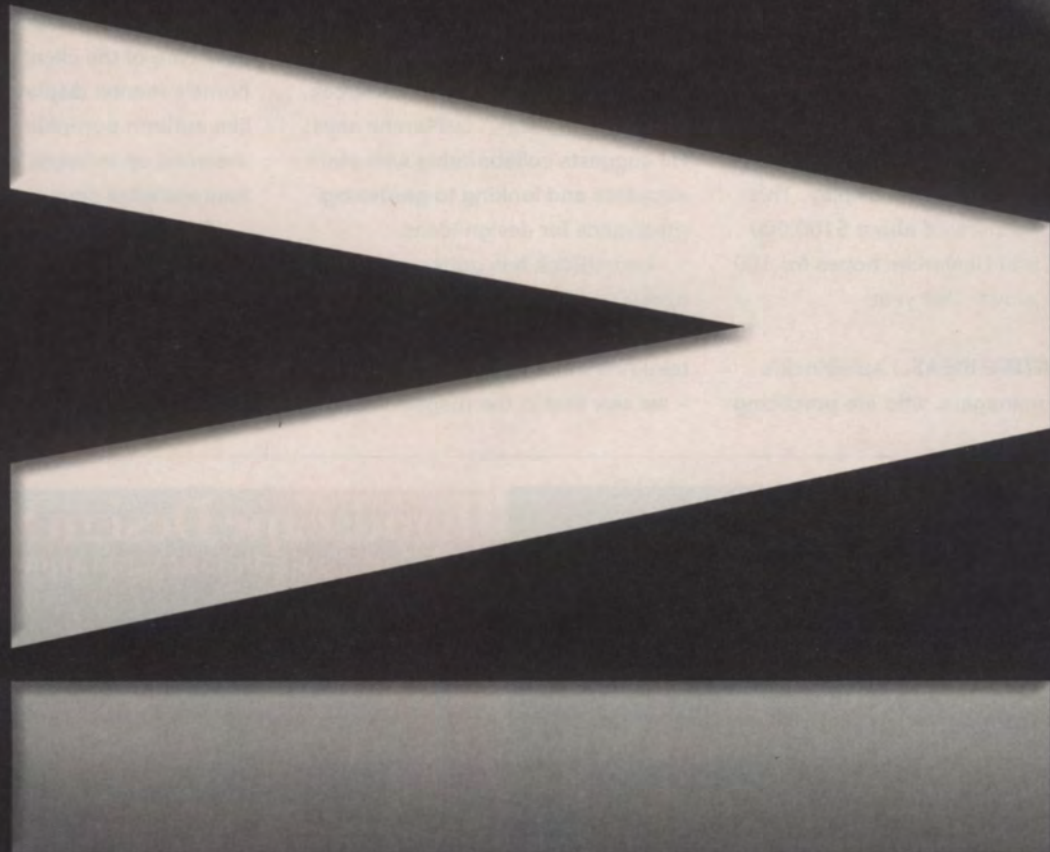
In affluent Fairfield County, Conn., where LaurelRock operates, money is no object for some of the firm's high-end clients, many of whom work on Wall Street. Census data ranks the area as one of the highest income

counties in the United States. Spending \$12,000 to \$40,000 per year on "fine gardening" services is common. Many of LaurelRock's clients receive their Wall Street bonuses in March and those checks dictate how much they'll spend on landscaping extras – like seasonal displays, DeMarche says. In 2007, the average Wall Street bonus was \$180,420, according to the New York state comptroller's office.

"Most of our clients are high-end residential," DeMarche says. "They have a need for adding color and some extras throughout the year." These "extras" run the gamut and are highly custom, DeMarche says. In the spring, LaurelRock's garden managers suggest container plantings for pool and outdoor living areas. Autumn brings Halloween- and Thanksgiving-themed displays with cornstalks, pumpkins and gourds. One family has LaurelRock install a 3-foot-high children's maze made out of 150 bales of hay. And December is time for holiday



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business opportunities

lighting, winter-themed containers and even interior fireplace decorating.

These add-ons have evolved over the years as clients have requested them or garden managers have identified opportunities. "The display business is always organically evolving and changing," says Mary Louise Santacaterina, manager of LaurelRock's landscape management division. Nearly a quarter of the company's 90 "fine gardening" clients opt for some type of seasonal display. This segment generated about \$100,000 in 2007 and DeMarche hopes for 100 percent growth this year.

GENERATING IDEAS. LaurelRock's garden managers, who are practicing

horticulturists, are part of the reason the displays are popular. "They are passionate about and talented at what they do," DeMarche says. But even companies that don't employ on-staff designers or horticultural experts can succeed in the seasonal display business. "Even if you don't have an eye for it yourself or you're unsure about colors, there are so many resources out there for ideas," DeMarche says. He suggests collaborating with plant suppliers and looking to gardening magazines for design ideas.

LaurelRock has gotten many ideas from *Fine Gardening* magazine. "The idea of doing the outdoor winter containers with boughs and winter berry - we saw that in the magazine about

five years ago," DeMarche says. "We thought, why don't we offer this?"

LaurelRock's relationship with an interior gardener in New York City spurred the idea to offer interior fireplace decorating at Christmas. The firms have a common client, and the interior gardener asked LaurelRock to take care of the client's Connecticut home's mantel display. Other items like autumn pumpkin containers were dreamed up in-house or by clients, Santacaterina says.

Generally, the seasonal display sales process starts with a discussion between the client and a garden manager. After they agree on a concept, the garden manager will generate a proposal based on how many hours

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- 2. Chemical Lawn Care Company (excluding mowing maintenance service)
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- 5. Irrigation Contractor
- 6. Landscape Architect
- 7. Other Contract Services (please describe) _____

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- 8. In-House Maintenance including: Educational Facilities, Health Care Facilities, Government Grounds, Parks & Military Installations, Condominium Complexes, Housing Developments, Private Estates, Commercial & Industrial Parks

III. DISTRIBUTOR/MANUFACTURER

- 9. Dealer 11. Formulator
- 10. Distributor 12. Manufacturer

IV. OTHERS ALLIED TO THE FIELD:

- 13. Extension Agent (Federal, State, County, City, Regulatory Agency)
- 14. School, College, University
- 15. Trade Association, Library
- Others (please describe) _____

2. What services does your business offer?

- 1. Landscape Design

Landscape Installation

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

Landscape Maintenance

- 9. Landscape Renovation 13. Tree & Stump Removal
- 10. Turf Fertilization 14. Irrigation Maintenance
- 11. Turf Aeration 15. Erosion Control
- 12. Tree & Ornamental Care

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?

- 1. Outsourced 2. Done by own employees

5. Is Chemical Application work

- 1. Outsourced 2. Done by own employees

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 \$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 _____ Commercial _____ Other _____

10. Is this a Headquarters or Branch location?

- 1. Headquarters 2. Branch 3. Single Office

11. What best describes your title?

- 1. Owner 11. Argonomist
- 2. President 12. Entomologist
- 3. Vice-President 13. Horticulturist
- 4. Corporate Officer 14. Plant Pathologist
- 5. Partner 15. Consultant
- 6. Managers 16. Technician
- 7. Director 17. Serviceman
- 8. Superintendents 18. Other (please describe) _____
- 9. Foreman
- 10. Specialist

12. Which of the following types of products and/or services are you considering adding/upgrading in the next 12 months? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

- 1. Construction Equipment (attachments, skid steers, loaders, tractors, etc)
- 2. Mowers
- 3. Chemical Equipment (pumps, tanks, hoses, reels)
- 4. Hand Held Equipment (trimmers, edgers, blowers, chain saws)
- 5. Engines
- 6. Tree Equipment
- 7. Chippers / Shredders
- 8. Fertilizers
- 9. Chemicals (insecticides, herbicides, fungicides)
- 10. Grass Seed
- 11. Nursery / Flowers
- 12. Irrigation Equipment
- 13. Financial Services (insurance, payroll, finance)
- 14. Uniforms (including hats and gloves)
- 15. Business Software / Hardware
- 16. Design Software
- 17. H2B Services
- 18. Hardscape Products (lighting, pavers, water features)
- 19. Renovation Equipment (seeders, aerators, dethatchers, spreaders, hydroseeders)

13. Which of the following subjects would you be interested in learning more about? (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY)

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

- 1. Technology solutions for your business
- 2. Employee recruitment/retention
- 3. Ergonomics
- 4. How to set up a safety program
- 5. Immigration/H2B
- 6. Major growth areas for contractors: Up and coming add on services
- 7. Alternative fuel/keeping fuel costs down

MOWING MAINTENANCE

- 8. Mowing — labor savers
- 9. Quoting jobs/services
- 10. How to add an enhancement crew/division

PESTICIDES & CHEMICALS

- 11. Generating revenue by adding lawn care services
- 12. Best practices: chemical applications
- 13. Hydroseeding versus turf
- 14. Fertilization
- 15. Organic/eco-friendly lawn care options
- 16. Chemical lawn care as add on services

CONSTRUCTION & INSTALLATION & DESIGN

- 17. Simplifying installation jobs
- 18. Installing pave stone
- 19. Software solutions for design projects—designing with technology
- 20. Design "how to's": Best practices for proper installation
- 21. Design/build/install as add on service
- 22. Water features
- 23. Tips on selling design/build projects to home owners

IRRIGATION

- 24. Basics of irrigation installation & maintenance
- 25. Weather — based controllers
- 26. Dealing with water restrictions
- 27. How to become a WaterSense Partner
- 28. Irrigation as add on service

HORTICULTURE

- 29. Best practices for dealing with drought
- 30. Soil treatments for best plants
- 31. PGR's
- 32. Software for planning
- 33. Seasonal planting guidelines
- 34. Bedding & installation

OTHER

- 35. None of the above
- 36. Other (please specify) _____

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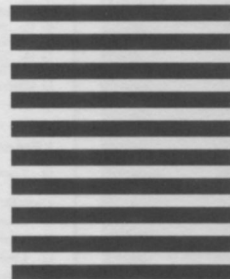
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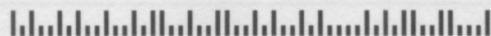
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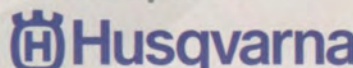
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the container or display will take to create and install. Estimates account for material costs, too, usually with a 50-percent markup.

"We mark materials up 50 percent so the price is generally what they would pay retail," DeMarche says. "That works well for us, and we recover the overhead in labor."

LaurelRock sells the displays piecemeal, but DeMarche is considering offering a package, possibly with four change-outs per year. Prices vary because displays are custom made. A 20-inch planted container typically ranges between \$150 and \$250 (plus the cost for the pot), depending on the plants, which may include a variety of annuals, perennials and grasses. Fall displays and holiday lighting services go up from there.

To advertise its seasonal offerings, LaurelRock sends out a marketing piece with invoices three times a year. In April, the fliers feature summer annuals, in August they advertise bulbs and in October they highlight holiday decorating.

The photo-heavy postcard instructs clients to call their garden managers to "discuss their needs." The company designs and prints them in-house on heavy-stock photo paper. DeMarche estimates the postcards cost about \$1 apiece.

LaurelRock's garden managers also have begun to supplement the fliers with e-mail messages. "By sending an e-mail with

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TOUGH TIMES

There are some challenges to offering seasonal displays, DeMarche says. One is maintenance.

"With annuals, there's always the issue of having to replace them if you lose some or if they don't fill in quite as well as you planned," DeMarche says. "We're most successful selling annuals to clients who get bed maintenance every week."

With containers, irrigation is a top concern. If maintenance crews aren't on site weekly to keep a close eye on the containers, LaurelRock is sure to explain to clients that it's their responsibility to irrigate. "We've asked clients to talk to their irrigation

providers to install drip emitters," DeMarche says.

Another challenge to offering "niceties" like seasonal displays is the potential for clients to drop those services during economic downturns. For example one of LaurelRock's clients spent \$6,000 in 2006 during the holidays. This past winter, in anticipation of a small bonus check, the client didn't book any holiday decorating. "I think they were just cutting back," DeMarche says. "It's an extra, not a must-have like lawn cutting. This is a good area to get into, but not something you want to base your whole business on."



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photo attachments in addition to the flier, you can get a lot more photos in," Santacaterina says. "We've found our clients are more apt to communicate through e-mail. The more you can target the marketing to the way clients communicate with you, the more business you get."

OPERATIONS TIPS. The seasonal display services operate out of the company's landscape management division, which consists of two fine gardening crews and one enhancement crew. During the busy season, the fine gardening crews are doing pruning and plant maintenance; the enhancements crew typically takes on larger plant installations. Depending on the time of year, any one of these three crews may implement seasonal displays.

The company didn't have to make any major equipment or supply investments to begin selling seasonal displays. To source containers, DeMarche scouts new suppliers at trade shows and retains their catalogs for clients to review throughout the year.

LaurelRock purchases holiday decorating supplies from various regional and national vendors, but is considering a holiday lighting franchise to streamline this process and grow this portion of the business. "The seasonality of it is great - we'd love to have more lighting business," DeMarche says. "It gives us more winter revenue on the setups and takedowns."

An increase in seasonal displays prompted LaurelRock to revisit its system for purchasing annuals last year.

"We used to just run out and get them as we needed them, and that would take a lot of time," DeMarche says. Now LaurelRock has a contract grower in upstate Connecticut from which it preorders 80 percent of its annuals. Relying on a grower to supply

"tried and true" plants, unusual varieties and to select quality flowers with little oversight has paid off.

"Going directly with the grower vs. buying through rewholesalers has saved us 35 percent in direct costs

for the plants, plus many non-billable hours in selecting, loading, delivering and returning the plants," DeMarche says. "Overall I estimate our profitability [in seasonal displays] has tripled as a result." LL



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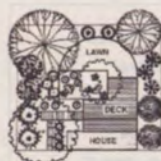
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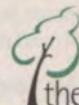


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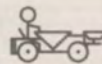
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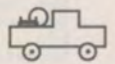
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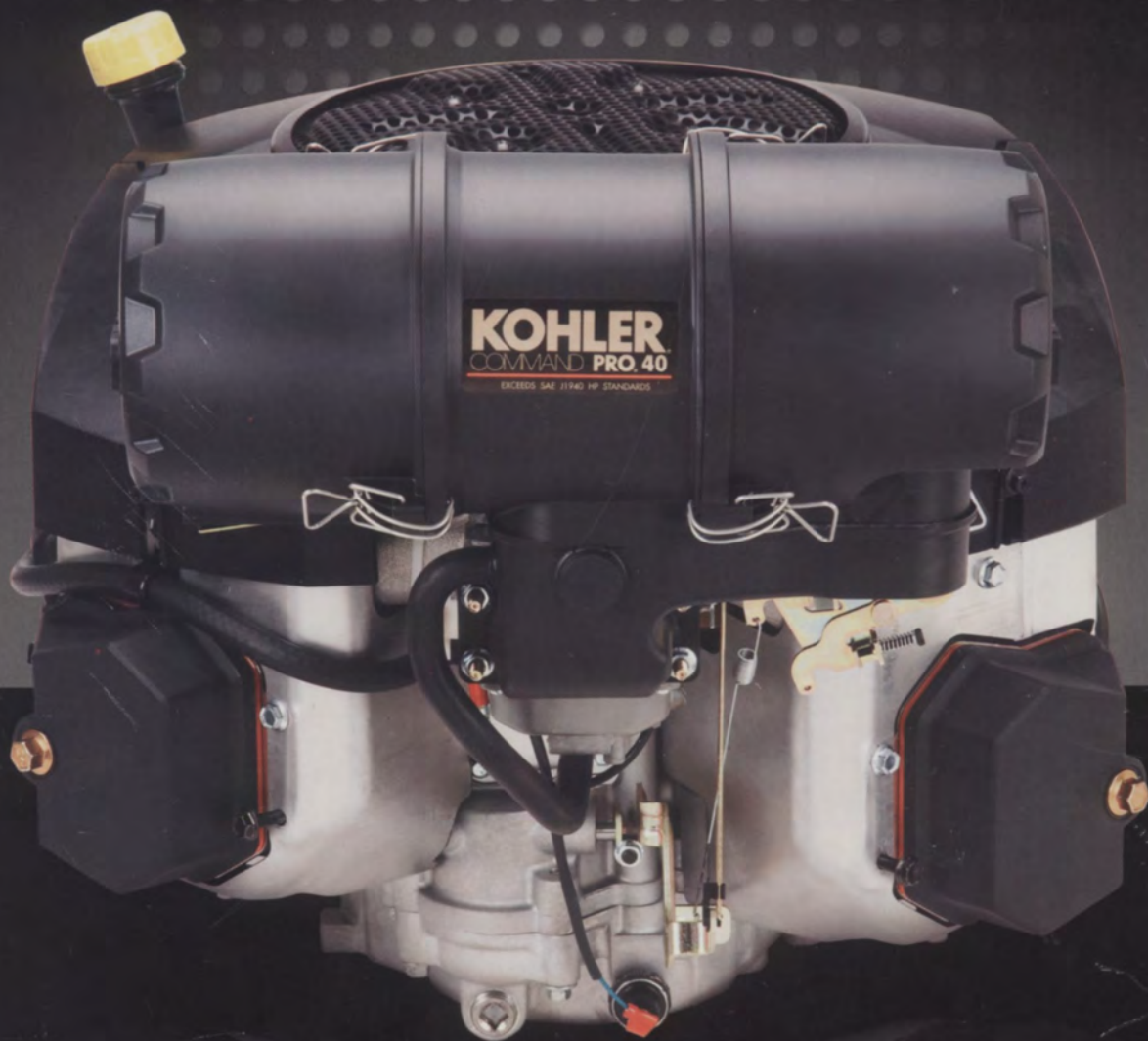


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