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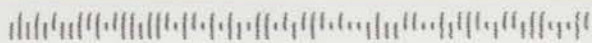
# Lawn & Landscape®

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# 100 TOP



An **a-to-z** guide of the best ideas  
from the industry's biggest companies.



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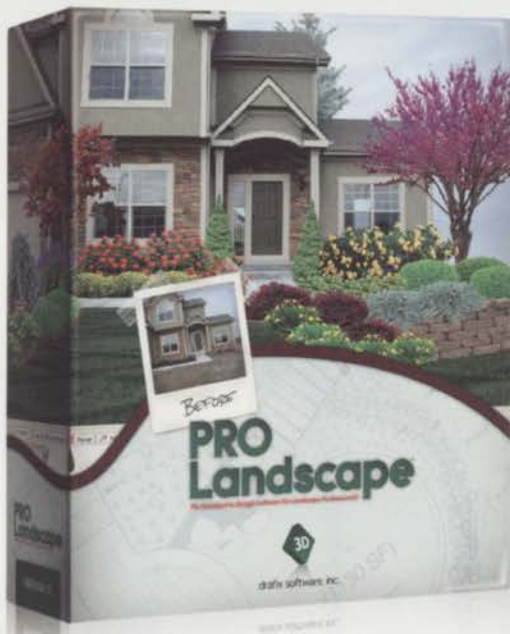
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Profit from holiday lighting, **pg. 72**  
Building focus areas, **pg. 75**

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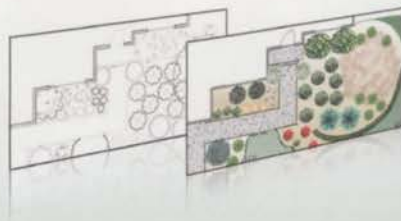
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### Weed Man: A Track Record of Success

#### Weed Man franchisees show growth

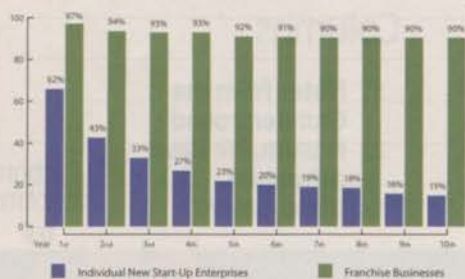
Business success should never be overlooked or underappreciated. Even in the best of economic times, business growth cannot be assumed.

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Weed Man is also seeing growth in franchise operations surpassing the \$1 million or better mark with 10 regions reporting sales over \$1 million in 2010 and two regions reporting annual sales over \$2 million.

#### FRANCHISE SUCCESS RATES



Those are powerful numbers and are indicative of the success that can be achieved through the Weed Man franchise system. The programs and systems are proven and when implemented to the fullest, can lead to sales growth, improved profitability and tremendous business success.

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**3 Local Network.** Every Weed Man franchisee is supported by their local and experienced franchisor who serves as a personal consultant and mentor providing experience, guidance and encouragement. Your franchisor will work with you each step of the way to ensure your complete, long-term success.

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### See you at the Green Industry Expo

Weed Man supports industry education and we encourage all lawn care and landscape professionals to attend the Green Industry Conference and Green Industry Expo in Louisville. This year's conference and show will be held Oct. 27-30.

Visit us at our booth, #1000, at GIE to find out more about Weed Man franchise opportunities.

**GIE+EXPO**  
THE GREEN INDUSTRY and EQUIPMENT EXPO



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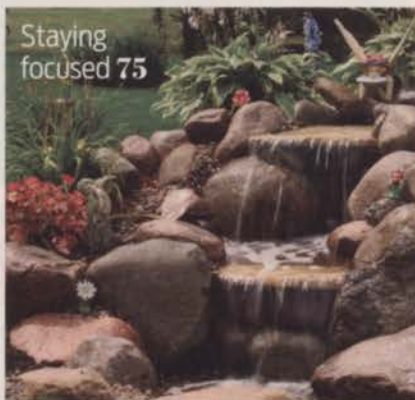
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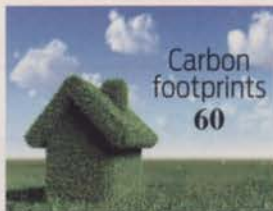
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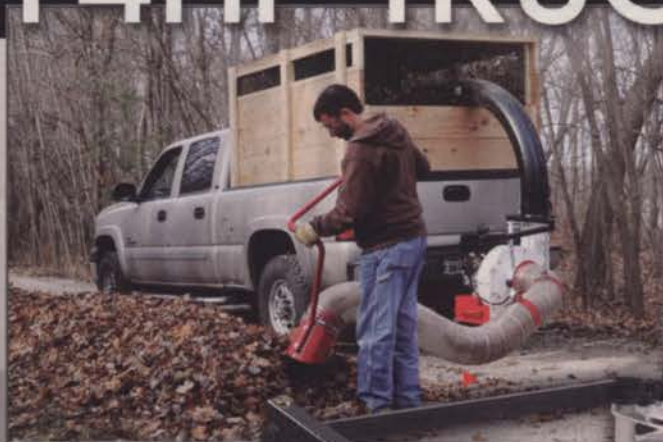
Carbon concerns  
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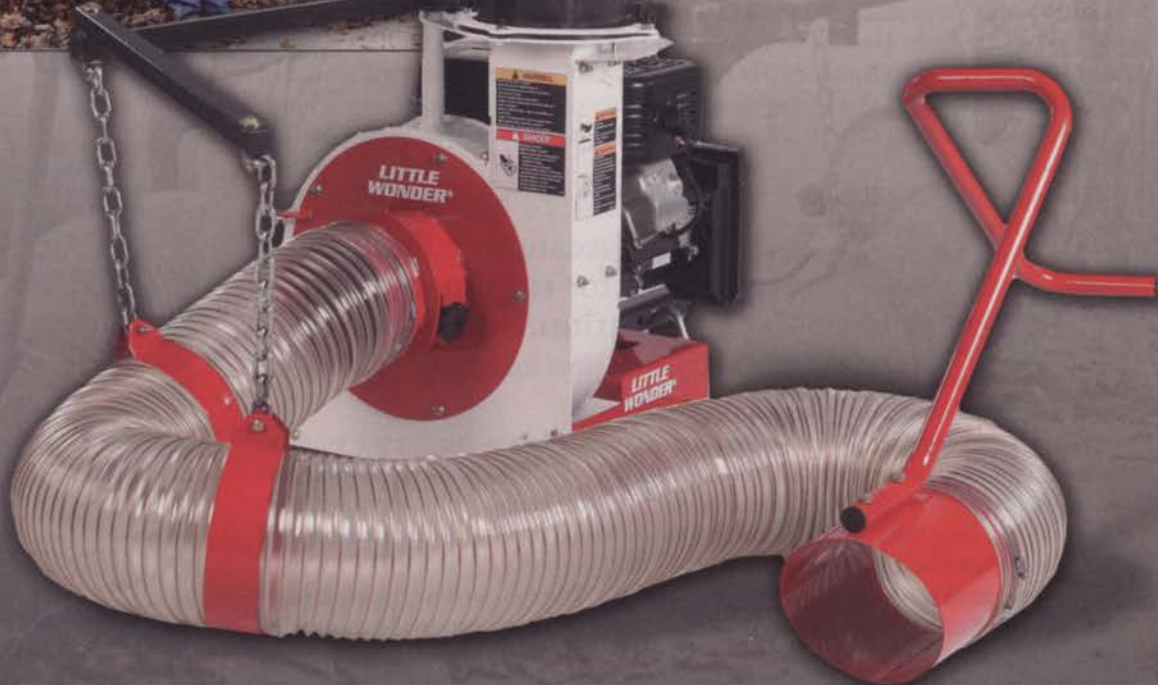


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CHUCK BOWEN

Editor

## Everything in moderation

Last month, about 75 green industry professionals spent a day on Capitol Hill lobbying members of Congress as part of PLANET's Day on the Hill. Mostly, they talked about how changes to current pesticide regulations and the Clean Water Act, EPA's WaterSense program and immigration reform could impact them and their businesses.

Regardless of where you fall on the political spectrum, and which of those issues is important to you, one message from the event holds true for anyone in the industry – the importance of a moderate approach.

It came first from David Crow, president of DC Legislative and Regulatory Services, a lobbying consultancy. He told the PLANET caucus that legislators and their staffs wouldn't be receptive to constituents coming in and taking a hard-line approach – asking them to repeal entire portions of the Clean Water Act, for example.

"Obviously, we use products that can cause harm if used improperly. We know that," Crow said. "We're headed toward greater regulation. We're for reasonable regulation."

His point was that it's a fool's errand to ask any member of Congress to try and enact sweeping changes to the laws that regulate chemical use in the green industry. It's just not going to happen right now. But, a message that can get through is that companies who use these products every day know best how to use them responsibly, and have been doing so for a long time. There's no need to introduce further restrictions on how they can operate their businesses.

The message of moderation came again from Cal Thomas, a conservative columnist, and Bob Beckel, a Democratic strategist, who spoke in turns to the assembled contractors about immigration reform, terrorism and the war in Afghanistan. Together, they write a regular column in *USA Today* called Common Ground and their message, basically, is that most people can find agreement on most issues if they look hard enough. This isn't a message of togetherness but one of pragmatism – no one can get anything done if we spend all of our time yelling and tearing each other apart.

And they're right. In the end, everyone wants clean water, healthy plants and healthy businesses that contribute jobs and tax revenue to the economy – especially those who depend on votes to keep them employed.

I'm all for fighting for what you believe in and standing up for your rights, but I'm also all for spending your time wisely and pursuing change you can affect. So the next time you stop by your local representative's office, or see him at the county fair canvassing for support, tell him your message – the industry's message – strongly, clearly but also calmly. So he'll listen, and we can all get to work. **L**

“We're headed toward greater regulation. We're for reasonable regulation.” – David Crow, DC Legislative and Regulatory Services

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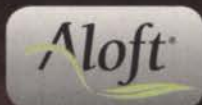
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# DUELING ESTIMATING SYSTEMS

In his June column (“Why are my bids too high?”), Jim Huston outlined his problems with the dual overhead recovery system (DORS) as a method to bid jobs. Frank Ross, a proponent of that system, disagreed. This is an edited version of their conversation. You can read the full version at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com).

– Editors

I have read your June article in *Lawn & Landscape* and am stunned. For you to infer that our firm is the reason that some company's prices are too high is outrageous. Further, I completely disagree with the smug attitude of the article as well as the assumptions and statements you make. It is clear to me that the book you so readily quote from in your article – “Pricing for the Green Industry” – is not one that you have read, or, if you have you did not grasp what you were reading.

In a global sense, it might be interesting to you that the pricing processes you so quickly bash have been utilized in the construction and services industries since their inception. The concept is commonly referred to as “component pricing” – not DORS. It gets its name from the premise that the components of a job (materials, labor, subs, etc.) do not each require the same amount of overhead to support a dollar's worth of its cost. Simply stated, each category of direct cost should be marked up differently to recover its support expenses (overhead) and to apply an appropriate return for profit.

You infer unfounded credit to our firm for having originated this method of overhead recovery. Alas, but if it were true. The concept has been around for quite some time – far longer than our 40-plus years in the business – and is promoted by some pretty reputable accounting and consulting firms – McKinsey, Boston Consulting, Fails Management, to name a few – and endorsed by some pretty substantial

**HUSTON, We Have A Problem**

**Why are my bids too high?**

"I see the DORS (dual overhead recovery system) method in use in your estimating work. I have read your article and am stunned. For you to infer that our firm is the reason that some company's prices are too high is outrageous. Further, I completely disagree with the smug attitude of the article as well as the assumptions and statements you make. It is clear to me that the book you so readily quote from in your article – “Pricing for the Green Industry” – is not one that you have read, or, if you have you did not grasp what you were reading."

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The DORS (dual overhead recovery system) method is one of six estimating methods commonly used in the green industry. It was popularized by the book "Pricing for the Green Industry," which was published in the early 1990s. Basically, you determine the amount of general and administrative (G&A) overhead that is needed to support your materials and labor costs by using different overhead weighting factors (OWFs). You have a separate OWF for each material cost and other charges up your labor rates. The two OWFs are then added together to take into account your materials and labor rates and G&A.

Without getting into the minutiae of the DORS method, let me state categorically that DORS does not work when used with the traditional method. First, it assumes that overhead is a function of the total cost of the job, not just the labor and materials. Second, it assumes that overhead is a function of the total cost of the job, not just the labor and materials. Third, it assumes that overhead is a function of the total cost of the job, not just the labor and materials.

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Figure 1  

Job	Material	Labor	Overhead
Job 1	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Job 2	\$200,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Job 3	\$300,000	\$100,000	\$100,000

Figure 2  

Job	Material	Labor	Overhead
Job 1	\$100,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Job 2	\$200,000	\$100,000	\$100,000
Job 3	\$300,000	\$100,000	\$100,000

construction associations – AGC, ABC, MCA.

Because you say you have read our text, you know that there is no single pricing method which will address all situations – but the unifying thread is that whatever the pricing process, it must integrate with the company's costing, accounting and budgeting processes – literally, there must exist an audit trail of financial intelligence for the system to be successful.

More to the issue of your article. I believe you discuss three issues with which you have a problem:

1. Overhead is not a function of direct cost
2. Equipment utilization on the job is not considered in component pricing
3. The process is simply too complex

You are correct that overhead is not a function of direct cost. Direct cost is, however, the basis for recovering overhead at the job level. The example you give of the three jobs each of which requires the entire monthly labor capacity, albeit unrealistic, supports the theories of component pricing nicely. In your example, you say job one is fairly priced and recovers overhead correctly. But, you say, that jobs two and three are underpriced and will not recover all of the monthly overhead. The inference is

that the prices on two and three should be raised to cover the shortfall. Good on paper, but I question whether you would actually sell those jobs – by my calculation, were you to look at the price per hour sold in job one – say \$27, (a price you propose is competitive) – job three would require per-hour pricing in the \$38 area in order to carry the entire burden of overhead.

The labor priced in job one at \$27 is fairly priced, period. That component did its job – it covered the requirements assigned to it – it was the other components that fell short of goal. This is not a pricing issue, this is a management issue – your example company simply undersold its requirements for the month – it's a silly example.

Issue two concerns applying equipment to jobs based upon utilization. I have no problem with this concept if it is installed correctly and in the right circumstances. Had you actually read the "Pricing" text, you would have seen an entire section devoted to establishing internally driven hourly rates for equipment and the situations appropriate for charging equipment to jobs.

In case you inadvertently overlooked that section, I will give you the executive summary version: equipment charging to jobs makes sense in those instances where equipment costs are a substantial portion of a company's cost structure – think 20 percent or more against the revenue stream – or, in the case where a company utilizes highly specialized equipment to perform its work.

I don't have a statistic here, but I doubt seriously many of the readers of *Lawn & Landscape* have equipment costs in excess of 20 percent to revenues. Excavation, fine. Road builders, fine. Heavy generals, fine. Landscape installation, maintenance, lawn care, tree care, irrigation, etc., ... doubtful.

But, let's say there were a few companies who had legitimate and recoverable equipment cost surpassing 20 percent



of revenues. Here's what you need to establish:

1. Internal equipment rates for each piece in the fleet. This is relatively easy.

2. A tracking capability whereby you can capture the use of equipment on each job (job costing) – this requires treating each piece of equipment as if it were another person on the payroll (figuratively speaking). I dare say that the grand majority of *Lawn & Landscape's* readers are challenged to track just labor hours to jobs much less equipment by piece by the hour. This is not easy

3. Next, you will want to set up a reconciliation process to verify that all of the identified equipment costs are being recovered by utilization charges to jobs. Most sophisticated firms will actually set up an internal equipment division to collect the revenues coming

from equipment charges to jobs (contra accounting) and the costs required to support the fleet. The reconciliation of this process is the basis of "accurate equipment costing to jobs" – not doing so exposes the company to a significant under-recovery of equipment costs, an unfortunate event often not realized until it is too late. This step also is not easy.

So, on paper, equipment costing is a good idea and makes great barroom conversation – in reality, not practical for most green industry companies because of the complexity of the systems required to track the process. To not install the entire system is simply too dangerous, if not irresponsible.

Issue three says that component pricing is too complex. Sorry, nothing in this world is easy, particularly when it comes to making money, least of all financial management. The industry,

before its recent economic collapse, generated only one half of one percent net profit to sales and possessed the third highest failure rate of any industry according to government statistics. Today, I dare say, we are big time upside down. So, to say anything about how making money is easy is sheer quackery. Short cuts have no place in this game. It's hard work – it is now and it always has been. Our job as advisers is to teach solid concepts of financial management that are practical, sound and usable in hopes of taking some of the risk out of this game – we are not on this earth to confuse – and shame on us for doing so.

And, to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine, I say shame on you as well for allowing such an article on your pages – I have never known you to practice yellow journalism. In fact, you are the premier magazine to the green industry – your

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## READERS' Forum

readers build their companies on the research and information you print – they trust the filters you put your writers through. It is clear that the editors did not understand the content of this article. How they allowed such a slanderous blindside attack on me and my associates is beyond comprehension. The entire experience flies in the face of the mission statement of your magazine.

Frank H. Ross III

Ross-Payne & Associates

Barrington, Ill.

### Huston's response:

I appreciate Mr. Ross' response to my June article. Whenever the various green industry cost estimating methods are critiqued in an open and scientific manner, the contractor benefits. As I state in my new book, *A Critical Analysis of the MORS Estimating*

*System (CAMORES)*, cost estimating is the science of determining the costs in a project or service being priced. If cost estimating is to be a science, its formulas, principles and mathematics must be open to duplication by other "scientists." This open verification process is referred to as being "peer-reviewed." I would also add that the objective of cost estimating is very simple: to accurately calculate costs for a project or service being priced.

While I welcome and appreciate Mr. Ross' input, I unfortunately cannot find anything good to say about the arithmetic in his manual, "Pricing for the Green Industry," which I find to be faulty and full of erroneous mathematical assumptions. I pointed out in my article how these false assumptions can and do cost contractors jobs and erode profitability.

Mr. Ross calls my three job examples

"silly." I beg to differ. I would prefer to use the word, "simple." It is well within acceptable parameters to use an example of a job (or jobs) that employs a company's entire work force for a period of one month. It is also perfectly reasonable to vary the cost of the materials used on such a job.

As I state in *CAMORES*, there are three important points that we need to make regarding general and administrative (G&A) overhead costs: First, G&A overhead costs, as I define them in my books, total approximately 25 percent of a company's sales. Second, G&A overhead costs do not vary much from month-to-month. This doesn't mean that they *can't*, just that they normally *don't*. Third, more than 90 percent of G&A overhead costs are paid based on a time unit (usually monthly or weekly): overhead salaries, payroll taxes, rent, telephone and related utility bills, etc.

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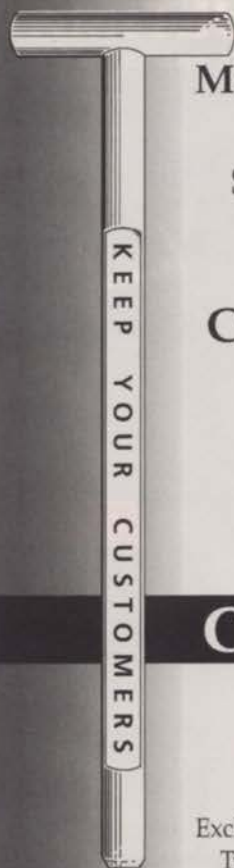
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This being said, it is safe to stipulate that the sample company in my article has a monthly G&A overhead cost of \$20,000. And here is the critical point in this discussion. If G&A overhead costs are \$20,000 per month, a cost estimating system must calculate and allocate \$20,000 of G&A overhead cost to each month's work. If it allocates more than that, you have a problem; you've overstated your costs and you'll lose work. If it allocates less than the monthly goal, you'll probably get lots of work because you've under-priced it.

The three job examples in my article simply and clearly show how a percentage-based G&A overhead recovery system quickly runs into trouble when the duration of the job is held constant and the material costs are varied. Using the Dual Overhead Recovery System (DORS) or Dual Overhead Rate Method (DORM), the total cost for G&A over-

head allocated for the month varies almost \$10,000. Call it *silly* if you will; but if your costs are \$20,000, your cost estimating methodology should tabulate a cost of \$20,000. DORS (DORM) doesn't.

Mr. Ross goes on to say, "(Component pricing) [I call it DORS or DORM] has been around for quite some time ... and is promoted by some pretty reputable accounting and consulting firms...." Didn't our mothers teach us that just because everyone else is doing it, doesn't mean that we should do it, too? And when did accurate cost estimating become a democracy? Cost estimating is a science, not a popularity contest. Tell McKinsey, the Boston Consulting Group, Fails Management, etc., to study my arithmetic. They'll find that it's solid and scientifically self-evident.

I appreciate the "executive summary

version" in which Mr. Ross says that "equipment charging to jobs makes sense in those instances where equipment costs are a substantial portion of a company's cost structure – think 20 percent or more against the revenue stream – or, in the case where a company utilizes highly specialized equipment to perform its work."

On page 70 of his manual he states, "As a guideline, I will suggest to you that if the total of the equipment expenses in your company amounts to less than ten percent of your revenue historically, your bidding prowess will probably not be hampered by leaving equipment cost in your overhead markups. Nevertheless, do what you are most comfortable with and what is best for your company and its situation."

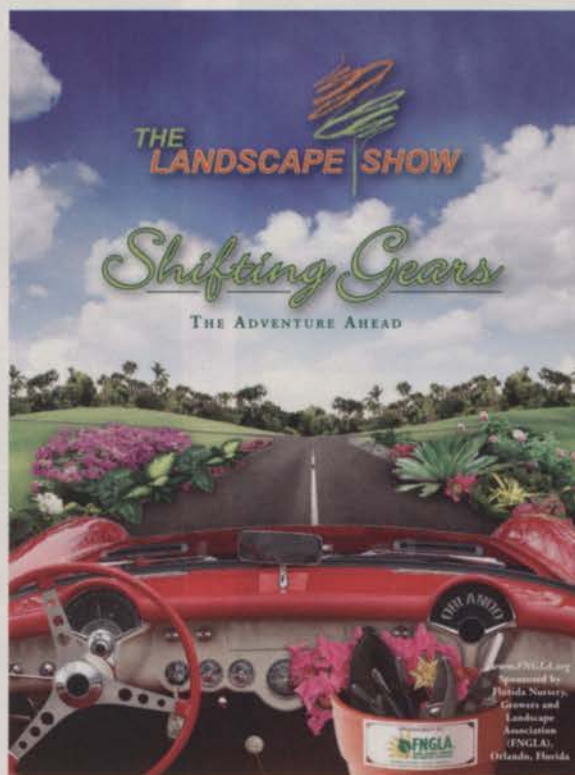
Is it ten percent or twenty percent? And how do you analytically quantify one's "comfort level?" I've analyzed

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thousands of green industry financial statements during the past twenty years and equipment costs for 98 percent of these companies range between 10 and 14 percent. According to Mr. Ross' advice, they're in an equipment expense "no-man's land." What should they do?

Herein lies another significant problem with DORS/DORM. Equipment costs are not calculated accurately. I've seen a \$5 million green industry contractor in the New England market go broke by putting field equipment and vehicle costs in G&A overhead costs as Mr. Ross recommends. It's easier doing it this way. However, expediency is no replacement for accuracy – especially in the current market conditions.

As I stated earlier, cost estimating is a science. Those who practice and teach it are smart to treat it as such. For those who critique the various cost

estimating systems, it is not just wise to treat it as science, it is *imperative*. In today's market, it is critical that green industry contractors use the most accurate cost estimating methods available. It is also critical that the mathematics in *all* estimating methods be subjected to rigorous analytical scrutiny and the peer-review process. The arithmetic in these systems must be proven to be accurate using job models.

My test for critiquing any estimating system is quite simple: Is it accurate? Does the system accurately calculate all costs included in a project or service being priced? As I have pointed out in CAMORES and in my article, DORS/DORM falls short of this standard in at least two important areas.

The first involves its method for calculating and allocating G&A overhead costs.

The second involves its method for

calculating and allocating equipment costs. For me, this is a much-needed scientific discussion. Let's keep it at that level.

J. R. Huston  
J.R. Huston Enterprises  
Englewood, Colo.

**ON A SARTORIAL NOTE**

I was wondering if we could get some t-shirts from *Lawn & Landscape* to wear at our expo – four shirts, all XL. I would really appreciate it. Myself and the crew really enjoy the mag. I use info from it during meetings every week on Mondays and Saturdays. God bless you.

Andy Reese  
Owner, Yard Artist  
Medina, Tenn.

We don't have any extra shirts to pass along, but we're glad to hear you like the magazine. – Editors

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## L&L ON THE ROAD: PLANET's Day on the Hill

WASHINGTON – The green industry descended on Washington in July to press its case with Congress on such issues as immigration reform, water policy and pesticide regulations.

And as part of PLANET's annual fly-in event in the nation's capital, nearly 450 green industry professionals helped maintain Arlington National Cemetery at the 14<sup>th</sup> annual Renewal and Remembrance Monday. Owners and employees from 115 companies spread lime, aerated turf, planted trees and flowers, and repaired irrigation systems at the military cemetery.

"Your presence here is a statement that demonstrates your dedication to your country as well as the industry by presenting our industry issues to your legislators," PLANET President David Snodgrass said. "You are not only representing yourself, your business and your state, but most importantly, our industry."

About 75 contractors and other industry members will spend Tuesday on Capitol Hill, lobbying members of Congress. Before they headed out, legislative team members from PLANET and the ANLA prepped them with talking points on EPA's WaterSense program, potential changes to pesticide regulations, immigration reform and other bills relevant to the industry.

But the main message was one of moderation. David Crow, president of DC Legislative and Regulatory Services, a lobbying consultancy, told the PLANET caucus that legislators and their staffs wouldn't be receptive to constituents coming in and taking a hard-line approach – asking them to repeal portions of the Clean Water Act, for example.

"Obviously, we use products that can cause harm if used improperly. We know that," Crow said. "We're headed toward greater regulation. We're for reasonable regulation." – *Chuck Bowen*



Above: Weed Man team members from franchises in Ohio, Virginia and Massachusetts worked together at Renewal and Remembrance at Arlington National Cemetery Monday. From left: Rob Bernardo, Tom Mauer, Stephanie

Mauer, Brandon Sheppard, Bruce Sheppard, Layne Sheppard and Joe Rosado.

Left: Paul Broun (R-Ga.) encouraged Day on the Hill attendees to exercise "not only your rights, but your political power" and to hold their elected officials accountable.

## Lawn care seminar covers grub control, chemical runoff and rain gardens

WOOSTER, Ohio – The Ohio Lawn Care Association's Eighth Annual Northeast Ohio Lawn Care Seminar brought about 120 professionals together in June to network, catch up on the latest scientific research and earn continuing education credit. OLCA held the seminar at the Ohio State University's Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster, Ohio.

Zhiqiang Cheng, a researcher at OSU, opened the program with a general session where he explained experiments he held to measure runoff difference between subsoil and topsoil. He created plots on four-degree slopes and applied fertilizer. After letting the fertilizer sit for 48 hours, he then applied one hour of rainfall at 3.5 inches per hour.

Cheng found that the runoff initiation time was significantly shorter for subsoil lawns than for topsoil lawns. The total runoff volume was also significantly higher for subsoil. The subsoil experienced greater losses in sediment and nutrients.

Kevin Power, research associate for the OARDC, reminded attendees to "think of your grass as an ecosystem" when dealing with pests. He explained that landscapers should identify the particular type of grub they're dealing with in order to better formulate a pest management strategy.

Power passed out sheets with pictures of nine grub species each with a unique raster pattern, which is the arrangement of bristles and hairs on the underside of the tip of the abdomen. He stressed that proper identification requires straightening the grub from its normal, C-shaped posture and using a 10-times hand lens to get a clear view.

He says microclimates on a property, such as areas below a south-facing glass wall or areas with underground steam pipes, can alter the grub population as well. – *Bo Gemmill*

## BIO Landscape & Maintenance acquires Forest Hills Lawn Service

HOUSTON – BIO Landscape & Maintenance expanded its Texas presence through the acquisition of Forest Hills Lawn Service, based in Dallas.

Forest Hills Lawn Service was established by Bob Ford in 1975 as a lawn maintenance and landscaping company primarily focused on municipal and governmental accounts including the city of Dallas, the city of Rowlett, the Dallas Area Rapid Transit and Dallas Public Libraries.

"With the Forest Hills Lawn Service acquisition, BIO gains valuable employees, a state of the art facility, and an equipment repair dealership business which allows BIO to bring additional value to customers," said Robert Taylor,

Get tips on installing rain gardens and how to ID turf problems at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com). Just search "OLCA."



The next great leap in broadleaf weed control is coming.

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president of BIO.

With the acquisition of Forest Hills Lawn Service, BIO now serves 21 counties with a combined workforce of more than 500 professionals throughout Texas.

The transaction marks the third addition to BIO over the last year. In October 2009, BIO acquired Outdoor Environments, a Houston-based commercial landscape maintenance company.

In December of 2009, BIO acquired Texas Services, a lawn maintenance and landscape company in Houston focused on tree care. In May of 2010, BIO officially opened a maintenance branch in Beaumont.

BIO operates multiple branches in the state of Texas.

## Ambius helps build largest vertical green wall in North America

KENNET SQUARE, Pa. – Longwood Gardens has engaged Bancroft Construction and Ambius to create the largest green wall in North America as part of Longwood Gardens' new East Conservatory Plaza.

The East Conservatory Plaza, which will open to the public Oct. 9, was designed by U.K. landscape architect Kim Wilkie in association with Wells Appel of Philadelphia, and will feature a terraced lawn, lush new plantings and the largest indoor green wall in North America. This vertical garden will feature a panel wall system across a green wall surface area of 3,590 square feet and include more than 25 species of plants.

"The East Conservatory Plaza is embracing innovative landscape design, which captures the very essence of Longwood Gardens," said Longwood Gardens' director Paul Redman. "The size and beauty of the green wall will amaze our guests as well as advance our continuing commitment to sound

environmental practices."

"Longwood Gardens' vertical green wall will feature over 47,000 plants," said Denise Eichmann, Ambius project development North America senior project manager. "The majority of the featured plants are fern varieties including the evergreen holly fern, the versatile and showy rabbit's foot fern, the button fern featuring arching, dark-colored stalks, the asparagus fern with its feathery arching stems, the delicate and lacy maidenhair fern, the leafy ladder brake fern and the Dallas fern, which features a compact round globe with fronds."

Currently the largest green wall in North America is the 2,380 square foot living wall at Pittsburgh's PNC Bank. Two other major green walls installed by GSky Plant Systems, a provider of green wall systems based in Vancouver, Canada, are at the Vancouver International Airport and at Vancouver's Whole Foods grocery store.

"After this is installed, Longwood Gardens' green wall will be the largest in North America by a wide margin, as it will be 1,210 square-feet larger than the PNC Bank wall," said Chad Sichel, president of GSky Plant Systems, the manufacturer of Longwood Gardens' panel-based green wall initiative.

The plants for this wall were contract grown for Ambius into the wall panels at Michael's Nursery in South Florida and will be shipped in climate-controlled trucks to Philadelphia at the end of August for installation into the wall by Ambius. The plants have been growing at the nursery since February.

Ambius also worked with Longwood Gardens in 2005 on the East Conservatory project.

## Hardscape show to co-locate with GIE+EXPO

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – With the addition of Hardscape North America (HNA), at-

**Correction** In the June issue of *Lawn & Landscape*, the number of companies ValleyCrest has acquired was incorrect. The correct number is less than 25.



tendees at the 2010 GIE+EXPO, Green Industry & Equipment Expo, Oct. 28-30, will have access to more education, certification opportunities, demonstrations and exhibits than ever. They can attend two tradeshow for the cost of one at the Kentucky Exposition Center.

Together, HNA, with products and materials exclusive to the hardscape industry, and GIE+EXPO, with the latest in outdoor power equipment and landscaping supplies, will offer 750 exhibits and 19 acres of outdoor demo space. HNA's Conference and Tradeshow will run concurrently with GIE+EXPO.

Attendees can register for more than 85 educational sessions and workshops covering everything from installation certification and hands-on demonstrations to lawn and landscape management and business marketing.

"There's no question that combining hardscape education with landscape education, in addition to acres of equipment on display, make this an all-in-one business-building experience contractors can use to grow their hardscape businesses," said Mike Mueller, chairman of the HNA steering committee and general manager of TEKA North America.

Registration for HNA or GIE+EXPO will allow attendees to build their show schedule around their particular business needs along with optional training and certification events. Visit [www.HardscapeNA.com](http://www.HardscapeNA.com) or [www.gie-expo.com](http://www.gie-expo.com) to register.

The HNA indoor area will feature exhibits displaying new products and equipment including pavers and segmental retaining walls (SRW), edge restraints, hardscaping tools and more.

Tradeshow attendees will also be able to visit hundreds of other power equipment and green industry exhibitors inside and outside at GIE+EXPO as well as compare the newest innovations at GIE+EXPO's New Products Arena.

Have some news you'd like to share with the industry? Send it to Editor Chuck Bowen at [cbowen@gie.net](mailto:cbowen@gie.net).



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## NEWS ///

### Davey named to Employee Ownership 100

KENT, Ohio – The Davey Tree Expert Company has been named as one of the 100 largest majority employee-owned companies in the country. Davey is also the largest employee-owned company based in Ohio.

The list is compiled annually by the National Center for Employee Ownership (NCEO), a private, nonprofit membership and research organization in Oakland, Calif.

Davey, which was established in 1880 by John Davey, was purchased by its employees in 1979.

“Employee ownership at Davey has been a tradition for the past 30 years. It has also been an essential part of our company’s success,” said Karl J. Warnke, Davey chairman, president and CEO. “But perhaps more importantly, employee ownership will serve as a catalyst for Davey’s future endeavors. The employee commitment will help drive the company through our next 30 years.”

Overall, there are about 11,400 companies in the U.S. with employee stock ownership plans (ESOPs), the most common form of broad-based employee ownership. About 13 million workers participate in these plans. About half of these plans own a majority of the company’s stock.

### Free ‘how-to’ sustainable practices guide available online

HOUSTON – The Groundskeeper and the IFMA Foundation announced the release of “Sustainable Landscaping,” a practical, real-world guide on how to introduce and advance sustainable practices in landscaping.

The guide, sixth in the IFMA Foundation’s “Sustainability ‘How-to’ Guide Series,” is available as a free download. It provides an overview of several key areas, including:

- The three primary phases of sustainable landscaping: Design, construction and maintenance;
- Guidance on making the business case for sustainability, along with information on developing an action plan; and
- Case studies offering real-world insight into effective approaches.

Insights and expertise for the guide came from a cross section of The Groundskeeper’s management team and other subject matter experts. It serves as a practical guide and reference for facility managers, property managers, community managers and operations professionals across multiple industry sectors.

“The Groundskeeper has been a valued partner of IFMA for a decade, and we are delighted to work with them on ‘Sustainable Landscaping,’ which we think will help facil-







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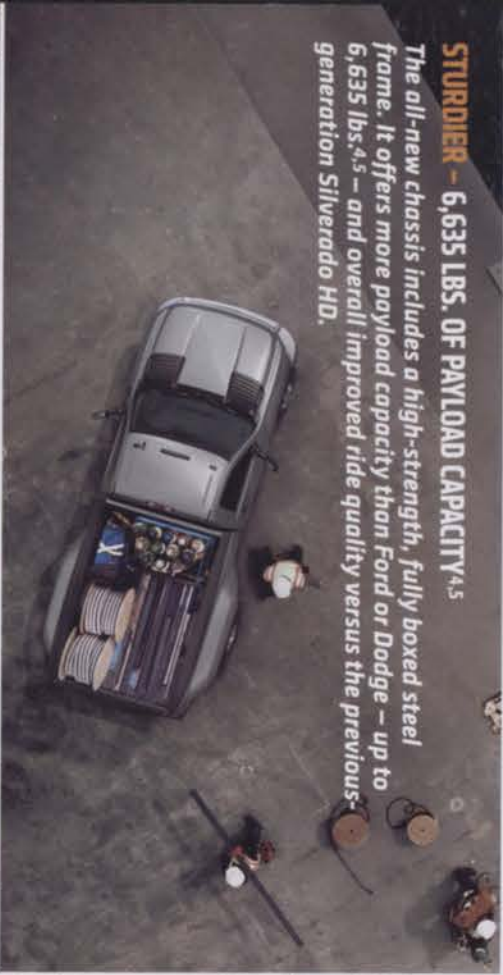


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**STURDIER** – 6,635 LBS. OF PAYLOAD CAPACITY<sup>4,5</sup>

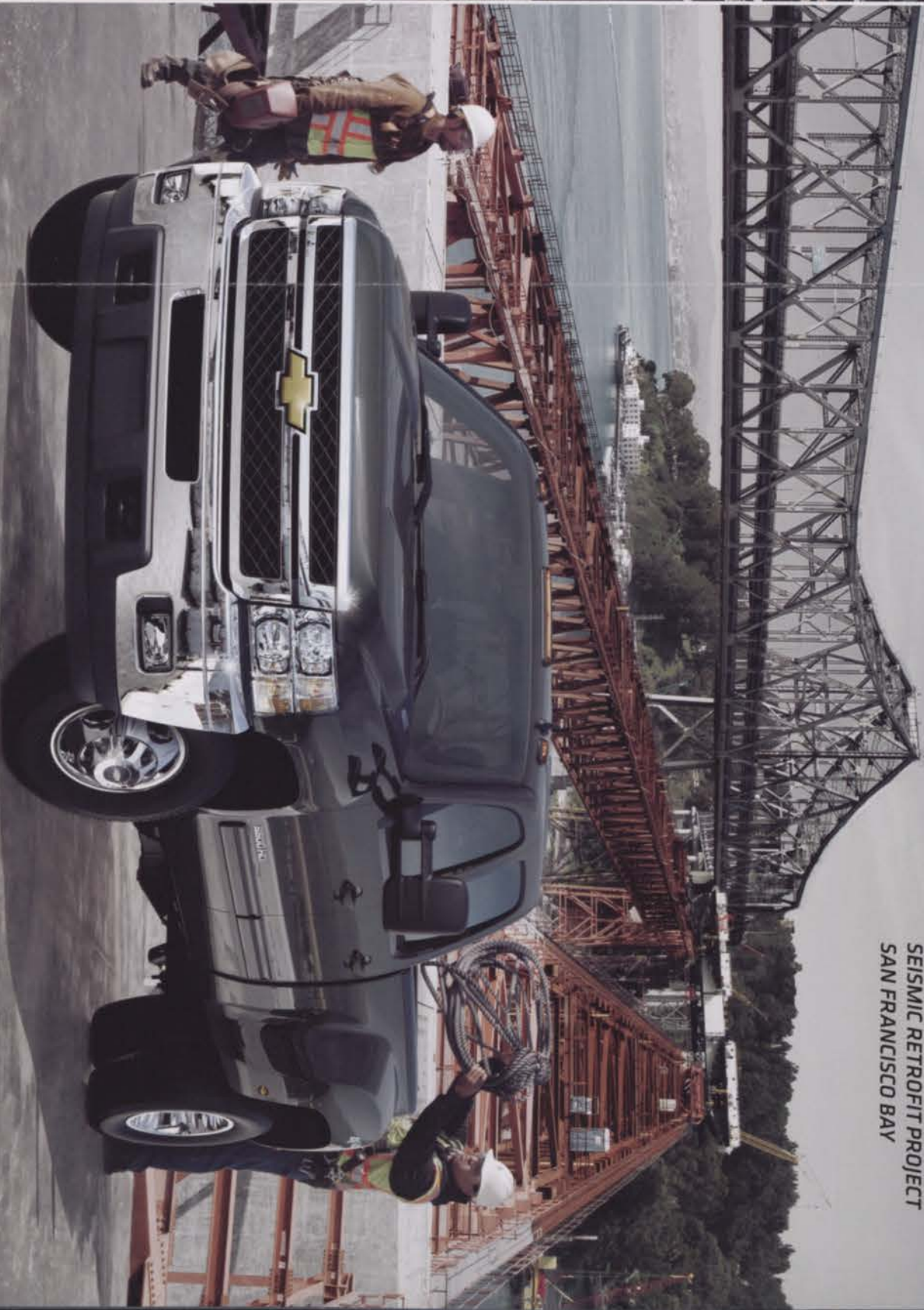
The all-new chassis includes a high-strength, fully boxed steel frame. It offers more payload capacity than Ford or Dodge – up to 6,635 lbs.<sup>4,5</sup> – and overall improved ride quality versus the previous-generation Silverado HD.



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A new, available diesel exhaust brake system<sup>6</sup> dramatically reduces brake fade and provides confidence when towing heavy loads, especially on steep grades.

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Shown above: New 2011 Chevy Silverado 3500HD Crew Cab with available Duramax 6.6L Turbo-Diesel V8 engine with 21,100 lbs. max. towing<sup>1</sup> and 5,122 lbs. max. payload<sup>2</sup>. Requires fifth-wheel trailer hitch and Regular Cab model. <sup>2</sup> Maximum trailer weight ratings are calculated assuming a base vehicle, except for any option(s) necessary to achieve the rating, plus driver. The weight of other optional equipment, passengers and cargo will reduce the maximum trailer weight your vehicle can tow. See your Chevy dealer for additional details. <sup>3</sup> Whichever comes first. See dealer for limited warranty details. <sup>4</sup> Requires Regular Cab model and gas engine. <sup>5</sup> Maximum payload capacity includes weight of driver, passengers, optional equipment and cargo. <sup>6</sup> Requires available Duramax 6.6L Turbo-Diesel V8 engine.



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## New Diesel Exhaust Brake System

The available, new diesel exhaust brake system works with the available Allison transmission, reducing the amount of conventional braking needed while towing or traveling downhill. That means reduced brake fade, prolonged brake life and more confidence when you're pulling 21,700 lbs.<sup>1,2</sup> even on steep grades.

## Duramax 6.6L

The proven, available Duramax 6.6L Turbo-Diesel V8 got a boost in muscle with 397 horsepower and 765 lb.-ft. of torque. That gives it 21,700 lbs. of maximum towing capacity with a fifth-wheel<sup>1,2</sup> or 17,000 lbs. with conventional towing, which is more than Ford or Dodge one-ton pickups. And it's B20 biodiesel-compatible.

## Allison® Transmission

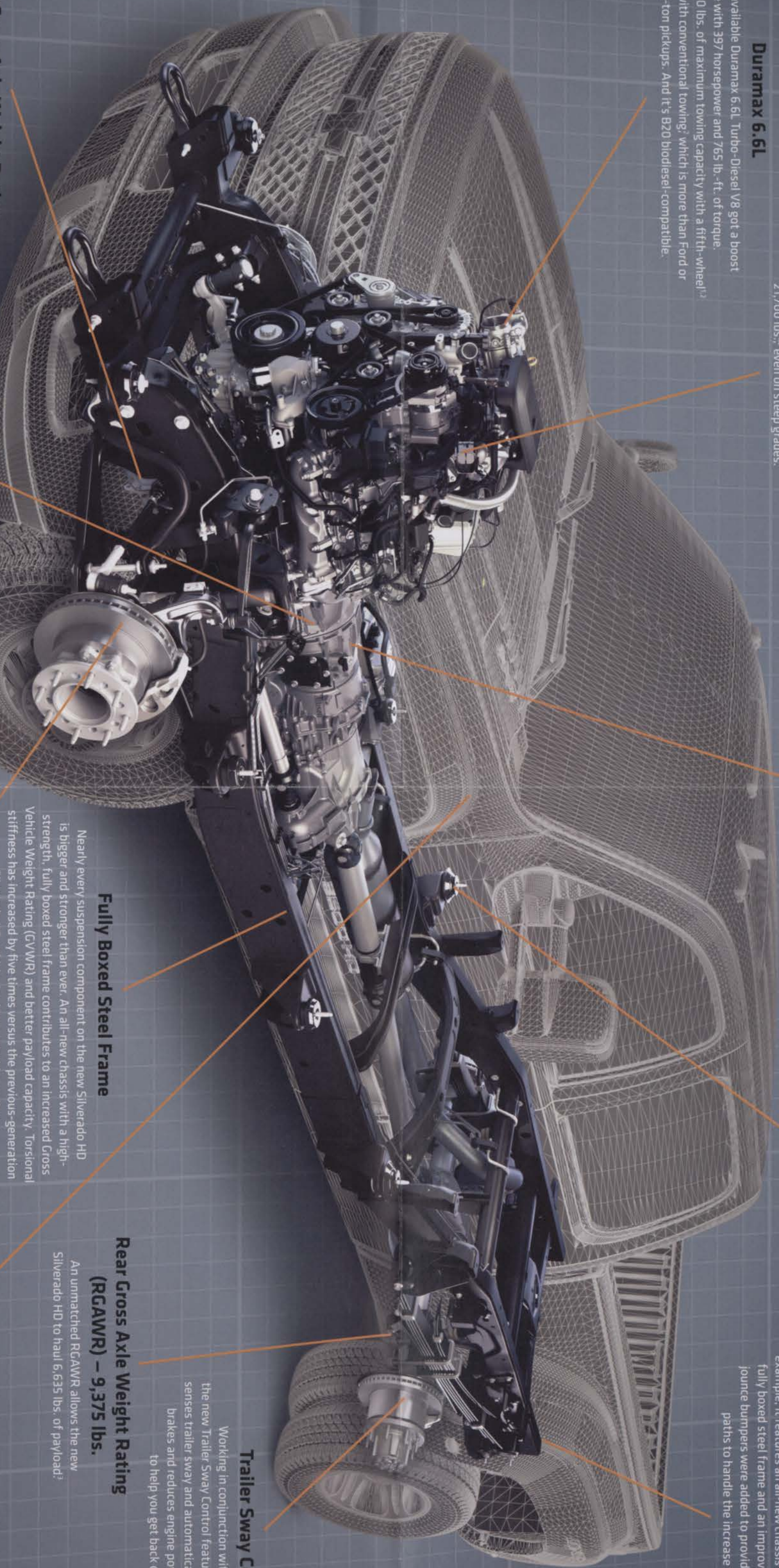
Together, the legendary, available Allison transmission and Duramax Diesel combo have been proving themselves in the field and on the job for nearly a decade. To make sure it can handle the increase in torque, we beefed up the Allison six-speed transmission with a stronger torque converter, larger diameter output shaft, and more robust clutches. Allison is the same make that's used in Mt. Tanks.

## Hydraulic Body Mounts

Hydraulic body mounts on Extended Cab and Crew Cab models improve ride quality by helping to isolate and absorb bumps, giving you a smoother ride.

## 6,635 lbs. of Payload<sup>3</sup>

Silverado HD has better payload capacity than Ford or Dodge. To make it capable of hauling 6,635 lbs.<sup>3</sup>, the new Silverado HD underwent major underside improvements. For example, it features an all-new chassis with a high-strength, fully boxed steel frame and an improved suspension. Dual jounce bumpers were added to provide dual load transfer paths to handle the increase in payload.



## Front Cross Axle Weight Rating (FCAWR) – 6,000 lbs.

Thanks to a new front suspension system with massive control arms, torsion bars and the largest steering gear we've ever used on a heavy-duty pickup, the new Silverado HD now offers up to a 6,000-lb. FCAWR. So every HD 4x4 model can easily accommodate a snow plow with the available Snow Plow Prep Package.

## Tow/Haul Mode

When engaged, the Tow/Haul mode button on the shift lever reprograms the automatic transmission shift schedule to accommodate hauling heavy loads.

## Fully Boxed Steel Frame

Nearly every suspension component on the new Silverado HD is bigger and stronger than ever. An all-new chassis with a high-strength, fully boxed steel frame contributes to an increased Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) and better payload capacity. Torsional stiffness has increased by five times versus the previous-generation Silverado HD, which also improves ride quality.

## Rear Cross Axle Weight Rating (RCAWR) – 9,375 lbs.

An unmatched RCAWR allows the new Silverado HD to haul 6,635 lbs. of payload<sup>3</sup>.

## Trailer Sway Control

Working in conjunction with StabiliTrak, the new Trailer Sway Control feature (SRW models only) senses trailer sway and automatically applies the truck's brakes and reduces engine power, if necessary, to help you get back on track.

## Hill Start Assist

On uphill inclines greater than 5% grade, the Hill Start Assist (SRW models only) automatically engages to hold the truck stationary for about a second after the brake is released. This gives the driver time to apply the throttle before the truck can roll backward.

## Integrated Trailer Brake Controller

The dash-mounted controls provide measured brake force to the electric-controlled trailer brakes, giving you an added measure of confidence and security when hauling heavy loads.




<sup>1</sup> Requires Regular Cab model. <sup>2</sup> Maximum trailer weight ratings are calculated assuming a base vehicle, except for an optional necessary to achieve the rating. <sup>3</sup> The weight of other optional equipment, passengers and cargo will reduce the maximum trailer weight your vehicle can tow. See your Chevy dealer for additional details. <sup>4</sup> Requires Regular Cab model and six engine. Maximum payload capacity includes weight of driver, passengers, optional equipment and cargo. Allison is a registered trademark of Allison Transmission, Inc. ©2010 General Motors. All rights reserved. Buckle up, America!



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Maximum conventional trailering capacity <sup>2</sup> (lbs.) (diesel <sup>1</sup> )	17,000	16,000	12,000
Maximum payload capacity <sup>4</sup> (lbs.) (gas)	6,635	6,520	Not available
Maximum payload capacity <sup>4</sup> (lbs.) (diesel <sup>1</sup> )	5,724	5,530	5,130
Maximum Rear Gross Axle Weight Rating (RGAWR)	9,375	9,000	9,350
Maximum Front Gross Axle Weight Rating (FGAWR) (diesel <sup>1</sup> )	6,000	6,000	5,500
Maximum horsepower (diesel <sup>1</sup> )	397	390	350
Maximum torque (diesel <sup>1</sup> )	765	735	650
Trailer Sway Control	Standard (SRW only)	Standard	Not available
StabiliTrak	Standard (SRW only)	Standard (SRW only)	Not available
Exhaust brake system (diesel <sup>1</sup> )	Standard	Standard	Standard
Tow/Haul mode	Standard	Standard	Available
Auto grade braking	Standard	Standard	Not available
Tap-Up/Tap-Down capability on automatic transmission	Standard	Standard	Available
Hill Start Assist	Standard (SRW only)	Standard	Not available
B20 biodiesel capability (diesel <sup>1</sup> )	Standard	Standard	Available (fleet only)
Intelligent Brake Assist	Standard	Not available	Not available
Powertrain Warranty	100,000 miles/ 5 years <sup>5</sup>	60,000 miles/ 5 years <sup>5</sup>	100,000 miles/ 5 years <sup>5</sup>

 watch  compare  learn more at [chevy.com/NewSilveradoHD](http://chevy.com/NewSilveradoHD)

The new 2011 Silverado HD offers an available 397 horsepower, a massive 765 lb.-ft. of torque, and 21,700 lbs. of maximum towing capacity.<sup>1,2</sup> That's more than Ford or Dodge one-ton pickups. It also has an all-new chassis with a high-strength, fully boxed steel frame, and an improved suspension that results in much better ride quality than before and allows for an increase in payload.<sup>4</sup> Innovative trailering features such as Trailer Sway Control (SRW only) and the available, new diesel exhaust brake system<sup>1</sup> help keep you on track. And for even more confidence, its quality is backed with a 100,000 mile/5-year<sup>5</sup> Powertrain Warranty. That's 40,000 miles more than Ford offers. To learn more about the most dependable, longest-lasting full-size pickups on the road,<sup>6</sup> and to find out what else separates Silverado HD from its competition, visit [chevy.com/NewSilveradoHD](http://chevy.com/NewSilveradoHD).

NEW SILVERADO  
 HD

<sup>1</sup> Requires fifth-wheel trailer hitch and Regular Cab model. <sup>2</sup> Maximum trailer weight ratings are calculated assuming a base vehicle, except for any option(s) necessary to achieve the rating, plus driver. The weight of other optional equipment, passengers and cargo will reduce the maximum trailer weight your vehicle can tow. See your Chevy dealer for additional details. <sup>3</sup> Silverado HD with available Duramax 6.6L Turbo-Diesel V8 engine. <sup>4</sup> Requires Regular Cab model. Maximum payload capacity includes weight of driver, passengers, optional equipment and cargo. <sup>5</sup> Whichever comes first. See dealer for limited warranty details. <sup>6</sup> Dependability based on longevity: 1981-July 2009 full-size pickup registrations. Allison is a registered trademark of Allison Transmission, Inc. The marks of General Motors, its divisions, slogans, emblems, vehicle model names, vehicle body designs and other marks appearing in this advertisement are the trademarks and/or service marks of General Motors, its subsidiaries, affiliates or licensors. ©2010 General Motors. All rights reserved. Buckle up, America!





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Sponsor: Association of Equipment Manufacturers, Milwaukee, WI.



ity and landscaping professionals in various industries see more of a return from their sustainability efforts," said IFMA Foundation Executive Director Will Rub.

"Our constituency indicated a strong interest in learning more about sustainability in the landscape industry," said Eric Teicholz, executive editor of the guides. "This new guide, coordinated by The Groundskeeper, definitely meets that need."

To obtain a free copy of "Sustainable Landscaping," visit [www.groundskeeper.com](http://www.groundskeeper.com) or [www.ifmafoundation.org](http://www.ifmafoundation.org).

## FMC introduces product label notification service

PHILADELPHIA – Help is only a click away for busy pest and turf management professionals who need up-to-the-minute information on product label changes. A new service from FMC Professional Solutions provides product users with rapid notification of label changes and updates.

After registering for the service on the FMC website, users will receive an e-mail alert each time an FMC product label is modified. Messages will include a summary of the change and a link to the label itself.

Signing up for the service takes less than a minute. Just visit [www.fmcpro-solutions.com/Home/LabelsMSDS.aspx](http://www.fmcpro-solutions.com/Home/LabelsMSDS.aspx) and follow the directions.

"With all the things turf and pest professionals have to worry about – employees, customers, equipment, weather, local issues and more – we know they don't have much time,"

said Rick Lewis, FMC sales support manager.

## Aqua Engineering receives Hunter Industries' Trailblazer Award

SAN MARCOS, Calif. – Hunter Industries has presented the Hunter Trailblazer Award to Aqua Engineering. Hunter traditionally presents the award to an individual; however, Aqua Engineering is one of the few to be recognized as a group that makes great contributions to the industry.

Aqua Engineering is an irrigation engineering and water management firm headquartered in Fort Collins, Colo. The firm specializes in water-conserving irrigation system design and management for aesthetic and functional landscapes and agricultural endeavors.

"We are both excited and humbled by this award," said Aqua Engineering President Robert Beccard. "We are passionate about what we do and pride ourselves in providing innovative water solutions to irrigation project challenges. This award will serve as an attractive reminder of how far we've come in 35 years."

Hunter has a tradition of recognizing individuals who have made significant contributions to the irrigation industry.

The Trailblazer award is meant to showcase professionals whose innovation, leadership, and forward thinking not only benefit Hunter Industries, but also the irrigation industry as a whole.

## PEOPLE

**Andrew Freeman**, IPM specialist at Broccolo Tree and Lawn Care, recently became a certified nursery landscape professional through the Cornell Cooperative Extension.



**James Doyle**, James Doyle Design Associates, Greenwich, Conn., was named 2010 APLD International Landscape Designer of the Year.

**Bill Owen** was named the first safety director at Hayward, Calif.-based Arborwell.

**George Brown** was promoted to area manager at Ruppert Landscape's Forestville, Md., Landscape Management branch.

OPEI announced its 2010-11 officers at its annual meeting in June. They include: OPEI Chairman **Fred Whyte**, president, STIHL; OPEI Vice Chairman **Jean Hlay**, president and chief operating officer, MTD Products; and Secretary/Treasurer **Richard Fotsch**, president of the Global Power Group, Kohler.

Subaru Industrial Power Products appointed **Michael Magolan** as regional sales manager.

## Two semi-finalists named in 2010 Landscaper's Challenge contest

RACINE, Wis. – The April and May semi-finalists were named in the 2010 Landscaper's Challenge, sponsored by New Holland Construction.

K Morris Landscape Design, Oakdale, Pa., won for April. The company turned a drab suburban backyard into an entertaining platform for family and friends.

And Kinsella Landscape, Blue Island, Ill., won for May. The company created a "city chic" atmosphere for a townhouse complex.

To see photos of the projects – or to enter your own – visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com/NewHollandSkiDSteer.aspx](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/NewHollandSkiDSteer.aspx).

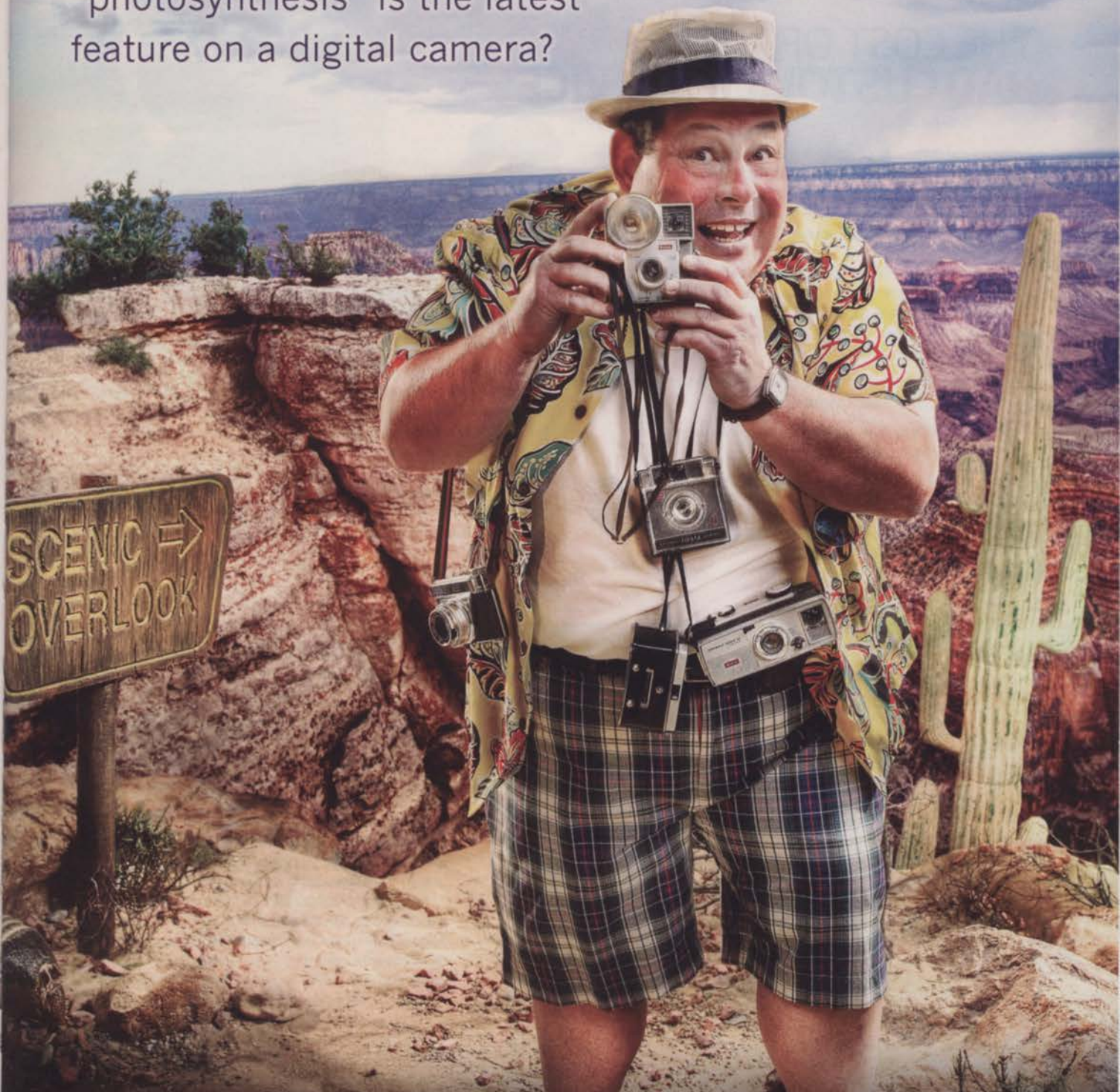
## Refuge herbicide receives updated registration

GREENSBORO, N.C. – Refuge non-selective herbicide from Syngenta has received registration from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for use on aquatic and wetland sites, forestry, railroad, utility and other vegetation management sites.

With five pounds-per-gallon of glyphosate acid, Refuge is the most concentrated liquid glyphosate formulation labeled for the vegetation management market. It offers broad-spectrum, systemic and non-selective control of more than 170 emerged annual and perennial grass and broadleaf weeds, and unwanted woody brush and trees.



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## THE COST OF BAD CUSTOMER SERVICE

A majority of Americans report that quality customer service is more important to them in today's economic environment (**61 percent**) and will spend an average of 9 percent more when they believe a company provides excellent service, according to data from the American Express Global Customer Service Barometer.

However, in a challenging economy where growth is harder to achieve, many businesses are missing out on this opportunity.

Although only a little more than a third of Americans (**37 percent**) believe that companies have increased their focus on providing quality service:

- **27 percent** of consumers feel businesses have not changed their attitude toward customer service.
- **28 percent** say that companies are now paying less attention to good service.
- **48 percent** feel companies are helpful but don't do anything extra to keep their business.
- Worse, **21 percent** believe that companies take their business for granted.



"Customers want and expect superior service," says Jim Bush, executive vice president, World Service. "Especially in this tight economic environment, consumers are focused on getting good value for their money. Many consumers say companies haven't done enough to improve their approach to service in this economy, and yet it's clear they're willing to spend more with those that deliver excellent service – suggesting substantial growth opportunities for businesses that get customer service right. It's important to see customer service as an investment, not a cost."

### Good news travels fast

Importantly, customers are spreading the word willingly and widely when they experience good service. In fact, contrary to conventional wisdom, customers are more inclined to talk about a positive experience than complain about a negative one. Three-quarters (75 percent) are very likely to speak positively about a company after a good service experience in contrast with 59 percent who are very likely to speak negatively about a company after poor service.

Good service experiences also carry more weight than bad ones when Americans make future spending decisions. Consumers are far more likely to give a company repeat business after a good service experience (**81 percent**) than they are to never do business with a company again after a poor experience (**52 percent**).

In fact, consumers say the three most influential factors when deciding which companies they do business with include personal experience (**98 percent**), a company's reputation or brand (**92 percent**), and recommendations from friends and family (**88 percent**).

### Two strikes and you're out. Or is it one?

A negative service experience is an important factor for most Americans: 81 percent have decided never to do business with a company again because of poor customer service in the past.

When asked how many poor experiences they allow, half of all Americans (**50 percent**) reported it takes two poor-service experiences before they stop doing business with a company.

Importantly, consumers are far more-forgiving if a company has earned their trust over time. Almost nine in ten consumers (**86 percent**) report they're willing to give a company a second chance after a bad experience if they've historically experienced great customer service with that company.

But companies who get it wrong should realize it's at a cost.

Half of consumers (**52 percent**) expect something in return after a poor customer service experience, beyond resolving the problem.

Most consumers (**70 percent**) want an apology or some form of reimbursement.



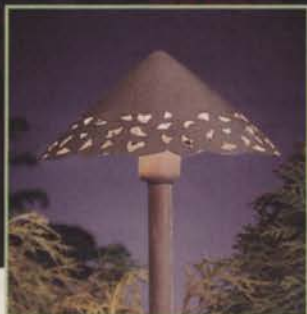
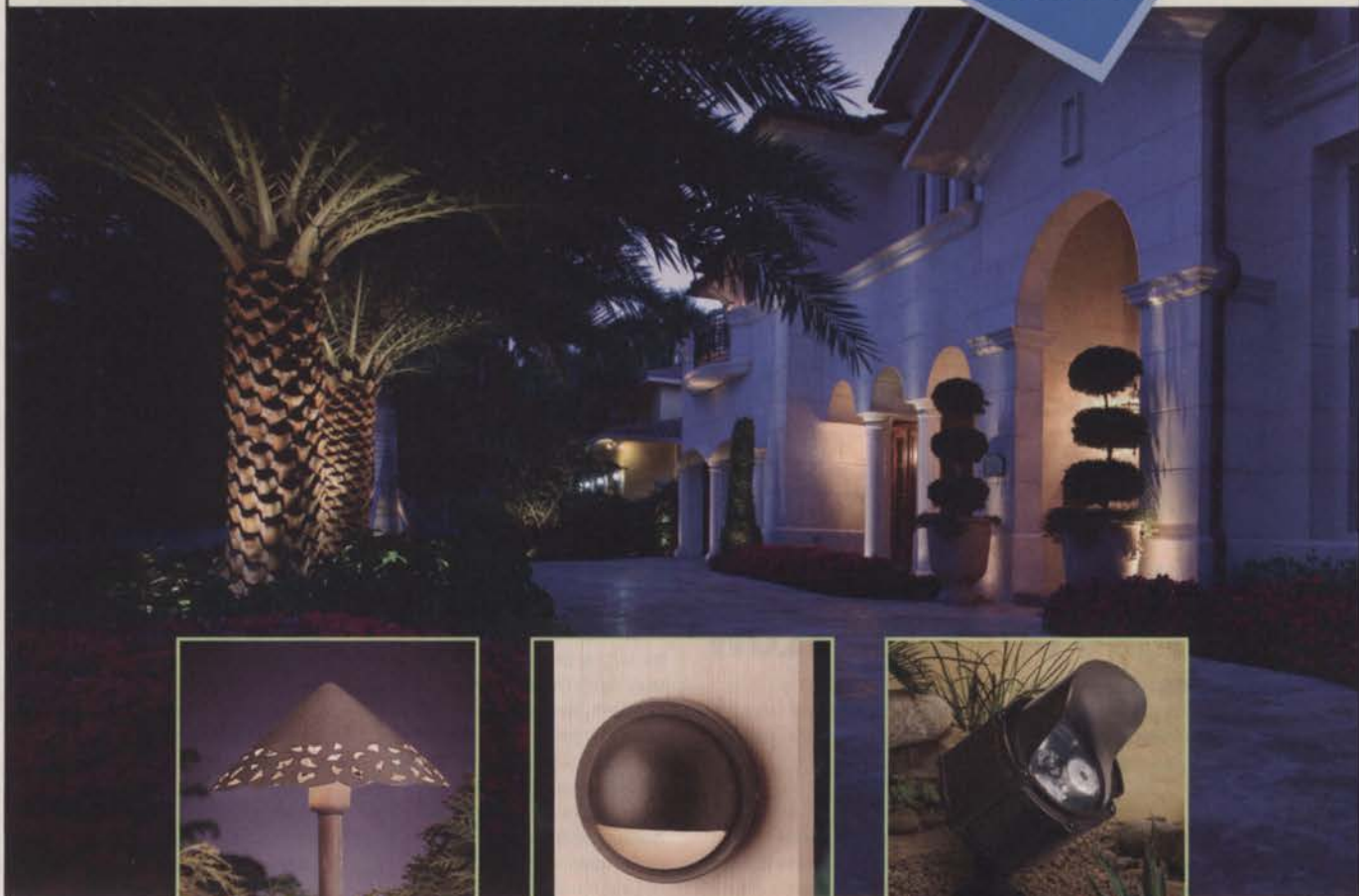
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## CUTTING OVERTIME COSTS, SMOOTHING OUT CASH FLOW

**ASK THE EXPERTS** is presented in partnership with PLANET's Trailblazers On Call program. Trailblazers are industry leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to give back to the industry. Have a question for the experts? Send it to [llexperts@gle.net](mailto:llexperts@gle.net).

**Q:** Our production times for regular maintenance work are running over budget, but our production times for the cleanups, pruning and small projects are typically OK. Although we've had a wetter spring than normal, I can't seem to get a handle on it. Part of the problem is I don't have a good way of holding the crew accountable for the time. We have a very accurate way to measure the time on the project, but the times seem to keep running over without improving. Fortunately, we have very few quality problems. I know we are capable of reducing the overtime and overall labor costs but need to know how. What actions can I take?

**A:** You're right; it has been a wetter, soppiest spring in the Northwest than usual. This, of course, is bound to affect your production times negatively, a

fact that those of us who live here just have to learn to accept. Our production standards are geared for the average year and sometimes Mother Nature deals us a bad hand.

Beyond the weather, however, I assume you are tracking labor performance on a job-by-job basis through your job costing system and that your job cost reporting tracks actual labor hours or dollars against budgeted labor hours or dollars. If not, you should be. We used to project labor budgets by week for each job and used this as our standard of job cost comparison, monitoring cumulative actual labor against budgeted cumulative labor as we went through the year. Crew leaders should be aware of their performance against budget on a monthly, if not weekly, basis.

Once you can sort out individual contract performance, sit down and review this with the foreman/crew leaders for these jobs. Review the man-hour

budget with them and the history of satisfactory performance and start asking questions:

- Is it the weather?
- Which operations on-site are taking more time than we estimated?
  - Is there more pruning and edging on this job now than our estimate because things have grown in and matured?
  - Are pre-emergents not working because the weather has been so wet?
  - Why were we able to hit these times in the past and can't do so now?
  - What would you recommend to improve our performance on this site?
  - Are there modifications or enhancements we can recommend to the customer that would help improve our performance?

Get them to buy into their role in the problem and to accept the individual job budgets as a realistic production standard. Let them know they are responsible for hitting the standards, and, if they don't think the standards are right, they should address that with you for a common accountability standard. Their performance should become a subject of discussion and accountability at your regular performance reviews.

One number you might want to start tracking would be your "realized rate" – revenue billings divided by your direct labor production man-hours. This number can be very relevant if you are billing out maintenance jobs on a rate-of-actual-effort basis.

If you bill your accounts on an equal monthly billing against an annual contract amount (most common in commercial contracts), then you will need to establish an expected monthly "realized rate" pattern.

Next, look at it is whether it is the individual job budgets you are not hitting, or is it the total crew time versus your budgets. Also, take a look at your indirect labor budgets. This is the great profit leak that many contractors miss. Here is where management and supervisory inefficiencies in managing crew time show up.

Your target for getting direct

labor (excluding burden) under 30 percent is realistic. Your total direct labor plus leased labor is, by your own words, running 38-plus percent. This puts you about 4-6 percentage points over the medians for exterior maintenance contractors as reported in the 2008 PLANET *Operating Cost Study for the Green Industry*.

Rod L. Bailey, landscape industry certified manager, Alder Springs Enterprises, Duvall, Wash.

**Q:** We currently pay every two weeks and have for a couple of years now. At the time, we changed from twice monthly – the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> – because I thought it was better for the employees. However, I am strongly thinking of going back to twice monthly because it will help even out our cash flow and be more predictable. Also, I think it will more accurately cost the labor for the month, without having months run into each other.

**A:** I would be cautious about going back to the twice-per-month system, because your current frequency is more crew-friendly. Are you going to make this easier on yourself or on them? When you do your budgets, just make sure you allow for the actual number of payrolls in any given month. Some will have two and some will have three. This will put a little more burden on your cash flow budget planning, but you should be doing this anyway to avoid surprises.

If you have a line of credit relationship with a bank, this is what it is for: to smooth out your cash flow.

I have seen contractors use twice-per-month, every other week, and weekly pay periods as we did. There are problems and benefits attached to each. Once you get your accounting, budgeting, and cash flow planning systems set up, you should have no problem tracking yourself, whichever system you use.

Rod L. Bailey, landscape industry certified manager, Alder Springs Enterprises, Duvall, Wash.





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## VAST Composite Permeable Pavers

**The pitch:** Reduce rain runoff into storm drains and decrease stormwater pollutants by infiltrating rainwater on building sites.

**The target:** Design/build contractors.

**Specs:**

- Tested infiltration rate of more than 450 inches per hour.
- Slip-resistant.
- Maintain a precise 0.275-inch space between pavers.

**Contact:** [www.vastpavers.com](http://www.vastpavers.com)



## Rain Bird LIMR Wireless Remote

**The pitch:** Gives contractors the ability to activate their customers' controller devices without having to physically access their controllers.



**The target:** Irrigation contractors.

**Specs:**

- Consists of a receiver and a handheld transmitter with an LCD screen and key pad.
- Receiver relays information sent by the contractor through the remote device.
- Virtually eliminates the need for two-person service calls.

**Contact:** [www.rainbird.com](http://www.rainbird.com)

## Bobcat T870

**The pitch:** The largest compact track loader the company has ever manufactured.

**The target:** Any green industry company.

**Specs:**

- The 10,008-pound S850 has a rated operating capacity (ROC) of 3,875 pounds.
- Higher horsepower than any of Bobcat's current loader models.
- New cab forward design with improved visibility and more space.
- Higher lift capacities and reach.

**Contact:** [www.bobcat.com](http://www.bobcat.com)



## Orbit/Evergreen FG 5400 Series outdoor lighting

**The pitch:** 3-watt LED light source that produces the same brightness as a standard 20-watt lamp.

**The target:** Lighting contractors.

**Specs:**

- Delivers up to 50,000 hours of performance.
- Constructed from injection-molded PBT composite for durable performance in challenging soil and weather conditions.
- A range of beam options are available.

**Contact:** [www.orbitelectric.com](http://www.orbitelectric.com)



## The Power Rake

**The pitch:** Gives contractors a fast and convenient solution that dethatches, rakes and scalps in a single tool.

**The target:** Lawn care operators and maintenance companies.

**Specs:**

- Nylon lines brush grass to rake leaves, grass clippings and lawn debris.
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- Scalps the lawn in preparation for reseeding.

**Contact:** For sale at ACE Hardware, [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) and other home improvement stores.



## John Deere 2011 Cross-over Utility Vehicles

**The pitch:** Packed with advanced features that deliver balance between work and recreation.

**The target:** Any green industry company.

**Specs:**

- The 825i boasts 50 horsepower and is the highest powered engine in its class.
- 812-cc inline three-cylinder engine features dual overhead cams and electronic fuel injection.
- Low-end torque for handling the toughest tasks, trails and terrain.

**Contact:** [www.deere.com](http://www.deere.com)





A SUPPLEMENT TO

August 2010

# Lawn & Landscape®

## **INSIDE:**

Succulents add sculpture to containers

PG. 10

New program unites landscape, retail divisions

PG. 13

Landscaper turned breeder uncovers innovative plants

PG. 14

# LINK UP

Improving the supply chain helps all green industry companies. **PG. 7**

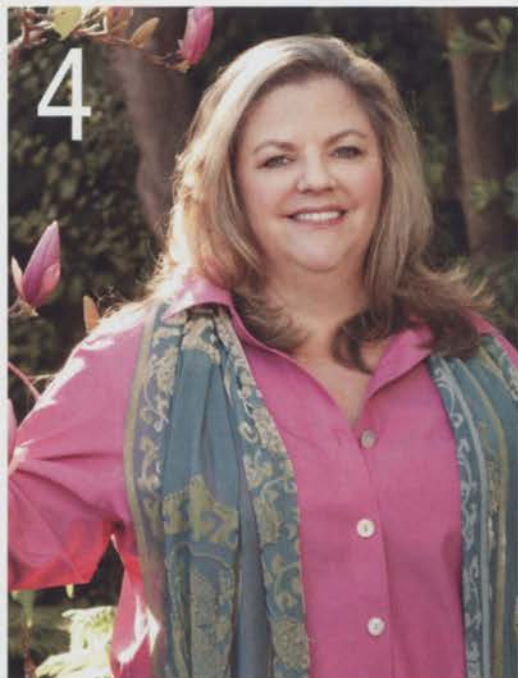


## TREES, ORNAMENTAL & BEDDING PLANT EDITORIAL SUPPLEMENT

# AUGUST

2010 VOL. 1, ISSUE 6

The editors at *Lawn & Landscape* and its sister publications – *Greenhouse Management & Production*, *Nursery Management & Production* and *Garden Center* magazines – have teamed up to bring you the latest installment of our trees, ornamental and bedding plant editorial supplement. It's specifically designed for design/build contractors looking for the latest plant varieties, hardscape trends and best practices across the entire green industry.



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- 7 Improving the supply chain**  
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Green Industry Insight

# 105 Making the most of native plant selections

By Nancy Mickey

Whenever the topic of native perennial plants comes up there almost always follows a discussion on where to obtain them. Do we go to a field and locate wild populations to dig? What, then, are we to do?

You might be surprised to find that a garden consisting solely of natives isn't as limiting as you might imagine. Some areas of North America have a breathtaking diversity of plant life. It has been estimated that in the temperate world, the eastern United States is second only to China in botanical diversity. Native plants offer a vast array of colors, shapes and textures. With beautiful displays of flowers and foliage, native perennials, ornamental grasses and hardy ferns make great additions to any garden, but beauty and variety aren't the only reasons why.

**Low maintenance.** Aside from regular watering during their first season, most native perennials require little maintenance. In general they're resistant to disease and insects and do not require fertilization or protection in the winter.

**Adaptability.** Because soil types, light conditions and temperatures change so rapidly and vary so much throughout this region, many native perennials are able to survive in a wide range of conditions.

**Hardy.** They are naturally occurring

in the local environment so they actually thrive even after the harshest Mid-Atlantic or New England winter.

**Good for local ecosystem.** By planting native plants, you are restoring part of the natural ecosystem.

A native plant is one that develops, occurs naturally, or has existed for many years in an area. These can be trees, flowers, grasses, perennials or other plants. Some of them may have adapted to a very limited range. They may have adjusted to living in unusual environments or under very harsh climates or exceptional soil conditions. Although some types of plants exist only within a very limited range, others



Native plants bring a host of positive traits to any landscape – low maintenance, adaptability and hardiness.

can live in diverse areas or by adaptation to different surroundings.

North American gardeners, on the whole, are embracing their native plant heritage. A good part of the change is because native plants have become such obvious, sensible choices for today's more ecologically focused garden. Appropriately sited native plants require no watering, no fertilizer and no pesticides. Many natives offer so much in addition to their showy blooms. Locally native plants are known as local ecotypes, and are well adapted to the soils, animals, and climate of the immediate area.

Choose the right natives and your landscape installation will shine! 🌿



## Designer of the Year

# TALKS

## INSPIRATION



Margie Grace was recently honored by the Association of Professional Landscape Designers.

**M**argie Grace of Grace Design Associates ([www.gracedesignassociates.com](http://www.gracedesignassociates.com)), in Santa Barbara, Calif., was recently named Designer of the Year by the Association of Professional Landscape Designers. Grace's winning project was for a Santa Barbara residence that incorporates eco-friendly elements. Grace also won top honors for that same project, receiving the APLD's Gold Award for Residential Design.

Grace works in a wide range of styles, from classical and highly formal to contemporary and naturalistic. She spoke with *Lawn & Landscape* recently about what influences her landscape design projects.

**Q. What was your reaction when you learned you had won the awards?**

**A.** Bill Healy (APLD's award chair) gave me a call with the news, and said he felt just like Ed McMahon announcing a Publishers Clearing House winner. I think I felt like the person on

Grace's winning project was for a Santa Barbara residential design. The eco-friendly home and garden are masterfully integrated, and Grace worked closely with renowned green architect Michelle Kauffman throughout the project.





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Jacqueline™  
Orange Fusion

Rosy Victoria™ Coral

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the receiving end! It's humbling and a terrific honor.

**Q. In your gold-award design, you used materials harvested from the site, correct?**

**A.** Yes. There were hundreds of tons of stone on the lot after excavation. We decided that every one of those rocks

belonged on site. We salvaged some cut-sandstone curbstones that were probably from the 1890s.

Other stones went into walls. We did some almost fieldstone-type walls, and others more stacked and fitted. There was just history scattered all over there. If you're looking to create a sense of



Grace's award-winning design created a naturalistic landscape.

space in Santa Barbara, you're using these stones.

**Q. What are the key influences in your design work?**

**A.** My work is dictated overall by process; not a specific aesthetic. I look first at the land and its context – geology, climate, existing and proposed structures, heritage of the region. Then I work with the client to articulate their personal vision. All these factors influence the final design.

**Q. When you initially visit a project site, what is the first thing that strikes you?**

**A.** I'm looking at the assets and liabilities of the site, and I look at the land forms. Are the structures on the site at rest? Or do they look like they're fighting with each other? People have their own style, but our job is to translate it into something that will be successful. What wants to be there? You can have a house you love and a garden you love, but, sometimes, you put them side-by-side and they don't belong together.

**Q. What inspired you to study design?**

**A.** Ever since I can remember, I've loved plants, rocks, wildlife, beautiful scenery, old houses, exotic cultures, music, art and history. My formal training is in geology and biology – the rest I learned from observing and doing.

**Q. Who has most influenced your work?**

**A.** My mother. She was an engineering geologist. She inspired my love of nature, insatiable curiosity, civic-mindedness and the need to have work I'm passionate about. 🌱

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Garden Gate Landscaping in Silver Spring, Md., forged a special partnership with landscape distributor Manor View Farms in Monkton, Md., to improve supply processes.



## IMPROVING the SUPPLY CHAIN

All sectors of the green industry must improve partnerships to boost sales. *By Kelli Rodda*

The green industry should be a unified, cohesive group. But in too many cases, the supply chain is disjointed, which doesn't provide a solid base to build a successful industry. And whether the economy is flat or flourishing, every sector of this industry should work as a team, not as thousands of individual units.

From the plant breeder, down to the propagator, the grower, the distributor, the retailer, the designer and the contractor, everyone needs to work smarter and collectively to reach the end consumer.

"That whole supply chain is tied to one thing – the happy customer. And it's up to all of us as an industry – an interconnection of that chain – to get the end consumer excited about plants," says Richard Davis, owner of The Ivy Farm in Locustville, Va.

Davis is passionate about plants and their well-documented benefits, and he'll preach those benefits to anyone who will listen. And it's those benefits – increased property values, improved health and reduced crime – that should be on the minds of all end consumers, he says.

"We must make consumers aware that plants are not a luxury, they're a necessity," he says. "We have to do a better job to impart that value message to the end consumer."

How? By unifying the industry through a national marketing campaign.

"We're doing a poor job of marketing plants as a unit," he says. "There are lots of brands out there, and I don't have a problem with that. But we have to come together to get the message out about plants in general."

"When consumers understand plants'



full benefits and have success with plants, they'll come back and buy again."

Davis sees no conflict between the plant brands and a national marketing campaign.

"It's for the betterment of the entire industry. How can you not be on board with that?" he says. "I'm willing to help pay for a national campaign. We need a good spokesperson and a series of ads. And not just to people on the home gardening channel. We're not reaching anyone new that way."

Davis would like to see organizations like the American Nursery & Landscape Association lead this charge and help pull the industry together.

Research shows that every dollar spent on landscaping equates to \$1.09 in return, he said, "and the American people have to make that association."

Steve McShane, owner of McShane's Nursery & Landscape Supply in Salinas, Calif., sees joint marketing as an excellent cause. McShane operates a retail and landscape supply and design firm, as well as a small growing operation.

"There is a huge opportunity for the various industry segments in the supply chain to work together. And some trade associations have recognized this. The California Association of Nurseries and Garden Centers have worked aggressively to bring together the various segments in order to promote plants via a statewide radio campaign and on-



A unified supply chain could better spread the message that plants are important.

line advertising," McShane says. "This model must be the way of the future. When we're all pulling together it's an easier feat to overcome in reaching the consumer and keeping them focused on and excited about plants."

**INTERNAL CHANGES.** For the industry to be unified and work efficiently, there are cues to follow from some of your peers. Seems simple enough, but you may be overlooking one of your biggest marketing tools – your company's website. C.M. Hobbs, a landscape distribution firm in Indianapolis, makes sure its

site is constantly updated for the benefit of their contractor customers.

"Keep your website updated. We update ours about every half hour," says Gordon Hobbs of C.M. Hobbs. Having the latest availability online eliminates a lot of frustrations. Custom growing services can help keep the buying process efficient, and boost sales across the board.

"I have growers that are custom-growing trees for me that I can't find on the market – not necessarily types but forms, such as *Carpinus* limbed up 7-8 feet off the ground," says Joseph Hillenmeyer, owner of Joseph Hillenmeyer & Associates, a landscape design firm in Lexington, Ky.

Education throughout the entire chain is another key to everyone's success, McShane says.

"We invite installers in all of the time for education, and we have a great program for consumers," McShane says. "Today's consumer wants short, quick educational snippets – that's the added value independent garden centers could offer. Interfacing with consumers goes a long way."

**ONE-ON-ONE RELATIONSHIPS.** Charlie Bowers, owner of Garden Gate Landscaping in Silver Spring, Md., found a way to simplify his business. He implemented a just-in-time plant buying system with Manor View Farms, a landscape

## WHAT'S HOT AND WHAT'S NOT

Two or more links in the supply chain can follow a simple but effective strategy – sharing consumption numbers, said Bud Eskola of Next Level Consulting.

"I tell growers to ask their distributors what they sold last year and what they are forecasting this year. I tell growers to incorporate those sales and purchasing trends into their production plans," he said.

The same holds true for the grower-to-retailer, grower-to-landscaper, distributor-to-landscaper and distributor-to-retailer partnerships.

"It is partnering with your customer, as some Japanese firms have done so well, that eliminates guesswork, waste and inefficiency, while allowing both parties to make a profit. It is based on trust to a great degree, something that even in our 'we all get along together' industry is frequently absent."

For more: Bud Eskola, [bud.eskola@nextlevelconsultingco.com](mailto:bud.eskola@nextlevelconsultingco.com).



**"Today plants move from our loading dock to the projects within days or weeks."** – Charlie Bowers, Garden Gate Landscaping

distributor in Monkton, Md. Residential design/build landscaping, by its nature, results in gardens that contain a broad variety of plants, Bowers says.

"Economically it was no longer possible for us to buy and store and to work from a typical spring inventory of plants. And wholesale growers were no longer interested in dealing with the rich mix, but small quantity per unit, of our relatively small plant orders. They wanted to sell hundreds of each plant, not one to 25."

Bowers approached Manor View Farms with a proposition. Bowers offered Manor View all the plant business he possibly could in return for a personal sales representative that would hand-pick plants and deliver them to Bowers on a regular basis. This partnership improved Bowers' business systems and saved him overhead dollars. Garden Gate sends the plant list for each project to Manor View, which coordinates the tagging and delivery of the plants just-in-time.

"Manor View gets a substantial increase in business volume and we no longer stock any plants," Bowers says. "We eliminated a plant buyer and the associated overhead of the buyer and the folks who had to water and maintain the plants for months until they were sold."

"Today plants move from our loading dock to the projects within days or weeks. We hold a crew in on Thursday morning to unload plants and we have devised an easily adjustable irrigation system. Today our plant buying and handling overhead is minimal."

Manor View Farm entered into this special partnership with Bowers 13 years ago. Now Manor View has at least 60 customers with the same set up.

"There are some kinks to iron out when you first begin a partnership like this one," says Damon Nock, sales manager and buyer at Manor View Farm. Nock is also Bowers' personal sales rep. "It doesn't take long for things to start running smoothly. Trust is a big hurdle

to overcome. The designer or contractor needs to learn to trust their personal sales representative." 🌿

**For more:** The Ivy Farm, [www.theivyfarm.com](http://www.theivyfarm.com). McShane's Nursery & Landscape Supply, [www.mcshanesnursery.com](http://www.mcshanesnursery.com). C.M. Hobbs Inc., [www.cmhobbs.com](http://www.cmhobbs.com). Joseph Hillenmeyer & Associates, [www.josephhillenmeyer.com](http://www.josephhillenmeyer.com). Garden Gate Landscaping, [www.gardengate.net](http://www.gardengate.net). Manor View Farm, [www.manorview.com](http://www.manorview.com).



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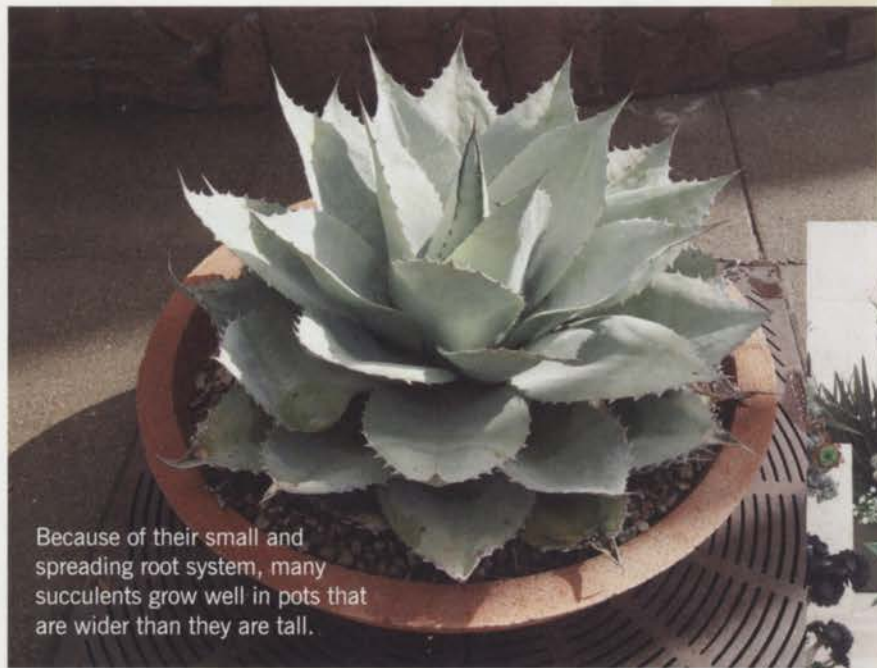
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# Succulent containers

By Mary Irish

Hardy plants with sculptural forms give new life to container plantings



Container-grown succulents can make stunning statements in a landscape.



Because of their small and spreading root system, many succulents grow well in pots that are wider than they are tall.

**S**ucculent lovers know no geographic bounds. There are fans of these enticing plants in the most unforgiving parts of the country, where cold dominates and rainfall is abundant. Yet it is this resilience coupled with a striking ease of culture, particularly in containers, that has endeared this varied group of plants to gardeners and landscapers since they first arrived in European and American gardens.

Plants like mother-in-law tongue (*Sansevieria* spp.) have been used in parlors and halls for decades filling out huge vases with their upright form and tall sturdy, deep green leaves that seem to grow in any situation and any light (including dim halls). But container grown succulents are also useful to gardens with their vast array of forms, color and styles allowing them to be used as a stunning accent, a colorful note in an odd corner of a patio or seating area, or massed together to create a potted

garden of their own. They are useful to enhance the smallest of gardens—a patio, a tiny balcony, even a window ledge.

Plants, of course, have adapted to the conditions from which they arise and in the case of almost all succulents those conditions are long periods of little or erratic rainfall, high temperatures and often intense sunlight. But two adaptations in this enormous class of plants aid them in adjusting to the rigors of container culture: succulence itself, and their root systems.

**SUCCULENCE SUCCESS.** Succulents have specialized cells that hold water, releasing it for photosynthesis when soil moisture becomes too low for plants to draw water out of the ground. The most familiar succulents—aloes, haworthias, gasteria, ice plants, and sansevieria—have this tissue in their leaves. This is

why their leaves are fat, often fleshy and filled with a gel-like substance. In plants like succulent euphorbias and cactus, the stem is where these cells are housed and leaves are either absent altogether or show up only from time to time.

The root system of succulents is small in comparison to the plant and radiates out from the base as a fine meshed web. The roots are shallow as well, growing only inches below the surface and allow the plant to take up water in even the tiniest rain shower. As soils dry out, the feeder roots at the ends of the system begin to die off, signaling a shift to the use of the stored water. Once the soil is wetted the roots grow quickly, often within days, to take up water and dis-



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solved nutrients once again.

Understanding these twin systems offers a road map to the culture of these long-lived plants and as with almost all container grown plants success begins with the soil.

Choose a soil mix that has as little peat as possible and drains very well. Use a blend of half this soil and half inorganic material like gravel, pumice or grit for cactus. Use a mix of 2/3 soil and 1/3 inorganic material for all other types. If your plants will be exposed to an abundance of rainfall, use the half/half blend for faster drainage.

Because the succulent root system is specifically designed to wick up water, it has virtually no capability to shut down as long as water is available. Ultimately, if water is constantly on hand, plants will burst or rot. To accommodate this type of root activity, maintenance involves watering thoroughly, but allowing the container to dry out between waterings. For cactus, it's important that the entire column of soil is entirely dry and you can use a dowel, or pencil, or long screwdriver to find out. For most other succulents, a pot that is 2/3 dry is sufficient. Never use a saucer or other continuous watering system for succulents.

**CULTURE CONSIDERATIONS.** Many succulents have strong dormant periods. Adeniums, pachypodiums and rock figs lose most or all their leaves in the

winter during their dormancy. Some haworthias, most ice plants and boojum are dormant in the summer. Watering such plants during their dormancy is tricky, a little may be fine, but in general they want to be dry during this period. This is especially true of those that are winter dormant.

In all succulents, the combination of cold, wet soils presents problems. Overwatering is easy because few are actively growing in the cold. The best strategy is prevention: Test the soil to be sure it is dry and don't worry if it takes weeks between waterings.

Few succulents in the ground ever need to be fertilized, but it is helpful in containers. Use any all-purpose fertilizer with low nitrogen content (a number of 6 or less) and at half or less the recommended strength for container plants. Water soluble fertilizer is ideal for most succulents. The most important thing is to use much less than recommended on the label, and never fertilize succulents when they are dormant. Cease applying any fertilizer at least a month before a plant goes into dormancy or the weather turns cold.

**CONTAINER OPTIONS.** The type of container is limited only by availability, garden style and the size of the plant. It is best to move plants up one pot size at a time rather than putting a small plant in a big pot. Too much soil means too much water most of the time, and rot is

easily encouraged by too big a pot.

Because of their small and spreading root system, many succulents grow well in pots that are wider than they are tall. The container needs to have at least one hole in the bottom for drainage. In almost all cases, clay is preferred over plastic, chiefly because plastic can become brittle in high heat, holds too much moisture in some climates and is rarely good looking. Slipping a succulent that is in a plastic pot into a larger, more attractive clay or ceramic container is a great way to use decorative pots, vases or other items that do come with drain holes. However, when using such containers be sure to lift the plant out to water it; let it drain completely before putting it back.

Mulching succulents, especially in hot climates, is helpful for many reasons. Mulch cools the soil, slows down soil evaporation and reduces watering frequency. Mulch helps keep down splashing which is often how diseases spread among container grown plants. It is also attractive and gives a potted plant a finished look. Many growers of container succulents prefer inorganic mulch, like fine gravel or even chicken grit, but whatever you use, pick a product that enhances the beauty of the plant. 🌵

Mary Irish, former director of horticulture at the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix, is a freelance writer, book author and speaker. She lives in Scottsdale, Ariz.

## INSTALLATION TIPS

To avoid injury when moving or repotting cactus or other spiny succulents, use tongs, carpet scraps or old hoses and handle the plant by the roots. When handling cactus, cover your hands with plastic bags rather than gloves.

Dry out the roots before repotting by placing the bare-root plant in dry shade for a week for small succulents, and up to a month for larger ones. Never dry out the roots of yucca, nolina or dasylium; plant them directly.

Try to maintain identical sun exposure when repotting, or accustom plants to a new exposure in the late fall and winter when the sun is less intense.

Always water until it runs out of the pot, changing the frequency with seasons – not the amount.

Examine plants often, problems are easier to control early. Use a cotton swab dipped in alcohol for mealy bugs and scale, fingers or long tweezers for more active bugs, a 1:10 bleach drench for root mealy bugs. Most problems arise from inappropriate watering – watch for over watering.



Succulents can enhance small garden spaces, such as patios and balconies.

GARY IRISH



By Sarah Martinez

# SEASONAL SERVICES

## *and more*

Weston Nurseries launches a program to tackle outdoor jobs big and small.

**W**eston Nurseries in Hopkinton, Mass., launched a new program this spring. The company's Seasonal Services initiative specializes in garden-design, holiday and event installations and garden mentoring. Design consultant Roanne Robbins is leading this new venture, which dovetails nicely with her unique background in design, installation and maintenance.

"We want (homeowners) to think of Weston Nurseries not only for excellent horticultural advice, but also for sprucing up an entryway and interior and exterior decorating for special occasions," Robbins says.

**SERVICE LINEUP.** Weston Nurseries created a beautiful, full-color brochure to promote its Seasonal Services menu. The primary offerings of the program are:

**Ongoing care.** This includes weekly maintenance, seasonal updates, ornamental pruning and garden restorations. Essentially, the Weston Nurseries team will take on the roll of "personal gardener" for homeowners.

**Garden mentoring.** For homeowners that want to do it themselves, but aren't sure how to begin, the Seasonal Services lineup also offers on-site garden mentoring services.

"The nice thing is I get to see clients on a very high-touch level," Robbins said. "It's nice that I'm able to connect to them through garden mentoring. Also, I feel like I can guide them and help them use their (outdoor) space."

**Container garden design.** This element of the Seasonal Service program includes both plant design/selection and choosing the appropriate containers to accent the home.

"We've offered a custom container service for a couple of years now," says Jennifer Angell, marketing manager for Weston Nurseries. "We'll go on site and change out containers seasonally—and sometimes customers will bring containers here for us to plant up and deliver. We're trying to respond to demand and all the different needs of our clientele."

**Seasonal borders.** Robbins and her team can add seasonal color to an existing landscape or create a new mixed border that provides year-round interest.

**Holidays and events.** Weston Nurseries will coordinate



Weston's new program unites its landscaping and retail divisions.

natural (flower or plant) décor for parties, weddings and other special events. This service draws upon the expertise of the business' garden center and retail florist division.

**CROSSOVER OPPORTUNITIES.** One of the best things about Weston's Seasonal Services is it truly buys into the maxim, "no job too big; no job too small." Robbins' office is in the company's landscape services building. She works closely with the landscaping team, and they often toss projects back and forth – depending upon the needs of the homeowner and scope of the project. "The nursery has so many talented people, I can pull them in if I need to," Robbins says.

Seasonal Services has allowed Weston Nurseries to channel the myriad requests of homeowners and lock them into particular elements of the program. "We'll build up the history and education to know how to further build the program," Robbins said. "We're lucky, because once we develop our clientele, we'll constantly be in touch with them." 🌿



# GARY TRUCKS

## Amber Wave Gardens

Landscaper turned breeder uncovers innovative plants.

By Jyme Mariani



**Education:**

Self-taught plant breeder.

**Breeding accomplishments:**

Many ornamental grasses that are improved selections in color, form and function for the marketplace.

**Plants that fascinate him:**

Ornamental grasses, daylilies and hostas.

**Biggest influences:**

Larry Cripe, owner of Larry's Nursery in Walkerton, Ind. "I really respected him as a nurseryman. He grew a lot of (plant material) that other nurseries didn't."

**Advice:**

"Follow it through to the end. You made the cross for a season, but you have to follow through. Don't give up."

**For more:**

Gary Trucks, Amber Wave Gardens, [www.amberwavegardens.com](http://www.amberwavegardens.com).

Chances are that you haven't ever heard of Gary Trucks, but you probably have seen his work on ornamental grasses.

Trucks is a self-taught plant crosser who got his start as a landscaper in South Bend, Ind. When he was a landscaper, he started growing plants and making crosses as a hobby. "People pulled in and started asking where they could buy them (the grasses)," Trucks says.

Trucks decided that he would open his own small retail nursery in Benton Harbor, Mich. Amber Wave Gardens sells ornamental grasses, hostas and daylilies that Gary field grows himself. He and his wife Sandy are the only employees. Everything Amber Wave sells is weed-free and dug to order.

Amber Wave is open from late April to mid-November. He doesn't do any mail order. "I'm just one guy. I don't have the time for it," he says.

This doesn't stop out-of-state customers from driving for hours to buy grasses directly from Trucks.

"Gary's seedlings and sports are often planted in the same area where his retail customers shop and it is his customer's comments that give him indication for which plants will be 'winners,'" says Chad Walters of Walters Gardens in Zeeland, Mich.

Trucks takes people's opinions into

consideration when he is looking for the next big grass. "Talking to people is my favorite part," Trucks said.

**CROSSING FOR A WINNER.** Trucks will work as long as necessary to make sure that the plant he releases has a combination of the best qualities.

"It is not uncommon for Gary to have an upset customer because he will not sell them one of his hot new seedlings that is still in the evaluation stage," Walters said. "Gary's breeding is focused on finding exciting new characteristics that set a plant apart from the norm. Plants must not only be unique though; they must also measure up to Gary's expectations in the garden. A pretty new grass that flops with rain or wind will not make the cut at Amber Wave Gardens."

Trucks isn't active in any association or garden clubs. He prefers to work more on the plants than on promoting them. "You can fill up all season talking to clubs, not breeding," he said.

As far as ornamental grasses go, Trucks thinks that feather reed grass and blue fescue are overused. "They have so many drawbacks that I don't even grow them," he said.

Instead, he focuses on finding better cultivars that can withstand the weather and look great in the landscape. 🌿

'Princess Anastasia'





# PLANT SNAPSHOT

**NAME** Penstemon

**DESCRIPTION** Large lavender-pink trumpet flowers with white throats and bright magenta veins.

**GROWTH HABIT** Plants are vigorous and form dense clumps that increase in size each year. Grows to 24 inches tall and wide.

**LANDSCAPE USES** It works well in a border or as an accent plant because of its height.

**HARDINESS** USDA Hardiness Zones 5-9.



## Penstemon 'Sweet Joanne'

This hardy selection flowers until frost.

Since the early 1990s, horticulturists at the University of Nebraska's West Central Research and Extension Center have been crossing penstemon plants and assessing the progeny. 'Sweet Joanne,' selected by horticulture professor Dale Lindgren, was named after his wife.

'Sweet Joanne' is one of more than 25 selections of ornamental plants for which Lindgren has been responsible. His penstemon 'Husker Red' was selected as the 1996 Perennial Plant of the Year.

'Sweet Joanne,' which is part of the Blooms of Bressingham line, combines the best attributes of its genus. Plants produce large lavender-pink trumpet flowers with white throats and bright magenta veins. 'Sweet Joanne' flowers heavily and continuously from late May through June and will rebloom in fall if spent flower stems are removed.

Plants are vigorous and form dense clumps that increase in size each year. 'Sweet Joanne' does best in full sun and grows to 24 inches tall and wide. Plants, which exhibit extreme tolerance to insects and diseases, are hardy in USDA Hardiness Zones 5-9.

Its medium height makes it suitable for a border or accent plant. It offers a very long life compared to other penste-

mon selections, Lindgren says.

"There are similar varieties out there, but this one is extremely hardy," Lindgren said. "It continues to flower until frost and has shown 100 percent survival over the winter season."

### PROPAGATION

'Sweet Joanne' can only be propagated by licensed propagators. For unrooted cuttings, propagation usually takes two to three weeks, with an additional four to five weeks to produce a finished liner. Total production time for a finished liner is seven to eight weeks (usually faster in the summer).

Transplant 72-cell rooted liners into 6- or 8-inch or standard 1-gallon pots with one cell per pot. For larger pots, use two or more liners.

Use a porous, well-draining growing medium with a pH of 5.5-6.5. Plants should be grown moist and will require

more water once established. While actively growing, apply a constant liquid feed of 100-150 ppm nitrogen.

Supplemental lighting is not required when plants are finished during the natural season. It is recommended to grow the plants outdoors to minimize the amount of stem stretch. Best growing-on temperature range is 65° F-75° F during the day and 60° F-65° F at night.

Crop production time for rooted liners planted in 6-, 8-inch or 1-gallon pots outdoors in April to finished flowering plants is 10 weeks.

Finishing time from unrooted cuttings to flowering plants is 17-18 weeks. The only insect problem can be with spider mites. It doesn't have any major disease concerns. 🌱

**For more:** Blooms of Bressingham, 800-321-9573; [www.bloomsofbressingham.com](http://www.bloomsofbressingham.com).

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## What does your team look like?

I will stay with my point this month that a recovery is coming. I don't know when but you, as a leader and small business owner, need to be ready. And your success begins and ends with people. So, as you look forward with a positive belief that things can and will get better, you need to look at who is on your team – and who you need to succeed.

Years ago I was struggling with my company. We were doing OK, but we were not performing nearly as well as we could. There were small problems everywhere. I had a bunch of nice people who did great work, a bunch of nice people who did OK work and, truthfully, a bunch of nice people who didn't do very good work and needed to go. But as many leaders do, I kept poor performers around way too long. Why? Because they were nice. Because I liked them as people. Because they had been here a long time.

A lot of companies operate like this. They promote people because of their length of service rather than their performance. Long-time salespeople are made sales managers and we are surprised when they don't do well. Long-time team leaders are made into department managers and they don't do well. Family members are promoted due to their last name and not their performance. I've seen it, I've done it and you have, too! It wasn't until my board of advisers pointed out to me that the problems I had in my company were due to my inability to see the big picture, and my inability to make some tough decisions and get the poor

performers out the door, regardless of how nice they were.

I didn't see it at first; I thought I was a great leader and motivator and I would be able to fix them. It wasn't until I heard my friend Pete Luongo, an author, speaker and former CEO of a Fortune 500 company, say two things that I became armed with the confidence to do what I needed to do. The first thing was, "I can make you more than you are, but I can't make you something you aren't." And my personal favorite, "I love you, but you just can't work here anymore."

My quest to improve started when a board member advised me to write out my organizational chart the way I wanted, not the way it was then. He told me to focus on the position, not the person, and draw up my ideal or-

view mine. After you have your chart, get out three markers: one red, one yellow and one green. Look at each person on your team and if they need to work someplace else and can't be trained to improve, or moved to another position, circle them in red. If they might be able to be trained to improve or do something else in your company effectively, circle them in yellow. And if they are someone you definitely want in your future, and you want to invest in them and they are a leader, circle them in green.


Your job as a leader is to continually be looking for opportunities to improve your team. You need to see on this piece of paper how good or bad you've got it. If there is more red than any other color, don't feel bad; at least you know what you need to do. The

### I love you, but you just can't work here anymore.

ganization. He helped me write up the types of people I needed in each position. Ten years later that chart has hardly changed and I have an excellent team of people who are in their positions because they perform – not because they are nice or are family. It was amazing the change that took place with my company in terms of culture, accountability and the overall support of the company mission by removing poor performers.

This month, make sure you've got the right people in the right positions. Here's an exercise to help you. Get out your organizational chart. If you don't have one, put it down on paper as best you can. Go to my website to

exercise should show you what you need to improve upon in the coming year so that your company can succeed.

Nobody ever said running a business is easy. But I can promise you, if you get the right people in the right positions focused on the vision and mission of the endeavor – if you get a whole lot more green on your organizational chart – you'll have a very good chance to take advantage of the opportunities that are coming our way. 

#### Marty's org chart

Go to [www.martygrunder.com/org-chart](http://www.martygrunder.com/org-chart) to download a copy of Marty's own org chart.



#### MARTY GRUNDER

is a speaker, consultant and author, and also owner of Grunder Landscaping Co. in Miamisburg, Ohio. Reach him at [landscapesales@gie.net](mailto:landscapesales@gie.net) or via [www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com).



# Letter of the LAW

Tom Delaney says the industry has to stand together to fight regulations and speak its message to big government. By Chuck Bowen

**T**om Delaney, director of government affairs for PLANET, has spent more than two decades working on government types on behalf of the green industry. He's traveled the country, visiting state legislatures to try and get each to pre-empt pesticides. Now he's focused on local governments as they start taking up regulations on fertilizers.

*Lawn & Landscape* caught up with him in his Georgia office to talk about the biggest challenges facing the industry from government – and what contractors can do about them.

#### What's the biggest legislative threat the green industry faces right now?

It's probably still the comprehensive immigration reform. Immigration is going to have the biggest impact on the most number of companies.

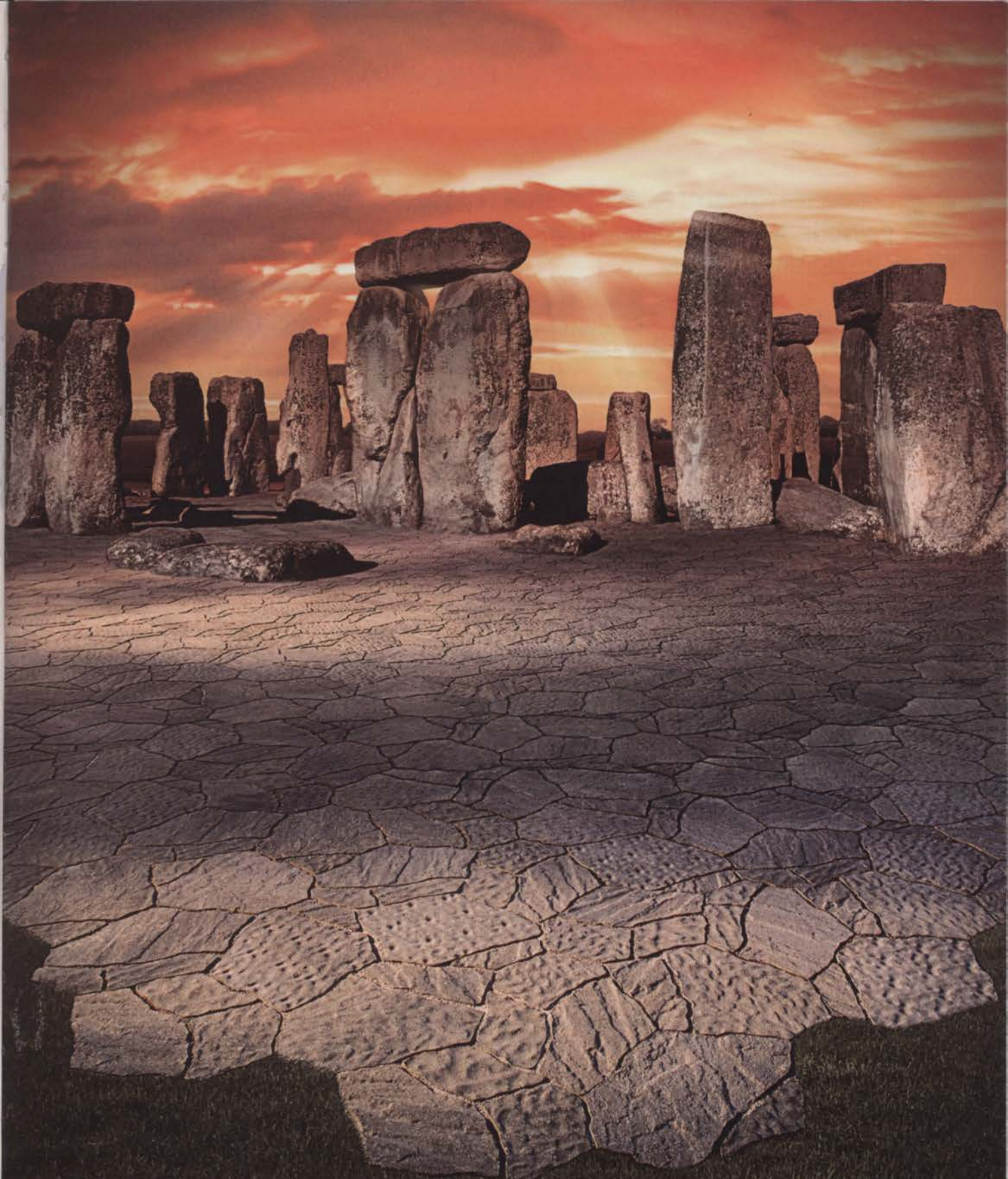
Right now the administration is trying to take more action against companies that are either intentionally paying people under the table or taking advantage of workers, but our industry follows the law and is checking W-2 forms and documentation. So much of it can be fraudulent, and there's also requirements that you can't treat people differently: you could be sued for discrimination. Companies are careful. Some of them had workers with fraudulent documentation for a long time now.

Some of the states like Arizona and Georgia have passed some laws trying to get stiffer on checking for citizenship, so that's something that will affect a majority of companies out there. And H2B is thrown into the mix.



Tom Delaney has spent decades haunting the halls of government for the green industry.





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“ Our people represent businesses, **they represent payrolls.** A lot of the anti-immigration movements are just single people.

**What can a landscape company do to stave off any major changes?**

It's going to be on the federal level. Eventually we're going to have to have support for our positions in Congress, and the only way is to have constituents having strong relationships with their representatives.

The wolf has to be at the door to get people to do things. You still have to come to Legislative Day and send letters on the issues even when there isn't the wolf at the door, so we establish close relationships so that when we're asking them to support a position, they already know who we are and what industry we're in.

Our people represent businesses, they represent payrolls. A lot of the anti-immigration movements are just single people.

**What's the industry's biggest stumbling block to getting more of a voice?**

Right now it's the economy. Everyone's worried about keeping their head above water. It's always been tough to get people to go to Washington. People are apprehensive about sitting in a congressional office.

There's also fear. They might be singled out and that must mean you have illegal workers. Some people have that particular fear. We're always trying to encourage groups to come. Even if two people come and are from different areas of the state and have different representatives, there's no reason each one couldn't go with the other to their representatives offices.

We get good representation from some particular states that have found the importance of coming and doing this on a regular basis.

**How do you think the mid-term elections are going to impact landscape contractors?**

There's not going to be a total shift of power. Democrats are still going to be in control. There will be some changes. There's some dissatisfaction. We'll see some legislators more sympathetic to small business come online. Sen. Reid (D-Nev.) is going to have challenges. There'll be some changes there. More likely, some governorships are going to be changed and state legislatures possibly on the edge of changing from one party to another. That type of thing can cause some individuals to be head of different regulatory bodies. In some states, agriculture departments are run by appointment and some of them are run by elected officials. More of them are being appointed lately.

I've seen more proposed regulations by OSHA and EPA over the last few months than I've seen in the last eight years. They're opening up more opportunity for changes. It felt like some of them have been stifled by eight years of Republican leadership. They can bring back things that couldn't get passed before. There's more federal register notices popping up of things being done.

**What are the biggest changes in policy you've seen in your tenure on the Hill?**

When we started, we had those lawn care hearings. There were a lot of negative articles about the industry. That sort of died down through the years until this last year. It all of a sudden picked up again. There was change in the legislature in New York that caused one of the pesticide bills to be passed. There's a study committee in New Hampshire looking at a possible cosmetic ban like

Canada's. RISE has been active there.

In 1989-90 when we had the hearings, there was an organic movement. Now we're back to sustainability and organic practices. There are a lot of negative articles about lawns again. They want to call it wasting resources that are used to maintain a lawn.

We've had more water issues in the past few years with droughts and quality like the Chesapeake Bay area. We're in another mode of increased environmental activism, which makes people look more at things that they didn't a few years ago.

And there's more labor. OSHA is looking at agronomics again and safety. All those things are good, but it's a question of how far you go with it. Now we're talking about global warming, and whether it's true or not or how far it goes – these are all things that end up having more influence on the tools we use and the appreciation for lawns and landscape.

**Two decades ago did you think you'd have to talk about global warming?**

No. And we thought a lot of this stuff could have been put to rest with more science. A lot of this just plain isn't exact science. It stands to reason that we're still looking at no 100 percent positives on risks or information we have on research.

**Do you think the industry will ever be able to communicate cohesively?**

It's still something to work on. It's grassroots and working with government at the state, local and federal levels. In some aspects, I thought it was getting better, then the economy slowed it down. Peoples' priorities changed on some of that. It's back to being difficult again. It's as little as sending a letter. It takes less than ten minutes to send a letter, but we haven't been able to do that.

When we get an issue that's going to cripple us, at least we'll have trained a



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lot of people to go to Washington and it won't be their first time. We're doing a little Hill training and communications training. They also need to be going to hearings and going to state capitals. Sometimes they just need to be in the audience for them to represent the industry.

RISE has worked more on the grassroots program over the last two years. We had a speakers' ambassadors program where we'd go out and speak so that we'd be getting out some of those positive messages.

**What do you consider your greatest success in your career?**

Back when we started the H2B initiative to get more workers, I was the one who suggested not counting returning workers against the cap to a congressional staffer. That ended up getting legs. There was a voice vote in the Senate, it didn't pass, but it got picked up by Sen. Mikulski (D-Md.) and others as being put in the law.

When we were able to stay under the radar, we were able to work with H2B coalitions and organize our members, and we had some good grassroots movements. We had several fly-ins to get the bill passed, two years in a row. We took what we learned about working in pesticides in coalitions and took it with H2B and now we hope to take it on to comprehensive.

**Has technology made it easier for you to do your job?**

It's definitely easier, but I also think it's caused some of the people to not put as much heart in what they're doing. You had a real commitment when you had to step forward and not just send a letter. It's like that old saying: familiarity breeds contempt. I heard people saying now, "I e-mailed the guy. I left

him a voicemail. I still can't get him to respond." Then they say, "I got on his Facebook, and that's something he touches more regularly and that's how I got him to respond." That's just the way people act now with new technology.

**How many people open up the e-mails that are sent?**

We've become blasé and it's nothing to not respond to an e-mail. It used to be you'd feel terrible if you didn't respond to a letter or a phone call. It's getting harder to get attention and action.

**What can contractors start doing today to have an impact on their government?**

They've got to stop sitting on the sidelines and contact more of their people and their legislators. We've talked about the problem, but they just have to give it a try. It's not so difficult or time consuming. What we've put on our website and I'm going to be putting in my next From the Hill message is a simple introductory e-mail. It's

sort of like a Facebook or Twitter – here I am, put me in your resources and use me when you need me, you're going to hear from me again when there is an issue, and I'm a businessman. A businessman is more important in the community than a single person. It's about time they used that to their advantage. Some are going to have to act more proud of their businesses.

**Is there one area or level of government where a business owner can have the most impact?**

There are a lot of challenges on the local level. I'm a big shot if I have a company worth so much money and employ so many people, I can be a big fish in a small pond at the local level. These kind of people become state level people. You can be more involved in local areas that

will give you the confidence that you need to go talk to somebody else. One of the reasons for Facebook and all these things is the connections. You've got to remember face-to-face connections. Some of the best connections you can make are starting out with some face-to-face people and shaking somebody's hand and looking them in the eye. We still want to use those other tools we have, but we can't be closed up with our little handheld pieces of equipment.

We need to get out to meetings and fundraisers and city council meetings. And don't tell me you can't get on the computer and send a letter. You can do it from your hand-held equipment now.

**What other issues do you see coming down the pike for landscape contractors in the next year or two?**

I think it's only going to increase these water issues. With quantity we also have quality. Phosphorus has been the key thing, the next thing is nitrogen.

We have to look at unions coming back. They seem to be flexing their muscles and their administration is in there, and they're going to affect the way we're able to do business.

I think that a tax of turfgrass and the landscape as not being good for the environment is going to continue until we have more of our people writing editorials and things. We do tracking and so does TruGreen with clipping services, we tend to see how many negative stories out there.

You don't need a bunch of science and facts and figures to write an editorial. You've got to have stories out there and we've got to start that as a group.

We can't close our eyes when one group or commodity is being attacked. We can't stand alone anymore. It's going to cost us more money, or it's going to be because we lost on turfgrass. **L**

The author is editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. Send him an e-mail at [cbowen@gie.net](mailto:cbowen@gie.net).

“And we thought a lot of this stuff could have been put to rest with more science.”



# TOP 100

## Steal these ideas

The biggest companies in the landscape industry didn't get there by chance. Hard work, business intelligence and a willingness to try new ideas all play a part in any company's success. The trick is finding good ideas to try.

This year, *Lawn & Landscape* took an alphabetical approach to its annual Top 100 list, picking out the best ideas, strategies and programs from some of the best companies in the industry: Nanak's Landscaping used cloud computing to gather all its employees' knowledge in one place. Dennis' 7 Dees diversified into retail garden centers to help smooth out cash flow and safeguard against market instability. Urban Gardener pursued LEED-certified jobs. ISS Grounds Control implemented a quality control system for its jobs.

All of these things aren't necessarily easy to implement, but they aren't hard to do, either. Your company might not start building zoos overseas and open up offices in Dubai like ValleyCrest, but that doesn't mean you can't branch out into new markets in your region – or new regions entirely.

So, check out the ideas on the following pages and see what might work for your company as you finish up 2010 and start planning for 2011. Maybe next year, you'll see yourself on this list.

We make every effort to identify and contact companies via e-mail, phone and fax to gather the data to compile the Top 100 list. If you know of a company we missed, please contact Editor Chuck Bowen at [cbowen@gie.net](mailto:cbowen@gie.net) or 330-523-5330.

By Chuck Bowen, Julie Collins, Tom Crain, Bo Gemmell and Matt LaWell

Total revenue  
for *Lawn & Landscape's*  
Top 100 companies:  
**\$4,133,153,207**



## COVER STORY

# A-G

2009 RANK	COMPANY
33	AAA Landscape
21	Acres Group
7	Ambius
15	American Civil Constructors
6	Bartlett Tree Experts
90	Benchmark Landscape
41	Cagwin & Dorward
51	Chalet
30 (t)	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.
24	Choate USA
61 (t)	Christy Webber Landscapes
65	Christy Weber Landscapes
78 (t)	Clarence Davids & Co.
22	Clintar Landscape Management
40	CoCal Landscape
45 (t)	Complete Landscaping Service
72	Cornerstone Solutions Group
68	Countryside Industries
71	D. Schumacher Landscaping
69	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting
28	Denison Landscaping
73 (t)	Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping
59	Dixie Landscape Co.
60	DLC Resources
84	Dora Landscaping Company
70	Ecoscape Solutions Group
92	Gachina Landscape Management
73 (t)	Gibbs Landscape Company
66	Girard
58	Girard Environmental Services
63	Gothic Grounds Management
12	Gothic Landscaping
53 (t)	Greenscape



### A IS FOR ACQUISITIONS

With more than 120 offices worldwide, ValleyCrest Landscape Companies has grown from \$450 million in 1999 to leaping over the \$1 billion mark in annual sales within a decade. A good share of that growth has been fueled by strategic acquisitions.

The acquisition campaign has been in place since the '60s and fully engaged since the early '90s. Some notable examples include: Omni Landscape Group in 2004, adding \$50 million in annual revenue and more than 600 employees, expanding its operations primarily in the Mid-Atlantic; Pine Ridge in 2008 with 200 employees; and Waverly Landscape Associates with sales of \$45 million serving more than 300 commercial customers in metro Boston.

A crucial aspect of acquisition is successfully integrating new employees into the company culture. "Our companies are made up of people," says founder Burt Sperber. "And we spend a lot of time trying to learn about the people in the company. We spend as much time (as possible) understanding the philosophy of the people more than anything else and ensure that they have similar values that we have." — *Tom Crain*



### B IS FOR BEST PRACTICES

The last couple of years have not been the ideal time to scour the markets to find new business

partners and advisers. Too bad the executive team at Teufel Landscape has had no other option.

Just last year, during the height of the recession, Teufel executives received a call from their banker — a partner, an adviser and a reliable source for credit for more years and decades than many employees have worked for the company. The bank was closing its lending business. Teufel needed to find a new credit source as quickly as possible.

"It could not have been a worse time to look for a banker," says Rick Christensen, landscape division manager and a veteran of almost three decades with the company. But that one drastic moment spurred Portland-based Teufel to examine and change major chunks of its business.

Executives drafted a revised and realistic budget, recommitted to employee education and training, increased communication with both employees and customers with a monthly newsletter, and even found a way for the company to fund itself. Those best practices might not seem big, but they have paid big dividends.

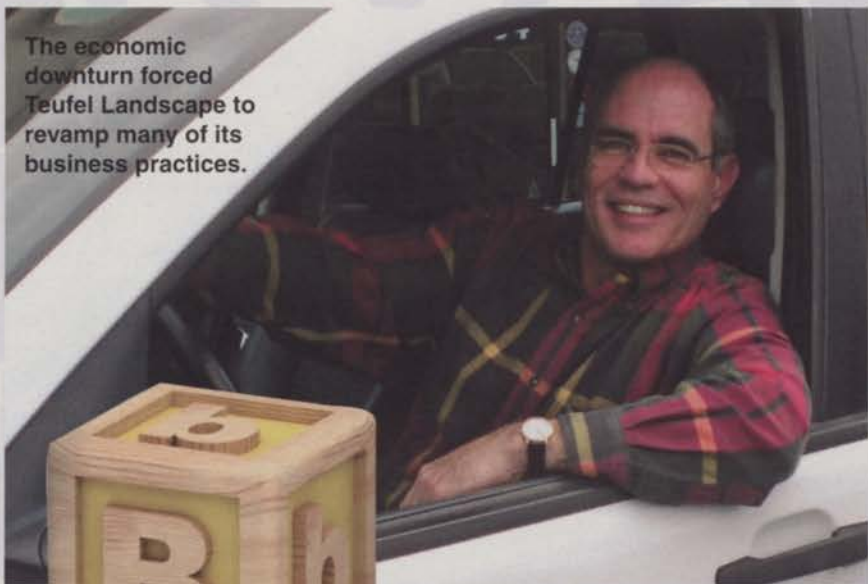
"We're now at a point where we're comfortable with our size," Christensen says. — *Matt LaWell*



### C IS FOR CLOUD COMPUTING

Nanak's Landscaping was a mess. Oh, the offices and the

The economic downturn forced Teufel Landscape to revamp many of its business practices.








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## COVER STORY

# H-O

2009 RANK	COMPANY
83	Hazeltine Nurseries
82	Heads Up Landscape Contractors
95 (t)	High Tech Landscapes
36	ISS Grounds Control
67	James River Grounds Mgmt
23	Jensen Corp.
42	L.J. Thalmann Co.
78 (t)	Lambert Landscape Co.
25	Landscape Concepts Construction
44	Landscape Concepts Management
99	Landscape Specialists
10	Lawn Doctor
26	Lipinski Outdoor Services
87	LMI Landscapes
30 (t)	Lucas Tree Expert Co.
38	Mainscape
78 (t)	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping
30 (t)	Mariani Landscape
19	Marina Landscape
56	Mariposa Landscapes
57	Massey Services
35	McDonnell Landscape
52	McFall & Berry Landscape Management
97	Meadows Farms
50	Metroplex Garden Design Landscaping
45 (t)	Mission Landscape Companies
61 (t)	Moore Landscapes
34	Nanak's Landscaping
29	Naturalawn of America
43	Nissho of California
76	Odyssey Landscaping
13	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services
91	Outside Unlimited

trucks and the folks at the top were just fine, but the organization of information on bid histories and properties was nothing short of a disaster on par with the city dump.

"Everything we knew about our marketplace was contained in people's heads, in notebooks, on Post-it Notes, and that was all over the company in little bits and pieces," says Sampuran Khalsa, CEO, president and owner of Nanak's, which has six locations in Florida. "We all felt like we were experts in the markets, but we'd forgotten 90 percent of what was going on."

The disorganization prompted Khalsa to start work on a cloud computing project that, during the last three years, has revolutionized the way the almost 20 employees in sales and marketing do business. Now, those employees put information into the system right after talking with clients, no matter where they are. They can turn on their smartphone before they even turn on the truck. All those bits and pieces of information – more than 7,000 jobs – are in the system. No more notebooks.

Installing the system took about a year, Khalsa says, and though it has not been without its challenges, it has been worth the investment.

"There's really no way," Khalsa says, "you can keep everything in your head."  
– ML



### D IS FOR DIVERSIFYING

To diversify their company, David Snodgrass, president of Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping & Garden Centers in Portland, Ore., and his partners, brothers Dean and Drew, went back to the foundation their grandparents built more than 80 years ago and bought back a group of garden centers.

The purchase helped stabilize the 200-plus employee company's balance sheet: 24 percent of its \$18.5 million in revenue last year came from residential design/build; 28 percent from commercial bid/build; 18 from landscape maintenance and 29 percent from retail.

"It bucks the economy trend," Snodgrass says of his retail division's performance this year – up when other

areas are stable or down. "That goes back to the diversification – the green industry is never hitting on all cylinders in all areas. Sometimes there are pockets of strength and pockets of weakness. Being diversified allows us to leverage the pockets of strength into the pockets of weakness." – Chuck Bowen



### E IS FOR EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Recognition, innovation and empowerment are the tenets for employee engagement at Ruppert Landscape. By engaging employees, Ruppert management attests, the trickle-down effect starts with satisfied employees who then take ultimate care of their customers.

A shining example of morale boosting lies with employee giving and volunteering. "Our employees bring their ideas directly to us from their previous involvement in church and neighborhood causes already close and personal to them," says Chris Davitt, president. "When the cause also includes active involvement versus just a money contribution, it's a good fit for us." Popular causes have included a breast cancer walk, feeding the homeless, running a Wiffle Ball fundraising tournament and participation in an Extreme Home Makeover landscaping project.

Remaining decentralized allows Ruppert employees to control their own destiny. "A good way to motivate employees is to never let them get too far from the decision-making process," says Davitt.

Sustainability practices have all been driven from the employees on up. This has led to innovative projects such as the installation of a 10,000-gallon cistern to collect and store rainwater, hosting of a sustainability summit for existing clients, installations of green roofs and recycling of waste materials on job sites. – TC



### F IS FOR FOCUS

The current recession is nothing new to James Oyler, owner of Dora Landscaping in Apopka, Fla. This recession is the fifth he and his





company survived.

Oyler's focus on selective bidding has allowed Dora Landscaping to provide quality projects and uphold the integrity of the industry. When flocks of contractors undercut or inaccurately estimate the cost of a job, Oyler stays out of the fray.

"We had these issues in other recessions," he says. "When things were bad, we scaled the business down and were selective of who we worked for. We're already very selective of who we work for, but we became more selective in the bidding process."

Oyler's basic method is to avoid jobs that already have four or five bids. He knows from experience that people who jump into the industry and drive prices down hurt those professionals who know the true cost of business as well as the industry as a whole.

"It doesn't make sense to bid on a job where there are 16 contractors," he says.

And regardless of what the future brings, Oyler says he will continue bidding selectively.

"This is my life's work," he says. "What happens in this industry we care about greatly, so we have a duty to make sure the pricing is upheld so our guys can have health insurance, uniforms, vacations – so we can treat people the way they want to be treated." – *Bo Gemmell*



#### GIS FOR GREEN

A cost-control initiative at Brickman resulted in new, green vehicles to complement the company's fleet of signature brown and tan trucks. Brickman's heavy-duty Ford work trucks are now joined by about 500 Toyota Priuses.

Account managers and branch managers used to use their personal vehicles and get reimbursed by Brickman, so switching to the Priuses helped control costs and save an estimated 280,000 gallons of fuel per year.

The switch also gave Brickman the chance to do some rebranding and  
*(continued on page 40)*



David Snodgrass, above, and his company expanded into garden centers to help diversify and smooth out rocky business cycles. The centers help bring in business to the landscape division through a design program called Planscaper, managed by Mulysa Melco, bottom.



# COVER STORY

2009 Rank	Company	Headquarters	2009 Revenue	% change from 2008	% expected for 2010	Year-round employees	Seasonal employees
1	The TruGreen Cos.	Memphis, Tenn.	\$1,311,132,213	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2	ValleyCrest Landscape Companies	Calabasas, Calif.	\$940,000,000	-5	n/a	n/a	n/a
3	The Brickman Group	Gaithersburg, Md.	\$687,000,000	1	n/a	2,270	9,550
4	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	Kent, Ohio	\$562,111,000	-5.7	n/a	6,626	291
5	Scotts LawnService	Marysville, Ohio	\$272,600,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
6	Bartlett Tree Experts	Stamford, Conn.	\$150,000,000	-9.5	5	1,300	30
7	Ambius	Buffalo Grove, Ill.	\$123,500,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
8	Weed Man	Oshawa, Ontario	\$105,000,000	0	10	1,000	3,000
9	U.S. Lawns	Orlando, Fla.	\$94,000,000	8	8	1,600	n/a
10	Lawn Doctor	Holmdel, N.J.	\$86,000,000	-7	3	40	n/a
11	Yellowstone Landscape Group	Plano, Texas	\$81,000,000	0	-5	700	1,125
12	Gothic Landscaping	Valencia, Calif.	\$68,000,000	-15	-10	1,000	n/a
13	OneSource Landscape & Golf Services	Tampa, Fla.	\$60,000,000	0	0	n/a	n/a
14	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	Miami	\$58,385,000	-8	-5	800	0
15	American Civil Constructors	Littleton, Colo.	\$57,750,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
16	Ruppert Landscape Company	Laytonville, Md.	\$56,400,000	3	8.9	350	605
17	SavATree	Bedford Hills, N.Y.	\$49,000,000	-8.2	8	430	101
18	USM	Norristown, Pa.	\$48,434,477	1	n/a	1,982	n/a
19	Marina Landscape	Anaheim, Calif.	\$48,000,000	7	5	400	0
20	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	Middleton, Wis.	\$47,034,260*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
21	Acres Group	Wauconda, Ill.	\$46,512,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
22	Clintar Landscape Management	Markham, Ontario	\$44,982,000	-2	5	175	400
23	Jensen Corp.	San Jose, Calif.	\$41,700,000	-20	9	415	0
24	Choate USA	Carrollton, Texas	\$40,000,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
25	Landscape Concepts Construction	Richmond, Ill.	\$39,500,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
26	Lipinski Outdoor Services	Marlton, N.J.	\$36,790,000	22	15	65	250
27	The Groundskeeper	Tucson, Ariz.	\$36,000,000	-6	1	700	0
28	Denison Landscaping	Ft. Washington, Md.	\$35,700,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
29	NaturaLawn of America	Frederick, Md.	\$35,500,000	1	5	250	30
30 (t)	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	Portland, Maine	\$35,000,000	33.3	n/a	400	0
30 (t)	Mariani Landscape	Lake Bluff, Ill.	\$35,000,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
30 (t)	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	Woodbine, Md.	\$35,000,000	10	10	275	150
33	AAA Landscape	Phoenix	\$34,650,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
34	Nanak's Landscaping	Longwood, Fla.	\$34,500,000	-5	5	450	200
35	McDonnell Landscape	Brookeville, Md.	\$34,410,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
36	ISS Grounds Control	Phoenix	\$33,610,000	-25	5	581	n/a
37	Sierra Landscape Co.	Palm Desert, Calif.	\$32,965,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
38	Mainscape	Fishers, Ind.	\$32,600,000	-7	25	300	120
39	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.	Plainfield, Ill.	\$32,476,000	0	5	n/a	n/a
40	CoCal Landscape	Denver	\$32,300,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
41	Cagwin & Dorward	Novato, Calif.	\$30,345,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
42	L.J. Thalmann Co.	Wilmette, Ill.	\$27,766,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
43	Nissho of California	Vista, Calif.	\$27,710,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
44	Landscape Concepts Management	Grayslake, Ill.	\$26,319,000	-15	-5	100	250
45 (t)	Complete Landscaping Service	Bowie, Md.	\$26,000,000	0	25	150	250
45 (t)	Mission Landscape Companies	Irvine, Calif.	\$26,000,000	-19	8	520	0
47	Teufel Landscape	Portland, Ore.	\$25,300,000	-28	-14	194	48
48	Sebert Landscaping	Bartlett, Ill.	\$25,000,000	3	12	50	300
49	Reybrun Landscape Contractors	Henderson, Nev.	\$24,860,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
50	Metroplex Garden Design Landscaping	Dallas	\$24,000,000	-20	-20	35	35



2009 Rank	Company	Headquarters	2009 Revenue	% change from 2008	% expected for 2010	Year-round employees	Seasonal employees
51	Chalet	Wilmette, Ill.	\$23,629,000	-15	5	300	100
52	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	McLean, Va.	\$23,400,000	6.8	0	180	120
53 (t)	The Greenery	Hilton Head, S.C.	\$23,000,000	-20	10	360	30
53 (t)	Greenscape	East Taunton, Mass.	\$23,000,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
55	Scott Byron & Co.	Lake Bluff, Ill.	\$22,970,000	-22	2	75	160
56	Mariposa Landscapes	Irwindale, Calif.	\$22,822,200*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
57	Massey Services	Orlando, Fla.	\$22,461,296	1.3	10	1,176	0
58	Girard Environmental Services	Sanford, Fla.	\$22,273,650*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
59	Dixie Landscape Co.	Miami	\$22,240,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
60	DLC Resources	Phoenix	\$22,000,000	0	n/a	340	0
61 (t)	Christy Webber Landscapes	Chicago	\$21,000,000	6.6	-12	75	180
61 (t)	Moore Landscapes	Northbrook, Ill.	\$21,000,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
63	Gothic Grounds Management	Valencia, Calif.	\$20,782,753	13.6	22	352	75
64	Shearon Environmental Design	Plymouth Meeting, Pa.	\$20,400,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
65	Christy Weber Landscapes	Chicago	\$20,192,500*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
66	Girard	Sanford, Fla.	\$19,994,920	-5.7	-10	220	100
67	James River Grounds Mgmt	Glen Allen, Va.	\$19,760,661	10	11	175	190
68	Countryside Industries	Wauconda, Ill.	\$19,100,000	-27	-20	49	179
69	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	Germantown, Wis.	\$19,000,000	-12.1	5	200	50
70	Ecoscope Solutions Group	Charlotte, N.C.	\$18,902,364*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
71	D. Schumacher Landscaping	West Bridgewater, Mass.	\$18,900,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
72	Cornerstone Solutions Group	Dade City, Fla.	\$18,600,000	-7	34.4	270	0
73 (t)	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	Kennewick, Wash.	\$18,500,000	-4.5	10	200	70
73 (t)	Gibbs Landscape Company	Smyrna, Ga.	\$18,500,000	5	2.2	300	25
73 (t)	Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping	Portland, Ore.	\$18,500,000	-12.4	16	210	40
76	Odyssey Landscaping	Stockton, Calif.	\$18,360,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
77	Urban Farmer	Thornton, Colo.	\$18,250,000	1.4	1.5	100	200
78 (t)	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	San Antonio	\$18,000,000	-30	30	350	120
78 (t)	Clarence Davids & Co.	Matteson, Ill.	\$18,000,000	-19	n/a	75	200
78 (t)	Lambert Landscape Co.	Dallas	\$18,000,000	-2.3	2.7	163	12
81	The Highridge Corp.	Issaquah, Wash.	\$17,859,461*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
82	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	Albuquerque, N.M.	\$17,500,000	-30	10	180	70
83	Hazeltine Nurseries	Venice, Fla.	\$17,020,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
84	Dora Landscaping Company	Apopka, Fla.	\$17,000,000	0	0	60	0
85	Russell Landscape Group	Dacula, Ga.	\$16,950,000	-18	6	275	75
86	Ryan Lawn & Tree	Overland Park, Kan.	\$16,740,247*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
87	LMI Landscapes	Carrollton, Texas	\$16,607,700*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
88	Villa Park Landscape	Orange, Calif.	\$16,600,000	-7	8	370	30
89	Realty Landscaping Corp.	Newtown, Pa.	\$16,200,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
90	Benchmark Landscape	Poway, Calif.	\$16,197,000	-12	-15	200	0
91	Outside Unlimited	Hampstead, Md.	\$16,000,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
92	Gachina Landscape Management	Menlo Park, Calif.	\$15,995,856*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
93	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	Denver	\$15,850,100	-9	0	148	52
94	Sun City Landscapes	Las Vegas	\$15,565,200*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
95 (t)	High Tech Landscapes	Branchburg, N.J.	\$15,000,000	n/a	0	30	300
95 (t)	Sunrise Landscape	Tampa, Fla.	\$15,000,000	0	-12	n/a	n/a
97	Meadows Farms	Chantilly, Va.	\$14,875,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
98	Ronning Landscaping	Mesa, Ariz.	\$14,630,000*	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
99	Landscape Specialists	Lake Forest, Calif.	\$14,500,000	-27.5	10	300	0
100	Western Dupage Landscaping	Naperville, Ill.	\$14,400,000	-11.5	-10	29	55

\*2009 revenue based on 2008 projections.

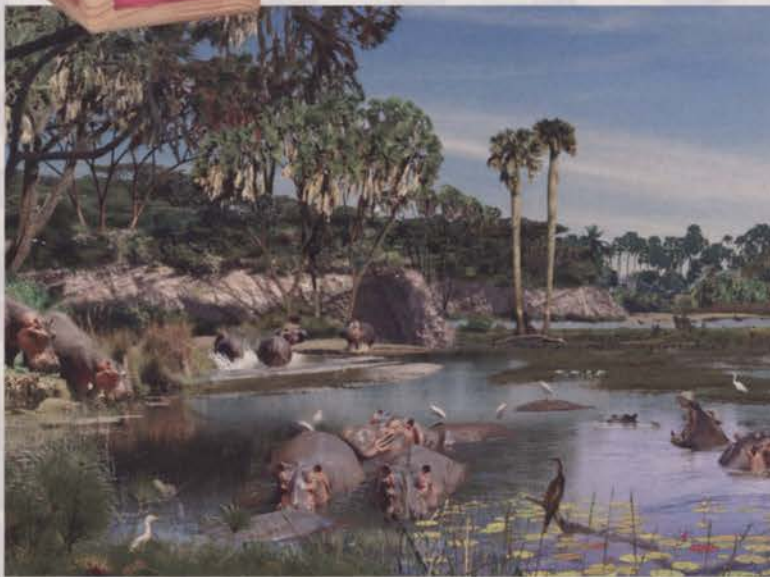


(continued from page 37)

show customers the company's stance on sustainability. The new fleet of white hybrids features a green Brickman logo, a grass skirt and the phrase "Plant Friendly. Planet Friendly." – BG



International projects like the Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort in the UAE, shown in artist's renderings below, have helped buoy ValleyCrest in the face of a sluggish U.S. economy.



### I IS FOR INTERNATIONAL EXPANSION

ValleyCrest first became an "international" company when it landed the contract to landscape the sprawling Atlantis hotel in the Bahamas around the mid-1990s. This opened up opportunities for other Caribbean projects including Blackadore Caye and Ambergris Caye, Belize, and Moon Palace Golf, Casino & Spa in the Dominican Republic.

Now, ValleyCrest is setting its sights on conquering the Eastern Hemisphere.

It set up ValleyCrest Middle East to assist its United Arab Emirates (UAE) customers, a burgeoning market for ValleyCrest, on a wide range of commercial real estate projects from destination theme parks to master-planned communities. Its projects include Al Ain Wildlife Park and Resort, Al As'adain Mosque in UAE; Al Nakheel Palace and Hawadi- King Abdullah Economic City in Saudi Arabia and the Four Seasons Hotel in Bahrain.

In collaboration with Suzhou Garden Development Co. in China, ValleyCrest built The Garden of Flowing Fragrance for the Huntington Library and Botanical Gardens, in San Marino, Calif. This year, several design assignments are in progress or completed in China.

"Internationally, this economy has opened a whole world to us," says Richard Sperber, CEO and president. "Becoming more of an international company is an exciting challenge." – TC



### J IS FOR JOB MEASURING

Fertilizer is included in the residential and commercial maintenance programs offered by Villa Park Landscape in Orange, Calif. "Our customers love it, because our jobs always look good and we do not have to hassle property managers with proposals that have to be approved every three months in order to spend money on fertilizer," owner Javier Reyes says. But when fer-



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2009 RANK	COMPANY
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89	Realty Landscaping Corp.
49	Reybrun Landscape Contractors
98	Ronning Landscaping
16	Ruppert Landscape Company
85	Russell Landscape Group
86	Ryan Lawn & Tree
17	SavATree
55	Scott Byron & Co.
5	Scotts LawnService
48	Sebert Landscaping
73 (t)	Senske Lawn & Tree Care
64	Shearon Environmental Design
37	Sierra Landscape Co.
39	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.
94	Sun City Landscapes
95 (t)	Sunrise Landscape
93	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care
47	Teufel Landscape
3	The Brickman Group
20	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin
4	The Davey Tree Expert Co.
53 (t)	The Greenery
27	The Groundskeeper
81	The Highridge Corp.
1	The TruGreen Cos.
9	U.S. Lawns
77	Urban Farmer
18	USM
2	ValleyCrest Landscape Companies
14	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.
88	Villa Park Landscape
8	Weed Man
100	Western Dupage Landscaping
11	Yellowstone Landscape Group

tilizer costs soared, Reyes started scrutinizing his company's fertilizer use. He discovered the company was over-fertilizing, its spreaders were not calibrated, and its laborers did not know how to use the spreaders effectively.

To remedy these inefficiencies, he got rid of battered spreaders and focused on maintaining properly calibrated ones. And the company started using Google Earth to measure accurate square footage for every jobsite. By separating turf from planter beds and slopes, employees can accurately measure square footage and calculate the exact amount of fertilizer needed per job site.

"Our foremen and supervisors used to eyeball turf areas and request eight 50-pound bags," Reyes says. "We realized in some cases we were applying as much as three times the amount of necessary fertilizer. Now we can continue to provide this service and it's not killing us financially." — Julie Collins



#### K IS FOR KEEPING FOCUSED

The Greenery decided to distinguish itself from its competition this year by focusing on ways to exceed customers' expectations.

Lee Edwards, CEO of the company in Hilton Head Island, S.C., says that punctuality is key. The Greenery has in-house training programs to instruct employees on calling back customers within four hours and having friendly interactions with both residential and corporate customers.

The employees also do role playing so they can project a good image and high level of professionalism.

"People see somebody who is walking around their yard grumbling and gruff looking — it just doesn't give as good a feeling as if somebody says 'good morning' or 'how are you?'" he says. Edwards says the company has always had a focus on customer service, but the new training program helps employees learn how to handle certain situations.

"It's like that old saying: 'Customer service isn't a department, it's an attitude,'" Edwards says. "If somebody needs something, you're the person who needs to take care of it." — BG



#### L IS FOR LEED

It's all about LEED for Thornton, Colo.-based Urban Farmer. The landscape construction, maintenance and reclamation company has made a name for itself vying on projects that pursue LEED certification from the U.S. Green Building Council — and it's paying off. Last year, the company increased its revenue by 1.3 percent, and it's poised for another 1.5 percent jump in 2010, thanks in no small part to the fact that "80 to 90 percent of the jobs we're doing are LEED at some level," says Sean Lynam, head of business development.

That's why a number of Urban Farmer employees — including Lynam, a vice president, an estimator and a project manager — are working on obtaining LEED certification. "We've done enough jobs that are LEED that we're in the loop on what's going on with it, but getting our LEED certifications will bring us up to speed so we can speak intelligently and know how our piece is affecting the overall project," Lynam says.

Even when the company isn't working on LEED projects, it still emphasizes sustainability. "For us, when it's LEED-certified, there's not a whole lot we do differently than any other project," Lynam says. "It's just going in and making sure we're hitting those milestones and requirements, whether it's installing an all-drip irrigation system or catchbasins for rainwater." — JC




#### M IS FOR MINIMIZING PESTICIDE USE

Ted Hofer, CEO of Spring-Green Lawn Care, says the industry has a responsibility to look at herbicide use. The six franchises that the company owns now focus on an injection system that has allowed them to decrease herbicide use by 70 to 80 percent.

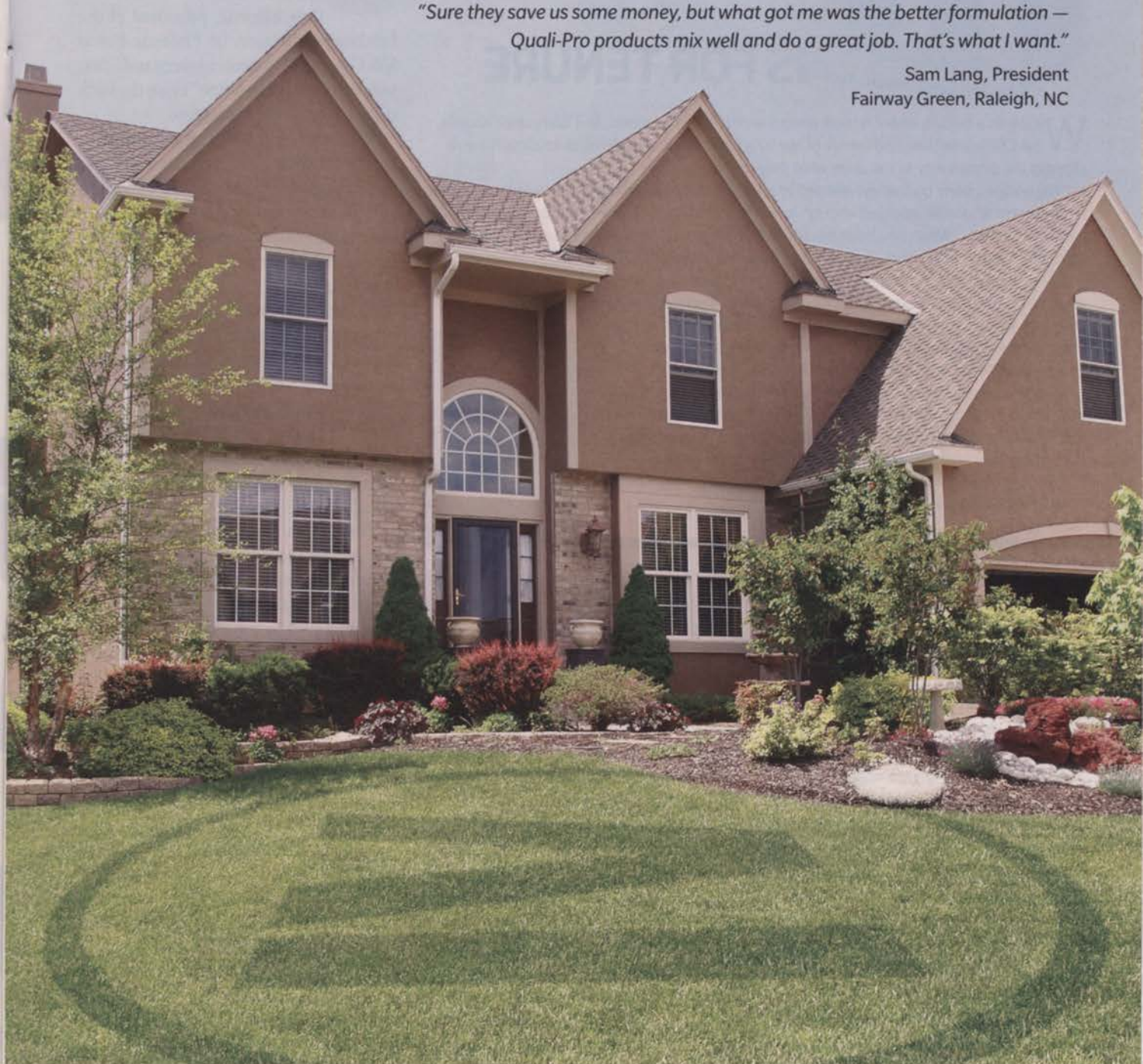
Spring-Green doesn't promote the program to customers yet because it's part of a two-year test in the six franchises. It does try to communicate a message about general environmental responsibility. The green message is everywhere, Hofer says, and Spring-Green saw it as an opportunity to take action.



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## COVER STORY

# IS FOR TENURE

We live in a culture where it feels almost wrong to not multitask. But Sampuran Khalsa, the CEO, president and owner of Nanak's Landscaping, just wants to allow his employees the opportunity to focus on what they do best.

"We realized early on that we needed to give our company the kind of environment where landscapers who were talented enough to run their own business would choose to stay with us," Khalsa says. "When you have people with that kind of initiative and talent, if you give them the support they need, they can be free to be great landscapers."

The vision has helped Nanak's spread to six locations across Florida since it was founded in 1973, and it has also allowed Khalsa to retain hundreds of his employees for long stretches of time. The average tenure for the 75 employees on the management team is more than nine years. Dozens more employees have worked for Nanak's for more than two decades.

During a generation of general movement up the corporate ladder, where jumping from one company to another is common, the stability at Nanak's has allowed the company to experience whole cycles together and react quickly when similar events occur.

"The organization can handle those things," Khalsa says, "without them becoming major crises." — ML



"The main part of the test is getting the same quality of service," Hofer says. "Our testing is showing that there isn't a rise in complaints." — BG



### N IS FOR NEW TRUCKS

Anybody can talk a good game about crew safety. But ValleyCrest takes it one step further — giving new Ford Rangers to employees for superior performance as part of its safety program. This is the eighth year the company has given away the trucks — making 42 in all.

To qualify, full-time field employees must complete one year of service with no accidents and be employed by a branch that meets or exceeds the company's threshold safety standards.

And the program seems to work: Since its introduction, overall claims have dropped 60 percent. With more than 4,200 trucks on the road each day, that's no small feat. — CB



### O IS FOR ORGANIC

Canada has some of the most restrictive measures on the use of pesticides. Because of this, Weed Man, headquartered in Oshawa, On-

tario, had to change the entire way it does business. Just ask Chris Lemcke, director of technical services.

The company learned early on that fighting the pesticide ban was futile because the tide was too strong. Instead of spending all its resources trying to reverse the tide, Weed Man hopped the crest of the wave and rode it instead.

Now, at the forefront of research and development of organic pesticides, Weed Man is not just surviving, it's thriving while many of its Canadian competitors have been sucked under.

Weed Man recognizes that south of the border, organic lawn care is a growing business segment. "More of our U.S. landscape industry professionals are looking to organic solutions to expand their market and grow their businesses as they realize that more restrictive pesticide legislation in the U.S. is inevitable," says Lemcke.

Organic pesticides can't deliver the exact same results as traditional controls, so, it also requires some re-education. Weed Man's technicians must work with customers to inform them that they should not expect a weed-free lawn in the future. — TC



### Q IS FOR QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Dale Micetic, president of the landscape division of Phoenix-based ISS Grounds Control, understands that service providers need to "close the back door" to keep clients happy.

"You can bring all the contracts in the front door, but if you can't close the back door you're just churning out relationships," Micetic says. "You're churning through money and you're losing the opportunity to gain long-term relationships."

Micetic instituted the Quality Counts program to monitor employee performance and customer satisfaction. ISS Grounds Control looks for process improvements by going out and rating levels of care in all aspects of landscaping. If they see something that can be improved, they instruct the workers and return later for a follow-up inspection.

The company also hired a firm to create e-mail surveys for clients. Micetic likes e-mail because he thinks clients are more open with their feedback than they are in face-to-face critiques.

"The goal is to build longevity in your relationships," he says. "You do that through understanding the customers."

He says companies should ask their clients two questions: "What are we doing well?" and "What makes it difficult to work with our company?" — BG



### R IS FOR RECYCLING

Mission Landscape earned its designation as the only integrated landscape firm in California with a California Integrated Waste Management Board-approved recycling facility and green-waste center.

"Recycling green waste completes the cycle of design, development and maintenance," says David DuBois, Mission's CEO. For the past 20 years, Mission turned plant debris into certified environmentally clean materials. In 2009, Mission diverted more than 12,000 tons of green from the landfill and sold more than 58,000 yards of mulch.

That not only translates to immense cost savings, but also provides tremendous environmental benefits including



the reduction of fertilizers and chemicals, erosion control, weed suppression, water conservation, enhanced plant healthcare and soil enhancement.

Mission's compost has been used successfully in wetland restoration and rebuilding slopes devastated by fire. It's now using compost as a source of renewable energy for biomass systems and bioremediation of petroleum-contaminated soils. And recycled palm fronds are being used as longer-lasting slope stabilization agents. — TC



#### S IS FOR SALES SYSTEMS

Retaining customers in a market hard-hit by recession is tricky. And making new sales in this economy? That's even harder. This year, Senske Lawn & Tree Care of Kennewick, Wash., has risen to the challenge by giving its sales team the tools they need to succeed.

"We put in a significant accountability system where goals are established, and then there's frequent coaching to make sure salespeople are meeting those goals," owner Chris Senske explains. "It's establishing sales and contact figures and cold calls and making sure we can help our salespeople get enough work coming in the pipeline so they can be successful."

The system includes weekly meetings where salespeople report their progress to managers. The company implemented the system in January. Currently, sales are about equal to last year at this time — but to Senske, that's progress. "On the West Coast, the downturn is still ramping up, so we're satisfied. We'd like to have more, of course, but we're at least matching last year's sales." — JC



#### U IS FOR UPPER MANAGEMENT

The plummeting economy hit the construction division of Andre Landscape Service, Azusa, Calif., hard. So owner Jeremy Andre decided it was time to get leaner — much leaner. "I've made management and salesperson cuts throughout the landscape maintenance, landscape construction and tree divisions," Andre says. "And I cut

upper management and pretty much all my sales staff in my construction division."

Although the company's revenue increased in 2009, Andre saw signs of the economic slowdown even then. "Then it went really bad this year," Andre says. As a result, the company's construction division now has one superintendent managing and running the field and one employee handling sales. Andre says cutting upper management allowed him to hold onto those employees in the field he needs most.

And there are still plenty of salespeople on board in the maintenance and tree divisions. "They're actively pursuing a lot of sales right now," Andre adds. Yet odds are, the company won't be adding upper management positions back in the construction division anytime soon. "I see things staying lean for a while," Andre says. — JC



#### Z IS FOR ZOOS

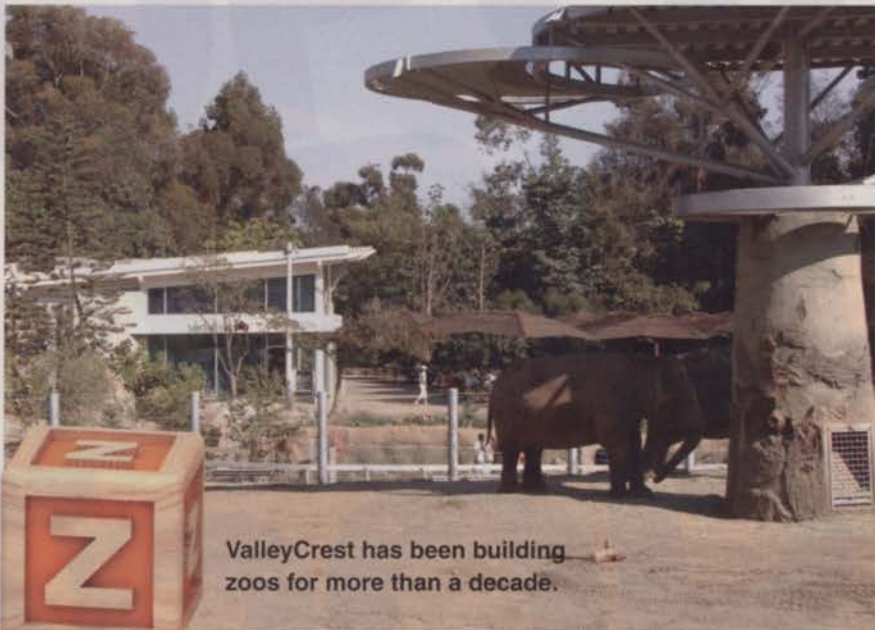
It was a landmark deal for ValleyCrest when in 1998 it landed a \$75 million contract to build Walt Disney's Animal Kingdom in Orlando, its largest contract to date. Then, it was awarded the San Diego Zoo. Fast forward a little over a decade and shift 8,000 miles to the east: ValleyCrest is now taking on another high-profile and

Read more ideas from the Top 100 companies at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)

lucrative zoo project, Al Ain Wildlife Park & Resort in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In a desert setting on the edge of a historic oasis settlement, this \$1 billion, 2,000-acre zoo is being created as a place for people to come and learn about arid land wildlife and conservation through first-hand experience, including desert safaris. It's part of a mixed-use facility including a hotel where residents can watch animals from their balconies.

One of ValleyCrest's most significant challenges on this grandiose zoo project is to take on the preservation, and often times the relocation, of up to 1,000 mature trees. It's been deemed "Operation Green Fingers" under the blessings of his Royal Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed al Nahyan, president of the UAE, himself. The procedure involves ValleyCrest's signature complex technique of creating a box made of eco-plastic lumber, this time produced in Dubai, for each tree it moves. — TC 



ValleyCrest has been building zoos for more than a decade.





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# A GREENER INDUSTRY

Sustainability isn't just buzz, it's an inherent trait of the industry. Companies that embrace this and educate clients about green practices become valuable players.

by Kristen Hampshire



**L**andscaping: the original green industry. If you need a marketing slogan to promote your company's eco-conscious ideals, steal that one.

"There are lots of industries that claim to be green, but we've been taking care of the environment for a long time," says Dean DeSantis, president, DeSantis Landscapes, Salem, Ore.

But are we communicating the benefits of a healthy, managed landscape to our customers? Probably not.

"Everyone says they are interested in green and they want the service providers they hire to be green, but in a lot of cases, customers don't know what green means," says Jim McCutcheon, president, High Grove Partners, Smyrna, Ga., and chairman of PLANET's Crystal Ball Committee, which produced a report last year called Green Industry ECONOMICS.

Explaining sustainable landscape practices to customers is the first step. "Being knowledgeable, understanding what's going on (in sustainability) and guiding our customers is going to raise our value level with customer," McCutcheon says.

One way to brush up on green industry sustainability initiatives is to review the principles outlined in the Sustainable Sites Initiative. Its goal: to create voluntary national guidelines and performance benchmarks for sustainable land design, construction and maintenance practices.

McCutcheon suggests reading the guiding principles of the initiative and culling ideas from the document that could represent service opportunities. For instance, High Grove Partners has organized a storm water management program to address stricter enforcement of municipal water quality laws. Property management clients are getting citations, and now they can turn to High Grove for help.

Before you dive into a new service, take time to assess where your company stands in the spectrum of "green." McCutcheon suggests focusing on the two buckets of sustainability: products and services; and internal operations.

"I think we can use our resources more wisely, protect our environment better and make good business decisions," McCutcheon says.

This month, *Lawn & Landscape* spoke to three firms to learn how they approach sustainability.





DeSantis

## Innovation the green way

During an annual planning meeting seven years ago, the DeSantis Landscapes team was lobbying ideas around the conference room. A facilitator asked each person at the table to describe his or her passion. "As we went around the room, it became clear that each of us had a passion for the environment and sustainability," says Dean DeSantis, president of the Salem, Ore.-based firm.

The facilitator blew his whistle. "Why aren't you doing something about this?" he asked the group.

Good question, DeSantis thought. Before long, the company hatched its EarthSense organic lawn care program and began scrutinizing its business practices. "That led us to ask the question: Where do we have the most impact on the environment as a company?" DeSantis relates. "One of the big things we found was fuel."

So five years ago, DeSantis found a biodiesel vendor, brought two 500-gallon tanks on site and began filling equipment and trucks with this cleaner fuel. The change required some adjustments – mainly changing filters more often since biodiesel works as a sort of cleansing agent and can push the "gunk" on the inside of equipment into filters. And DeSantis pays slightly more for this fuel: \$3 per gallon rather than the \$2.79 going rate for regular diesel. But customers recognize the company's eco-conscious effort.

"They call us because they're heard we're green, or they see our bumper stickers that say we have biodiesel in our trucks," DeSantis says.

Clients can choose among three levels of EarthSense services – a no-pesticides platinum program; a silver level with some spot treatments; and bronze with more chemical intervention. "People love the idea of being green and no pesticides, yet we have several clients who then come to the realization that they also don't want any weeds," DeSantis says, adding that green never promises weed-free. "So we find out where clients are comfortable and how far they want us to go with (our green program)."

Regardless of the service clients choose, they benefit from DeSantis Landscapes internal green initiatives – the use of biodiesel fuel, the bioswale on the company's property that filters storm water and the solar panels on its building that cut energy bills.

And while clients can certainly choose organic or so-

called "natural" services from other firms, DeSantis Landscapes has established a leadership position in this niche by constantly innovating and offering customers interesting alternatives. One of those is compost tea. The company has a 100-gallon brewer and can customize batches for clients' properties depending on soil needs. "Everyone can say, 'We are using less pesticides,'" DeSantis says. "Something has to be unique."

That's why DeSantis is talking to customers about rain water harvesting: ways to capture run-off and redirect this water so it can be used for irrigation. He suggests rain gardens for homeowners and talks to commercial clients about bioswales. Marketing collateral that outlines these services helps customers understand what's new in green.

A big part of selling green services is educating the customer base and community outreach. DeSantis has also found that partnering with like-minded businesses – even in different industries – can result in effective marketing campaigns. For instance, DeSantis Landscapes services a chain of burger restaurants that sell waste oil from making French fries and other menu items to biodiesel companies. "We use that waste oil to help fuel our trucks," DeSantis says.

So DeSantis and the restaurant are telling the public about their good work. And clients in the Portland market listen. "People here are very interested in sustainability and green products and services," he says, noting that about 80 percent of customer calls inquire about the Earth Sense program.

Meanwhile, DeSantis also fields inquiries from job seekers all over the country who want to work for his environmentally conscious firm. So he gets the pick of the crop.

What's next for DeSantis? The company is assembling its many sustainable "pieces" into a comprehensive plan by using a Sustainability Planning and Reporting Kit (SPARK). This tool will help the company synthesize its current efforts and set goals for the coming years.

"One of our goals is to continue being perceived as the sustainable landscape leader," he says. "And that requires innovation and constantly educating ourselves and continuing to improve." **L**

### DeSantis Landscapes

#### Dean DeSantis, president

LOCATION Salem, Ore.

ESTABLISHED 1974 2009

REVENUES \$4 million EMPLOYEES

60 CUSTOMERS 70% residential;

30% commercial SERVICES design/build, maintenance

### QUICK TIPS

**Key in on ROI.** Sell clients on green technology by illustrating how offerings like an efficient irrigation system or low-water use plants will impact a household's bottom line over time.

**Provide green options.** Tailor services to accommodate clients who want 100-percent organic and don't mind weeds, and customers who want eco-friendly service but want spot-spraying.

**Be the expert.** Volunteer to give talks to local community groups on sustainability and landscaping, and be a teacher to your customers by anticipating their questions and serving them with green knowledge.





## Systemizing sustainability

Freedom Lawns U.S.A. was founded on the concept of providing clients “freedom from harsh chemicals and freedom of time,” says president Mark Tamn, who has worked in the industry for 35 years at national firms. “I’ve seen companies come and go, and I’ve seen different ways of performing lawn care. I saw the chemical part of (the job), and I knew we needed to do something different.”

The core of that is Integrated Pest Management. “We have thorough training of employees to make sure they understand these products and when to use them,” he says.

“It’s not only what you use – it’s what you don’t use,” he adds.

Because Tamn wants technicians to take their time in the field, properly identify weed and disease problems, then choose an appropriate product, the company does not pay its workers commission. “It’s human nature to work as quickly as you can to get to the next job because, at the end of the week, the more you do the more profit there is for you,” he says of commission-based pay structures. “We want employees to spend time on the lawns so they can make sound judgment on when to use pesticides and when not to use them.”

This use-sparingly technique is what differentiates Freedom Lawns U.S.A. from competitors, Tamn says. “The majority of our clients are trying to be more green,” he says, citing demand for the services. “But they have to realize their lawn may not be that cookie-cutter, weed-free patch of grass. Most are OK with that.”

Setting reasonable customer expectations is a big part of the job. Technicians educate customers about what to expect of Freedom Lawns’ services – and that’s not a golf course look. What clients can expect is a safe lawn that is virtually weed-free. And they can also expect to spend some time maintaining that lawn to get the best results. “We don’t do mowing or irrigation, so we have to educate homeowner on the proper



Tamn

ways to do that and what is required of them,” Tamn says.

Tamn worries that other companies are making promises that aren’t realistic of green lawn care, or calling themselves “green” but not walking the talk. “That will dilute the meaning of being environmentally conscious,” he says. In fact, in many industries, this “greenwashing” is already happening. “People really have to do some due diligence.”

And as a green industry leader in providing organic services, education becomes just as important as caring for the lawn. Tamn emphasizes his company’s complete “system” for sustainability. “It starts at the top,” he says of leadership. “It includes employees and works down to the end products you are using.”

### Freedom Lawns U.S.A.

#### Mark Tamn, president

**LOCATION** New Hanover and Pender counties, N.C. **FRANCHISES** 7 locations throughout the Southeast **ESTABLISHED** 1999 **2009 REVENUES** about \$3 million **EMPLOYEES** 18 **CUSTOMERS** 90% residential; 10% commercial **SERVICES** lawn care, plant health care

So Tamn applied this philosophy to a business plan and Freedom Lawns was born – and soon after in 2001, so was a fertilizer product he developed and registered in North and South Carolina. The product is organically fortified and formulated specifically for southeast lawns. There are four different analyses for the region’s warm season grasses to suit various properties’ needs. Aside from the fertilizer, Tamn is testing a natural mole repellent that is a botanical product and a natural insect repellent.

When selecting other products for the company’s lawn care services, Tamn scrutinizes labels and practices common sense. He pores over research provided by universities and decides which products fit his business model.

### QUICK TIPS

**Study labels.** Scrutinize ingredients in the products you use and determine if their contents mesh with your green business philosophies.

**Manage client expectations.** What do your clients want from their lawns and what can you reasonably deliver with an organic program? Be sure to set realistic expectations so customers won’t be disappointed if they see a weed here and there.

**Take a whole-company approach.** Greening a business involves more than rolling out a “natural” service. Sustainability involves improving efficiency, providing a healthy work environment for people, training workers to do a “greener” job and educating clients.





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## Learning and adopting green practices

Richard Heller accidentally completed his first sustainable landscape project in 1996. It was a green roof a landscape architect asked him to build. "The architect said, 'Let's put up a stone retaining wall, add some waterproofing mat between the roof and plants, and we'll plant right here,'" Heller recalls of the (at the time) radical concept. Now, roof gardens are about 10 percent of his business.



Heller

"I knew it was something different, but once I found out how eco-friendly it was..." Heller says, adding that he wrote his college thesis on alternative technology and realized this project fell under that heading. "I got real excited about that, and we pursued it aggressively."

At the time, Greener by Design was servicing interiorscape clients, as well. But as Heller began to rewrite his business philosophies with a green slant, he eventually dropped that niche and began exclusively marketing landscape design/build services to his New York City clients.

Heller gradually stepped into sustainability, beginning with soil testing and simply putting the right plant in the right place. It's basic stuff, but no one else was really doing it in his market, he says. His suburban clients are curious about why his technicians pull soil plugs from their properties.

That's why customized marketing pieces are a key part of getting new customers to understand the Greener by Design way. "When we go to pitch a client, we tell them we are the only full-service we know of in this area of New York that are using corn gluten, testing the soil and using compost tea," he says.

None of this is new technology. "I have nothing original going on here," Heller says.

But what Heller does have is a desire to learn from other companies and apply their green practices to his own business. "Through our affiliation with the Professional Landcare Network and our networking with other companies across the country,

we are always finding out about sustainable innovations that we can take little pieces of and apply to our company," Heller says.

For example, Dean DeSantis of Salem, Oregon's DeSantis Landscapes has been brewing compost tea to amend lawns for years. Now, Heller makes his own formula and will only

sell spot weed treatment to clients if they agree to a healthy dose of the mixture each year. "We believe if you are selective and only spray where weeds are, when we come back with the compost tea, that will help restore the damage," he says.

Not every effort works. Heller tried operating his suburban landscape business with electric mowers, blowers and edgers, but he couldn't be competitive using that equipment. So he fuels up commercial mowers like everyone else, but strikes a green balance by doing all he can to make business operations efficient so he doesn't waste gas.

"Besides farming, we are the only industry that engages in a practice to sequester carbon," he points out. "A well-maintained lawn sequesters five times more carbon than ornamental grass, even with a dirty polluting lawnmower."

For Heller, operating a sustainable company means striking a balance between doing good and doing well. He finds out what green services customers are willing to pay for, and he looks for ways in his business to improve efficiencies and run a lean operation.

### QUICK TIPS

**Network and learn.** Meet with other companies in the industry and find out how different organizations are adopting green practices. Borrow and adapt ideas to suit your company.

**Hit the books.** How well do you know your plant varieties? Heller was surprised to find out how many blanks he left while taking a certification exam. "We need to understand horticulture," he says.

**Strike a balance.** Decide what you can feasibly accomplish without hindering performance. For instance, Heller's plan to use electric mowers was a "green" idea that lost him business because the competition could outbid him.

For instance, Heller can service two or three city crews from one truck. The truck drops off materials at various sites the night before those jobs, and crews show up on site the next day via public transportation. (This is only natural for the New York City natives.)

"We take the philosophy that we're saving the planet one property at a time," Heller says, emphasizing that every effort counts. As Heller and his team continue to learn, they apply more green practices to the business. "We're looking now at becoming a zero-waste organization, which is the goal of lean manufacturing," he says.

Heller emphasizes that sustainability requires a commitment to learning – and doing. "We are always trying to figure out what is the next step and how we can do things better," he says. **L**

The author is a frequent contributor to *Lawn & Landscape*.

### Greener by Design

**Richard Heller, founder**  
 LOCATION New York, N.Y.  
 ESTABLISHED 1990 2009  
 REVENUES \$843,000 EMPLOYEES  
 10 CUSTOMERS city: 40%  
 commercial, 60% residential;  
 suburban: 100% residential  
 SERVICES landscape design/  
 build, maintenance, green roofs



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## A More Sustainable Site

Collier Arbor Care is testing a sustainable landscape system and revitalizing a Portland-area industrial park in the process.

“ We basically converted all of our clients to organic fertilizers, and **nobody has requested we go back.**”

– Terrill Collier, Collier Arbor Care

By Julie Collins

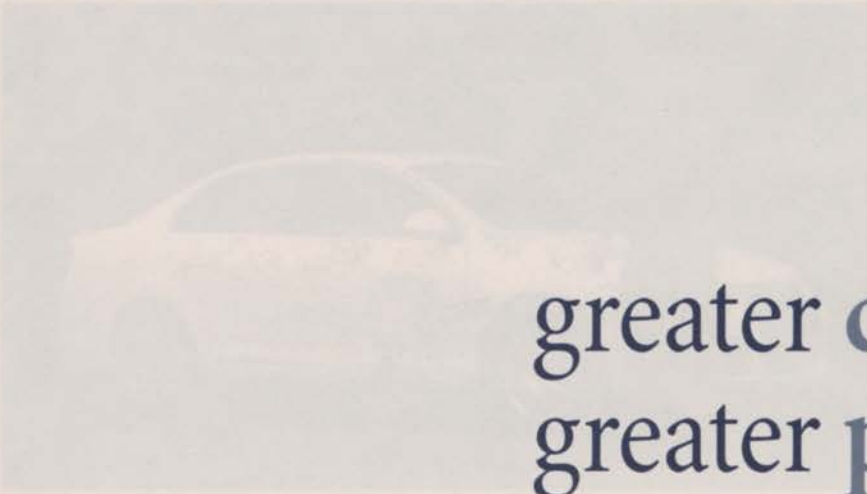
Sustainability and Integrated Pest Management have been a focus of Terrill Collier's work for more than 20 years. But now the board-certified master arborist and president of Collier Arbor Care is taking that interest to the next level, as his Oregon-based firm transforms the four-acre site around its headquarters into a model sustainable landscape as part of the Sustainable Sites Initiative (SITES) rating system pilot program.

SITES originated from a partnership between the American Society of Landscape Architects, the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center at the University of Texas at Austin and the United States Botanic Garden. The goal of the pilot program – which includes 175 projects from 34 states, and three countries – is to develop a uniform, voluntary rating system for sustainable landscapes.

“I applied because we have a sustainability initiative at our company, so this was a way to showcase our sustainable practices and to show people what we can do at an industrial park,” Collier says.

**TREE TRANSFORMATION.** For the SITES program, the company will transform the industrial park Collier owns, which is mostly bare ground and blackberries, by redesigning and augmenting a conservation corridor along a creek beside the site and installing bioswales to collect runoff water from the parking lot and roofs on the





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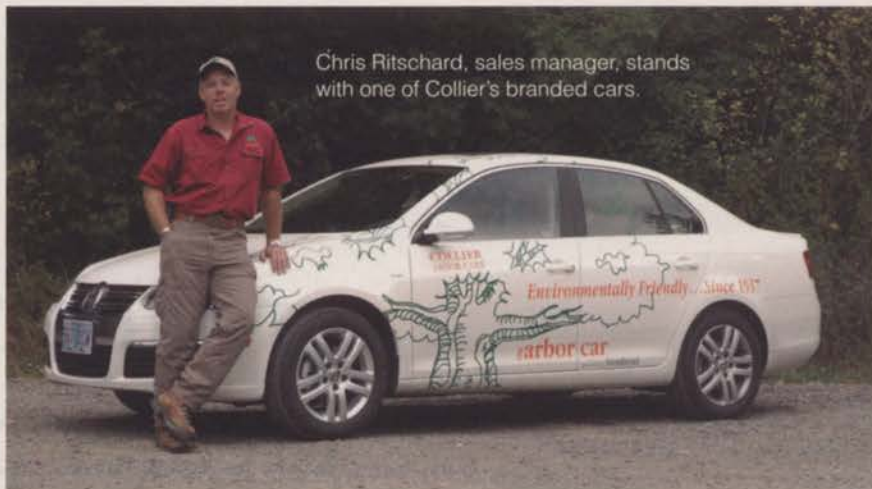
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property. "We are removing invasive plants and planting native trees on the easement and around the industrial park to restore the native ecosystem and demonstrate the use of native plants," Collier says. When the project is finished, the site will boast 40 species of trees.

At the site, the company also is using Integrated Pest Management and organic products for the management of insects and diseases and is relying on compost tea and organic fertilizers for soil health. In addition, the Collier Arbor Care is retrofitting its existing irrigation system. The new drip system will reduce water usage by about 70 percent.

Such moves are a natural extension of what the company already does for customers. Collier says the company recycles all pruning debris and green



Chris Ritschard, sales manager, stands with one of Collier's branded cars.

waste, offers Integrated Pest Management, and has switched from using synthetic fertilizers to all organic options and compost tea for customers.

"We basically converted all of our clients to organic fertilizers, and nobody

has requested we go back. We educate them about why it's good for the environment, and they all think it's a great idea," Collier says.

"I think there's a perception that to maintain a property sustainably

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is more expensive or that it may not look as good. But that isn't always the case. And I think when clients realize it's going to cost them about the same amount of money to maintain their landscape, they will opt for the sustainable option.

"We're trying to show leadership to the industry in showing how an arborist can do sustainable practices, maybe even more than what we do already as part of our day-to-day job," Collier says. To that end, during his term as chairman of the Tree Care Industry Association from 2009-2010, Collier established the association's sustainability task force.

**GOING FOR THE LEED.** The company's work doesn't end with the SITES pilot project either.

Collier's ultimate goal is to obtain

LEED certification for the industrial park, which is why he is installing solar panels at the company's facility. "We have a 15-kilowatt system that will supply electricity for our building," Collier says.

There's also a fuel tank on-site for fueling the company's biodiesel vehicle fleet, including the "arbor cars" sales-people drive, which get 40 miles per gallon, and trucks for work crews. In the office and warehouse, low-energy lights save 50 percent of the company's energy costs. And all office waste is recycled – a move that earned Collier Arbor Care recognition from the Clackamas County Business Recycling Awards Group.

Now that the SITES plan is being implemented, it is a key component of the company's sustainability initiative. The pilot program ends in June 2012, at which time SITES will use feedback

## Collier Arbor Care

### Terrill Collier, president

LOCATION Clackamas, Ore.

ESTABLISHED 1937 2009 REVENUE \$2.5 million

EMPLOYEES 22 CUSTOMERS

70% residential, 30% commercial

SERVICES tree, shrub and lawn care; pruning; plant health care; organic soil health care

from the participants to revise the final rating system.

"I think we're on the leading edge of it. This sustainability movement is not a flash in the pan. This is something that's here to stay," Collier says. "It's going to become more important over the next four or five years, and I predict that sustainable practices will become an important way for people to select a company." <sup>L</sup>

The author is a freelance writer based in Abington, Pa.





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# Carbon footprints of urban landscapes



Two case studies from North Carolina State University show the positive impact of plants.

By Thomas Ruffy, Richard Rees and Nick Hamon

Climate change is fast becoming one of the most important issues of our time. Not to dismiss the political discussions going on across the U.S., but a recent analysis of public opinion sponsored by the National Science Foundation indicates that 75 percent of the American public believes the earth's climate is warming and human activities are responsible<sup>1</sup>. The Stanford University study also found that about the same percentage of Americans think the U.S. government should be passing regulations limiting emissions of greenhouse gases that are causing the problem and moving towards energy savings and green technologies. No one can predict how fast the political process will respond but because of our dependence on the fossil fuels, oil and coal, it's fair to say that significant changes are coming.

The earth is in an inter-glacial period when cooling would be expected, yet temperatures are increasing<sup>2</sup>. Scientists estimate that with current trends, temperature increases of at least seven to 12 degrees seem likely over the next 50 to 100 years, which will increase sea levels and change weather patterns in unpredictable ways. The heightened awareness of the American public leads to many asking how they can we help control carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions and do their part to prevent climate change.

Most strategies being proposed to mitigate global climate change include increasing carbon storage in plant systems<sup>3</sup>. This is often referred to as "terrestrial carbon sequestration." If large amounts of CO<sub>2</sub> are removed from the atmosphere by

photosynthesis and then held in stable plant material or soil organic matter, it could help offset CO<sub>2</sub> generated by fossil fuel use.

The potential benefit of carbon sequestration provides an opportunity for the landscape industry and its clients to become involved in efforts to control global warming. Much of the CO<sub>2</sub> being released into the atmosphere originates from urban and suburban areas, with household fuel use and automotive travel generating about forty percent of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the U.S.<sup>4</sup> But if substantial amounts of carbon can be stored in trees and in soil beneath turfgrasses, maintained landscapes could help offset some of their CO<sub>2</sub> generation.

## Carbon Calculator

Figure out how much carbon you and your customers can help sequester at <http://www.turffiles.ncsu.edu/Default.aspx>

**WHAT IT MEANS TO YOU.** One of the challenges for university scientists and the landscape industry is to come up with accurate estimates for amounts of carbon that can be sequestered in residential areas and develop ways to optimize the storage. To help with this effort, we have been developing carbon calculators that can be used to estimate residential footprints. The calculators are part of educational programs on managed ecologies being developed by faculty at North Carolina State University (NCSU) and its private sector part-



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Using the carbon calculator, we assembled carbon balance summaries for two residential landscapes to provide examples of the factors controlling carbon footprints. The two cases are typical for suburban areas in North Carolina. Trees and turfgrasses are the two types of vegetation contributing carbon to the systems. Negative carbon factors are the release of CO<sub>2</sub> during fertilizer manufacturing and mowing, and the release of nitrous oxide associated with application of nitrogen fertilizer. Nitrous oxide is a greenhouse gas that has a heating potential 310 times greater than CO<sub>2</sub>. The summaries also include automobile use to demonstrate the potential of landscape carbon storage to offset one of the primary sources of family CO<sub>2</sub> generation. (See "Case Studies" below.)

The two examples clearly show that residential landscapes

### Case Studies

	Case #1	Case #2
Number of trees	25	8
Turfgrass area	1 acre	1/3 acre
Mower type	riding mower	push mower
Mowing frequency	26 times a year	26 times a year
Fertilizer rate per 1,000 sq. ft. per year	4 lbs. N	1 lb. N
Vehicle 1	12,000 miles per year at 25 mpg (gasoline)	
Vehicle 2	15,000 miles per year at 35 mpg (diesel)	
Carbon sequestered*		
Trees	1,823	593
Turfgrass	809	270
	2,632	863
Carbon emissions		
Mowing	230	21
Fertilizer production	215	18
Nitrous oxide from fertilizer	165	38
	-610	-77
Carbon footprint of landscape	<b>2,022</b>	<b>786</b>
Automotive emissions		
Vehicle 1	2,562	2,562
Vehicle 2	2,625	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>- 5,187</b>	<b>- 2,562</b>
Carbon offset by landscape	<b>39%</b>	<b>31%</b>

\*All accumulation and emissions numbers are in units of pounds of carbon equivalents; to convert to pounds of carbon dioxide equivalents, multiply by 3.664.

Sources:

Tree carbon storage (5) | Turfgrass soil carbon from (6) and our own surveys in North Carolina | Mowing based on data from (7; 8; Toro, direct communication) | Fertilizer CO<sub>2</sub> release (9) | Release of greenhouse gas nitrous oxide (10)



can have positive carbon footprints, and the landscapes can offset a substantial amount of the CO<sub>2</sub> generated by suburban lifestyles.

**CONCLUSIONS.** Several aspects of the summaries are of particular interest. One is that turfgrasses make a positive contribution to the carbon footprint. Recently, there has been much controversy surrounding the carbon balance of turfgrass systems. We find that turfgrass systems nearly always have neutral to positive footprints in our geographical region. Still, homeowners must be aware that excessive fertilization and greater numbers of mowings move the carbon equation towards the negative. The extension faculty at NCSU recommends that nitrogen additions stay within the 1- to 4-pound range used in our summaries.

In addition to keeping inputs at a reasonable level, the key to carbon sequestration in residential landscapes is

to maintain healthy plants. Sustained carbon accumulation by trees, turfgrasses and other horticultural plants depends on sustained growth. Up to this time, we do not have estimates of the carbon costs for the manufacturing of the chemical inputs which, of course, will have to be taken into account in the carbon balances. **L**

Rufty is a professor of environmental plant physiology at North Carolina State University; Rees is development manager, Bayer Environmental Science; and Hamon is vice president of sustainable development at Bayer Environmental Science.

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# Carbon concerns

Contractors have options to reduce the carbon footprint of their maintenance operations.

By Frank S. Rossi

**M**owing is the most fundamental of all cultural practices. Regular mowing maintains an aesthetically appealing lawn and, when done properly, enhances turf density. Enhanced turf density has the added benefit of reducing runoff of fertilizers and pesticides and in general improving the environmental benefits of lawns. Now that we live in a new climate- and carbon-sensitive world we have to be mindful of carbon emissions from our mowers.

**GRASSES.** The first step to reducing carbon emissions might be to mow less. To mow less might require a shift in the types of grasses we grow, to species that require less mowing. We have grown accustomed to certain types of grasses, mostly due to the visual appeal. Few lawns receive the intense traffic of sports turf and therefore one must question why we have grasses that grow rapidly and require such frequent mowing. Can we get the look we want with less mowing?

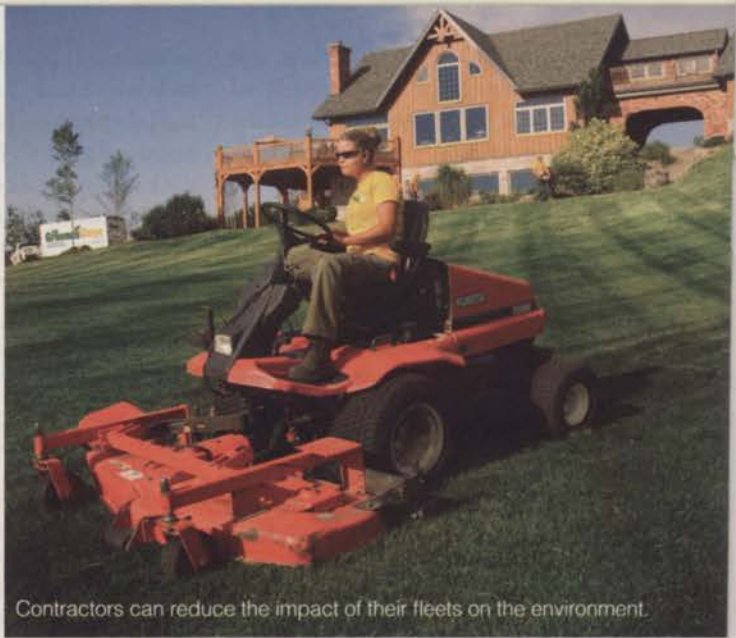
There are alternatives such as the fine leaf fescues (red, chewings, hard and sheeps) that allow for an 80 percent reduction in mowing compared to any turfgrass mixture that contains perennial ryegrass and tall fescue. Kentucky bluegrasses require about 40 percent more mowing than the fine fescues and about 20 percent less than ryegrass and tall fescue.

Consider renovating some areas in the landscape to more slower-growing turf types. Of course there are trade-offs with some slower growing species relative to thatch production and visual quality.

**MOW DIFFERENTLY.** Mowing differently would require changing the fuel source we currently use to a source that reduces carbon emissions. Looking strictly at carbon emissions and efficiency, propane-powered equipment looks like a great option.

According to the Alternative Fuel Vehicle Institute, propane is the most widely available alternative fuel, with more than 3,400 fueling stations nationwide. Propane, which can achieve 90 percent of the fuel economy of gasoline, carries an octane rating of 104 to 112, and its total hydrocarbon emissions are 87 percent lower than that of gasoline.

As more managers continue looking for fuel alternatives, diesel-powered mowers are becoming more popular. They offer greater power and durability than gasoline engines and greater fuel efficiency. Compared to gasoline, diesel fuel burns



Contractors can reduce the impact of their fleets on the environment.

more slowly and produces more power per gallon.

Diesel fuel contains much more energy than gasoline, resulting in less fuel use per hour of operation. Biodiesel fuel also can be used to power any conventional diesel engine, and it is a renewable fuel that is produced domestically.

The demand for greater fuel efficiency and lower emission levels has prompted manufacturers to offer improved engine designs. For example, incorporating electronic fuel-injection technology has enabled one manufacturer to reduce the fuel demands of one mower model by 20 percent.

The final aspect to mowing differently might include mowing pattern. Studies have shown that turning mowers consumes between 20 and 30 percent of the total fuel burned while mowing. Furthermore, there is evidence that increasing mowing speed, requiring the engine to be running for less time at full throttle,

will also reduce fuel consumption.

A Toro study found mowing lengthwise compared to mowing at a 45 degree angle tripled the mowing time. Looking closely at these data indicates the increased fuel consumption is almost entirely explained by the amount of turning.

**PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER.** A recent study from the University of California-Irvine was corrected to reveal that lawns are a positive contributor to global warming. Additional studies from Ohio State University also indicate lawns are a positive contributor to carbon levels.

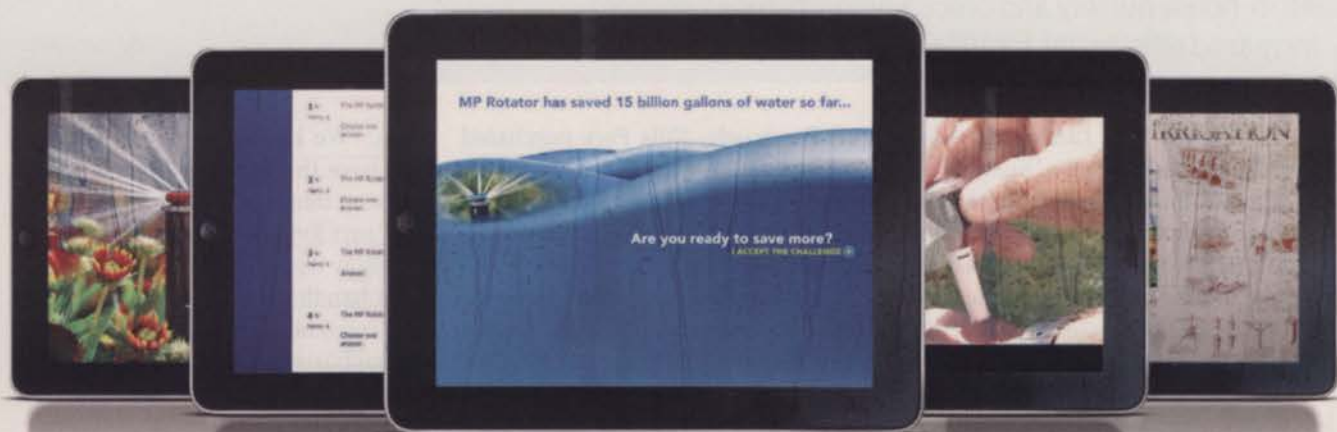
The largest single energy use and carbon issue associated with lawns is mowing. Addressing this issue proactively will not only shed a positive light on our industry, but will also lead to increased profitability in the future carbon economy. **L**

The author is a professor of horticulture at Cornell University.

**“The largest single energy use and carbon issue associated with lawns is mowing.”**



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# Cut out the MIDDLE MAN

An in-house nursery and precise property measurement increased efficiencies for Villa Park Landscape.

By Tom Crain

In 2005, Villa Park Landscape, Anaheim, Calif., started a nursery to increase efficiencies and satisfy customer demand. The ten-acre site, located in Riverside, was established to grow mostly common ornamentals that Villa Park knew customers would purchase outright.

The nursery now carries 120 varieties of ornamentals including the top six hardy sellers: *Raphiolepis Springtime*, *Variiegated Pittosporum*, *Ligustrum Texanum*, *Acacia Desert Carpet*, *Pyracanthus* and *Agapanthus*. Average orders ring up at about \$450 with purchases ranging anywhere from \$200-\$2,000.

"It was something my dad (Javier Reyes Sr., founder and president) and I always talked about doing," says Javier Reyes Jr., the company's district man-

ager. Previously, Villa Park purchased all of its plant material from a wholesale nursery. Now, it has cut out the middle man, securing the profit that its wholesaler used to make.

"After searching for a long time, we finally came across a site in the central valley that was ideal for it," he says. The property offered ample acreage (enough to incorporate parking for a fleet of trucks and growing space), was priced right and far removed from any residential areas.

Villa Park rarely has problems with stagnant inventory, selling most of what it grows. It will only stock the most common varieties of shrubs and groundcover for easy turnover to existing customers. Excess inventory is rare, but for the last two years, Villa Park hasn't added any

trees. "We know our market perfectly and have the benefit of being able to make recommendations to our customers," says Reyes Jr. "We only grow what we know we will use. We have a pretty good handle on what our existing and new customers will want. It's been great for our business because it saves us a lot of money when doing plant installs and replacements."

With nursery stock, there are no marketing costs involved. "We don't have to do any marketing to sell plants," says Reyes Jr. "Our customers do not order plant material themselves. We charge them once for the cost of the plant material and installation. They usually don't care where we get it from as long as it looks good. Also, they know our inventory is priced competitively."



Javier Reyes Sr. (left) and Javier Reyes Jr. started a nursery to increase efficiency.



2010 Breakthrough is an ongoing series of success stories from the green industry. Each month, *Lawn & Landscape* and its sister horticulture publications – *Nursery Management & Production*, *Greenhouse Management & Production* and *Garden Center* – will profile businesses that have found success by working across the industry.

To see more Breakthrough stories from the rest of the green industry, visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com/2010breakthrough](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/2010breakthrough).

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## 2010 BREAKTHROUGH

Still, there are some challenges with operating a landscape nursery. "Our biggest challenge is maintaining a consistent inventory that involves planning and planting ahead," explains Reyes Jr. "For example, you have to know how long it will take for a five-gallon shrub to reach an acceptable height and ensure that you have nice shrubs all year-round."

**EXPANDING FAMILY BUSINESS.** Villa Park Landscape is a family-owned-and-operated company providing landscape services throughout Southern California for nearly 25 years. Reyes Sr. and a business partner started the company in 1986 offering lawn maintenance and tree trimming services. He soon bought his partner out, and grew the company to current revenues of nearly \$17 million and 400 employees with additional services including irrigation and water management; fertilization; weed and pest control; seasonal color design; installation; landscape renovation and design; and specialized tree care.

Since the age of 18, Reyes Jr. has worked at the company at least part-time, earning his stripes. Now, armed with a degree in Plant Science from Cal Poly Pomona, Reyes Jr., at age 23, he has been elevated to District Manager, bringing in several innovative processes and procedures, especially in the area of sustainability.

"I learned a lot at Cal Poly about how to incorporate sustainable practices into an existing business, and upcoming trends in sustainable landscaping," says Reyes Jr. "Certainly one of the major focuses in the industry right now is water conservation where Cal Poly leads here in research and education. Villa Park is dealing with this every day, mainly because more and more of our cities in Southern California are adopting water conservation programs and imposing stiffer penalties for irrigation offenses."

In addition to its main office in Anaheim, Valley Park operates a center in Irvine and Palm Desert, the nursery in Riverside, and maintains seven service yards throughout Southern California.

Villa Park Landscape stocks the most common varieties of shrubs and groundcover for quick turnover and ease of installation.



### Villa Park Landscape

**Principals: Javier Reyes Sr. and Javier Reyes Jr.**

**LOCATION** Anaheim, Calif. **YEAR FOUNDED** 1986 **2009 REVENUE** \$17 million **EMPLOYEES** 400 **CUSTOMER BREAKDOWN** 60% residential; 40% commercial **SERVICES OFFERED** maintenance; tree trimming; irrigation and water management; fertilization; weed and pest control; seasonal color design; installation; landscape renovation and design; and specialized tree care.

Villa Park's customer base consists of more than 250 clients, including HOAs, corporate businesses, industrial buildings, retail centers and community parks. HOAs account for 75 to 80 percent of its business. "The HOA market is a great segment for us with economies of scale and a good match for our services," says Reyes Jr. In order to really grow, the company is expanding to Palm Springs and San Diego.

**OTHER EFFICIENCIES.** Supplying its own nursery stock is just one change Villa Park has made in the last few years to increase efficiencies. The company has started recycling its green waste and measuring precisely the landscapes it services to save on chemical costs.

Since Reyes Jr. introduced green waste recycling to Villa Park, it has generated significant cost savings. It is currently recycling 70 percent of its green waste and converting it into mulch. "We had to invest in a specialized machine to grind the waste and we dedicate one worker to managing the mulching and picking up recycled green waste from worksites," says Reyes Jr. The company is able to re-sell all the compost it makes directly to its customers. "It's quite an efficient process," he says. "We have

a good reserve of material to use and don't have any large stockpiles that we don't know what to do with."

A key program that Reyes Sr. introduced to the company last year was incorporating precise measurement of exact square footage for every job in order to accurately apply fertilizer and reduce waste.

"When the cost of lawn fertilizer skyrocketed a few years ago, we realized we needed to apply it more efficiently," he says. "We decided to make some changes, and this seemed like the best way to do it. Now we have in our system the square footage and amount of corresponding fertilizer needed in our computer system." That means no more guesswork involved in how much fertilizer to use.

During the past 18 months, Villa Park has had one full-time worker measure and analyze every customer's landscape via an online measuring software tool using Google Earth.

"We started using Google Earth to determine exact square footage of the turf and planting areas for each job site," says Reyes Sr. The information is then stored in the company's files. When it's time to fertilize, rather than give its foremen and supervisors whatever they ask for, it is now able to provide the exact number of bags needed based on pounds per 1,000 square feet as recommended by the manufacturer.

"Doing this we realized that on some areas we had previously been using double or even triple the amount of needed fertilizer," he says. **L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Akron, Ohio.



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# Time for Plan B

## Kutter's Grounds Maintenance adapts to life after the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

By Bo Gemmell

Like many in the industry, Ron Kutter starts his morning checking the weather. But Kutter, president of Kutter's Grounds Maintenance in Gulf Shores, Ala., has more to worry about than rain or snow: He has oil on his mind.

The oil spill that began in April about 100 miles from Kutter's market area has since devastated the coast with tarballs and patched the gulf with oil sheens.

"We had the pristine white beaches, but now when the water breaks on shore, it looks like coffee stains," he says.

**"I never thought I'd have to think about cleaning up oil, but it's a fact of life here."**

— Ron Kutter, Kutter's Grounds Maintenance

our country's ever seen, and we got hurricane season," he says. The 2010 hurricane season, which runs from June through November, is predicted to be rough and could threaten the already fragile region.

**ADDING A SERVICE.** Kutter's Grounds Maintenance provides condos, hotels, corporate businesses and residences with full

service lawn care, but the oil spill redefined what "full service" means for the company. Kutter's entire workforce took the 40-hour HAZWOPER (Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response Standard) class and is now certified to properly handle oil. The course taught him and his employees about "Louisiana Sweet Crude" – the name of the type of oil polluting the Gulf – as well as protective guidelines for handling all sorts of hazardous materials.

In addition to safe handling, Kutter and his crew also learned how to properly dispose of the oil.

"You're not just going to throw it in a landfill," he says. "It's coming onto our shore and polluting our environment, but we don't want to pollute another environment." He says the crew has to store and transport the oil in hazardous material bags.

"I never thought that next to my city services license and landscape license and chemical applicator's license that I'd have to have a hazardous materials license to do business," he says. "That's just a fact of life down here on the Alabama Gulf Coast."

**PLAN B.** The series of beatings his region has received in recent years – starting with Hurricane Katrina, followed by Hurricane Ida and then the oil disaster – has taught Kutter to "always have a Plan B."

Kutter's business was strictly lawn care prior to the storms. He didn't want to get into installation, but the devastation the storms brought by ripping through landscapes made it a necessity for Kutter to change his direction and add installation to his services.

As of now, Kutter says he just wants to keep providing services for his current clients. The ocean brings oil onto the beaches, and guests at the hotels and condos Kutter serves track it onto the properties. The amount of labor his crews will have to invest in safely disposing oil depends on the amount of foot traffic going through the properties, but Kutter expects that the company will probably have to invest a few man hours at each property doing retention or cleanup.

"I just want to provide my customers another service," he says. "I don't know what that service is going to entail, but I'm ready for it."

Competition is the last thing on Kutter's mind. Kutter said in June that the effects of the spill were spread from Louisiana to Florida, so there's plenty of work on more than 300 miles of coastline to go around.

"You got an oil disaster that's the biggest our country's ever seen, and then you got hurricane season," he says. "I never thought I'd have to think about cleaning up oil, but it's a fact of life here." **L**

The author is an intern at *Lawn & Landscape*. E-mail him at [bgemmell@gje.net](mailto:bgemmell@gje.net).

See photos of Kutter's oil clean-up crew in action at [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com).





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## HOLIDAY LIGHTING

Preferred Landscape and Lighting uses holiday lighting services to bolster its off-season business.

# Lighting up Profits

By Lindsey Getz

A holiday décor business can help keep cash flow steady – but it requires dedication and focus.

**K**eeping cash flow steady in the off season is a common challenge many contractors face. As a result, many have tried to launch a holiday décor segment to supplement their income. But without the right implementation and management of this seasonal service, the attempt can fall short. Like any other segment of the business, a holiday décor service requires dedication and has to be cared for more than just a “job on the side.”

Mark Metzger, owner of Preferred Landscape and Lighting, has found that the extra effort pays off. The business’ annual revenue is \$5 million, with holiday décor accounting for \$1 million of that total. His holiday décor business – Preferred Holiday Décor – serves mostly commercial clientele in San Antonio and the surrounding areas.

Holiday décor tends to mean a lot of repeat business, so making initial customer contact is key. “A great way to pick up new customers is to leverage your existing relationships,” says Metzger, who started the segment of his business doing 95 percent residential work, but has now flip-flopped to 95 percent commercial. “Approach your landscape customers with your new holiday décor services. From there, word of mouth spreads fast.” Metzger adds that it also works the other way around – once you start picking up new holiday décor clients, you can also market your landscape services to them. “Starting with the holiday décor relationship, we’ve had the opportunity to provide landscape services to new residential and commercial customers.”

**15%**  
of companies  
offer holiday  
lighting services

Source: 2009 SCL Report

When first starting out in the holiday décor business, it’s important to get to know your product. It makes selling easier, says Metzger. Then, one of the first decisions to make is whether to lease or sell the product. “Before LED, exterior lights with a one- to two-year life span were predominantly used,” Metzger says. “Some decorators may choose to take down the lights, refurbish and reuse. This





takes labor during the year and needs to be factored into your price. Others would save on the labor by cutting lights out of the trees and selling new ones each year. But the life span of LED is six to seven years and they are much more expensive than incandescent, so decorators will not be able to sacrifice these lights. However, the good thing is they won't have to replace them, and if you lease them to your customers, you'll make money off the same lights for several years."

Once a job is sold, it needs to be scheduled. "The time for customers to enjoy their display is only about four to eight weeks, so they are not tolerant of delays," says Metzger. "Good project management and communication is essential. Weather can cause problems since you can't work with electricity in the rain, so it is important to build some cushion into your scheduling."

To ensure the job goes smoothly, Metzger also recommends doing your homework before you start. "Know where the power is coming from and make sure there is enough to run the display. Nothing is worse than installing lights that draw more power than is available."

Safety is another consideration as Metzger says with holiday décor installation the crews will often be working high above the ground. "Make sure your crew has safe ladders and harnesses if necessary," he says.

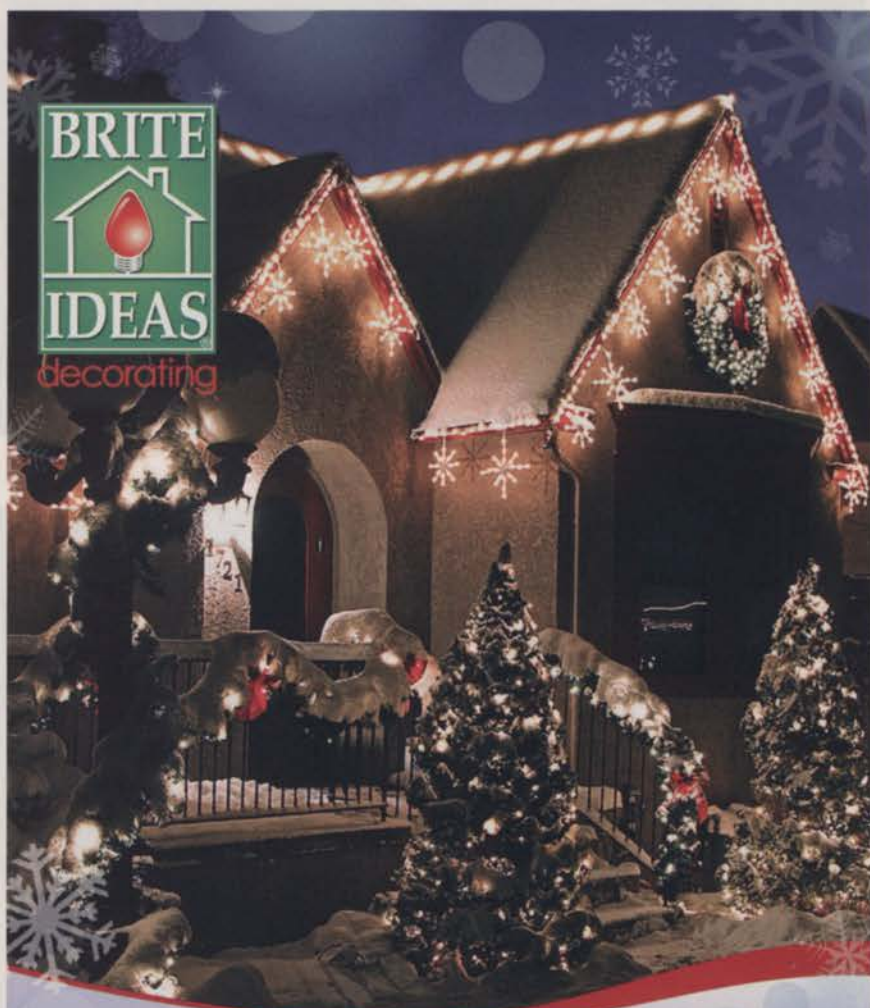
Learning how to price the labor is also important. "The rate you charge for your core services will be different for holiday décor installation," says Metzger. "When estimating, don't forget the labor on the take down in January. We do time studies to confirm how long it takes to wrap a tree trunk with lights or install garland on an archway. We then put the information into a bid template that has labor and product components."

For Metzger, the dedication to this segment of his business has paid off and compared to the company's other services, the profit margins are actually much healthier. "The economic situation in 2009 took its toll on our other lines of business," he says. "Commercial

**Preferred Landscape and Lighting, Preferred Holiday Décor**

**Principals: Mark Metzger, David Dunne, Darryl Cook, Scott Wiatrek**

**LOCATION** San Antonio **ESTABLISHED** 1995 **2009 REVENUE** \$5 million, including \$1 million in holiday lighting **EMPLOYEES** 70 **CUSTOMERS** Total: 50% residential, 50% commercial; holiday lighting alone: 95% commercial, 5% residential **SERVICES** design/build, landscape maintenance, landscape lighting, irrigation, arborist services, holiday décor



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## HOLIDAY LIGHTING



One of Metzger's projects is the Riverwalk in San Antonio.

and residential install slowed, but our holiday décor installation business actually grew 50 percent. Our commercial clients rely on sales during the holiday season to make or break their year. Even with the economic downturn, they had to invest in the holiday season to put their customers in the buying mood."

Metzger says the revenue generated from this business segment helps pay for fixed expenses. "In the early years of our business, our landscape maintenance trucks had downtime during the holiday décor season so putting them to full use during the slow times has helped spread out costs over all 12 months," he says. "An added benefit was that since we kept our assets working, we were able to price our landscape services more competitively. Getting into the holiday décor business was a win-win for us." **L**

The author is a frequent contributor to *Lawn & Landscape*.

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# STAYING FOCUSED

Use focal points in your hardscape designs to earn new clients. By Phil Sarros

**A**t Sarros Landscaping, we approach our designs by first asking our clients how they want to use their outdoor space. However, we always remember the reason most people seek us out is also to learn our opinions and ideas. This is where we have an opportunity to introduce our potential client to higher level of creativity and professionalism by using focal points.

Creating focal points in a yard can set you apart from the competition. They allow you to demonstrate your creativity as a designer and add a unique component to a design that projects a much higher value. The extra time spent on a well thought out focal point can mean the difference of earning a new client and being seen as just another contractor. Ideas for great focal points are all around if we simply open our eyes to look. Books, magazines and neighboring properties all offer elements from which a creative designer can draw upon.

Here are **five simple ideas** for creating focal points for your clients. We use these same elements in our designs and they continue to stand out against competitive ideas as unique and thought provoking. We also make sure to show our appreciation by thanking our clients with a small but thoughtful gift, as you'll learn below.

## FOCAL POINT #1

### A PASSAGEWAY TO SERENITY

Doors represent a portal from one place to another. Usually, we use them to enter a home or a specific room. However, there exists a huge opportunity to use a doorway in a back yard to take the homeowner from their busy life and lead them into the tranquil peace of their garden or patio. This door can be an old salvaged door dressed with an arbor and anchored by climbing roses or formal topiaries. Consider getting to know a great carpenter who can help build trellises, lattice or arbors to enhance this look even more. Don't forget to include some unique hand-hammered hinges and a rustic handle. These small details will communicate excellence and professionalism to your client.



**Gift idea:** When you finish the project, give the client a seasonal wreath to dress the door as a way of saying thank you for your business.

## FOCAL POINT #2

### THE SOUND OF RUNNING WATER

Water features tend to spark fear in some people because of their high costs and high level of maintenance. We've found the easiest way to sidestep this is to simply create pondless features using pots and just a few well placed rocks or boulders. Using pots in a variety of sizes, shapes and colors adds a unique focal point without breaking budgets. The use of mixed height grasses creates a gentle backdrop to the sound of running water. Now I'm certainly not a fan of gaudy lawn art but a well-placed ceramic frog can compliment this type of feature well.



**Gift idea:** Tell your client thank you by offering a set of wind chimes upon completion of the project. Every time the wind blows, they'll think of you.




## DESIGN IDEAS

### FOCAL POINT #3

## 100-YEAR-OLD BRICK PATH

Unless your client is lucky enough to have an authentic 100-year-old brick path, you'll have to help create that same look for them using today's products. It's easier than you think and you'll find aged and weathered bricks being manufactured today. Getting the rustic look of hand-laid brick paths has more to do with the construction technique than the actual brick itself. Slightly off-center spacing, little base prep and only dollops of mortar here and there are the key. Most home and garden centers sell moss kits that can be used to fill in between the cracks. The moss and other spreading grasses will help create an antique look. Line the pathway with a variety of perennials and soft grasses. Place taller flowering shrubs that won't hedge toward the back. Consider adding a small fountain or bird bath as a centerpiece or destination at the end of the pathway.


 **Gift idea:** Let your clients know how much you appreciate their business by engraving one or more of the bricks with their name or children's names. A local engraver usually charges anywhere from \$15 to \$25 per brick. A small price for repeat business and a referral.



### FOCAL POINT #4

## FIRE PIT

The classic fire pit invites families and friends to join together for great conversation. While fire pits can exist virtually anywhere, we most often design them as stand-alone features in parts of the yard that would be considered most "natural." – a clearing in a wooded area or a bump-out to a nearby patio serve as ideal locations. Many of our designs are built on a circular patio measuring 16 feet in diameter. We have found this size ideal to comfortably hold up to eight Adirondack-style chairs. The fire pit itself has an outside diameter of 5 feet and an inside diameter of 3 feet. Any hardscape surface is acceptable, but caution clients against simply building a fire pit in a mulched area or an area with surrounding grass. Not only is a hardscape surface a very nice complement to the pit itself, it also serves as a layer of protection from flying embers.

 **Gift idea:** The best way to thank your new clients for their business is with a marshmallow roasting kit available at home cooking stores like Williams-Sonoma.

DAVID HYDE

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#### FOCAL POINT #5

### LIGHTING

I'm cheating a bit here because lighting is not, in and of itself, a focal point. However, it is important enough to hold its own position because lighting can turn virtually anything into a focal point. Lighting takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. Lighting is low cost and carries one of the highest profit margins of any of our services. For these reasons, make sure to include a lighting option in your proposal to further enhance your focal point feature. Keep in mind that most entertaining is done in the evening when the sun is down. This creates a perfect opportunity to communicate the value of exterior landscape lighting to your client.

Using focal points will not only earn you new business, it will earn you the right kind of business. You'll establish credibility and you'll gain a reputation for creativity without breaking budgets. Start building a whole new portfolio using focal points and you'll quickly see the value and benefit in your client feedback and in your bottom line. **L**

*The author is president of Sarros Landscaping, Cumming, Ga.*

 **Gift idea:** Want to say thank you to your clients for selecting you to install their new lighting package? Give them a set of green and red lens covers to use at Christmas. Clients just set them on top of the light and cast festive holiday colors onto the house.

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# Talking trimmers

By Lindsey Getz

These hand-helds are vital to any maintenance operation.

Quality is the top factor landscapers look for when purchasing new trimmers. But with the tough economy still looming, price has become a rising factor as well. "It has always been quality first, pricing second when purchasing equipment," says Peter Schwalm, owner of Professional Landscape Services in New Hope, Pa., a company with about 24 employees. "That's how I sell my business, too – quality always comes first. Of course with the way the economy has been, we do watch our nickels and pennies these days, and price has become a closer second than ever before."

Still, most contractors say that a good quality trimmer is worth the extra cost. "My philosophy has always been to buy top quality equipment," says Tim Johnson, owner of Tim Johnson Landscaping, a nine-man company that operates March to November in Highland Park, Ill. "When it comes to any equipment, I'm less price-oriented because the idea is to provide the best equipment for my crews. When you have good quality equipment it makes the job easier – and that makes it worth the expense," he adds.

Johnson, who currently has two trimmers for his small business, adds that top-quality equipment also breaks down less often. "When you have break downs it slows the workflow and becomes expensive to pay for parts and repairs," he says. "My goal is to have fewer breakdowns. And I always expect good quality equipment to last longer, which is another reason I'll put the extra money in." Marc Hyde, owner of

Gardeners Choice Concepts in Fayetteville, Tenn., says that trimmers are one of the absolute must-have tools of the business, which is why he looks for quality equipment. He keeps about eight to 10 operable trimmers on hand at all times. "I buy two new ones every year because we use them almost every single day and they end up getting a lot of wear and tear."

Besides performance and quality, Pete Lucadano, president and CEO of Luke Brothers Landscape Services, a \$13-million business in Holiday, Fla., also seeks trimmers that are durable, easy to find parts for and comfortable to use. "These are all major factors we consider when purchasing trimmers of all sizes," he says. "We use a variety of types of trimmers, therefore a single-line manufacturer that can provide all relevant use products is an advantageous line to purchase."

**SAFETY FIRST.** When it comes to using trimmers, the professionals all say that safety is the absolute main focus of training. "Due to the fact that the use of trimmers is one of the higher rates of injury functions in the green industry, we utilize several levels of training to ensure safety and effective usage," says Lucadano. "Our company's safety policy is the first method of curricular train-



Hand-held trimmers are the lifeblood of any solid maintenance operation.





Landscape companies,  
on average, spend

**\$884**

a year on trimmers and edgers.

SOURCE: 2009 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

Operation and safety training are key for any crew sent out with trimmers.

ing used, followed by hours of field training by experienced supervisors and veteran crew members.”

Johnson, whose clientele is 95 percent residential, agrees that hands-on training is most effective when teaching crew members about trimmers. “Working alongside the crew so they can watch me and I can watch what they’re doing has worked best,” he says. “I also always emphasize wearing ear and eye protection.”

Schwalm also says he takes employees out himself to assess their ability and emphasize key safety points in the field. “We are very serious about safety and have a good record of no accidents,” he says. “In fact we even had our insurance company come out to see what we were doing, and serve as a model for others, because they were impressed that we had no claims. Most importantly, I can’t stress enough how crucial it is to wear safety goggles when working with this type of equipment.”

In addition to hands-on training, led by the company’s account manager and crew leader, Paul LaMontaine, district manager of Austin Outdoor, an all-commercial business with 366 employees in Bun-



nell, Fla., says that trimmer safety is also discussed regularly at company meetings. “We train employees in our bimonthly tailgate safety meetings. In the meetings, we use the manufacturer’s operational manual as a guide for the training.”

Of course ability and skill are also important in training, but Schwalm says that with the use of trimmers

you either have what it takes, or you don’t. “You can definitely teach some things, and the crew can improve on what they’re doing, but you have to have some level of coordination to begin with or you’re not going to be successful. Besides safety, we also talk to crews about going around trees,” he says.

Hyde helps crews focus on how to trim bushes. After all, trimmers are a vital part of maintenance – a segment that drives much of the industry. “A popular expression in our company is: ‘A well-maintained property is an easily maintained property,’” adds Lucadano. “Consequently, we approach maintenance as the lead function as our clients look for us to both meet and exceed their expectations. In lieu of contractual specifications, we attempt to assure that intermittent needs are accommodated so as to provide consistent curb appeal on the property.

Lucadano says that maintenance has proven to be the “life blood” of many landscape contractors through this recession, and tools like trimmers are essential to that role. “In my opinion, maintenance has finally been recognized as the most important and dependable function related to the success of a healthy green industry company,” Lucadano says. “How well a company handles its maintenance responsibilities, while obtaining profitability, is a true test as to the long-term health of the organization.” **L**

The author is a frequent contributor to *Lawn & Landscape*.



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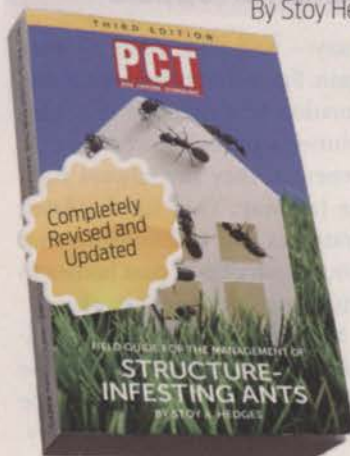


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### What are we going to do?

**"We have had some luck, being that we have had work, but only one job at a time. We're down to one crew in landscape and one in maintenance. It is really slow and we see the entire economy crashing around us. There is literally no work in Sacramento. Other friends of mine tell me that they cannot buy a job. How is the rest of the country doing?"**

To get a true perspective on this contractor's concerns, I'd also ask, "Where is the country heading?" The first question is fairly easy to answer. It's the second one that's a crap shoot. There are more mixed signals in today's economy than in BP CEO Tony Hayward's testimony before the U.S. Congress.

Here's a sampling from the *Wall Street Journal*: capital-equipment orders were up 2.1 percent in May, and 18.4 percent above its year-earlier level. Engine-maker Cummins, Inc., plans to boost capital spending to \$400 million this year, up nearly 30 percent from 2009. The G-20 meeting in Toronto saw little consensus from the world's economic leaders – the U.S. fears moving too fast and plunging into another global recession, and European nations, have cautioned that moving too slowly could produce unsustainable debt loads, higher interest rates and even defaults.

So where are we, and where are we headed? In my consultations with more than 60 contractors in the last five months, the word "recovery" is not what comes to mind. Rather, the word "stagnation" seems to be the phrase of the day. Yes, quantifiably, sales are

up a little and people are feeling a bit less anxious. But less than one percent of the contractors that I've visited are planning on "robust" growth (more than 10 percent) from 2009. Still fewer feel overly optimistic about the future or are planning for robust growth any time soon. It's less anxiety, not more optimism, as contractors seem to be more comfortable with the "new normal" in which we seem to be mired.

While the current markets are characterized by flatness, future ones appear extremely timid. In many market sectors there is some economic growth, but it has not trickled down to the green industry with any significant momentum. If the current economic

Yes, it will return. However, it won't be soon, and be prepared for some very rough times in the future. The uncertainty that plagues our economy today makes it more likely that we will experience a double-dip recession than that we will see a robust recovery any time soon. Do not allow the current increase in economic activity to lull you into thinking that the recovery is under way. If this is an economic "recovery," it is the most anemic one that we have seen in recent history.

So, what do you do about it? Be proactive at all levels. Remember the basics in your business: set measurable and time-based goals, know your numbers, maximize your production, market like

### Either we grow or we crash.

The current situation is not an option.

malaise continues, it will take over a decade to recapture the jobs that have been lost in the last thirty months. That is simply unacceptable. Just as a bicyclist needs some momentum to keep balanced and upright, so too does the economy need a minimal amount of inertia to keep it moving forward and to keep it from collapsing. Either we grow or we crash. The current situation is not an option.

The question seems to be, will we recover? Will we get back to a place where the future optimism that once characterized this country for generations is warranted? Will we have a return of the robust optimism that has always been at the core of the American Dream?

crazy – and then do it all over again. Since the current economic situation is a systemic one, past solutions probably won't work. Generals, they say, always fight the last war. They use outdated strategies and technologies that brought success in past battles to future ones. It doesn't work.

My contractor friend in Sacramento and contractors all over the U.S. are experiencing the same thing – a lackluster economy. Entrepreneurs by definition take things into their own hands and make things happen. It's time that we do that at a governmental level as well and get back to the optimism for our future that has made us great and made us who we are as Americans. **L**



**JIM HUSTON**

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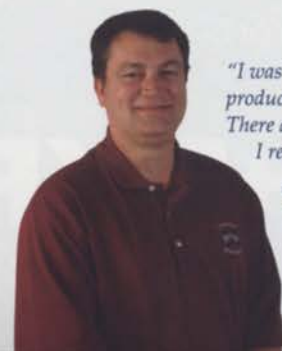
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### Consider adding hardscape services



Pat McCrindle

Adding **Hardscape North America** to the industry mix at this year's **GIE+EXPO** provides contractors with a unique learning opportunity. The **Hardscape North America** educational sessions will include approximately 124 hours of hardscape-specific sessions (See [www.HardscapeNA.com](http://www.HardscapeNA.com) for details about the full program), but you can explore how hardscaping services can add to your profits by attending Thursday and Friday morning workshops sponsored by the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute. **As a bonus for signing up for Session A or C**, you will receive **FREE** access to a series of eight live demos on Thursday and Friday afternoon. Demo topics will cover compaction for paver installation, outdoor living enhancements, basic paver installation, water features, stone veneer applications, permeable pavement construction, raised patio contraction and segmental pavement maintenance.

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# Workshop Schedule

Register on page 7. Sessions are \$50 each.



## Thursday, October 28

### Session A 10:00-11:30 a.m.

(Will be repeated  
in Session C)

### "Adding Hardscape Installation to Your Company's Success"

Pat McCrindle, MW Hardscapes, Inc.

Learn about the equipment, training and capital investment required, the best structure for your work crews and how to promote your new services. Pat McCrindle is one of the top trainers in the U.S. and will share knowledge accumulated over many years of hands-on experience as a contractor and business owner.

### Session B 3:00-5:00 p.m.



Ed Laflamme

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## Friday, October 29

### Session C 10:00-11:30 a.m.

(A repeat of Session A)

### "Adding Hardscape Installation to Your Company's Success"

Pat McCrindle, MW Hardscapes, Inc.

Learn about the equipment, training and capital investment required, the best structure for your work crews and how to promote your new services. Pat McCrindle is one of the top trainers in the U.S. and will share knowledge accumulated over many years of hands-on experience as a contractor and business owner.

### Session D 3:00-5:00 p.m.



Kevin Kehoe

### "Growing Revenues in a Crowded/Price-Driven Market"

Kevin Kehoe, Three Point Group, Inc.

The greatest challenge facing the majority of contractors is growing revenues in a price-driven market while achieving net profit goals. This is no mean feat and requires the consideration of three key strategies: (1) organic growth driven by a sales process and staff, (2) growth by acquisition to expand market footprint and density and (3) organization leverage at all staffing levels to grow overhead slower than revenues - especially in light of declining gross margin percentages. In this seminar, the keys to building a sales process are illustrated through real-world examples and case studies of the industry players who are responding to these challenges effectively.

## Saturday, October 30

### Session E 9:00-11:00 a.m.



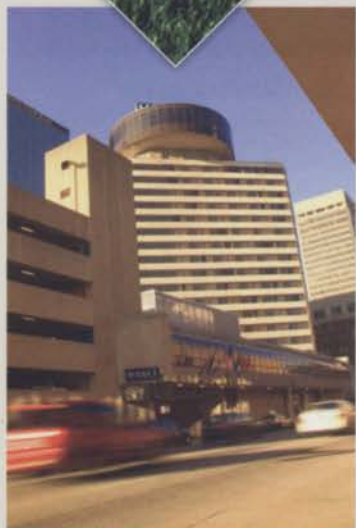
Marty Grunder

### "27 Tips to Making Some Sales RIGHT NOW!"

Marty Grunder, Marty Grunder, Inc.

Do you feel like you are spinning your wheels trying to make sales? If so, then this energizing, entertaining session is for you. Marty Grunder is a national award-winning landscape contractor who knows how to sell. You'll learn how to find clients in this environment and get them to do business with you. Nothing is easy, but, armed with these tips, you'll greatly improve your chances of finding more work, closing more sales and feeling like you are moving forward instead of backwards.





## HOTEL RESERVATIONS

Area A - Louisville Airport	Single	Double
Airport & Expo LaQuinta Inn & Suites	\$125.00	\$125.00
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<b>Days Inn Central*</b>	<b>\$72.00</b>	<b>\$72.00</b>
Fern Valley Hotel & Conference Center	\$115.00	\$115.00
<b>Hilton Garden Inn Airport*</b>	<b>\$161.00</b>	<b>\$161.00</b>
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<b>Courtyard by Marriott Downtown*</b>	<b>\$182.00</b>	<b>\$182.00</b>
Fairfield Inn Downtown	\$129.00	\$129.00
<b>Hyatt Regency Louisville*</b>	<b>\$146.00</b>	<b>\$156.00</b>
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Springhill Suites Downtown	\$149.00	\$149.00
Area C - East	Single	Double
Drury Inn & Suites	\$107.00	\$107.00
Hilton Garden Inn Louisville East	\$134.00	\$139.00
Area D - Southern Indiana	Single	Double
Sheraton Louisville Riverside Hotel	\$120.00	\$120.00

\*Shuttle service provided to the show.

### Deadlines:

To take advantage of special GIE+EXPO hotel rates: Make your hotel reservations by October 7, 2010.

Any hotel reservation cancelled on or after October 7 will result in a \$25 cancellation fee. Any reservation cancelled on or after October 18 or failure to check in at your hotel will result in the first-night room and tax charges.

To receive admission badges by mail: Register by October 1. After that deadline, you can pick up your badge(s) at the show.

To save 80% on your registration fee: Register by mail or fax by October 22 or online before October 28 - [www.gie-expo.com](http://www.gie-expo.com). Onsite registrations are \$50 per person.

### Reservation Options

#### INTERNET

For immediate hotel confirmation, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, book your reservation on-line using the following interactive site: [www.gie-expo.com](http://www.gie-expo.com).

#### TELEPHONE

If you have questions about hotels or you want to make reservations by phone, call the Louisville Housing Bureau:

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Use the map below and chart above to select your hotel. Make your reservations through the Housing Bureau of the Louisville Convention Bureau. See the Internet and telephone options.





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Register now to save 80%. Simply complete and return this form before October 22 or register at [www.gie-expo.com](http://www.gie-expo.com) before October 28. Children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult at all times and register at the adult price.

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**Exhibitors:** Please use this form for your customers only.

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Print clearly in black ink or type all information. Fees are nonrefundable.

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If you are planning to attend the **Workshops**, you must check which sessions you will attend. **No on-site registrations will be accepted. See pages 4 & 5 for info.**

- Session A - \$50** (Same as Session C)  
Oct. 28 | 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.  
"Adding Hardscape Installation to Your Company's Success", McCrindle
- Session B - \$50**  
Oct. 28 | 3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.  
"Xtreme Service=Xtreme Profits", Laflamme
- Session C - \$50** (Same as Session A)  
Oct. 29 | 10:00 a.m.-11:30 a.m.  
"Adding Hardscape Installation to Your Company's Success", McCrindle
- Session D - \$50**  
Oct. 29 | 3:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m.  
"Growing Revenues in a Crowded/  
Price-Driven Market", Kehoe
- Session E - \$50**  
Oct. 30 | 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.  
"27 Tips to Making Some  
Sales RIGHT NOW!", Grunder

## PAYMENT INFORMATION

Tradeshow Pass, \$10

- OR -

Non-Exhibiting Manufacturer/ \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
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## Choices

If you have been an irrigation contractor for more years than you would like to admit, you can remember the days when installing irrigation systems was simpler. You didn't have many choices – you installed a spray sprinkler or a rotary sprinkler to properly irrigate an area. You may have on occasion branched out to a stream spray or even a bubbler. It didn't matter much whose equipment you used because a spray head was a spray head and a rotor a rotor. Ah, the simpler life.

Today's irrigation systems are a bit more sophisticated. Whether dictated by water conservation, regulation or client wishes, there are now choices, and lots of them. In today's irrigation world you need to sift through the myriad choices available to you and come up with an irrigation system best suited for the landscape, the client and for your business.

This requires effort, not just installing what the local distributor representative wants to sell you. It takes educating yourself, looking at the various features of the products and their performance. It might require learning more about uniformity and efficiency so you can compare one sprinkler to another and it could involve learning – or relearning – about precipitation rates so you can better utilize the water window available to you or change your programming habits.

To see how new technologies have provided abundant choices you only need to look at the spray sprinkler, both the body and nozzle. Although two separate

pieces together they provide the means to apply water to what are considered short radius areas, 0 to about 25 feet. The body has a few options, pressure regulating or non-pressure regulating, check valve in the bottom or not, pop up height (minimally 2-, 4-, 6- or 12-

Whether dictated by water conservation, regulation or client wishes, **there are now choices**, and lots of them.

inch) and flow stop or not. Most spray sprinklers are designed to operate at 30 psi. However, the majority operate at much higher pressures. Using a pressure regulating spray sprinkler will cost more, but will operate all of the sprinklers at approximately 30 psi, which provides the indicated precipitation rate, the specified distance and proper uniformity.

There have been improvements in the sprinkler bodies, but it is nozzles where the choices have mushroomed. No longer do we have the standard 5, 8, 10, 12 and 15 series nozzles throwing their respective distance using up to 4 gallons per minute with very high precipitation rates. Today there are U-series nozzles, precision nozzles and multiple stream, multiple trajectory (MSMT) nozzles.

Rotary sprinklers offer choices in pop-up height, pressure regulation and matched precipitation rate nozzles. The uniformity of rotary nozzles has improved across the board with most manufacturers in the last five years. Higher uniformity sprinklers reduce water use when scheduled cor-

rectly. Each feature needs to be chosen carefully to determine if the system to be installed will benefit from the feature and be cost effective for the project. Although the "feature" may cost more up front it may have long term benefits in terms of water savings and/

or reduced maintenance.

The development of smart irrigation controllers also provides a choice in today's market. Certainly smart controllers save water, but there are questions as to whether they provide a good return on investment. Additionally, since they are programmed to provide the plant with its optimal moisture level, they are not appropriate in areas where deficit irrigation takes place. Soon the market will also have a number of soil moisture-based smart controllers. These controllers also have substantial water saving potential.

Choices are not limited just to products either. You can choose to be the cheap, low bid contractor or the value added contractor. You can choose service what you sell or leave it to others. You can choose to be green and sustainable installing systems that use water efficiently or not. There are many choices available in both products and in business practices. In the current economy it is important to choose wisely and set yourself and your company above the average irrigation contractor. **L**



**BRIAN VINCHESI**

is president of Irrigation Consulting, Inc., an irrigation design and consulting firm that designs irrigation systems throughout the world. He can be reached at [irrigation@gie.net](mailto:irrigation@gie.net) or 978-433-8972.



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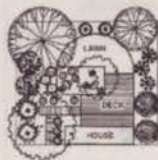
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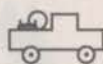
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# Gerry President/CEO, Mac's Landscaping McCarthy

**What have you been up to since you won your Leadership award in 2006?**

The last three years have been really tough. This is the first year we're starting to feel a little bit of a breather. As far as what we've been doing in business, I kind of changed the flow of work. We cut back on advertising. We're no longer in the phonebook; we just use Google.

I'm still doing all the social organizations. I cut back on the leadership roles because of the situation. I've been trying not to extend myself too much because of the way things are.

**Have you had any life-changing events that reshaped the way you do business?**

I was so happy when I got that Leadership Award. At my age I thought I'd be in a better position, but I'm back into survival mode and growing a little bit. But the jobs make me feel good.

The economy woke me up. May of last year I thought I was going out of business. We just buckled down as much as we possibly could. We stopped all spending and made necessary payments. Obviously number one was payroll and then the vendors. We called the vendors and told them the situation. There was a freeze on everything. I've been through it three times in past recessions. It's like getting stung by a bee – you know how the pain feels.

I knew the recession wasn't going to last one year and be all over. There's still pain here. I take one job at a time, get paid and don't have too many going on or there's no cash flow. You always have to have cash flow.

**What's your take on business technology?**

I'm not as technical as most of the other guys. I do my e-mail. I don't have a "Crackberry." The technology hasn't changed too much other than that I really do notice that everybody likes to be treated by e-mail. It's annoying because they don't like to talk on the phone. We're going to be in trouble if we can start doing landscaping on e-mail.

I'm still doing the exact same thing I've done for 35 years. When a customer calls, I go out and see them. I like to meet the customer. It's almost the same as when you go for a job. It's not like you just send a resume – you still have to meet the person.

**Where do you think the industry will be in 2020?**

We'll definitely be in an upswing. I've been through three recessions and this one is the hardest. We'll come out of this in the next three years. As people get jobs and more money to spend, they're going to spend it. I think it'll get better and the technology and equipment will get better. I'm at the point that I'd love to bring a laptop on the job and have a printer right there.

**What key issues are you paying close attention to right now?**

I think on the environmental part we have to start watching our water use. It's a very precious thing. In Boston we had a water break in the spring and nobody could use water for three days. We always took it for granted.

The other thing is pesticides – people are really concerned about care of their lawns. There's always a certain clientele who will spend the money on the herbicides and pesticides. I think as the next generation is coming up they're getting mindful of all the toxins.

**What's the best piece of advice you've ever heard?**

A good friend of mine always said, "Go after the nickels and dimes – the dollars will follow." Don't take on too much that you can't handle. If you get overloaded you can't handle it and can't produce then you can actually go out of business pretty quickly. You got to take it slow. Slow, steady and easy is the smartest thing to do. You have to control your costs, your help and you basically have to take one job at a time, finish it and make the customer happy.

To read the 2006 profile of McCarthy, visit  
[www.lawnandlandscape.com/leadershiplessons](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/leadershiplessons).







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