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WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

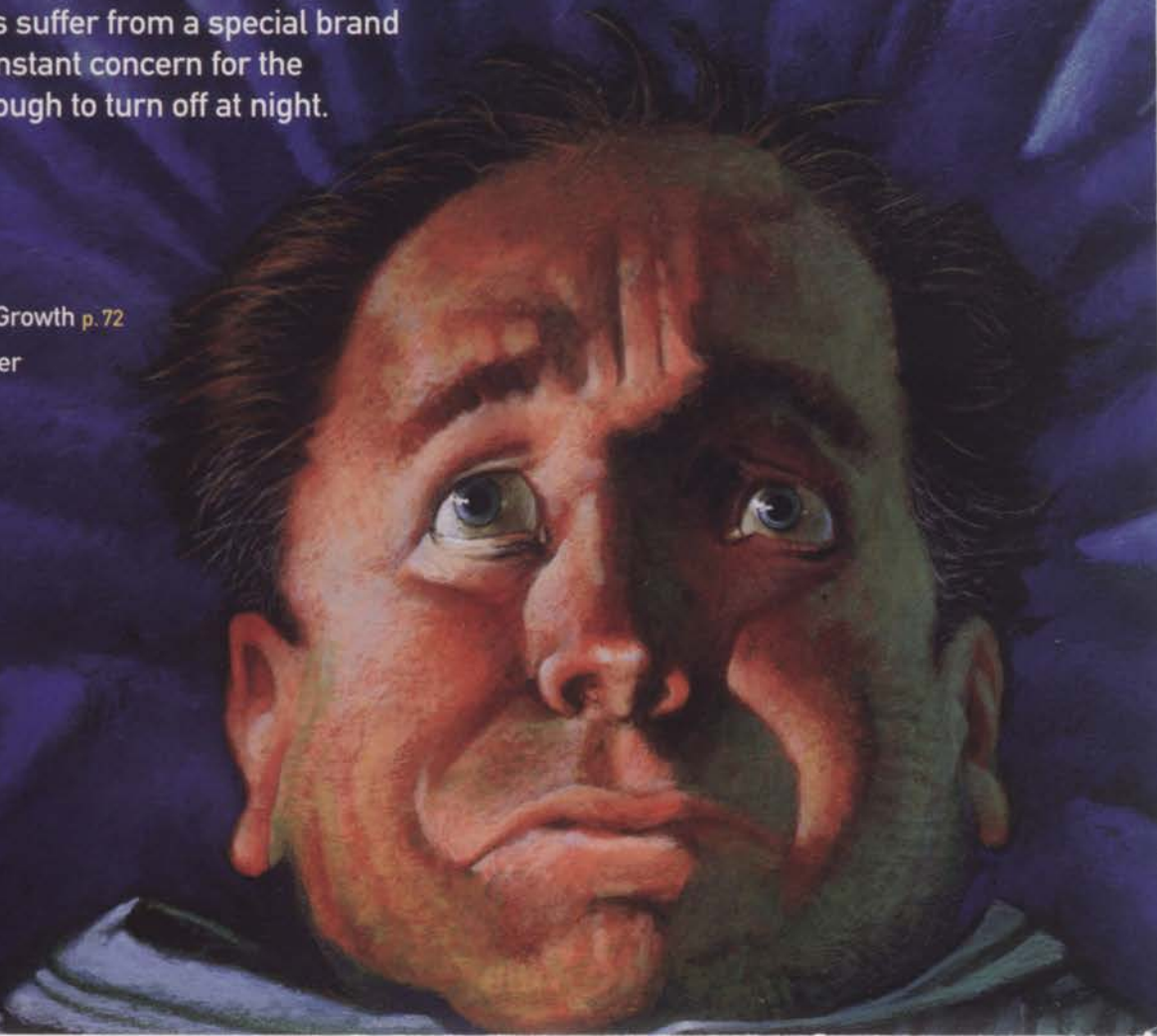
Business owners suffer from a special brand of insomnia – constant concern for the business that's tough to turn off at night.

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Pesticide and Fertilizer
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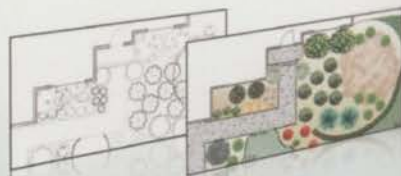
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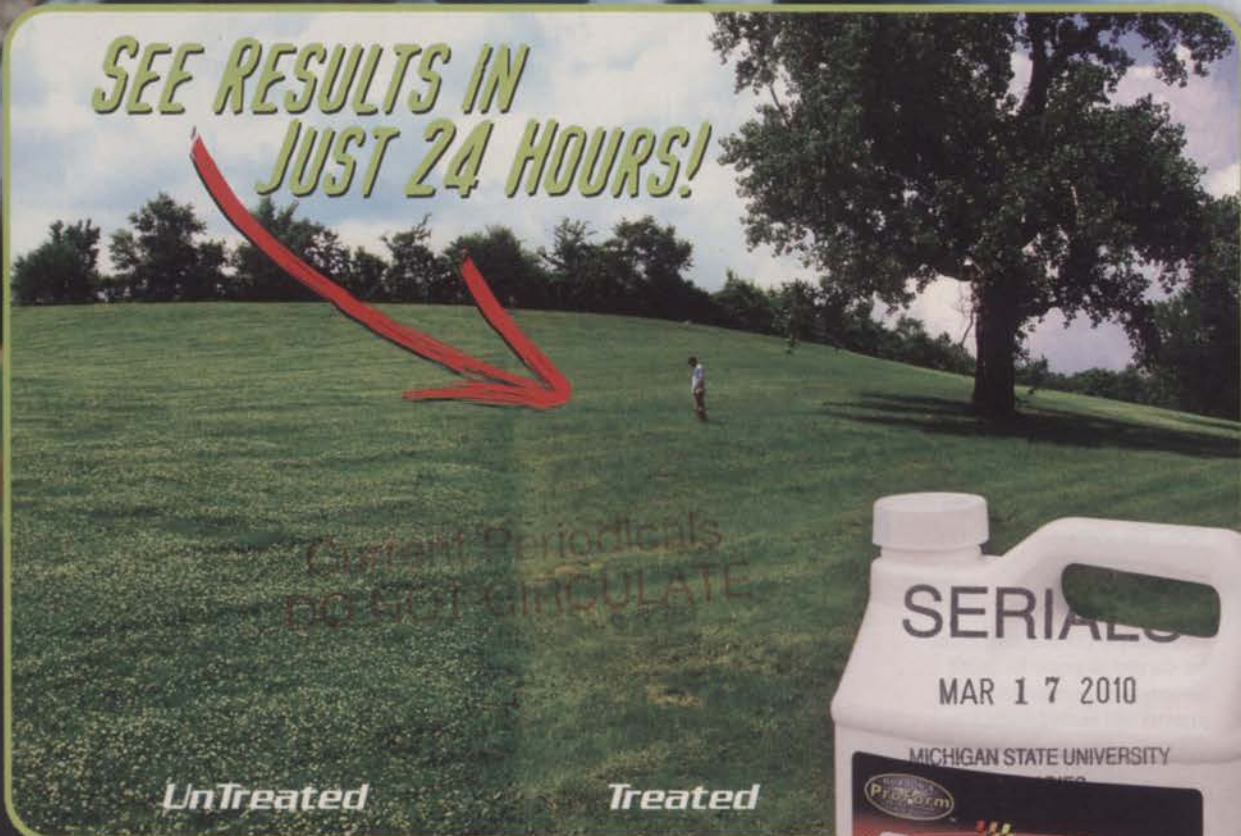
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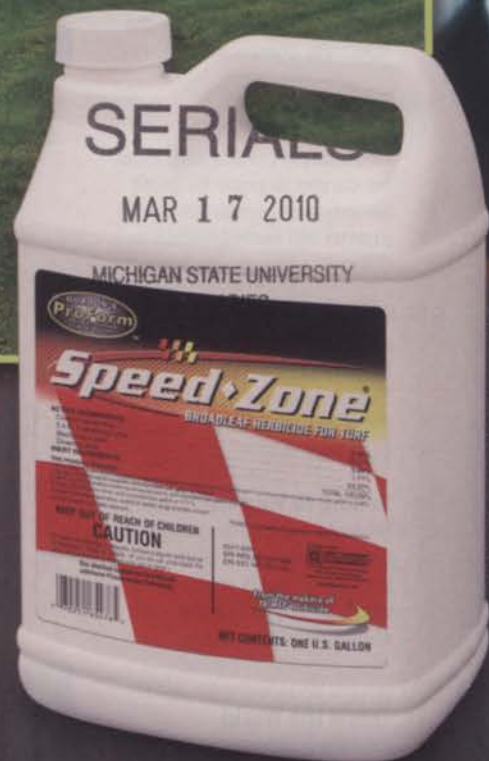
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IT'S GOT MOVES

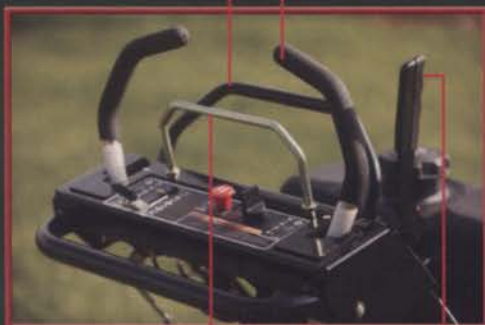
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CHUCK BOWEN
Managing Editor

It's not rocket science

In 1964, two astronomers working for Bell Labs in New Jersey wanted to make a detailed map of the Milky Way. So, they built a powerful radio telescope to record sound waves from deep space.

But they kept getting static – like an AM station that is just out of range. They thought the disruptive noise was coming from nearby New York City, but the sound didn't get any louder when they pointed their receiver right at Manhattan. They thought it might be the pigeon droppings that so often covered the roof of their building, but it didn't get any better after they scrubbed it all off. For years, they worked on their research, putting up with this constant static.

A year later, the astronomers – Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson – called one of their colleagues and, in passing, told him about the problem. Their colleague was Robert Dicke, a nuclear physicist who was trying to learn more about a new thing called the Big Bang theory. He immediately realized that the static the two men were hearing wasn't static at all – it was radiation left over from the beginning of the universe.

Penzias and Wilson went on to receive the Nobel Prize for physics in 1978.


Recently, researchers at Stanford University studied how scientists work, and have learned how the guys in lab coats find success after several miserable failures. They:

- ask questions of people outside their usual circle of colleagues;
- are open to ideas that go against traditional thinking; and
- learn from those failures

The trick is tricking your brain, which naturally wants to blame outside factors for events or ideas that don't jive with what you already think.

You're not rocket scientists, astronomers or physicists, but I'd bet you're all pretty smart. Smart enough to know you need someone – or some people – who don't work for you, aren't related to you and can give you honest feedback on your ideas, both good and bad. This could be a formal advisory board, or a group of colleagues from outside the industry who get together for a few beers on Fridays.

In late December, I attended Agrium Advanced Technologies' Green Industry Grad School in Sylacauga, Ala., where nearly 50 landscape contractors and lawn care operators learned about new products and better ways to run their businesses. It was a ready-made opportunity for them to learn from some of the best companies they don't compete with in the industry.

Traveling can be disruptive to your business and expensive. You have to leave your people and spend valuable hours or days away from your operation. But, taking the time to network, spitball ideas and learn will pay great dividends for your company as 2010 unfolds. It's not rocket science, just good business. 

“The trick is tricking your brain, which naturally wants to blame outside factors for events or ideas that don't jive with what you already think.”

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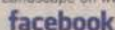
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FAUX TREES FAIL TO IMPRESS

Editor's note: In October, we ran an item in This Way Out about an Institute of Mechanical Engineers study that reported forests of artificial trees could help sequester CO₂. Readers weren't impressed. What do you think? Send your comments to Managing Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net.

I don't know where to begin on how insane this is. \$24,000 for an artificial tree? Plant a real one for a couple hundred dollars and invest a couple hundred more in some simple maintenance and save \$23,000. Whatever these are made of it's going to take energy and resources to build them. This coating that absorbs CO₂ – what else does it do? Even if it's completely neutral, it doesn't contribute anything to the environment. Anything you build needs maintenance. How long will they hold up without a recoating of

this CO₂-eating stuff? The point about what happens to the 'stored' CO₂ is good, but way down on my list of reasons that this is unbelievably dumb.

Trees do the same thing and add habitat, shade, water conservation – the list goes on and on. Another example of man thinking he can do something better than nature. One thing 35-plus years of landscaping has taught me is that you can't fight nature for long. And if you go along with her, you'll be way better off and way less frustrated.

*Karen Morby, estimator and arborist
Robert Ebl
Carol Stream, Ill.*

Well, let's see. The manufacture of synthetics generally involves heat (derived from fossil fuels) and then there is shipping and installation (more fossil fuel). So right off the bat, you are adding to the carbon problem. Then there

is the monetary cost: Let's say we can plant a real tree for \$100. So we could plant 240 real trees for the cost of one fake. Would one fake tree absorb more carbon than 240 real ones? Then you say we could put the fake tree underground in the voids from oil and gas production. That sounds like an engineering feat in and of itself, plus would require more shipping and processing.

Carbon scrubbers that have been in use for decades in the space program. Why not simply place scrubbers on top of downtown buildings to deal with the problem where it is most needed?

I have never seen any man-made object that is actually more pleasing than the day to day show provided by nature. Might as well build a fake sunset.

*Paul Dowlearn, owner
Wichita Valley Nursery
Wichita Falls, Texas*

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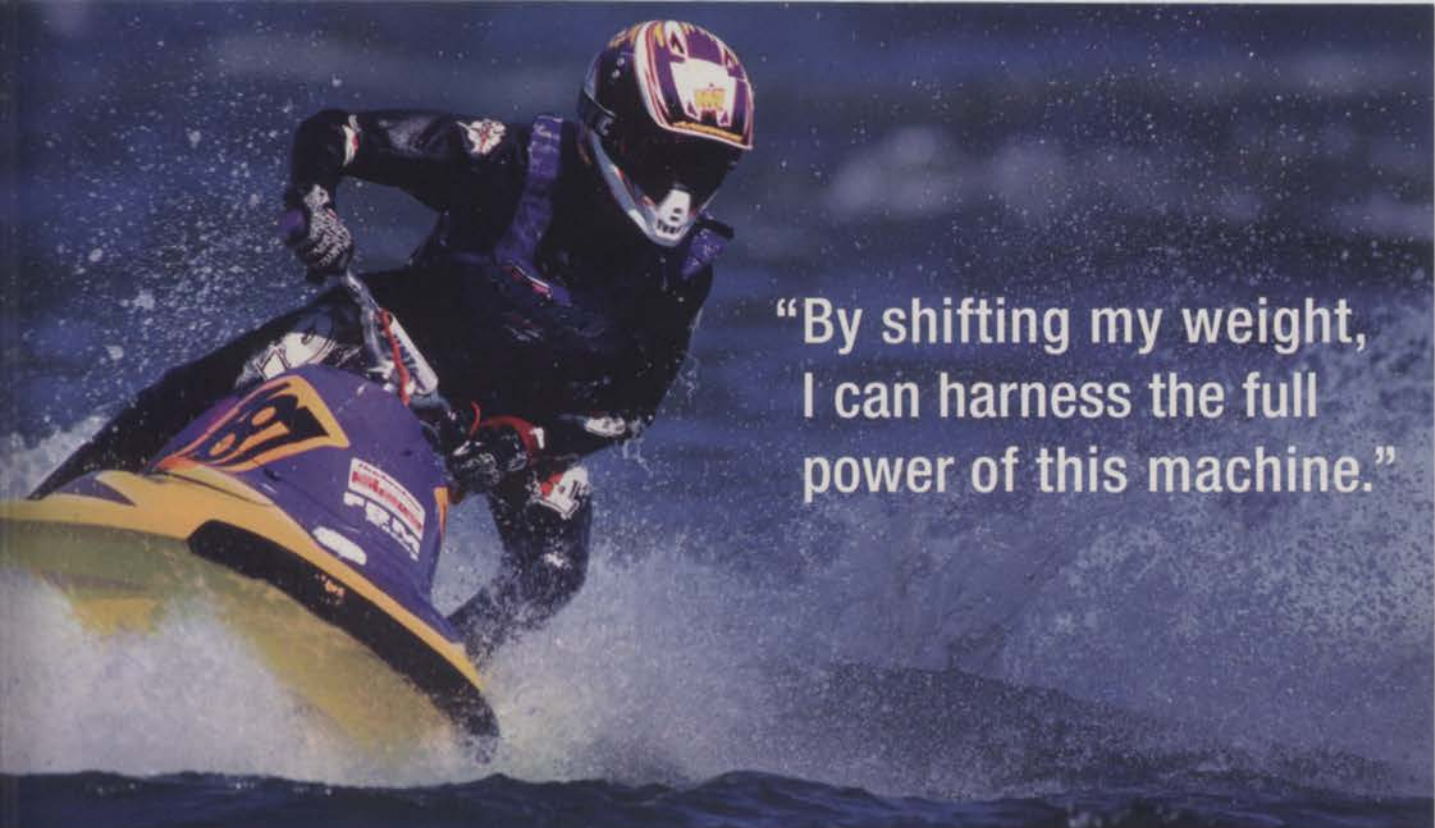
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Where **Beauty and Sustainability** Meet

Industry and education meet to face environmental challenges in hopes of ensuring sustainability and plant health for the future. BY HEATHER TUNSTALL

Landscape contractors know the importance of a beautiful green space. Healthy plants and aesthetic appeal help drive business and create profits. But how do you combat the increasing stresses placed on these plants through environmental and human factors?

That is exactly what Bayer Environmental Sciences and North Carolina State University aim to answer.

PARTNERING FOR THE FUTURE. Professor Tom Rufty of North Carolina State University is passionate about plants. As a result, his research team has partnered with Bayer Environmental Science dur-

ing the past several years in an initiative to increase plant health and stress tolerance in maintained green spaces.

Rufty is the newly named professor of sustainable development and current director of the Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research and Education. He is also a professor of environmental plant physiology at the Department of Crop Science at NCSU. Dr. Rufty and his team have worked with Bayer to research the effects of certain chemicals on turfgrass and other plants in an effort to find practical solutions to environmental issues.

The Plant Health Initiative focuses on

the consequences of population growth, industrialization and limited resources, and these factors' effects on a sustainable environment. With the additional stress of climate change, green spaces need to have the ability to accommodate future situations and thrive in an environment 10, 20 or 100 years from now. To do that, Rufty's team has been measuring positive and negative environmental factors to determine where plants need that little extra boost to flourish in difficult settings.

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tors facing landscaping vegetation. "The Plant Health Initiative has been designed to determine whether we can (handle sustainability challenges) with chemical intervention," Rufty explained at the Bayer Environmental Science Plant Health Symposium, held in Raleigh, N.C., in November. "When we talk about plant health, we are talking about a healthier plant above and below ground."

North Carolina is an ideal location for experimenting in a variety of conditions. As the mid-point between North and South, the area allows for tests during both warm and cool weather conditions. Warm-weather grasses are placed under stress during the cooler months, and cool-weather grasses and plants are under stress during warmer periods and the effects are measured for each, giving the research team a variety of plants and situations to study.




Dr. Richard Rees, product development manager, fungicides and plant health at Bayer Environmental Science, explains the benefits of using chemicals to increase plant health and sustainability.

FINDING THE FACTS. According to Rufty, lawn care products are necessary to reduce heat and water stress and diseases.

His team has experimented with fungicides, and has found that there is increased tolerance for plants and turfgrass in stressful situations with the application of these types of chemicals.

The team has also studied issues such as tree and turfgrass carbon sequestration capability. Their research revealed that as water leaves green spaces such as parks, maintained landscaped areas or golf courses, it tends to form carbon sinks, which prove to be highly environmentally beneficial.

Through an indoor research center and 24-acre outdoor lab at NCSU, research is continuing to find the optimal methods of combating insects and environmental stresses, thereby creating the means for sustainable, healthy plants.

Bayer's Clayton, N.C., facility is home to the majority of the research for this program. Over 50 types of cultivars are used in experiments to determine methods of sustainability under myriad stress situations.. 

The author is web content manager for GIE Media. Send her an e-mail at htunstall@gie.net.



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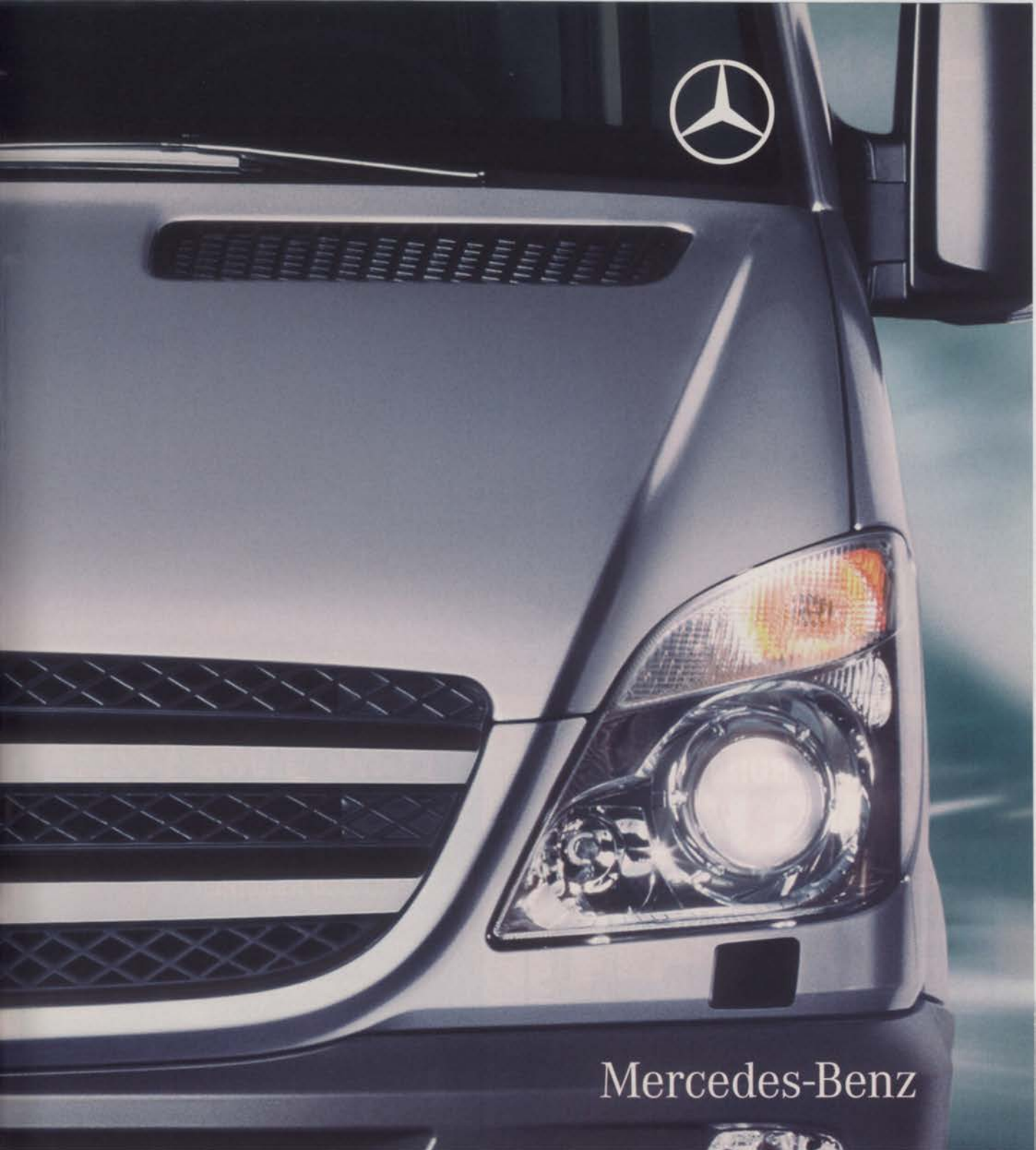
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*Based on a comparison of the Automotive News classification of full-size commercial vans.



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Knowledge Is Power

Attendees at the annual Real Green Systems conference learned the importance of a strong sales and marketing program.

BY CHUCK BOWEN

About 350 lawn care contractors gathered in Florida in early January for the annual Real Green Systems users conference and trade show. They learned best practices for the company's software, and how to bolster their company's sales and marketing efforts.

A MARKETING UNIVERSE. Joe Kucik, president of Real Green Systems, told conference attendees that they should try to build what he calls a marketing universe when gathering information about their customers. Kucik, who also operates a Scotts LawnService franchise

in Holt, Mich., says the more owners and salespeople know about their clients, the more successful they'll be.

"The more information you have on each prospect, the easier it is to sell that prospect service," Kucik says.

Priced offers sell better than a postcard that just introduces your company to homeowners, he says, adding that he's found success offering a free grub control service with new contracts.

"Grub control is a powerful thing in Michigan, because people know grubs are a problem," he says. "When it comes to marketing, don't bother doing any-

thing if you don't have a strong offer."

He promotes a strategy he calls one-step sales: When a prospect calls after receiving one of his postcards, his phone reps are trained to immediately offer them an estimate and a deal for a yearly contract. They don't wait for a salesperson to go out and measure the property and then offer an estimate.

DOOR TO DOOR. With the advent of the National Do Not Call Registry, companies need a way to supplement their once-profitable telemarketing operations. Ken White, manager of license operations for Real Green, says a well-run door-to-door program can generate customers for less than \$60 each.

White, who also works at Kucik's Scotts franchise, detailed his door-to-door program. He hires college students from nearby Michigan State University – mostly women – to knock on doors

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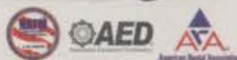


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in teams for a 12-week period that starts about a month before the beginning of production. The teams focus on a pre-determined area seven days a week and earn \$7 per verified lead.

He suggests hiring a supervisor – usually a salesman who can immediately work leads as they come in – for the teams. “If you don’t, it’s not going to happen,” he says.

The canvassers focus on the area around the company’s office, which saves on gas. They go out in the company’s trucks, since they’re already branded, and everyone working gets company shirts, hats and jackets, etc. White also suggest that you tell canvassers who in the neighborhood is already an active customer, so they don’t offer your cur-



Peter Shiplov, dealer and new product coordinator for PermaGreen Supreme, demonstrates a spreader for attendees at the trade show portion of the conference.

rent clients estimates.

White, who devotes 25-30 percent of his marketing budget to canvassing, gets half of his sales from the effort. He says a team of door knockers can visit 500 homes per shift. If half the people

are home, eight percent will want an estimate, which comes out to about 2.4 leads per hour. In all, White says, he spent just more than \$48,000 on the effort.

“That’s the key to door-knocking: Get them out of the house. If they’re talking through the screen, you’ve lost,” White says. “Once you get them out on that lawn, you’ve got ‘em.”

The author is managing editor of *Lawn & Landscape*. E-mail him at cbowen@gie.net.

Check out video from the conference and learn how to add tree and shrub care to your business and integrate chemical applications at www.lawnandlandscape.com/webextras.



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TCIA and PLANET discuss unification

The Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) and PLANET recently met for two and a half days in Baltimore to examine the possibility to combine the two groups.

Bill Hildebolt, PLANET president, said the two associations have been in talks since 2004, when the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) merged. Talks intensified about a year ago, and have been "serious" since then, he said.

"One organization is not acquiring the other. This is a unification," says Terrill Collier, chairman of the board of TCIA's directors. "We're designing this new, unified organization from scratch with that question in mind: How can we make this a better world for our members?"

TCIA has membership of 2,000 commercial tree care firms and suppliers; PLANET's membership is 3,500 landscaping companies. A combined membership would total about 4,000, Collier says.

"Our core purpose is to advance the professional greencare industry. That includes people that do lawns, landscape contractors, interior plantscapes (and) arborists. We're going to have a much greater impact together than we are apart," Collier says. "We want to have a more unified voice representing the green industry. We want to build value for our members. We're really going to have more of a voice in government and regulations and our government relations. The more members you have, the better your voice is going to be heard."

Both Hildebolt and Collier stressed that the two associations are still in talks; no formal decision has been made nor a timeline set to combine them.

"It's a process that's going to happen over the years. It has to gestate," Hildebolt said. "This is a big deal, this is a big undertaking. This is going to be even larger (than when ALCA and PLCAA combined). ... What you come up with is going to endure for years and years out."

In the past few years, PLANET has dabbled in combining with other green industry groups. In 2006, the Green Industry Expo and the International Lawn and Garden Power Equipment Expo shows merged to form the annual GIE+EXPO.

And the association was in talks a few years ago with the American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA), but the partnership was voted down by PLANET's board.

Hildebolt said PLANET isn't in unification discussions with any other industry associations. — Chuck Bowen



BIO Landscape & Maintenance acquires Texas Services

HOUSTON — In December, BIO Landscape & Maintenance, a Yellowstone Landscape Group company, acquired Texas Services.

Houston-based Texas Services focuses on tree care, lawn maintenance and landscaping. The company was founded in 1976 and serves Houston, Austin, San Antonio, Dallas and the surrounding areas. Texas Services will now become the tree care department of BIO Landscape & Maintenance, the company said in a release.

"Texas Services will further expand BIO's geographic footprint by adding a stationed office in the growing Sugarland area while allowing us to offer an expanded portfolio of sustainable services, including tree care, to all of Texas," said Robert Taylor, president of BIO.

Taylor said Jim Sivils, Jeff Hanawalt and Robert Jaynes, prior owners of Texas Services, will join BIO's management staff.

"We are excited to join an organization with the same culture and commitment to customer service, safety and employee development. When companies with the same objectives are integrated, the opportunities for customer and employee success along with organic growth are a certainty," said Sivils, the former majority partner of Texas Services and the new strategic accounts business developer for BIO. "We are really impressed by the BIO/Yellowstone company structure and relationship, their team-focused attitude, how most decisions are left in the operating company hands, the attention to customer needs versus company structure, and the additional benefits offered to Texas Services by becoming a wholly owned subsidiary of BIO. It is safe to say that the future of our company is much brighter and that our customers will continue to be placed first."

With the addition of Texas Services, BIO serves 15 counties with a combined work force of 440 throughout central and southeast Texas. The transaction marks the second addition to BIO in 2009. In October, BIO acquired Outdoor Environments, a Houston-based commercial landscape maintenance company.

For more on recent mergers and acquisition trends in the green industry, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search for "Acquiring Equity."



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GIE Media's Horticulture Group announces promotions

RICHFIELD, Ohio – GIE Media has promoted Jim Gilbride and Chuck Bowen

to management positions within its Horticultural Media Group.

Gilbride has been promoted to national sales manager of *Greenhouse Management & Production*, *Nursery Management & Production* and *Garden Center* magazines, leading business-to-business

magazines serving the nursery, greenhouse and garden center markets. GIE Media acquired the publications in 2008.

Gilbride joined GIE in 2004 as a sales representative for *Commercial Dealer* magazine, and in 2005 promoted to an account manager position for GIE's PCT Media Group. This most recent promotion acknowledges his strong sales and marketing abilities.



Bowen



Gilbride

Bowen came to GIE Media in 2007 as an assistant editor for the PCT Media Group, and was promoted to associate editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine in 2009. His recent promotion to managing editor of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine is acknowledgement of his strong journalism and management abilities.

"Chuck and Jim have demonstrated their exceptional abilities and high degree of personal commitment to professional standards, and we're delighted to award them with these increased business management responsibilities," says Chris Foster, president and COO of GIE. "These two individuals are a delight to work with and we feel are wonderful examples of the best young professionals in the media industry today. We're honored to have them both on our corporate team."

The Horticulture Group comprises print and digital editions of *Lawn & Landscape*, *Nursery Management & Production*, *Greenhouse Management & Production*, *Garden Center* and *Golf Course Industry* magazines, as well as the leading Web sites and newsletters serving the group's magazine title portfolio. GIE is the leading media company serving all five major professional horticultural markets.



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Spread it & Forget it is a new, advanced, high-efficiency fertilizer that is **DRIVEN BY DURATION CR**[™] Controlled-Release Fertilizer. It is formulated to effectively feed lawns or professional turf for six months or more. In many parts of the country, that means you get a full growing season's worth of green, healthy turf with just **ONE APPLICATION!**

When you compare fertilizers, you'll see there's no comparison.

To clearly illustrate the cost-savings and other advantages of *Spread it & Forget it*, an easy-to-use interactive savings calculator was created to walk you through some impressive numbers. Check out this user-friendly tool online at SpreaditandForgetit.com, and discover the potential savings for yourself.

Typical FOUR Application Program = \$120.00

(Estimates based on: 10,000 square foot lawn fertilized with a 30-0-7 blend with 50% slow release at 4 lbs. total N per 1,000 sq./ft. per year. Price per bag: \$15.00. Labor/overhead costs: \$2.00 per 1,000 or \$20.00 per lawn)



ONE Application of *Spread it & Forget it* = \$85.00

(Estimates based on: 10,000 square foot lawn fertilized with a 35-0-5 *Spread it & Forget it* blend with 95% DURATION at 2.5 lbs. total N per 1,000 sq./ft. per year. Price per bag: \$45.00. Labor/overhead costs: \$2.00 per 1,000 or \$20.00 per lawn)

TOTAL SAVINGS = \$35.00 (per 10,000 sq. ft. lawn)

Let's say you treat 500 lawns per year, that translates into \$17,500 in savings! Now that's a fertilizer you can apply to your bottom line.

Do more with less. Add up the benefits of a single, long-lasting fertilizer application.

Less labor *** Make one fertilizer application a season instead of four, five or six—and save money on the labor associated with multiple trips. Even if you don't eliminate trips, you'll save the time and labor costs specifically associated with spreading fertilizer and cleaning up hardscapes.

Less nitrogen *** Use up to 40% less total nitrogen per year. Just two to three pounds of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet is all you need to keep turf lush, green, and healthy for six months or more.

Less clippings *** Avoid growth flushes from the sudden release of nitrogen typical of ordinary fertilizers. Use less fuel and save money on mowing costs and clipping disposal.

More satisfied customers *** Whether your customer is a demanding homeowner, a commercial client, or the local soccer league, rest assured you'll get compliments about the great-looking turf.

More environmentally friendly *** The advanced generation, polymer coating gradually meters nutrients directly to the turf which minimizes potential losses to the environment, atmosphere or groundwater.

"With one application, *Spread it & Forget it* provided sustained and consistent green color without surge growth for the entire season. Our customers were so happy with the color that we didn't receive callbacks, which eliminated repeat visits."

Lawn Care Company President
Hillsborough, NJ

"I haven't had to fertilize again since I spread it in the spring and the yard is still as green in December as it was in May—the color has not changed one bit. With just one application, instead of the normal six, *Spread it & Forget it* really saves on labor. I'm amazed at how long *Spread it & Forget it* lasts."

Lawn Care Company General Manager
St. Louis, Missouri

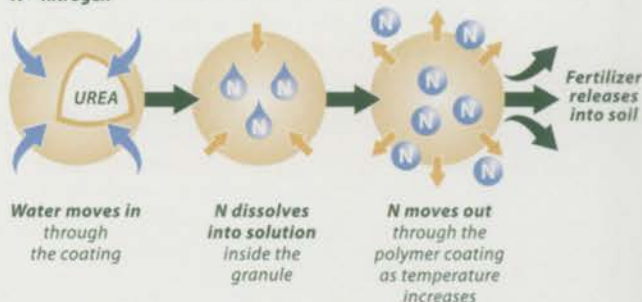
How it works.

The key to the steady nutrient release of *Spread it & Forget it* is an innovative micro-thin polymer coating on the DURATION CR Controlled-Release Fertilizer granules. Water passes through this polymer membrane and dissolves the nutrients inside. When activated by temperature, the dissolved nutrients pass through the membrane straight to the root zone, all at a controlled, predictable rate. That steady, long-lasting release enables one application of *Spread it & Forget it* to continually and consistently meet turf's nutrient demands for six months or longer.

Because the nutrient release depends on temperature, it isn't affected by rainfall or irrigation. There's no need to worry about growth flushes or nitrogen runoff from excessive moisture. The membrane coating is also very durable, so the granules stand up to rough handling.

Temperature-Controlled Diffusion

N = nitrogen



Water moves in through the coating

N dissolves into solution inside the granule

N moves out through the polymer coating as temperature increases

Fertilizer releases into soil

What's in it for my customers?

Your customers get beautiful, green turf, without the typical peaks and valleys of growth associated with standard fertilizer programs. Plus they will have fewer unsightly clippings to deal with, which is great news when it comes to mowing, no matter who handles it, you or your customer. You'll find that most customers will appreciate the environmental benefits of applying less nitrogen by using this unique new technology. As you know, multiple applications have a higher risk of excess nitrogen leaching into the environment. Controlled-release *Spread it & Forget it* one-application fertilizer releases nutrients so efficiently, you will effectively deliver more fertilizer directly to the turf roots with less threat of nitrogen runoff and groundwater contamination.

It's common for your customers to see you fertilize four to six times a year. However, many customers are willing to pre-pay for an annual service and are interested in using new technologies that will help protect the environment. As long as your customers get beautiful, green, healthy turf, they will be happy.

Lawn Care Professionals who have used it think you should, too.

In independent testing, *Spread it & Forget it* one-application fertilizer consistently works as promised. In real-world situations, over 100 turf professionals across the country trialed the product. Participants included commercial and residential lawn care contractors, sports turf and institutional turf professionals, and other turf managers.

The results of that 2009 trial program were overwhelmingly positive. After trying *Spread it & Forget it*, almost every turf professional said he would be very interested in using it again.

The test group rated it strongly for promoting healthy, green turf while saving on labor and fuel costs associated with multiple trips. Even more impressively, **95% of them said they would recommend *Spread it & Forget it* to a friend or colleague.**

"With just one application in the spring, the turf still looks beautiful after all these months. Plus, using just one application is better for the environment. *Spread it & Forget it* has blown me away; it's the gift that keeps on giving. I'll use it for all of my customers."

Landscape Company Owner
Mechanicsville, VA

"*Spread it & Forget it* is a one-time deal that lasts. The turf stays green longer. For athletic fields that aren't in season until spring, you can put nutrients on prior to the playing season and not have to worry about it."

Athletic Field/Lawn Care Company General Manager
Pasadena, MD

What's in the bag?

When you see the *Spread it & Forget it* brand, you'll know it is the highest quality. Only top blenders and distributors have been selected to produce and deliver these products. Each *Spread it & Forget it* blend is built using several DURATION CR® technologies along with small amounts of ammonium sulfate and potash to ensure balanced, smooth nutrient delivery throughout the growing season. Special formulas have been developed specifically for northern and southern climates.



Don't forget the crabgrass control.

We know fertilizer is just a small part of what you do. That's why we've developed *Spread it & Forget it* blends with popular pre-emergent herbicides like prodiamine and dithiopyr. That makes your job even easier and more efficient, adding to your savings of time, labor, and product costs.

Spread it & Forget it with DURATION CR saves, time, money and the environment:

- Make only a single application for green, healthy turf all season
- Available with or without pre-emergent crabgrass herbicides
- Save time, money and fuel by eliminating trips
- Spend less on fertilizer during the year
- Reduce your total annual nitrogen by up to 40%
- Lower the risks of nitrogen leaching
- Minimize problems from surge growth
- Add hours to your week by fertilizing less often
- Give yourself a competitive edge
- Increase your savings and profits!

SPREAD FERTILIZER ONCE, NOT FOUR TO SIX TIMES.



For more details, ask your fertilizer distributor about *Spread it & Forget it*
DRIVEN BY DURATION CR. Or contact us directly at 888.757.0072 or at
SpreaditandForgetit.com.



Because *Spread it & Forget it* is committed to protecting and preserving our environment, the products all support The Fertilizer Institute 4R system, a new science-based approach to best fertilizer management practices. The 4R system calls for the Right Product, Right Rate, Right Time, and Right Place.

Report: Two years of house price depreciation halted

LEXINGTON, Mass. – House prices in the U.S. ended their two-year slide in the third quarter of 2009 and edged up by 0.2 percent over the second quarter, according to IHS Global Insight. The uptick was led by a 2.1 percent increase in California, according to a quarterly housing valuation analysis by the economic analysis firm.

In year-over-year terms, house prices increased during the third quarter by 0.9 percent, according to the Federal Housing Finance Agency. This increase is the first since the second quarter of 2007 when the national housing market began its slide. From its peak in 2007, the U.S. housing market is now down 10.7 percent, on average.

While nationally the price index increased, prices still declined from the second quarter in 161 of the top 330 metropolitan areas.

This is a significantly positive change compared to 317 metro areas with declines in the fourth quarter of 2008, according to "House Prices in America," the quarterly U.S. housing valuation



analysis from IHS Global Insight. In the third quarter, 169 markets registered price increases.

For the first time since the study began in 2005, no metro areas were extremely overvalued. There were 52 in 2005. For the nation as a whole, the housing market is now slightly undervalued – 8.6 percent when weighted by market value; 10.1 percent when weighted by housing units.

The largest quarter-on-quarter home price declines were 5.6 percent in Bend, Ore., and 5 percent in Las Vegas; these metros are now 33.5 percent and 56 percent below their peak prices in 2006. In all, eight metropolitan areas of the 330 studied each quarter have experienced price declines greater than 50 percent from their peaks. Four of the eight, led by Merced, Calif., with a 66 percent

price decline, are in California's Central Valley. In all, 128 metro areas have experienced price declines of at least 10 percent from their peak.

Only 16 metro areas have escaped net home price declines since the cycle began. All 16, except Pittsburgh, are in the center of the country, and six are in Texas. Two areas hit hard by the housing downturn – Los Angeles and Miami – recorded third quarter price increases above 4 percent.

"While the rate of decline has decreased throughout (2009) as the market began to stabilize, it's not at all clear that the market is on a recovery path," said James Diffley, group managing director of IHS Global Insight's Regional Services Group.

"Economic conditions remain dire, with unemployment likely to remain stubbornly near 10 percent for some time. The federal tax credit for first-time homebuyers has played a temporary role in bolstering the market," said Jeannine Cataldi, senior economist and manager of IHS Global Insight's Regional Real Estate Service.

The markets that are still overvalued remain mostly in the Pacific Northwest, according to the report, though prices are declining in the region. **L**

PEOPLE



Jason Farland, vice president of operations, Ecoscape Solutions Group, Charlotte, N.C., has relocated to the company's Raleigh office. Ecoscape also hired two branch managers: Chris Hamill for its Charleston, S.C., office and Jed Warner for the Columbia, S.C., office.

Maria Muhlhahn, FCHP, operations manager with ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design, Venice, Fla., has earned her Certified Arborist certification from the International Society of Arboriculture.



Muhlhahn

Spring Meadow Nursery hired **Ryan McGrath** as marketing and public relations specialist.

Deanna Griffith has joined Jacobsen as marketing manager with responsibility for the Americas and Asia Pacific.

Clean Cut Lawns, Mesa, Ariz., promoted **Robert Logan** to branch manager.

Burke S. Hammonds has joined Lawns by Yorkshire, Westwood, N.J., as a vice president.

The Fockele Garden Company's draftsperson **Stephanie Gordon** recently completed the Georgia Certified Landscape Professional program and obtained an associate degree from Gwinnett Technical College in environmental horticulture.



Gordon

Aaron Majors, of Cagin & Dorward in Novato, Calif., has passed the certified landscape professional test.

MGK (McLaughlin Gormley King Company) has hired **Doug Mills** as sales representative for its newly defined Southeast region.



Mills

The Texas Turf Irrigation Association hired **Amanda Griffin** as executive director. She owns Smart Outdoor Services, Garland, Texas.

The IA Education Foundation named its board during the 2009 Irrigation Show in San Antonio. **Lynda Wightman**, Hunter Industries, chair; **Robert von Bernuth**, Michigan State University, vice chair; and **Steve McCoon**, Nelson Irrigation Corp., treasurer.

Jason Scire, nursery manager at VanWilgen's Garden Center, North Branford, Conn., was named the state's Connecticut's Young Nursery Professional of the Year by the CNLA.

CONTRACTOR NEWS

Premier Landscapes has received a national merit award from PLANET for a recently installed green roof on the Bentley Building in Sandy Spring, Md.

Borst Landscape and Design in Allendale, N.J., recently won the Grand Award in Environmental Improvement from PLANET for a landscape design/build project in Bergen County.



Jerry Kienast, service director at Milwaukee-based Reinders, accepted the Equipment Service Achievement Award from Toro for his accomplishments. The annual distributor awards honor outstanding customer service and performance in the commercial equipment market.

JFNew, Walkerton, Ind., was recognized at the 2009 U.S. EPA Conservation and Native Landscaping Awards ceremony in December for its work at Wolf Lake, a 500-acre body of water located on the Indiana-Illinois border.

Charlotte, N.C.-based **Ecoscape Solutions Group** recently completed the Circle at Concord Mills project, the first multifamily community in the country to be certified by Audubon International as an Audubon Signature Sanctuary.

Ecoscape Solutions Group, Charlotte, N.C., has opened two new

offices, expanding its South Carolina market presence with new offices in both Columbia and Charleston.

ArtisTree recently won an Overall Gold Safety Achievement Award from PLANET.

Two projects installed by Rochester, N.Y.-based **Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care** for Environmental, Design and Research, a design and planning firm, were recently recognized by the American Society of Landscape Architects.

The RIT Perkins Green Site Improvement project, which added numerous sustainable landscapes and energy efficient features to the RIT campus, won the 2009 NYU Chapter Honor in the category of built design.

And the Conkey Corner Park project received the 2009 NYU Chapter Community Award for Community Achievement.

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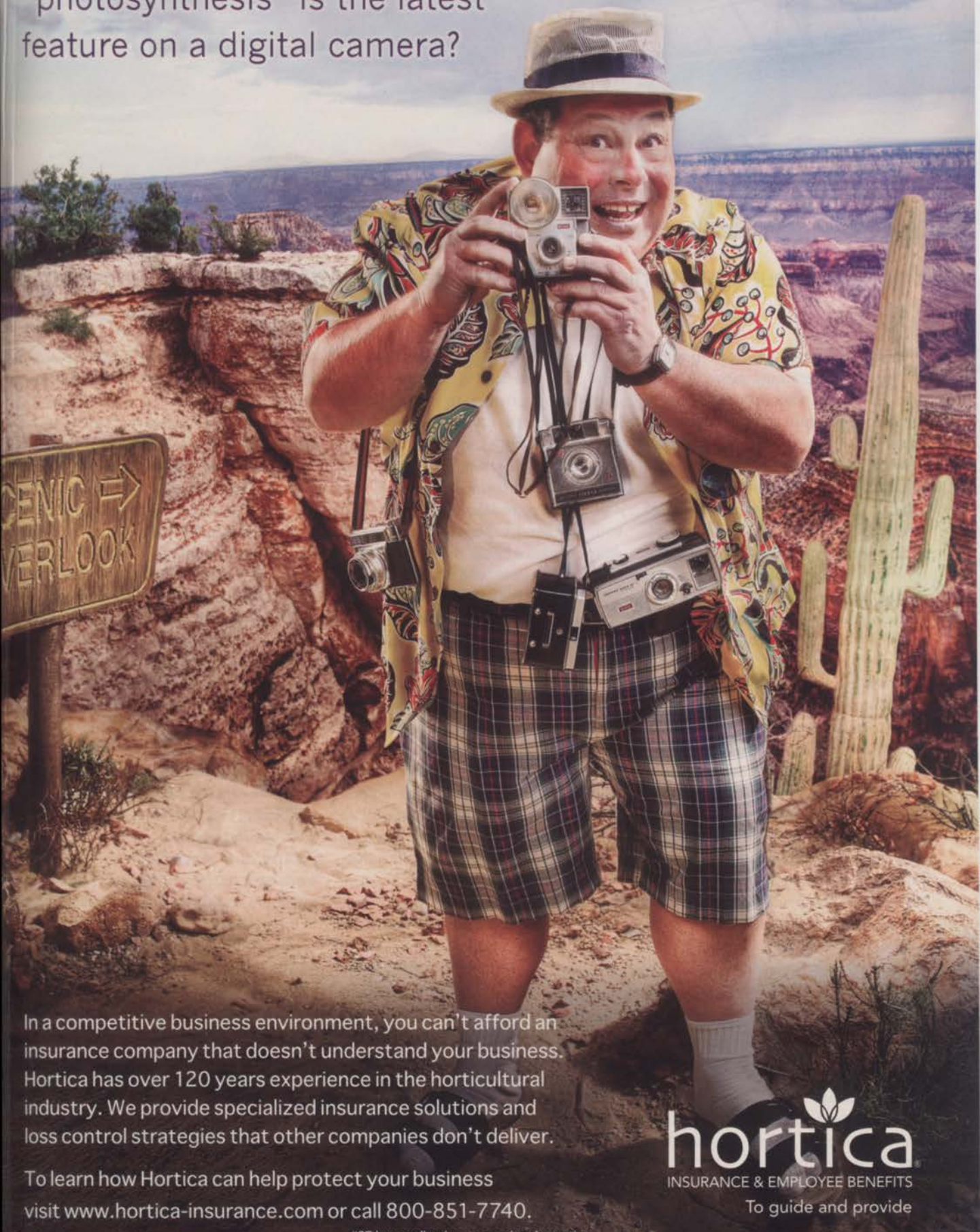
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BY POLLY BAILEY-RULE

Property owners used to enjoy the process of creating a stunning landscape. Weekend warriors would flock to garden centers, nurseries and landscape supply businesses for the necessary materials to complete outdoor projects. But a growing “do-it-for-me” consumer mindset plays directly into the hands of the landscape industry.

Homeowners are using their free time for other activities and are seeking landscape professionals to create and maintain their outdoor living spaces for them. And property owners are savvier than ever about the options available to them, particularly when it comes to seasonal color. It is therefore more important for landscape professionals to develop a solid working relationship with their local greenhouse growers.

Greenhouse growers are on the front line when it comes to new plant introductions and what will be promoted to the general public. They see the newest plant varieties each spring, a full year before those new plants will be available to consumers and the landscape trade. Growers have access to sample plants at this early stage and will trial these new plants in their greenhouses and display gardens for use in their own operations.

They are more than willing to share the cultural and performance information they gather with landscaper contractors. As the plant breeders

and propagators begin marketing their new plant varieties to consumers, you have the opportunity to gain firsthand knowledge from your grower so that you are prepared with the latest and greatest options for seasonal color sales and marketing efforts the next season.

If you were to ask your grower what you, as a landscape contractor, could do to develop a better relationship with them, the answer would unequivocally be “plan for next season now.”

Most contractors who install seasonal color don't give themselves a lot of time to seek out plant material for seasonal color plantings, and end up with whatever plants the grower has in a large enough quantity to complete the job.

This can cause design issues when a particular color scheme needs to be followed or when meeting cultural requirements. And, because growers speculate their flower crop production based on the previous year's sales, new introductions are usually unavailable because they are grown in limited quantities – usually earmarked for retail sales rather than for the wholesale trade.

FLOWER POWER

The average company spends nearly \$47,000 each year on plant material, and half sell seasonal color, according to the 2009 *Lawn & Landscape State of the Industry Report*.

Preordering plant material at the end of the previous season is the best way to insure that you will have both the quantities and varieties of plant material that you will need for your seasonal color projects. Greenhouse growers have a wealth of plant knowledge and can offer many

useful suggestions for appropriate plant material. For your good customers who renew on a yearly basis, you already have the information necessary for preordering – color scheme, height restrictions, water and light requirements, etc.

Sit down with your grower at the end of the season and work out an order for the next season. Even if you only book a percentage of what you will need, you'll have a leg up on next season: You'll spend less time spent running around trying to secure the necessary plants for your plantings because your grower will have what you need ready when you need it – no overgrown or root-bound plants, no supply issues, no last minute design problems.

Remember to also discuss container sizes, delivery dates and what stage the plants need to be in when delivered – full bloom, cracking color or green.

As our industry becomes more competitive, it is crucial that landscapers work hard to streamline their business processes and differentiate themselves in the market.

Developing a partnership with local growers is a great way to build both your business and your reputation as a quality landscaper. Show clients that you are on the cutting edge of the industry with new and different plants and save time in the already hard-pressed spring – it's a win-win situation for everyone. **L**

The author is a certified landscape professional, master certified nurseryman and landscape account manager for Four Star Greenhouse/Proven Winners in Carleton, Mich.

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Risky business

The first step to a sound investment strategy is determining your appetite for risk.

By William J. Lynott

Mark Procino is typical of America's conservative savers. A middle-aged electronics technician, he doesn't trust the stock market. He faithfully contributes to his 401(k) each month, but he avoids any other investments in stocks. He has several certificates of deposit (CDs) and a small money market account at his bank. Mark doesn't like risk, so he wants to keep most of his financial future in what he regards as "safe" investments.

Like other savers, though, he isn't happy with the sickly return that he's getting from these "safe" investments. With one-year CD rates at 1 percent or so, and money market accounts paying a fraction of a percent, Mark's investments are actually losing money when inflation is factored in.

Even the safest of all investments, Treasury bonds offer little help. Recently, three-year treasuries are paying a little more than one percent interest. Like many Americans, Mark wants to find a safe investment that will pay more than CDs or Treasury bonds.

Good luck.

You have two choices:

Keep your money in so-called "safe" investments where your return may be erased by inflation, or take a risk on investments that may pay you a much better return, with the understanding that you may lose money as well as make it.

In the professional investment community, this situation is described as the

risk/reward ratio. In general, the greater the risk, the greater the possible reward. Each saver/investor has to decide his or her level of tolerance for risk and balance investments on that decision.

Most pros will agree that investment in stocks represents the highest degree of risk (with the exception of such exotic instruments as futures and commodities) but also provides the highest level of potential return. From 1926 through 2004, the 500 largest companies (as represented in the S&P 500 index) returned an average of 10.4 percent per year. Small company stocks did even better with an average return of 12.7 percent per year – the best rates of return of any conventional investments.

But don't forget the risk factor. In some individual years during that extended period, stocks suffered losses in excess of 30 percent.

The lowest return of all during the period came from investments in cash or cash equivalents such as savings accounts, CDs or money market accounts. These averaged 3.7 percent per year.

The lesson in all this is that stocks offer the best

probable return over extended periods of time. The younger the investor, the longer the investment timeline, the more likely investments in stocks will provide a healthy return. For older investors with shorter investment timelines, the greater the risk that one of those "bad" years will reduce or even erase the return.

So what about such "safer" investments as U.S. government bonds? Not bad. Over roughly the same span of 80-plus years, treasuries returned a decent average of 5.5 percent.

However, as was the case with stocks, there were individual years such as 1967, when soaring interest rates caused sharp drops in bond prices.

So what are investors looking for higher returns but concerned about safety to do?

This is where the principle of asset allocation comes in. Asset allocation is a key to successful investing, and refers to the division of investment money among various classes of investments, stocks, bonds, cash and cash equivalents appropriate for individual investors.

So, what is the best asset allocation for you? Should you have 10 percent of your portfolio in stocks, or should it be 80 percent or 90 percent, or something in between? What about the rest? Should you invest the balance in bonds, CDs or other cash equivalents?

That depends on several important variables. At the top of that list is your tolerance for risk. Next is your timeline. If you have many years before you must start drawing down your investments, you have time to ride out the inevitable dips in the market that cause stocks to fall in price temporarily.

Ultimately, though, the choice is yours. No one knows your investment goals and your tolerance for risk as well as you do. **L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Abington, Pa. He has 40 years experience in business management and financing.

Not so safe
Some CDs and money market accounts pay 1 percent or less. These so-called safe investments actually lose money when you factor in inflation.

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= fewer callbacks

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Allowing, encouraging and leading

“Whatever you allow, you encourage.” That might be my favorite quote about leadership as it relates to small business. Let’s talk about your leadership. It is what separates winners from losers in this business.

Ever wondered why your people don’t seem to do what you want and need them to do? Actually, we’ve all been there at some point. People can say some are born leaders and that’s true: all leaders are born. But some people never grasp the concept. Leadership is all about influence. It’s showing people by your actions what’s important to be successful at your company.

If customer service is supposed to be important at your company but you complain about a client in front of your team, or don’t get back to clients quickly, what have you just done? You have just shown your team that customer service really isn’t that important at your company.

When you don’t take the time to share good news and bad with your team or you don’t recognize an incredible, new client one of your sales professionals just secured, what have you just done? You have just shown communication and your people really aren’t that important at your company.

Too many of us are constantly searching for new, great ideas with which to improve our company. We think a new software program will save the day or a new piece of equipment will enable us to make a ton of money. Yes, they can make a difference and they are important. But success in our small businesses is rooted in our people and your leadership.

The behaviors you don’t want to permeate your organization need to be addressed and eliminated from your culture. If you want to win in this industry, or in any industry, you need good communication, a culture of accountability and good leadership. Let me make a suggestion to you: Go buy John Maxwell’s “21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership” and read it.

The first law – and my favorite – is the Law of the Lid. Your leadership is like a lid or a ceiling on your organization. Your group,

“Success in our small businesses is rooted in our people.”

team, company or organization cannot rise beyond your ability to lead. People often think if they just work hard, they’ll find success. Yes, they may find a little success but the rest of the people on your team will not. The key is to develop others around you to take the lead. This is what allowed some of our industry giants like the Brickman Group, ValleyCrest Cos. and Mariani Landscape to get where they are today. They are entire companies full of leaders.

In 2010, we’d all be well served to pay very close attention to our actions more so than our words. I firmly believe a leader shows what’s important to them by what they do, more so than by what they say. If you want 2010 to be a success, I think you need to focus on leadership in three specific areas.

1 Sales. We have to have sales to make a company work. What are you going to do to get things headed in the right direction? How many cold calls are you going to make? How many Saturdays are you going to work meetings with clients? How many workshops on selling are you going to participate in? Communicate the goal, hold people accountable to those goals and lead the way.

2 Customer Satisfaction. How many clients are you going to talk to and make sure they are happy? What investments are you going to make at that let your team to offer better customer service? How good is the service you offer your clients? Are you going to be known as the best to work with at your company? Communicate the goal, hold people accountable to those goals and lead the way.

3 Profitability. What costs are you going to cut? How are you going to help out with making the company more efficient? How careful are you going to be at bidding jobs? Communicate the goal, hold people accountable to those goals and lead the way.

CONCLUSION. Leadership is what separates winners from losers. I told a friend recently that whatever he allows, he encourages. He responded: “You deserve what you tolerate.” I love that. What are you allowing and encouraging in your company? In 2010, communicate the goal, hold people accountable to those goals and lead the way. That’s what leadership is all about. **①**




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Live & Learn

by Kelly Pickerel

Rising from the Ashes

After his company went up in flames, Bruce Moore learned a lesson in community support.

One hot July night in 2008, Bruce Moore regretted sharing a building with a swimming pool company.

A fire had started and the pool liquids acted as a catalyst. Moore could only sit and watch his landscaping company's offices go up in flames.

"It got a fair amount of a head start, and because of the (pool) chemicals, it was an extremely hot fire," says Moore, president of Stamford, Connecticut's Eastern Land Management. "In essence, it destroyed half of the building."

The ELM's offices just happened to be in that half of the building. Instead of seeing desks, computers and business files, Moore only saw a hazardous material site.

"It was pretty difficult to watch," Moore says. "At that point, there was nothing we could do, and basically, that

was the attitude I took. There are certain things you can control and things you can't."

Thirty years of documents, photographs and memories were destroyed on that Friday night. Because of the chemicals from the pool company, no one was allowed on site for a month. A firewall prevented the fire from spreading to the shop area, so the trucks and equipment were saved. The building next door allowed ELM to move in, and the company is still occupying the temporary quarters today. ELM was able to relocate its trucks and equipment to a temporary location, and on Monday, business went on as usual.

"The good news is that (the fire) didn't have any affect on our operations directly," Moore says. ELM kept rolling because their server was recovered.

"Through some grace of God, it was intact, but my laptop was literally melted onto my desk," Moore says. "That was really golden – the angel sitting on our shoulder."

Still, Moore encourages businesses to have a good records' retention program and proper insurance. ELM now backs up its files at an off-site location.

"It was emotional to see 30-plus years of things lost," Moore says. "We lost a lot of our collection of photos. A lot of stuff that just can't be replaced. Business documents are one thing, but we had accumulated a lot of history."

Even though the company was fortunate to find temporary quarters next door to the burned building, the situation is "still more inconvenient" than the 60 employees of Eastern Land Management expected.

The company purchased a new building in November 2009, and after indoor and outdoor renovations, plans to move in this summer. ELM benefitted from the federal economic stimulus package, and was able to have some fees waived after financing their purchase through a Small Business Association loan, Moore says.

But even with the setbacks, Moore says ELM has had excellent numbers. "We haven't enjoyed the peaks, but we don't suffer through the valleys either," he says. "We are seeing growth. We've still seen our maintenance accounts go up by about 10 percent, so we're doing OK."

And the company is still looking to grow. Moore's son has joined the business and has helped put together a five-year business plan. Moore says he's ready to take it to the next level.

"As distressing as it was, it was very comforting to see the support we got from the community. It was just tremendous," he says. **L**

The author is an intern at *Lawn & Landscape* magazine.

"It was emotional to see **30-plus years** of things lost. Business documents are one thing, but we had accumulated a lot of history." – Bruce Moore



After a fire destroyed ELM's headquarters, the company lost 30 years of records. Bruce Moore hopes to move into a new building, above, this summer.

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JOHN DEERE

Big fish, small pond

How small businesses can turn into big market players.

By Mike Zawacki

Susan A. Friedmann, the author of "Riches in Niches: How to Make it Big in a Small Market," says small business owners need to find their market niche to find success. This includes everything from selecting the right name for your business to cultivating a productive relationship with the media so that your small company can become a big player in the market.

What is a business or service niche that small business owners often overlook?

Overlooked niches are found in the corners of the market no one thinks about – or no one has thought to think about. Finding these niches is both an art and a science.

We'll cover the science section first: landscape professionals who want to locate niche markets in their region must have a thorough understanding of the marketplace: Who the customers are and who currently handles their landscaping needs.

The art side comes from applying a different perspective to

your marketplace insights. Consider your market from a number of directions: Where are the customers who have special, unmet landscape needs? Shed all assumptions you may have about the way this work has to be done and brainstorm a list of opportunities. For example, communities in transition where residents who used to do their own landscaping are now 'aging out' and would prefer to utilize your services? Check the demographic data and regional business surveys to help identify some possible niches.

Small markets often mean lots of competition. What simple and cost-effective ways can a business owner distinguish himself or his services?

There are a number of simple, cost-

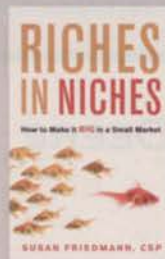
effective ways landscape professionals can differentiate themselves from the competition. Creating a highly visible public profile as the landscaping expert is the most efficient, effective way to do this. The public has demonstrated time and time again that they want the best service providers to meet their needs, and landscaping is no exception.

In my book, I outline seven strategies that can help you to achieve expert status with minimal out of pocket expense.

One of the best ways to generate new business in the green industry is word-of-mouth referrals. How can a business owner get his or her clients talking about their business and services?

There are two ways to generate positive word of mouth about your business. The first, of course, is to consistently do such a superlative job that your customers can't help but talk about you.

The second, and faster route, is to regularly position yourself to be talked about. Establishing a presence in the





“ The public has demonstrated time and time again that they want the best, most expert service providers to meet their every need, and **landscaping is no exception.**”

public eye is best accomplished by savvy use of the media – regular appearances in the newspaper, on the local TV news show and in appropriate online forums, can create public awareness of your business. It's important to note that we're talking about editorial coverage here – interviews, articles, columns and commentary – rather than any advertising efforts. This will get the public talking – and more importantly, motivate them to seek out your services for their homes or businesses as they view you as the “expert.”

How does a business owner train his sales force to think “riches in niches?”

Training your sales force to recognize niches is a three-part process. The first step is to familiarize your team with the niche concept, and give them the tools to recognize potential niches. The second step is to give your team the freedom and flexibility to devote a portion of their time and energy to exploring sales avenues outside the norm. This may require encouragement, especially

since sales professionals tend to be cautious about moving beyond familiar techniques and strategies. Thirdly, reinforce positive results by rewarding those sales professionals who identify and secure niche market contracts for your business.

Incentives will keep your team motivated and demonstrate, in a concrete fashion, the value of the new business.

If you find a niche, do you stop looking for new business niches?

The search for niches is the search for opportunity; you always want to be open to the possibilities.

Businesses go through cycles of growth. There will be times when you'll be eager to find new business, and actively seek out niches, and others where you'll do everything you can do to keep up with the business you have.

However, you want to always keep your eyes open to new niches. It's a good way to ensure that when you're ready to grow, you'll know where the best opportunities are.

Lastly, it doesn't take long for your competitors to catch on to the niche you've found and begin to copy your business strategy. How do you take what you've started to the next level and stay ahead of the competition?

They say that imitation is the most sincere form of flattery – and it's certainly the most prevalent form, at least in the business world. Don't be surprised if other companies follow your lead into niche markets. The key to success in this case – especially when you're up against competitors who underbid you and attempt to lure customers away on a price basis – is to hold the line and focus on maintaining your “expert identity.” This is the critical differentiation factor that attracted your customers in the first place, and it will allow you to retain them. Low-ball competitors seldom have the staying power needed to outlast you – especially if they take your jobs as a loss leader. **L**

The author is editor of *Golf Course Industry and Snow Magazine*. He can be reached at mzawacki@gie.net.

UP ALL NIGHT

Business owners suffer from a special brand of insomnia – constant concern for the business that's tough to turn off at night.

BY KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE

Where is that off button when you finally crash at the end of the day, set your alarm and lay your head down to sleep? The phone is quiet – there's no snow in the forecast tonight. No need to sleep in front of the Weather Channel. You finished the day's paperwork and prepared tomorrow's schedule. You paid the bills, cut the weekly checks to employees and returned customer phone calls.

But your mind won't stop racing.

"My office is at home – it never closes," says Alan Martin, president, Fertilawn Landscape & Maintenance, Grayson, Ga.

"If I hear the phone ring while the family is eating dinner or watching a movie at home, I always want to be on top of things, and I wonder who's calling," says Adam Linnemann, president, Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping, Columbia, Ill.

"If I could clone myself, I would," says Aaron Jung, president, Horticultural Impressions, Platte City, Mo. "But that's not an option, so you just work harder and you learn to work smarter."

Lawn & Landscape found out what's keeping you up at night, and what you can do about it so you can rest easier in 2010. Insomniacs, let this guide be your sleep aid. Because you'll need to be sharp this year to continue running a lean, mean organization in a highly competitive marketplace.

Now, write down your worry list and compare it to this one. We bet you'll find the reasons you wake up at 3 a.m. and some solutions to get you on the path to a stronger business and sounder sleep.



Cash Flow Concerns.

Cash is king, no matter what the economic conditions are. Without liquid in the bank, it's lights out for the business. And if you're counting on a generous line of credit from the bank to save the day, you'd have better luck uncovering hidden treasure.

"Without money, your business doesn't operate, and while we have an operating line of credit we can pull from, we have to pay interest on that," Jung says.

Lack of cash flow chokes a company. It's the root of other problems – budgeting stress, collections anxiety. "I spend most of my time making certain billing gets out and watching our receivables – almost on a daily basis," Jung says.

According to the American Express OPEN September 2009 Small Business Monitor, service businesses such as landscape maintenance are more concerned with cash flow issues (63 percent) vs. other industries (60 percent of retailers and 61 percent of manufacturers).



Sleep aid: The easiest way to raise cash is to prevent it from leaking out of the business unnecessarily. There are certain expenses that are difficult to downsize, such as your building, points out Jim Huston, president, J.R. Huston Enterprises, a green industry consulting firm based in Englewood, Colo.

"I'm telling people to plan for a repeat of 2009, and have two budgets: one for a best-case scenario, and one for a worst-case scenario," Huston says. Trim expenses accordingly.

Also, watch collections, and consider ways to "right-size" your organization as Jeff Oxley, president, Swingle Lawn Tree and Landscape Care, Denver, Colo., did in 2008 and 2009 (see "Missing Financial Goals," page 51).

Pay Up, People!



Last year was the first time Eric Brand, president, P&L Landscaping, Merrimack, N.H., enforced a "cease of service" clause on customers who did not meet the 30-day payment terms.

"We had about \$80,000 we had to write off in a period of two years," Brand says. That's \$80,000 that customers owed and did not pay. That's annual payroll for a couple of employees, several new pieces of heavy-duty equipment, a down-payment on a facility. Those monthly invoices that go unpaid add up, Brand recognized.

"I worry whether people will pay, when am I going to get the money," he says.

Brand has filed lawsuits in small claims court before. Those just cost him more. "At the end of the day I end up not getting the money," he says. "Even if we win the judgment in court, the customer will file for bankruptcy in the meantime, and we waste time and effort and don't get anything."

Sleep aid: Brand delegated collections phone calls to a couple of employees in the office so he can keep up with invoices that are nearing past-due. "There are some customers I feel close to that I would rather make the phone call to and ask when we should expect payment," he says.

And he's persistent. "After a few phone calls, you're not as friendly as you were during the first conversation," he remarks. "Especially if they are not following through with their commitment."

His advice: Seems like common sense, but Brand says many companies don't require customers to sign a contract. "Even friends and family," he says. "You have to make sure you have something in writing – an agreement everyone can follow."

Also, don't allow receivables to age too long before making phone calls. "Money is money, and you have to be tough and not listen to excuses," he says. "You have to work hard and diligently at collections to make sure you are getting the money."

Where Did the Day Go?



Before you know it, everyone at your house is sound asleep and you're still plugging away at the computer. There's paperwork, payroll, scheduling – and business planning, which is supposed to be the owner's key role, but there's no time for that during daylight production hours, especially for small and mid-sized firms.

The end of the month is always the worst. "I may be tired or not have one stitch of energy left, but I will crawl into the house at the end of the day and make certain the bills get sent out," Jung says.

The to-do list for a business owner is an evolving, ever-expanding load of roles and duties that only grows as a business matures. The pressure of "getting it all done" will stoke the brain into overdrive – the sort of mind-racing that keeps you up at night. *Did I remember to call this customer back? Did I send out this bill? Did I talk to this employee about this issue?*

"I worry about what we forgot to do that day," says Brandon Granger, president, Granger Landscapes, Florence, S.C. "If you have customers who have last-minute service requests and you don't write them down...."

At Swingle Tree, the company motto is "Keeping our Promises." This puts a lot of pressure on president Jeff Oxley to make sure customer expectations are met.

"If you lose one customer, you'll probably lose 10, because they're going to talk," he says. "If I get a phone call and learn that we didn't do exactly what we said we were going to do, it wears on me and the rest of the team."

Sleep aid: Granger organized a company job board where every project is logged, along with customers' special requests. This way, everyone at the company knows what tasks to complete, when and where.

To ensure that customers needs are met, despite complaints, Oxley says the company will do what it takes – even lose money on a job – to keep clients happy. "We have had instances where we've taken the wrong tree out on properties," he continues. "How we right that is by planting a new tree and caring for it for a number of years pro bono."

And in an ideal world, an owner would hire an assistant, but this is not always possible. Taking a break to spend time with family gives Granger some balance.

"I try to leave my work at work, but I do have an office at home and I usually work there for about an hour after the kids go to bed," he says. "But after that, I try to settle down and watch some TV with my wife."

11 percent of contractors' clients reduced services and/or spending, and 7 percent of customers **cancelled services in 2009.**

Source: State of the Industry Report

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What Happened to Loyalty?

It's frustrating. Longtime clients who supported the business for years will cancel to save a few bucks. No matter that the guy who cut the better deal isn't insured or experienced – or even all that interested in providing good service. “The most troubling issue at this moment is the demise of customer loyalty currently plaguing the Tampa Bay-area market,” says Ray Bradley, president, Raymow, Oldsmar, Fla.



Bradley's customer philosophy is simple: Put people first. “Historically, we have thrown our own budget limitations by the wayside in order to meet a customer's needs,” he says.

For the 20 years Raymow has been in business, clients have shown their appreciation for that extra-mile service by staying loyal. Not anymore.

“Regardless of the depth or longevity of any given customer relationship, and regardless of the professionalism or quality of our service, price is not only the dominating factor but sometimes, it is the only factor,” he says.

Most contractors are dealing with cancellations – 72 per-

cent, according to our 2009 State of the Industry Report

We don't know how many of those customers are buying services cheaper from someone else, or simply doing without.

“With so many unprofessional, fly-by-night landscape companies infiltrating the market, the value of our services is being cheapened, driving both price and quality down,” Bradley says. “For those of us who have strived to elevate the professionalism and worth of the green industry, this can have a devastating effect.”

Keith LoCascio, president, Barefoot Grass Co., Mount Pleasant, S.C., hasn't raised prices in four years because of pressure from pick-up truck start-ups with rock-bottom prices. “If anything, we are pricing our jobs a little cheaper just to get the business,” he says.

Sleep aid: Bradley will not lower quality for price – no matter what. “I will not compromise my own integrity and the integrity of my company by providing a less-than-quality service just to retain or acquire business,” he asserts.

He is confident that some customers will always recognize quality work. “And they are willing to pay for it,” he says.

“Low-balling will always exist,” Bradley adds. “But I prefer



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COVER STORY

to take the high road and stay true to my belief that you get what you pay for."

In general, customers want to pay for less. *Lawn & Landscape* research showed that 11 percent of contractors' clients reduced services and/or spending, and seven percent of customers cancelled services last year.

Alan Martin, president, Fertilawn Landscape & Maintenance, Grayson, Ga., bought loyal customers and expanded his business when he acquired the contracts of a longtime company in town that went out of business. Some of the contracts were 15 to 20 years old.

"Sound contracts like that pay dividends because those customers are starting to do new installations and re-upping their landscaping around their homes," Martin says. His strategy is to use those contracts as a base and upsell customers from there.

Workforce Woes



Good help is hard to find. Adam Linnemann employs eight people at Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping in Columbia, Ill. Because college students are attracted to these jobs, his turnover is generally every four years – after graduation, workers move on to different careers.

"I can't afford to pay a lot for labor, so having reliable laborers is a worry of mine," he says. "If you have one or two call in sick, it puts a damper on your day."


That's putting it lightly. Call-offs cause chaos. And Linnemann can't control this aspect of his business. Even more stressful is rounding up employees and sub-contractors to plow snow in winter. Because Linnemann lays off six of his workers in the off-season, he never knows if they'll be willing to help during snow season.

An entirely different personnel issue is keeping employees happy and busy during tough economic times. Martin knows his workers have families to support. Most of his 15 employees have worked for him for at least five years.

"I know they can't just go out there and find another job real quick because of the economy," Martin says, noting that he feels pressure to help his workers earn a living. "I want to make sure they can pay their bills just like I'm trying to do myself."

But the sporadic workload in 2009 didn't make this easy for Martin. "It was like a yo-yo – feast or famine," he says. "I've had some periods where I thought I needed to hire more help, and there were times when I really considered letting help go."

Sleep aid: Most of Martin's employees are simply happy to have a job. "This industry has been hit really hard here in the Southeast," he says. People who lost corporate or other service jobs broke into the green industry and have forced unhealthy

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prices and competition into the market. The trickle-down affect of this price-gauging and bloat of contractors is less work for more people.

Despite tough times, Martin maintains his people-first philosophy. "I've always said you're only as good as your people and your equipment," he says.

"You're A-team will have to wear more hats," says Judy Guido, president, Guido & Associates, Moorpark, Calif. As the workload becomes too much for employees, consider implementing technology that can ease the burden. "Everything from back-office technology to sales force automation technology will streamline the amount of people it requires to do certain functions."

The Weather Gamble



The only unknown that can damage a business as much as the economy is the weather. Mother Nature is an unpredictable force, and all the technology in the world won't create rain during drought, snow during winter or sun during wet seasons.

After two years of drought, the economy in 2009 and the fifth wettest season on record in the Atlanta area where Martin's crews maintain properties, he's feeling beaten down and stressed by the weather. "During the drought, you had to beg people to put annuals in the ground," he says. "Then (the city) shut the sprinklers off and we couldn't water. It's been a very trying three years. I've seen a lot of good companies

just fold up and quit."

In 2009, all the rain sparked interest in plant installations, but maintenance was a nightmare. "Yards were so wet, we couldn't put equipment on them," Martin says. "You're doing more by hand, making the situation tougher. And you fight weeds harder."

The precipitation Linnemann worries about most is snow. "If the meteorologist says we're going to get 6 inches of snow, that stresses me out to where I set my alarm for every couple of hours to see if the snow is falling or accumulating," he says.

Then, time to call in the subcontractors to plow. Anxiety runs high, and often the coordinating occurs in the middle of the night. "We could be out for 30 hours straight or just four hours – that's always another worry," Linnemann adds.

Sleep aid: Linnemann makes arrangements with a local concrete plant that closes during winter to hire subcontractors. This way, he has back-up for stormy weather. "I contacted the manager there and we use their laborers to help us plow snow," he says.

Because Martin balances his business between maintenance and installation, when weather disrupts one service, the other department thrives.

Bills, Bills, Bills



Keeping the doors open is no easy task during a recession. "Just keeping the cash flow coming in and getting

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- Does not decompose/ compress

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As playground safety surfacing, a 6-inch layer of Pinnacle Rubber Mulch will cushion a child's fall from as high as 12 feet.

- Will not cause splinters
- Wheelchair accessible
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With a variety of vivid colorfast hues, Pinnacle Rubber Mulch brings an element of fun to safety surfacing for playgrounds.

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COVER STORY

work sold to have cash flow is a concern," Granger says. Business expenses will suck the life right out of a company.

According to *Lawn & Landscape* research, operating costs increased by 3.4 percent in 2008, and survey respondents anticipate those expenses will rise by 7.3 percent in 2010.

The numbers scroll through LoCascio's head at night. The only way to stay profitable is to trim the fat. LoCascio will stop accepting credit card payments in 2010 to save the \$1,800 in processing fees he spent last year. "That doesn't sound like a lot, but it's three weeks of payroll for one employee," he says.

Barefoot Grass Co. hasn't raised prices in four years, so the company must gain its profit by "finding" dollars in the business. "This year, when it was time to renew our payroll processing software, I said no," LoCascio says. "It was \$300. I have three employees. It will take me an extra five minutes to do payroll, and we haven't updated our ACT software for several years. What we have works."

Granted, LoCascio is a former CPA who knows how to count beans and scrape pennies out of his budget - but this doesn't mean implementing leaner operations is easy.

Sleep aid: LoCascio scoured every line item in his budget for opportunities to cut costs. He found many. And, he adopted practices from successful businesses such as UPS. "They have a program in place where their drivers only take right-hand turns," LoCascio says. "We do that. Our crews make right-hand turns all day except a left-hand turn into the driveway at the end of the workday."

LoCascio installed GPS systems in his trucks that track routing, gas mileage and service needs. "We have a no idling policy," he adds. This rule reflects the No. 1 concern survey respondents expressed in our 2009 *State of the Industry Report*: rising fuel prices.

As Huston advised, create a best- and worst-case scenario budget and cut costs accordingly. Don't wait to make adjustments in labor or to reduce overhead expenses. It could be too late.

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900 Series Mowers



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MOWING PERFORMANCE

- 7-Iron PRO™ Deck—best deck made today
- Up to 12 mph mowing speed
- More torque to the drive tires
- Better hillside operation

SMOOTHER HANDLING

- New integrated ground drive transmission
- 2-position damper mounting
- Enhanced weight redistribution
- Conveniently placed controls

EASE OF USE

- Deck step entry
- Run flat caster tires
- Brake and Go starting
- Comfort and Convenience package



Made to perform.

A gear reduction drive in the wheel motor adds mechanical muscle, increasing the torque available over a purely hydraulic system.

A brand-new integrated ground drive system gives the Z900 line exceptional controllability, especially on side-hill mowing operations.

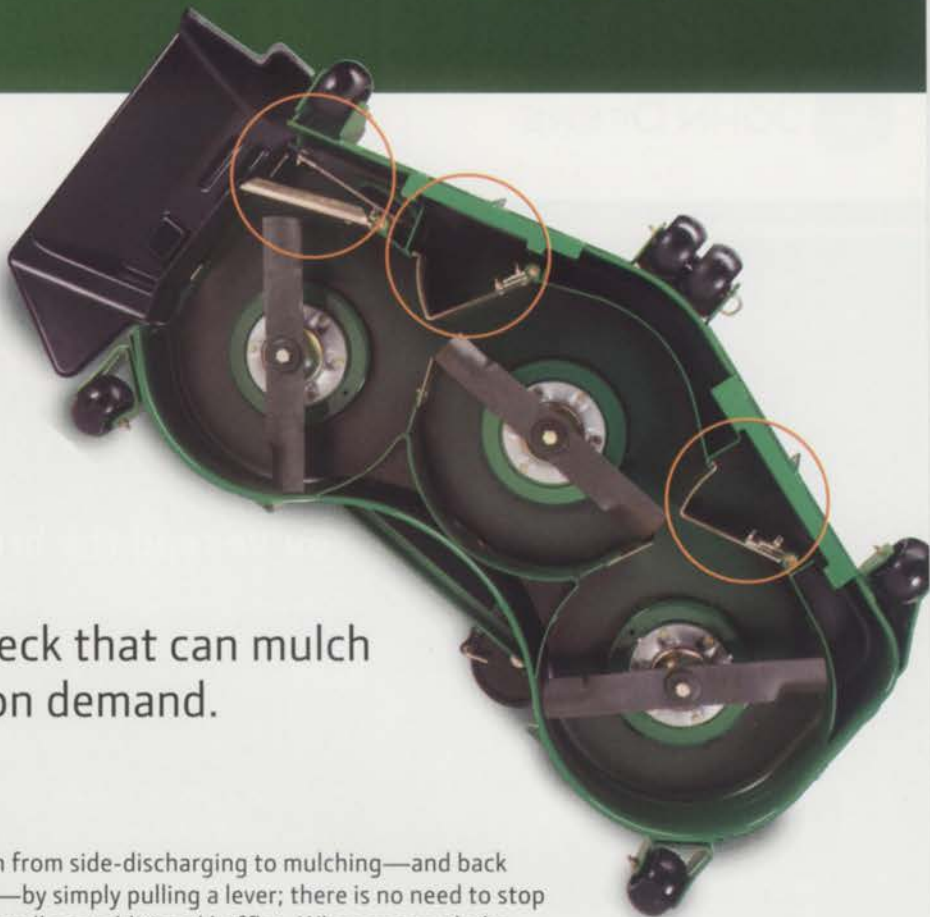
Improved power and redistribution of weight has also improved performance.



How the Mulch-On-Demand™ Deck works.

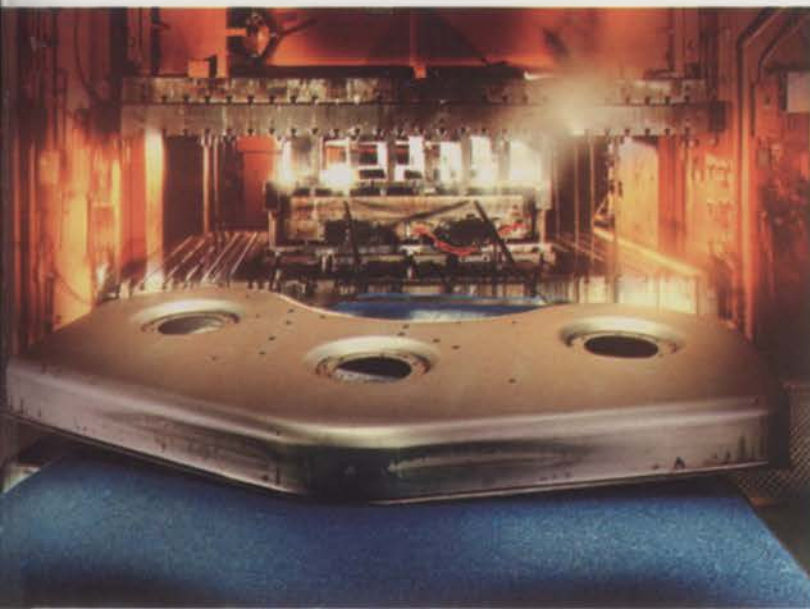
By shifting the lever to mulch position, the movable gate closes off the discharge chute and the smooth moving baffles close off cutting chambers to maximize mulching performance. The Mulch-On-Demand™ Deck also has, as its foundation, the legendary 7-Iron PRO™ Deck. Which means it's stamped from a single sheet of thick, seven gauge steel using four million pounds of pressure.

Nothing beats the deck that can mulch and side-discharge on demand.



Switch from side-discharging to mulching—and back again—by simply pulling a lever; there is no need to stop and install any additional baffles. When engaged, the baffles close off the cutting chambers, allowing the deck to mulch. When disengaged, the baffles fold to the front of the deck, allowing it to side discharge.

With its outstanding side-discharge performance, windrows are history with the 7-Iron PRO™ Mulch-On-Demand™ Deck—even in tall or thick grass. It's designed to save you time, especially when you're cutting by sidewalks, parking lots and plant beds, enabling you to engage the mulching mode when you need it. The flexibility to switch from side discharging to mulching effortlessly and safely helps you get the most from every acre and every hour.



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- Your trial period doesn't start until you actually use the machine, or April 1st, whichever comes first.
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Customer Testimonials

*KC Fisher, president, Landcare
Landscaping, Inc., Tampa, Fla.*

Runs 10 ZTrak 900s –
nine 60-inch and one 72-inch

Employees: 50
Revenue: \$3 million
98% commercial business:
70% maintenance,
20% landscaping and
10% irrigation

"The 72s are wonderful. They just felt like they were built heavy. All their steel seemed heavier."

"Over the years, I've bought other mowers, and I've never gotten so much as a thank-you. These people at Deere bend over backwards for you."

"The mulch on demand we liked. It's not just a little kit, it's really a whole mulching system. It lays a nice job down."

The Pain of Injuries

"When we have a personal injury, no matter how minor it is, I start second-guessing myself, whether that person was the right hire, or what I could have done to prevent the accident," Oxley says.

Accidents in the tree business can be especially serious. "I've had chainsaw strikes where people had very serious cuts on their arms or legs to where it has impaired them quite a bit, and it's a matter of figuring out what you can do for them, their families, and your team," he says. "You want to make sure it doesn't happen again."

These workplace injuries deeply affect Oxley. "It scares me," he says.



Sleep aid: Safety training is critical for all employees at Swingle Tree, and many landscape companies will find that having a program in place can reduce workers' compensation fees. Address safety during weekly staff meetings. Don't miss an opportunity to teach a safety lesson.

Most manufacturers and distributors offer training for the equipment they sell. Take advantage of this resource. "Unfortunately, many employees are given equipment to use without training, and that will really help with longevity," Guido says, noting an added benefit of training aside from safety.

Missing Financial Goals

Everyone at Swingle Tree took a 5 percent pay reduction in April 2008.

"It was a matter of right-sizing the organization to get our expenses in line," Oxley explains. "If the industry benchmark is a 5- to 15-percent profit margin and you don't have that, you fail to exist."

Oxley says business has never been this tough. "What the future holds, I don't know," he says.

How many companies actually met their financial goals in 2009? The average landscape company grew 2 percent this year, 8 percent down from last year's 10 percent average. Revenue-per-employee figures were also down in 2009, from an average \$46,378 to \$41,193.

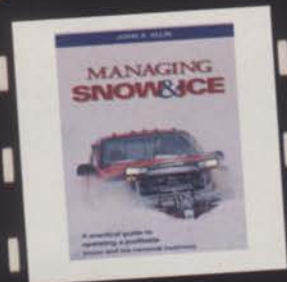
"Everyone has had to feel the pain," Oxley says. "If you don't meet financial obligations, you don't grow. You don't grow the corporation, and you don't grow the people. We want to protect our company and employees."

Those numbers – the goals and the reality – will keep a concerned contractor up at night. "We strive to hit all of our goals and benchmarks, and over the last few years, this has caused a lot of angst in our company because of the economy,"



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Oxley admits. "By not meeting these expectations, we fail to keep top talent and be able to invest back in our company."

Sleep aid: Swingle Tree focused on getting its budget in line with the economy to meet financial goals. "To protect as many of our players as we could (from lay-offs), we had to reduce expenses, and part of that was a wage reduction and looking at other benefits," he says.

Guido says the last decade, for the most part, has allowed business owners to spend more freely. "Business was easy when times were good," Guido says. "The country was going through some of the most fruitful times in American history. We've been pretty fat and happy, and you know what, we have to get back into fiscal shape and start becoming responsible companies," she says.

Drained by Insurance

Barefoot Grass Co. gets hit with a 11- to 12-percent insurance price increase each year. "We have never filed a workers' compensation claim," LoCascio says. "We have never filed a general liability claim. We have never filed an automobile claim."

That doesn't seem to matter.

"You get the audit at the end of the year and you feel like you've done everything right and they hit you with an increase," he says. "You find out that one guy you subbed out to wasn't insured to the same limit, so you have to pay the spread on the difference – or something."

The cost of insurance prevents LoCascio from hiring new employees. Though his hourly rate is an average \$11.50 per hour, with insurance and taxes, each worker costs him about \$16 per hour. "I don't look at people now as employees, I look at it as what's this going to do to my workers' compensation rate," he says. "I'd rather pay overtime to my existing guys than hire new workers."

"It gets to the point where we can only charge customers so much for what we do," LoCascio continues, noting that recouping the cost of insurance by raising prices just isn't realistic in this competitive market.

The worst part is, LoCascio has a feeling that many landscape contractors – and most one-truck operations in his area – do not carry insurance. They undercut his prices and avoid paying what is LoCascio's most costly business expense outside of payroll.

Insurance is a catch-22 in LoCascio's opinion: You can't be in business without it, but to pay for it, you struggle to stay in business.

Sleep aid: LoCascio's has cut costs in other areas, since he can't control the rising cost of insurance. Also, he doesn't offer health insurance. A 2009 Kaiser Family Foundation survey found that 60 percent of firms offer health benefits.

Less than half (46 percent) of the smallest employers (three to nine workers) offer health benefits. Among those firms that do, 21 percent reduced the scope of benefits or increased cost sharing; 15 percent increased worker's share of the premium.

Health insurance is a benefit for employees, but workers' compensation, general liability and automobile insurance are requirements. Look into group insurance options through business associations. National Federation of Independent Businesses provides discounts on workers' compensation through a member program, and PLANET's affiliation with a commercial insurance provider gives members perks. These opportunities can strengthen your buying power. **L**

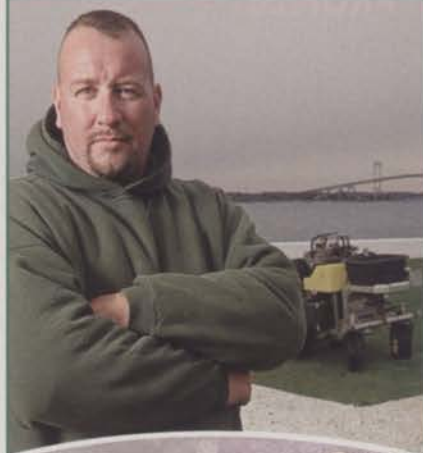
The author is a freelance writer based in Bay Village, Ohio.



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On the threshold of his retirement, the longtime president of RISE remains a passionate advocate for the specialty chemicals industry.

Some leaders manage through fear; others through the power of their personality. It is the uncommon executive, however, who inspires simply through the strength of his character. Such a man is Allen James, the widely respected president of RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment),

Allen James

By Dan Moreland



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PROFILE

national trade association representing the interests of the specialty chemicals industry.

Since being hired as executive director in 1991, James has transformed \$40,000 in seed money into a powerful advocacy group with a \$3 million annual budget and

an enviable track record of success against anti-pesticide special interest groups.

At the time James began his career at RISE the organization had 12 members. Today, RISE boasts more than 200 members accounting for more than 90 percent of the total specialty pesticide production

in the U.S. "Allen is an incredibly gifted leader who has done a great amount for RISE as an organization and for the industry as whole," observed Bill Culpepper, president and CEO of SePRO Corporation. "He has exceeded all expectations with the things he has accomplished since joining RISE."

"RISE is now a nationally recognized voice of the specialty chemicals industry because of Allen's talent and commitment," added Josh Weeks, vice president, Professional Products North America, for

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DOSSIER:

Allen James

Organization:

- RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment®)

Headquarters Location:

- Washington, D.C.

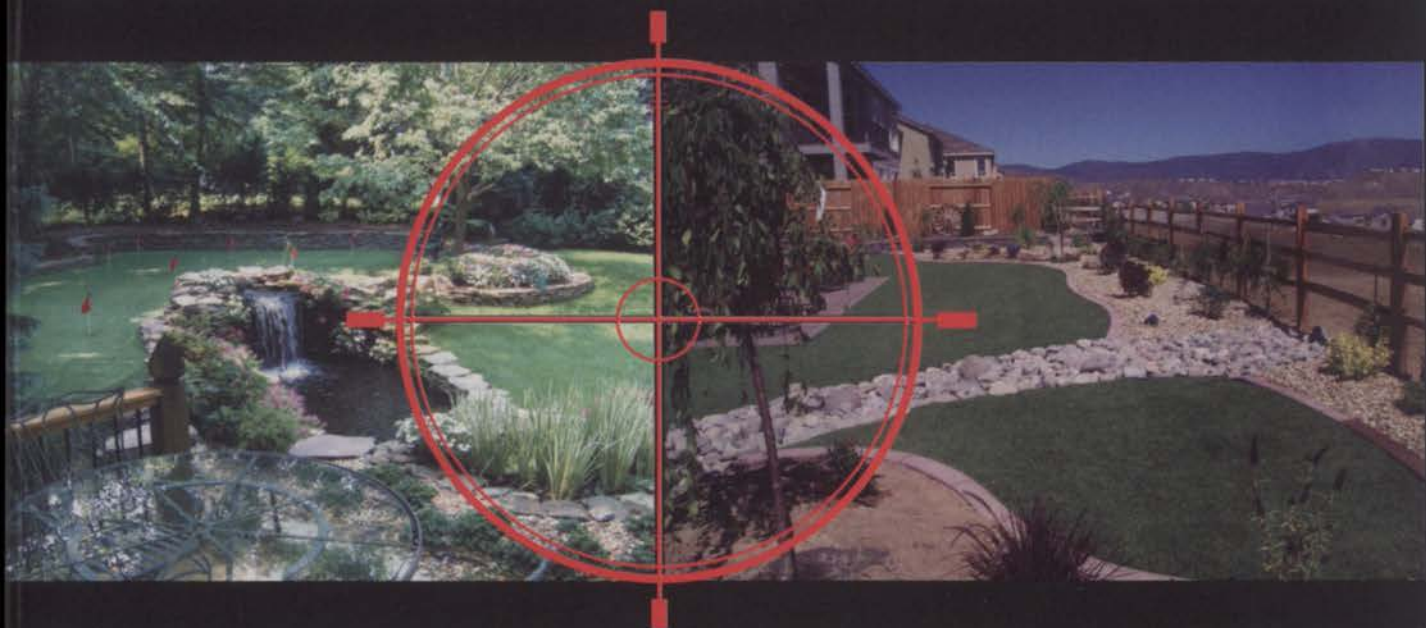
Career Highlights:

- President, RISE, 1991-2010
- President and CEO, International Sanitary Supply Association, 1987-1990
- Executive Director, Delta Sigma Phi Fraternity, 1978-1987
- Executive Director, USDA Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service, Beaufort County, N.C., 1969-1978
- MBA, East Carolina State University, Greenville, N.C.
- Bachelor's Degree, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N.C.

Personal:

- Married to wife Ann for 29 years; enjoys deep sea fishing and golf.

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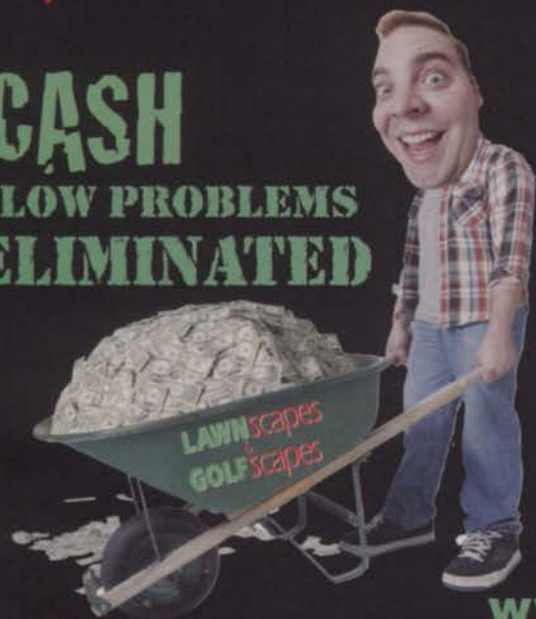
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PROFILE

the Environmental Science business of Bayer CropScience. "He is always looking for opportunities to be an advocate for our industry and is tireless in his efforts. He's widely respected for his inclusive leadership style and ability to build consensus," a sentiment shared by James' longtime

friend and colleague Keelan Pulliam, president of Conrad Fafard. "Allen is very focused and has great passion for the specialty pesticide industry," Pulliam said. "He is a consensus builder and over the years built up trust in RISE membership but more importantly 'on the hill' where

IN HIS OWN WORDS

In February 2009, James sat down with *Lawn & Landscape* contributing editor Pat Jones to talk about his time in the industry. Read that interview at www.lawnandlandscape.com/webextras.

he was listened to and respected. Our opponents didn't always agree, but Allen gave the industry a seat at the table to be heard. He is a true professional."

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS. When James joined RISE nearly two decades ago there was no guarantee the organization would be successful, much less have the wide-ranging influence it has garnered over time. "I came into work the first week to an office, a phone and a desk but no chair," James recalls of those early days. "I investigated the financial situation and learned we had \$40,000 in the bank."

Jay Vroom, president and CEO of RISE's sister organization CropLife America, told James, "Well, you've got some seed money, but if you want to keep working you need to go out and attract members." It proved to be sound advice. "I began an intense membership program," James recalls, traveling across the country to conduct face-to-face meetings with potential members. It's a strategy that produced immediate results, in large part because of James' low-key and non-threatening, yet highly evolved powers of persuasion.

"Allen is adept at forging alliances and coalitions," observes Rosenberg, who has worked side-by-side with James on a range of industry issues over the years. "His strong interpersonal skills command respect and make him, as well as RISE, a very effective organization. I can't say enough good things about Allen."

"Over the years, we've worked closely with a lot of different associations to build strong coalitions to meet our mutual objectives, which is something I'm very proud of," James said. "We've also tried to deal with our adversaries in an aggressive, yet respectful manner. There is a time to take a stand, but to do it in a way that is not offensive. I think such an



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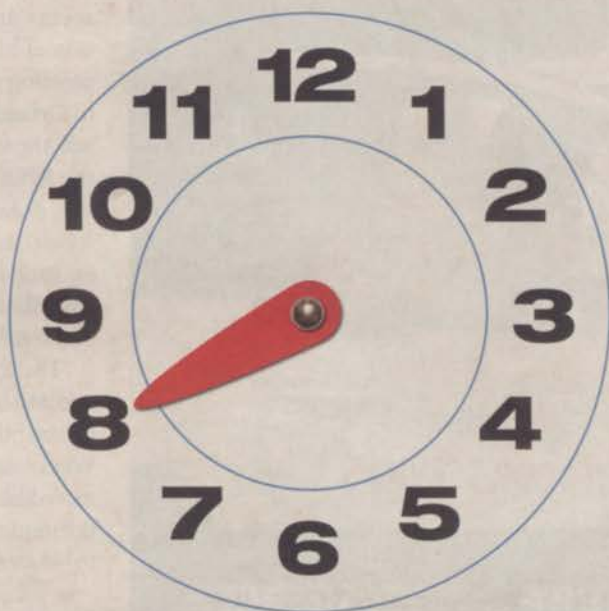


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PROFILE

approach has served me well throughout my career.”

“None of the people who conceived the idea of RISE were sure it actually could be done,” Vroom told PCT magazine, Lawn & Landscape’s sister publication, when James was named to its Crown

Leadership Class of 2003. However, it has been successful, in large part, because of James’ passion for his work and his innate leadership abilities. “He is capable of charismatically building consensus across industries,” Vroom observed. “His most significant strength is his ability to get

people of differing interests to quietly let down their guard and relate to each other. He has strong communication skills and is able to consistently deliver clear messages. And most important of all, Allen is a good listener.”

A REMARKABLE CAREER. Given James’ longtime association with Vroom, it seems appropriate that the culmination of his career would occur at a joint meeting of RISE and CropLife America in Orlando, Fla., in September 2009. It was there that Josh Weeks, chairman of the RISE Governing Board, announced the creation of the E. Allen James Award, which will be given annually to an individual who makes outstanding contributions to the specialty pesticide and fertilizer industry.

“This award is a lasting tribute to Allen and will be given for years to come to recognize others who build upon his legacy,” Weeks said. “Allen has contributed an incredible amount to the advancement of the industry and this award is an accolade to his accomplishments. He will always be



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“We must find a new way to get our message through the haze of misinformation. We must **find our voice** in the communities of our nation.” – Allen James

associated with the founding of RISE and building the organization into an effective advocate for the industry.”

One might think given the fact he only has six months left in his tenure as RISE president, James might take some time to sit back and smell the roses, visiting friends and colleagues as he travels the country on behalf of the association. If so, you’d be wrong.

James’ keynote address at the RISE Annual Meeting proved once again the longtime association executive isn’t about to give any ground to the opposition and



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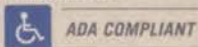
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The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) program was developed for the U.S. Department of Energy, utilizing a point rating system to recognize sustainable site and building design. Belgard permeable concrete paving stone systems can earn credit points in the LEED rating system. For more information, visit www.usgbc.org.



LEED CREDITS for permeable concrete paving stones (in Materials & Resources and Sustainable Sites rating categories)

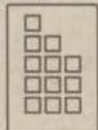
MR CREDIT 4.1 Recycled Content (1 point)	MR CREDIT 4.2 Recycled Content (Credit 4.1 +1 pt.)	MR CREDIT 5.1 Regional Materials (1 point)	MR CREDIT 5.2 Regional Materials (Credit 5.1 +1 pt.)	SS CREDIT 6.1 Stormwater Design: Quality Control (1 point)	SS CREDIT 6.2 Stormwater Design: Quality Control (1 point)	SS CREDIT 7 Heat Island Effect (1 point)
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Environmentally-friendly, aesthetically pleasing, Belgard permeable pavers offer the strength, durability, slip-resistance, and visual appeal property owners desire. Offering a versatile range of styles to suit almost any application, the Belgard Environmental collection's aesthetic options offer design flexibility while protecting precious resources. Each style is designed to adhere to EPA and local regulations while contributing credits toward LEED® certification.

DESIGNED FOR MAXIMUM VERSATILITY IN

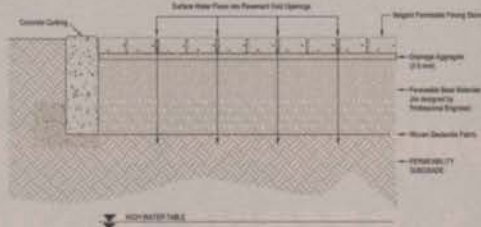


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FACT: According to the U.S. Geological Survey, Over **half** of the drinking water in America comes from groundwater, with the balance coming from lakes and rivers.

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PROFILE

remains a passionate advocate for the specialty chemicals industry.

"We have reached the tipping point with respect to activism targeting our industry, emboldened by Presidential and Congressional leadership favorable to their views," he warned. "They call our scientific basis into question." In fact, supported by the consumer media, he said the specialty chemicals industry finds itself under siege. "There is a tremendous divide between the beliefs of the majority of our nation and the voice of the few well-funded activist/detractors of our industry and critics of our standard of living. The activists opposing our industry are one-and-the-same as those opposing the progress of our great nation. That point we need to understand clearly. And, if we do not stand firmly against these groups, we will surely be torn apart by them.

"We must find a new way to get our

message through the haze of misinformation," James added. "We must find our voice in the communities of our nation. We must remind our neighbors it is our innovative products that allow them to

positive images about our products in our communities. Together, we will reframe the debate. We will reclaim the high ground."


It's a battle Allen James, despite some-

“ Allen is an incredibly **gifted leader** who has done a great amount for RISE ... and for the industry as a whole.” – Bill Culpepper, CEO, SePro

enjoy life in this wonderful country.”

Too often, he said, it's a message that fails to reach the public amid the din of anti-industry activists. The specialty chemicals industry is driven by 21st century technology and innovation, James observed, "while our detractors are rooted in 20th century rhetoric, devoid of meaningful value to the society we cherish.

"We are not in a time of business-as-usual," he warned. "We must create

times overwhelming odds, has embraced for nearly two decades because he believes that his is a just cause. Nowhere was this more evident than in his closing remarks during his final keynote address to RISE members: "It has been my honor to serve you all these years and I promise my strongest effort ... to assure the light of the future shines bright for our industry." 

The author is publisher of PCT magazine.





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For What It's Worth

Landscape contractors must be careful to price for profit so they can sustain business in what will likely be another difficult year.

Don't expect any great shakes in 2010 – more of the same is what most landscape contractors are planning for as they set pricing for the season. Most say they'll hold prices steady, but certainly there is pressure to mark down costs. Pressure from residential customers, commercial clients, anyone wanting a bid – they want it lower, or they want to pay less even if that means downsizing services.

But what happens when bidding gets tough and the bills keep piling up?

"People panic," says Jim Huston, president of J.R. Huston Enterprises and author of a book out this month, *A Critical Analysis of the MORS Estimating System*, a scientific, step-by-step, comparative analysis of the Multiple Overhead Recovery System (MORS) estimating methodology and all six pricing methods commonly used in the green industry. "Some numbers we are seeing in the marketplace are ludicrous because people don't know what their costs are. So then they're bidding for cash flow and not profitability."

You must understand your costs before negotiating the prices for your services. Otherwise, when a customer asks your company to match a competitor's bid, how will you know whether this is profitable for your business?

"If you know what your break-even point is and you know what your direct costs are, then you have a clearer picture of where your prices should stand," Huston says.

Because many business owners dedicated 2009 to teasing out unnecessary costs, leaning their operations and im-

proving the efficiency of processes across the board, they're starting 2010 in a better position than the year prior. So the more-of-the-same pricing strategy will at least keep a business steady.

Freezing prices is advisable in most situations, though Huston notes an inevitable dilemma.

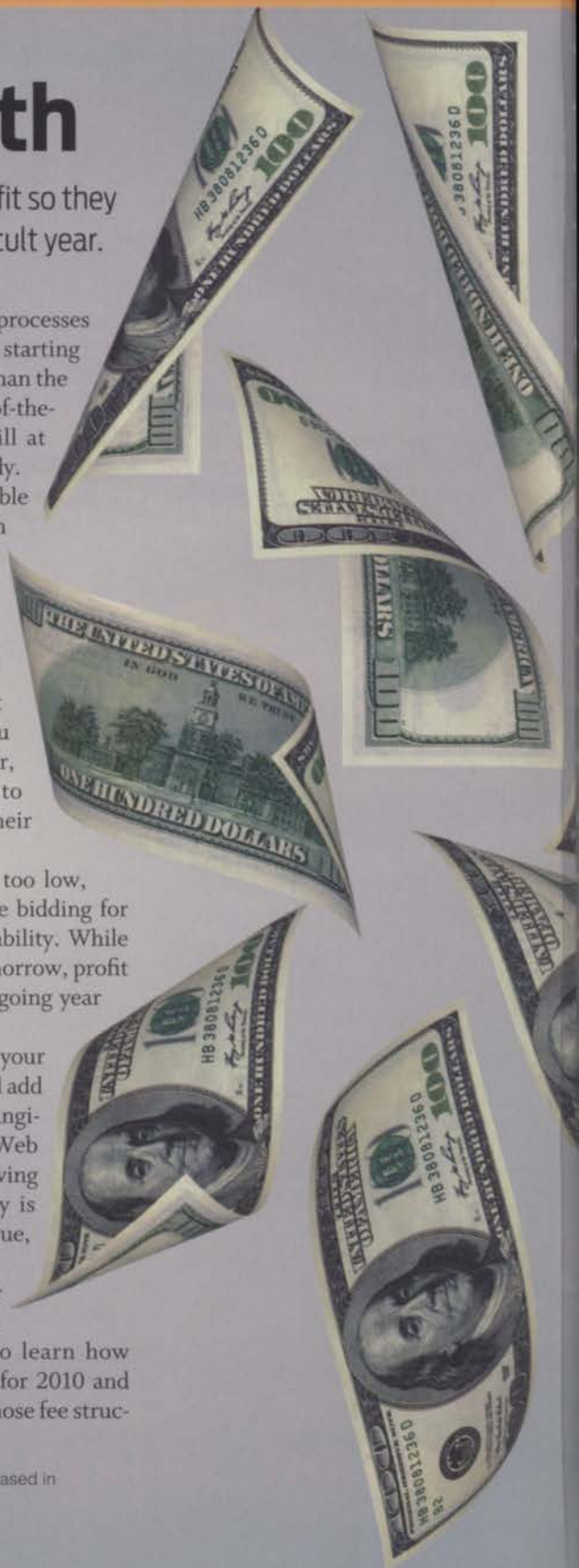
"If you don't lower your price, you may not get the work you want," he says. But if you start lowering prices then you set a trend as a price leader, and that sends a signal to everyone else to lower their prices."

And if those prices go too low, as Huston notes, you'll be bidding for cash flow and not profitability. While cash may pay the bills tomorrow, profit is what keeps a business going year to year.

Huston's advice: "Hold your prices as best you can, and add value – bring in the intangibles," he says. Use a solid Web site as an example of showing customers your company is worth paying for. "Add value, and show value."

This month, *Lawn & Landscape* spoke with three landscape firms to learn how they are pricing services for 2010 and what factors are driving those fee structures. **L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Bay Village, Ohio.



SMALL BY KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE

Raising Rates

Adjusting prices to cover the costs of a maturing business has helped this one-man firm grow.

William Prout started his lawn maintenance outfit with a truck, a lawn mower, an old backpack blower and a pile of flyers. He was in business and, like many one-man startups, he was charging way below the industry average. "I look back at my pricing now, and boy was I cheap," he says.

Prout has come a long way in nine years – a very long way. Now his pricing strategy involves more than covering the cost of gasoline to feed his mower. He pays taxes, insurance, license fees, all the standard expenses small business owners face in the green industry. Prout raised prices years ago, and his business grew as a result.

"I talk to other people in the busi-

ness, and I got online and participated in some landscapers' forums to find out what I should be charging," he says. "I started raising my prices, and customers weren't going away."

Prout knows today he's not the least expensive game in town, but he's fair. He prices jobs by time, and by now he knows exactly how long he'll spend on a job to mow, pick up leaves, trim hedges or do other cleanup work a client's requests. If pricing is off by a little, he will wait until the next contract year to increase their charges, presenting clients with an outline of the work performed and the time spent on their property.

For the most part, customers have not tried to negotiate cost with him. Though



As William Prout's business has matured, so has his approach to pricing.

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BRIEFCASE

SMALL

Fallen Leaf Lawn & Yard Care

Principal: William Prout, owner
Location: East Haven, Conn.
Established: 2001
2009 Revenues: \$25,000
Customers: 95% residential
Services: lawn maintenance
Employees: 1

of course, there's the occasional price-shopper looking for a down-and-dirty deal. "I've had some people say, 'That's way too expensive!' but I'm not about to come down on my prices when I know what I should be charging for a job," Prout says.

Price-shocked customers usually are new customers who have never had lawn service before. "So they're shopping around, and they don't know what the going rate is," he says.

Prout will maintain his pricing for 2010, raising it only if he recognizes jobs that required more time than figured into last year's price. He may consider purchasing another mower this year, which would be an expense he'd need to cover. But this will not affect what customers pay, he says. As for growth, Prout plans to continue operating the business solo, taking on as much work as he can personally handle.

"Over the last three or four years, I've been able to retain customers and make a good living," he says.

Keeping pricing in line with industry standards makes all the difference. "I wish I knew what I should have been charging back then," Prout says, with a chuckle. That would mean extra money in Prout's pocket today, perhaps a new backpack blower. But now Prout is on track for profitability, and his customers are pleased with the service and the cost. **L**

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MEDIUM

BY KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE

Educating Clients

Customers need a refresher course in Landscaping 101, and it's a landscape contractor's job to explain a bid's price.

In the landscape design/build business, "we deliver sticker shock daily," jokes Ted Bentz, president of Second Nature. Many people are surprised at how much a hardscape, pond or retaining wall cost. Bentz knows his expenses, and can make 10 to 15 percent profit.

The problem is, customers need a little Landscaping 101 to understand the numbers on an estimate, he says.

"When my crew knows I'm heading off to talk to a potential client, they'll holler at me as I'm heading out, 'Don't deliver another heart attack,'" Bentz says. "We, as an industry, need to educate homeowners so they understand what is invested in their landscape."

Second Nature focuses primarily on more plentiful, but slightly less profitable, commercial work. These projects are bid well in advance, so Bentz has been thinking about pricing for 2010 (and 2011) for some time. Estimating gas prices is impossible, but material prices have decreased since summer of 2009, Bentz says. His goal is to save money in materials, give his employees raises and keep prices even for 2010. For contracts that he's bidding for years ahead, he'll rely on strong supplier relationships to get the best pricing possible.

And while the profit may be less for commercial work, Bentz says that efficiency on the job site actually makes up the difference. "We can work with our suppliers, have their trucks deliver materials, work with bigger delivery items - whether rock or topsoil - and I don't have to spend my time or my guys' time chasing materials," he says.

Also, once crews park their trucks on a commercial job site, that's their home base until the project is complete. With residential jobs, the run-around can end up costing Second Nature more than they can figure in to the budget.

The X-factor is always gas prices. Bentz does not include a clause in contracts that would allow him to increase the fee if prices at the pump skyrocket, but tries to build in a cushion in case they do. "These are the things that keep you up at night," he says.

Overall, Bentz is pleased with 2009. His revenue was down about 10 percent compared to 2008. "You don't ever want to go backwards, but given the conditions nationwide, I feel like we did alright," he says.

"Projects are still happening, it's just a matter of focusing on our operations and what we can do to lower the overhead numbers to be competitive. There is work to be done." **L**



Bentz

Second Nature

Principal: Ted Bentz **Location:** Rapid City, S.D. **Established:** 2003

2009 Revenue: \$450,000

Customers: 80% commercial; 20% residential **Services:** landscape design/build and maintenance

Employees: 8 to 10

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LARGE BY KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE

Know When to WALK AWAY

Educating employees on pricing strategy encourages everyone to work toward the same goal: profitability.

Every time an AA Tex Lawn Co. truck stops at a job site, the company makes money. President Mark Lay makes sure of this by knowing his costs and pricing every job so that his profit margin is 5 to 10 percent, if possible. "If we aren't making money, we do better to walk away," he says, noting that landscape installation customers, in particular, are price-shopping with a vengeance this year.

"Everyone is wanting a lower price," Lay says. "If anyone is spending money on landscape, they feel like they know they can get it done cheap because businesses are hurting."

Meanwhile, landscape companies that focused on installa-

“ We’ve worked hard in the last few years with the drought, gas prices and the recession. We’re like a **bull dog with a bone**, just workin’ it hard.”

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Bill Kemp
Monday, February 8, 2010 - Friday, February 12, 2010

Jobsite Name	Cost Code	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thu	Fri	Total
Brentwood Job	Irrigation	7:38	7:35	7:53	-	-	23:06
Crestview Job	Planting	-	-	-	7:58	7:49	15:47
		7:38	7:35	7:53	7:58	7:49	38:53

Regular Hours **38:53**
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Bill Kemp
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tion have segued into maintenance, which has been stronger than design/build in most regions. Desperate to keep their schedules full, some are pushing down the pricing bar, which hurts when companies like Lay's compete for bids.



Lay

Still, Lay won't touch prices this year. "We're not brave enough to raise them," he says.

But he's not dropping them to bargain basement levels, either. He'll hold steady for 2010 and continue to streamline his operations, if necessary. Already, he has cut 16 percent of overhead costs by reviewing costs and tightening processes.

"We've had customers ask for lower prices, and we didn't give it to them and they went to someone else," Lay relates. "I don't want to just wear out my equipment. I can run a few less people instead if I have to."

For the past two years, Lay has focused seriously on job costing; the biggest mistake landscape contractors make is not spending time on this task. "You need to know if you go out there and price work and complete the job, what will you make per hour?" he explains. "Be truthful about your expenditures: delivery, materials, everything. Did you make any money on the work?"

Knowing the cost of a job provides more negotiating power. You can go lower on prices if you know you'll still come out with a profit. But bidding blindly rarely results in money made on a job. Lay relays this information to his salespeople and managers every Thursday during meetings when they discuss jobs.

Lay figures if he shares with salespeople and managers how much it truly

costs to complete a job, as well as the profits they make on each project, they will work harder to sell profitable jobs and, improve efficiency in the field.

Meanwhile, Lay is considering a scoring system for maintenance crews that will rate their performance based on total hours per day vs. billable time.

"The whole idea is clarity of picture," Lay says of this communication strategy. "If you can show people and they understand what and why, where and when, they are going to get it done."

Looking ahead, Lay doesn't expect the economy to shift much in 2010, and surely people will continue to underbid work. But those companies won't last. "People taking work for 60 or 80 cents on the dollar are driving themselves out of business, they just don't know it yet," he says.

And when those companies fall, there will be greater opportunity to win market share no matter the economy. "We've worked extremely hard in the last few years with the drought, gas prices and now the recession," Lay says. "We're like a bull dog with a bone, just workin' it hard. I know I have the greatest team here. When this thing turns around, there's a chance to come out bigger and make a run for it in the service industry." **L**

AA Tex Lawn Co.

Principal: Mark Lay, president

Location: Charlotte, N.C.

Established: 1980 **2009 Revenue:**

more than \$3 million **Customers:**

85% commercial maintenance;

15% landscape enhancement

Services: Landscape maintenance

and enhancement **Employees:** 50

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Accelerating **Business Growth**

Even in a down economy, there are ways to **grow your business.**

BY JON EWING

Have you resigned yourself to being satisfied with no growth in this sluggish economy? Have you seen your sales slip? We all know the challenges we face in this economy. Customers are spending less, building less, cutting costs, offering fewer improvements. Here are three ways to grow your business, even in this down economy.

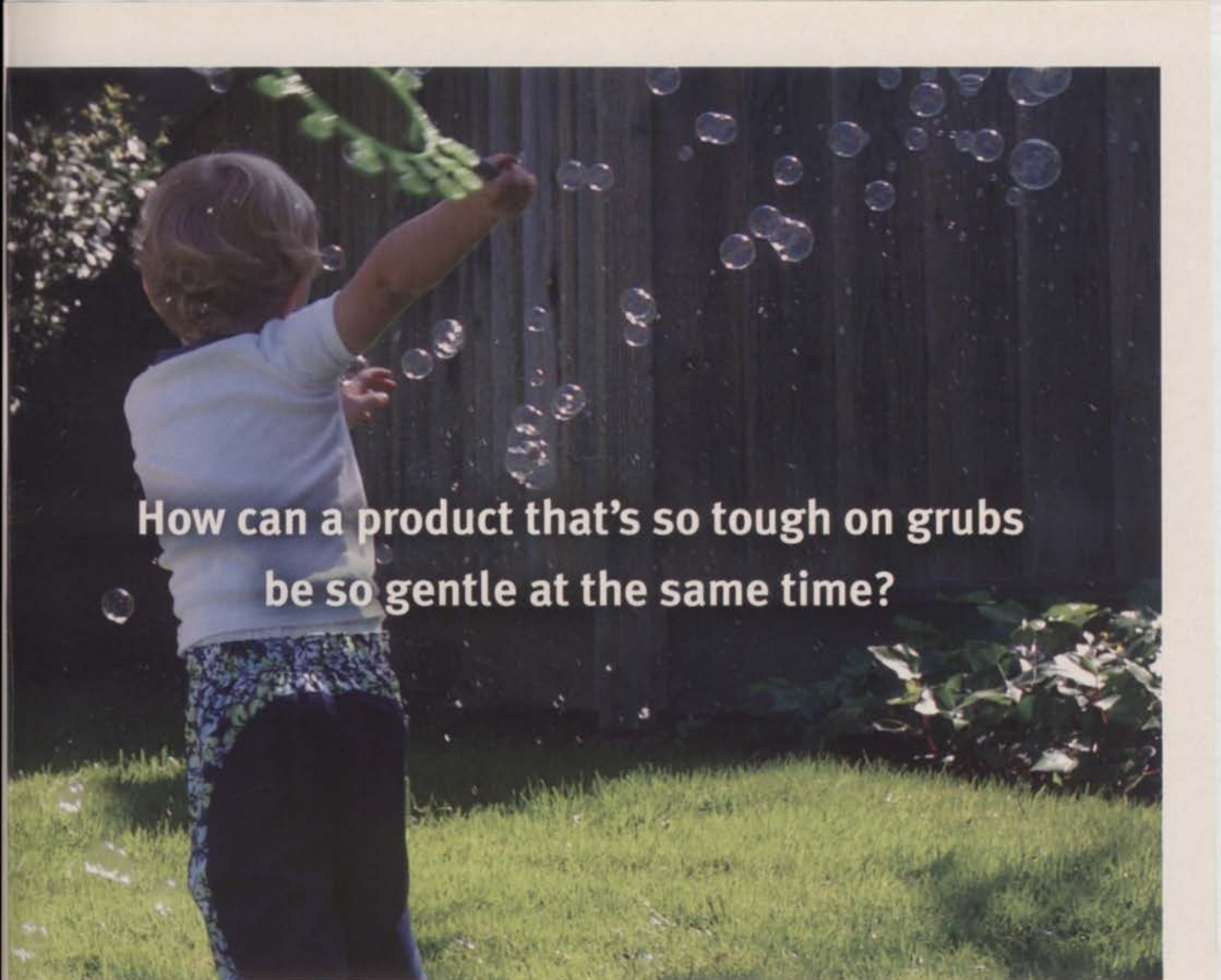
IMPROVE YOUR MARKET SHARE. You can improve market share by knowing your brand, knowing your competition, knowing who the customers are within your market and dazzling them. Also, buy your competition. If you have the financial means, poor economies are exceptional times to buy businesses as long as you have the capital and business acumen to adequately evaluate the opportunity.

Start out by knowing your segments. Are they broken down into residential sales, HOA sales, commercial sales, golf, etc.? Take each segment and evaluate what your market share is and which segments offer the best opportunities. Take some time and write down as many projects as you can list within your market and determine who services these accounts and determine what segment you can truly grow.

Simultaneously, make sure you fully understand who you are as a business. Are you a landscape construction business or maintenance business? Do you offer irrigation services, lawn care, tree work or chemical applications? Determine what services you have that stand out and what your competitive strengths are. Know your brand!

Devise marketing materials that promote the services your company does very well. Craft your marketing strategy to explain how your services can be beneficial during a rough economy. For example, show customers how you can save them money. You will want to craft this in a way that maintains or improves your margins. Can you eliminate annual color beds in favor of perennial color? Develop sustainable





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landscape recommendations that allow projects to save on water costs? Or can you eliminate groundcover and add fresh bark mulch?

Odds are that many potential customers are being overlooked by your competition while their businesses struggle. Or perhaps they are apathetic with their services and indifferent to their clients as they drop prices and lose margins. Realize that this is a huge opportunity for you. Pay close attention to your competition and the businesses they service. Understand that much of your competition is focusing on business issues that have nothing to do with serving their clients. So if they offer lackluster service, know that this is an opportunity for you to display exceptional qualities to new customers and improve your market share.

By knowing what your market is, what you do well and working hard to uncover prospective customers, you can grow market share. Stick to your brand and dazzle customers.

CREATE NEW BUSINESS SEGMENTS. Creating a new business segment can be a fun opportunity. Look for possibilities that are a good complement to your business and that offer strong upside. Look for a niche that makes you money.

There are many possibilities, possibly including: artificial turf, chemical applications, design/build work, golf courses, hardscape work, irrigation, landscape maintenance or construction, plant nurseries, putting greens, residential or commercial work, homeowner associations, hotels, resorts, sports turf, or tree divisions.

When considering a new segment or business niche it is very important to find the opportunity that best fits your business and complements your core business. You may be a sports enthusiast. Try specializing in sports fields. Perhaps you love golf; consider specializing in the design and installation of home putting greens. Use this as an opportunity to follow your passions and your customers will notice.

Understand the risk of not keep-

ing your eye on the ball in terms of developing your brand. Make sure that you have fully analyzed your company's ability to perform. Any new initiative must be complementary to your core business.

GROW YOUR BASE. Explore all opportunities available within your current customer base. Know them as well as you know your own business. Often, a business is able to grow by merely taking better care of their existing customer base. Let's face it, every business has a customer. Figure out why they chose you and make it a special experience for them.

Make sure every customer you have knows how much you appreciate their business. Ask your employees to treat them extra special. You may want to seek the advice of your staff and ask them what would be a fun way to recognize your customers and make them feel special. The tighter bond you build the more likely they will help you grow your business.

Can your customers describe you? If not, they cannot describe you to a friend. Make sure that your clients know what you do for them and like it. Turn them into advocates for your business.

As mentioned earlier, many businesses don't pay attention to their customers during difficult business times. Therefore, this is the best time possible for refer-ability. Spend more time with current customers and you'll find that they can sell for you. If customers really like you and believe in your services, the better their recommendations will be and the more likely they can sell you to a friend.

Strive to attract – rather than chase – customers. Sell mutually beneficial services and long-term relationships. Craft discussions to focus on your worth and not just cost.

Keep in mind the 80/20 rule. Twenty

Growing Your Green

According to *Lawn & Landscape* research, the three most popular new services offered by contractors in 2010 will be green/sustainability services, landscape lighting and irrigation/water management.



percent of your customers will generally provide 80 percent of your revenue. If you are a small business and lack large resources, focus on the 20 percent of your customers who really make it happen for your business.

Stay in touch with them through very positive courtesy calls. Plant the seed that you are excited about your brand and always eager to improve your business. Remember, if you take exceptional care of them they will be a strong advocate for you.

Is there a lost customer that you can go back to? When times were booming you may have taken in stride the loss of a customer. Now the market is much smaller and the surviving customers are more valuable. Figure out how you can patch up your differences and win them back. And when you get them back, handle them perfectly. Always think beyond price.

Don't be satisfied with your business and presume that there are no opportunities in this economy. Devise ways to make this tough economy work for you and your business. Do this by staying focused, creative, exploring any reasonable opportunity that is complementary to your business, and, last but not least, take special care of the customers you already have. **L**

The author is a past president of the California Landscape Contractors Association.

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Selling to Your Customers

Silver Moon Lighting held on to clients – and kept employees working – by expanding its services. BY CHUCK BOWEN

Bright business minds will tell you that you don't succeed by finding customers for your products, you find products for your customers. Silver Moon Lighting did just that to absorb a 30 percent drop in their core business.

A 'FIX-IT' SOLUTION. Silver Moon Lighting started seven years ago installing Christmas lights for large residential properties in southern California. As business picked up, customers started asking if the company could also repair their existing landscape lighting systems, so the company branched out. The expansion gave the company a little balance and consistency – crews could work on holiday lights only two months out of the year.

But last year, landscape lighting revenue dropped off 30 percent. Big installations – tied to the housing market – slowed down. Customers scaled back projects, which meant Silver Moon was subsisting on smaller jobs.

"We are kind of limping along with customers saying, 'I'm redoing landscaping, putting in a pool,'" says Diane Finley, vice president of the Poway, Calif.-based company.

So the goal for 2009 was to keep their four employees working. And to do that, the company reached out to its few hundred customers and ask them what they needed done. If the plan worked, Silver Moon could keep its employees

working and solve some of its customers' problems.

"The last thing we want to do is lay somebody off, have them go get another job and we're not able to get them back, because we love our guys," Finley says. "Our guys are so talented in many areas ... any one could be their own handyman. We've got customers; they always need fix-it things here and there."

COMMUNICATING CORRECTLY. So Silver Moon sent out an e-mail that outlined various handyman services its employees could perform at their regular rate

of pay, and that were legal under the company's contractor license.

"Now's the time to get those odd jobs around your house completed, fixed and taken off your 'to-do' list," the e-mail reads in part. "Our staff is talented and experienced in many areas, so as the economic situation declines and our core business slows, we have made the decision to expand the services of our company."

The message then lists about 15 services the company could offer – everything from demolition and drywall to painting and pressure washing.

The hardest part, Finley says, was striking a balance between sounding desperate but also communicating the company's need for more work.

"It was kind of sticky, because you don't want to go 'God, we're really hurting, can you guys help us?'" Finley says. "You don't want to come off that way as a business."

CUSTOMER FEEDBACK. In between lighting jobs, Silver Moon's team painted, refinished stucco, powerwashed a driveway and hung rain gutters for their customers.

"We had a lot of good feedback," she says. "Our customers were very understanding. That really did help us survive in 2009." **L**

The author is managing editor of *Lawn & Landscape*. Send him an e-mail at cbowen@gie.net.

New services offered by Silver Moon Lighting!

Now's the time to get those odd jobs around your house completed, fixed and taken off your 'to-do' list. Our staff is talented and experienced in many areas, so as the economic situation declines and our core business slows, we have made the decision to expand the services of our company.

Hundreds of San Diego homeowners have known us for years and used our company for the installation and service of their landscape lighting and Christmas lighting. The reason for this trust and long time patronage is the quality of our staff. Homeowners trust us and we take that trust seriously.

So, in order to survive these tough times, we now offer a variety of services to homeowners:

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Blind and Curtain installation	Fence installation/repair	Hanging pictures
Caulking	Fence & Gates	Painting
Demolition	Filter Replacement	Pressure washing

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Customer Communication

Want to try the same thing? Read the full e-mail that Silver Moon Lighting sent out to its customers at www.lawnandlandscape.com/webextras.

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Travel the WORLD

Exploring different gardens worldwide can bring a more original design back home. BY KELLY PICKEREL

Jeff Minnich describes a good gardener as the anti-Julia Roberts character in the movie "Mona Lisa Smile." Roberts plays a professor who teaches art history to her well-traveled students but has never traveled to Europe to see the works of art she's teaching herself.

"I think (traveling) opens your eyes to possibilities as a designer," Minnich says of good garden design. "I think they're richer for it for looking around."

He's traveled very far from his Arlington, Va., base – all the way to California, Australia and Europe – just to find richer ideas. He's found that the gardens in England are spectacular and Washington, D.C., has beautiful state gardens.

"You go around the world, and you see what you like and what you don't like. You might bring one little piece of it home, and if you go to 20 places, you have 20 new pieces, all unique to you as a designer," he says.

Minnich says getting away from your area brings in a different perspective. –

"Stretching it out away from the Anglo-Saxon (of the East coast), trying to get to other places where the gardens are so different just throws you," he says.

Minnich is a one-man band at Jeff Minnich Garden Designs. He works mainly alone with the help of subcontractors for his elaborate and elegant

garden designs.

"My business model is that I am the company," he says. "I design everything the old way – by hand. I'm 51 and still stuck in the old way. I love the process of growing. I think it makes me more creative."

Minnich finds creativity in many different places, learning new ways to affect climate changes or how different plants can grow in unheard of areas.

"Palm trees aren't seen in northern Virginia, but I have a few in my garden," he chuckles.

Particular about his work, Minnich only installs his own designs to a specialized clientele. He works mostly by referral in residential areas, using an "outdoor room" concept to make gardens feel like functional spaces. He considers himself a horticulturist first, landscape designer second.

"I really love design and I love hardscapes, but the thing that really turns me on is plants," he says. "I have one of everything I could possibly grow in my garden."

Recently, Minnich filmed an episode of "Curb Appeal" on HGTV. He says it was a wonderful experience that allowed him to reflect who his clients were into a distinct garden.

"My aim is to create a haven for my


clients – an integration of indoor and outdoor living – a refuge that reflects who you are and a place where you can truly be yourself," he says.

Minnich says he loves gardening because it gives people something to look forward to: a fresh start. It also instills good values in hard work and provides the joy of accomplishment. He knew he wanted to play in the dirt for the rest of his life at an early age.

"This is all I've ever wanted to do. When I was 5 or 6, an elderly next door neighbor – who was like a grandparent to me – made a little vegetable garden for me. From then on out, it really influenced me," he says.

Minnich suggests finding influence around you—whether it's the local gardens in your state or what's growing in the mountains of Australia.

"In Australia, I did not know one single plant, not a clue," he says. "It really opened my eyes. That's the thing you learn with travel: how much you don't know. I've been to Europe and thought, 'How in the world can this plant grow here? It's at the same latitude as Quebec!'"

"It's very interesting. Travel – I love it. The more the better." 

The author is an intern at Lawn & Landscape magazine. She can be reached at kpickerel@gje.net.

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Buying and selling a business: Part II

Just today I talked with two clients. One was in the process of buying a company and one was in the process of selling his company. Both companies are run very well with great teams in place. I called some clients for the selling company and found some very interested potential buyers. The company exploring an acquisition is going to meet with the prospective seller, do his homework and get back with me. Now is the time for both owners to do their "due diligence" – their homework.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK. Due diligence is a term with which you should familiarize yourself. Basically, it's the legal term that means do your homework. Buying, selling or merging with a business isn't just a numbers game. Many of the big consolidators have tried to turn this process into a Monopoly game of sorts. In some cases, I've seen heavy-handed tactics used, and that's one of the reasons for their failure. It was a shotgun wedding of sorts.

There's a psychology involved with mergers, acquisition and divestiture (MAD) transactions. (Maybe that's why it's often referred to as going mad.) But by psychology, I don't mean you're trying to psych out the other party. Rather, there's a psychological process you need to understand, especially from the seller's perspective, to be successful.

If friends or family are involved, you particularly want them all to do their homework, and to look out for their best interests. Encourage participants to obtain their own counsel or accountant to independently verify the numbers and the process. Go the extra

mile to protect the relationships of all concerned.

Too often I hear "friends" encourage other business associates to violate or ignore good business practices because they're "friends." This often takes the form of borrowing or lending money without any written agreement about paying it back. My position is that, if you're truly friends, you want to have everything above board and in writing to protect the relationship.

I'm not going to discuss how you should structure the deal or

process, the more successful it usually is.

Someone who wants to buy a business is motivated for many reasons. They want to make a career change, gain market share, assets or staff, or eliminate their competition.

And someone who wants to sell a business is also motivated for many reasons. They want to retire, make a career change, eliminate the headaches of ownership or partner with a larger, better-financed team.

Reasons for merging with an-

“ It was a **shotgun wedding** of sorts.

value the assets. That's between you and your attorney and CPA – the team that we discussed in my last article. The buyer might even want to carry a life insurance policy on the seller, with the buyer named as beneficiary. You should also consider how you're going to pay the seller. Here are some options worth considering:

- After the sale, pay the seller a consulting fee for work done, or a salary as an employee for work they do.
 - Pay the seller for a non-compete agreement.
 - Pay the seller a signing bonus.
- This can sometimes be an incentive to close the deal.

GOING MAD. One of my main goals in helping a client put together some sort of deal is that the deal has legs, and that no one suffers from buyer's or seller's remorse. The more we pay attention to certain key psychological factors in the due diligence phase of the

other company vary. They can even be a combination of the reasons for buying and selling.

CONCLUSION. And you thought that you were out of school and didn't have to do your homework anymore. As every entrepreneur soon learns, the homework never stops. Learning is a constant improvement process. Learn the acquisition process and it can serve you well. Next time we'll get into the nitty-gritty process of how to use the gross profit margin (GPM) evaluation model. **L**

This article was adapted from James Huston's books "A Critical Analysis of the MORS Estimating System" and "How to Price Landscape and Irrigation Projects." For a free audiobook version (plus shipping) of "MORS," visit www.jrhuston.biz.

EGO-FRIENDLY

Get Huston's checklist for managing a seller's ego during the buying process, and read part one of this series, at www.lawnandlandscape.com/webextras.



JIM HUSTON

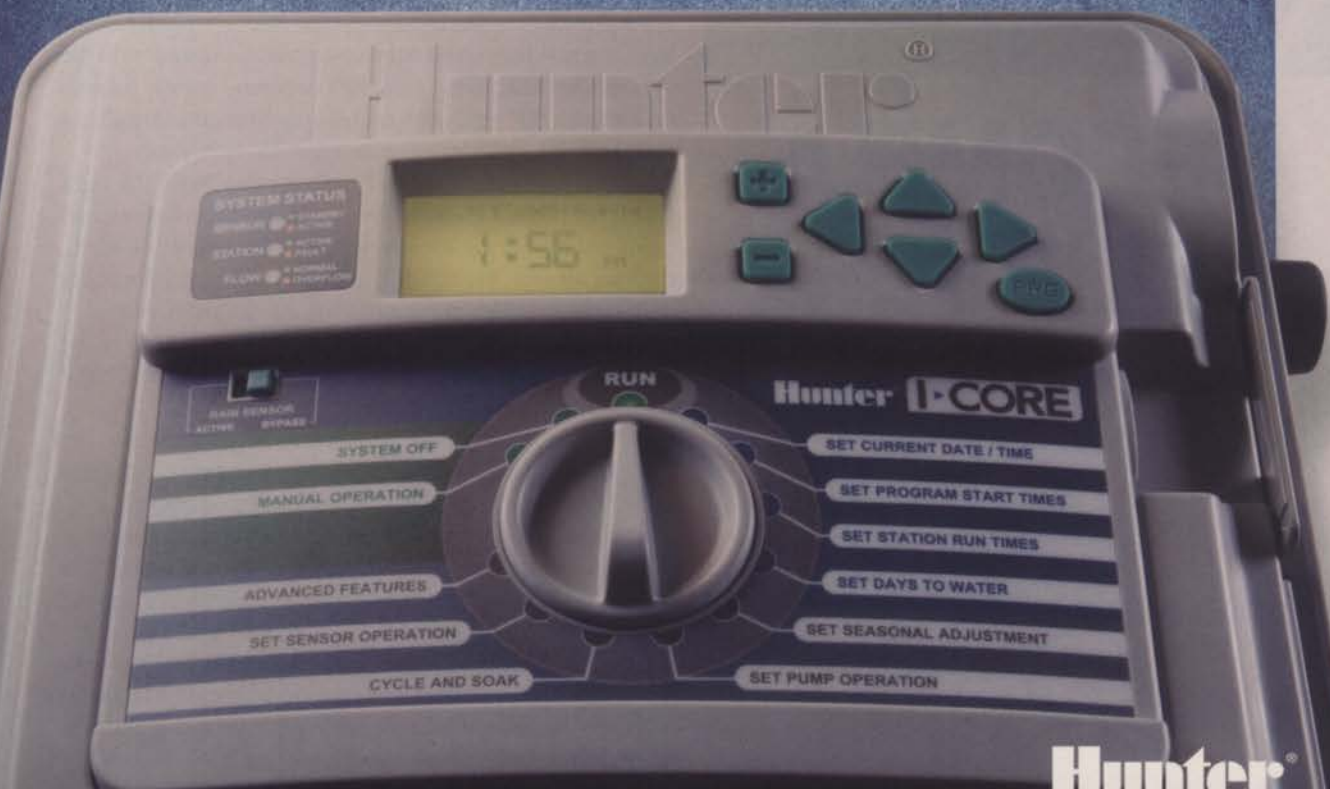
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Pacific Landscape Management has found a way to make sustainability pay. Here, a green roof the company maintains in Portland, Ore.



BECOME A BELIEVER

Practicing what you preach makes all the difference in selling sustainability.

BY KELLY PICKEREL

Chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers – consumers don't always lump into the same category as green or sustainability. But Bob Grover is trying to change that.

As president of Pacific Landscape Management, Grover has been making strides to bring a greener awareness to the greater Portland, Ore., area. His company mainly focuses on commercial renovations and upgrades and introduces sustainability practices to customers along the way.

"I'm a pragmatist," Grover says. "I want to do the right thing, but I'm not going to cut off my arm to do it. If we can figure out how to modify how we do things and still do them, then we all win. We can still maintain a reasonable quality of life and do it in a more sensitive, less impactful way."

Grover says most businesses are looking for a silver bullet when it comes to sustainable changes, but he's found small changes make a much bigger difference.

"It's really about a little bit of everything rather than big things," he says. "We think about the processes. Is there a better method? Can we figure out how to conserve?"

In order to be a leader in sustainability, you also have to be a believer. Pacific Landscape has done a "little bit of everything" at its own headquarters to prove it's serious about what it's selling.

Grover's company, which formed in 2001 and has now grown into a \$6.5 million business, decided to be a fanatical recycler – not just of office supplies, but also motor oil and its abundant supply of used fertilizer bags. The company has also managed to reduce its electric bill by 25 percent just by

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At left, an array of solar panels power the company's offices. Below, a bioswale – an installation designed to filter storm runoff – the firm installed and maintains for a commercial client.



turning off warehouse lights when no one's in the building.

The company has also done some outdoor experiments: It installed a rain garden off an office downspout and a bioswale (designed to remove silt and filter runoff) in the parking lot. The office now runs entirely on solar power, and has moved to lawn mixtures with clover to reduce the amount of fertilizer needed.

Grover explains that the company puts clover into seed mixes applied to low-visibility areas, and they've sold it to a few customers who aren't obsessed with having a putting green-quality lawn everywhere.

"We have talked to customers about having lower expectations. It's not like we just sneak it in," he says. "Nobody has accepted it on an entire portion (of their lawn), and we're not trying to sell it that way."

The clover mix, the solar panels, the rain garden and bioswale all show customers that Pacific practices what it preaches.

"If we truly believe in sustainability, we need to do everything ourselves," Grover says. "If we're going to promote some of these practices, we're going to do them at our office first. We're trying to experiment with new procedures at our facility to use it as a demonstration site."

But Pacific Landscape sometimes has a difficult time winning over commercial customers, even after proving certain practices benefit the environment.

"A true organic program doesn't really fit well with the commercial mindset of crisp and clean and curb appeal," Grover says. "We have always struggled with being able to come up with that type of program because there would be increased labor and costs and then (custom-

ers) aren't as interested anymore." He said a program like that would add 25 percent to his labor costs.

In Grover's view, sustainability has picked up because his customers' tenants are looking for it.


"Sometimes the market helps dictate where you go, and if you have customers interested in sustainability, you need to have an answer for that," he says. "When it becomes popular, everyone needs it. The sustainability culture that has developed is a really great movement because it starts to look at things in the middle instead of black and white."

Increasingly, companies and consumers have realized that, when it comes to things like chemical use, the best tools for certain situations are sometimes the most traditional. And although Pacific Landscape hasn't converted to using 100 percent organic products, Grover says they've examined their chemical levels and done the best they can to meet somewhere in the middle.

"Forty percent (organic) is a lot better than zero," he says. "We evaluated how we used herbicides and pesticides, finding the lowest threshold of chemicals."

Pacific Landscape has also started promoting water saving technologies to its customers, including weather-based irrigation programs.

"I think we made a really good strategic move," Grover says of diving into sustainability practices. "We're finding that with sustainability, we can save people money."

"It's a process, not a destination. We're going to continually make improvements to reduce our impact. It means you are making an effort and it gets better every year." 

The author is an intern at *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. Send your comments to cbowen@gie.net.

GROWING GREEN

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Lawn & Landscape Pesticide and Fertilizer Buyer's Guide

As part of this month's buyer's guide, we've included an overview of the products many manufacturers offer professional contractors. Also included in this guide, on page 95, is a listing of companies that participated and their contact information. To view the complete guide, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/webextras.

To submit pesticide or fertilizer information for inclusion in an upcoming issue of *Lawn & Landscape*, contact Managing Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net or 330-523-5330.

Manufacturer	Product name	Category	Active ingredient	Formulations	For use in/on
Arysta	Aloft LC G	n/a	clothianidan/bifenthrin	granular	lawn and landscape
Arysta	Aloft GC G	n/a	clothianidan/bifenthrin	granular	lawn and landscape
Arysta	Aloft LC SC	n/a	clothianidan/bifenthrin	liquid	lawn and landscape
Arysta	Aloft GC SC	n/a	clothianidan/bifenthrin	liquid	lawn and landscape
Arysta	Disarm 480 SC	n/a	fluxastrobin	liquid	golf, lawn and landscape
BASF	Insignia	fungicide	pyraclostrobin	water dispersible granule	residential and commercial lawns, parks, sod farms, recreational areas and cemeteries
BASF	Trinity fungicide	fungicide	triticonazole	suspension concentrate	athletic fields, residential and commercial lawns, parks, recreational areas cemeteries and sod farms
BASF	Amdro Pro Fire Ant Bait	insecticide	hydramethlyon	granule	athletic fields, landscaped areas, residential and commercial lawns, parks, sod farms, recreational areas, airports, roadsides and cemeteries
BASF	Basagran T/O	herbicide	sodium bentazon	soluble liquid	athletic fields, landscaped areas, residential and commercial lawns, parks, sod farms and recreational areas
BASF	Drive XLR8	herbicide	quinclorac	soluble liquid	athletic fields, residential and commercial lawns, sod farms and recreational areas
Bayer	Allectus	insecticide	bifenthrin, imidacloprid	liquid	broad-spectrum insect control
Bayer	Maxforce FC Fire Ant Bait	insecticide	flupronil	granular bait	fire ants
Bayer	CoreTect	insecticide	imidacloprid	tablets	tree and shrub insects



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Lawn & Landscape Pesticide and Fertilizer Buyer's Guide

Manufacturer	Product name	Category	Active ingredient	Formulations	For use in/on
Bayer	Dylox	insecticide	trichlorfon	granular, liquid	white grubs, mole crickets, sod webworms and cutworms, annual bluegrass weevil
Bayer	Forbid	insecticide	spiromesifen	flowable (suspension concentrate)	miles
Converted Organics	Flower & Garden Fertilizer	fertilizer	n/a	4-1-8	flower and garden
CSI	CSI Cyonara L/P	insecticide	lambda-cyhalothrin	granules	turf, landscapes
CSI	CSI Permethrin SFR	insecticide	permethrin	emulsifiable concentrate	turf, landscape ornamentals, trees, interiorscapes
Dow AgroSciences	Confront Specialty Herbicide	herbicide	triclopyr/clopyralid	liquid	35 broadleaf weeds on most cool- and warm-season nonresidential turfgrasses; for use on commercial properties only
Dow AgroSciences	Dimension Specialty Herbicide	herbicide	dithiopyr	granular, liquid, wettable powder	crabgrass; 40 grassy and broadleaf weeds in turf and landscape; 2EW formulation can be used over the top of landscape ornamentals
Dow AgroSciences	Gallery Specialty Herbicide	herbicide	isoxaben	granular, dry flowable	95 broadleaf weeds for up to eight months on all established cool- and warm-season turfgrasses
Dow AgroSciences	Kerb Specialty Herbicide	herbicide	pronamide	wettable powder	Poa annua control for greens and tees on overseeded warm-season grasses; controls grassy and broadleaf weeds in landscape ornamentals
Dow AgroSciences	LockUp Specialty Herbicide	herbicide	penoxsulam	granular	broadleaf weeds, including white clover, dollarweed, chickweed, lespedeza and ground ivy on warm- and cool-season turf
DuPont	Acelepryn Insecticide	insecticide	calteryx	liquid, granular	white grubs, surface-feeding insects, annual bluegrass weevils, billbugs and caterpillars
DuPont	Advion Fire Ant Bait	insecticide	indoxacarb	granular bait	fire ants
DuPont	Advion Insect Granule	insecticide	indoxacarb	granular bait	crickets, mole crickets, cockroaches, and listed crawling nuisance or occasional invaders
DuPont	Provaunt Insecticide	insecticide	indoxacarb	water dispersible granule	lepidopterous larvae and other pests
DuPont	TranXit Herbicide	herbicide	rimsulfuron	dry flowable	weeds in warm season turf
FMC Professional Solutions	Echelon	herbicide	sulfentrazone + proflaminate	liquid	crabgrass, sedge and goosegrass; fall applications for the control of poa annua
FMC Professional Solutions	Dismiss	herbicide	sulfentrazone	liquid	sedges, including yellow nutsedge and green killlinga
FMC Professional Solutions	Dismiss South	herbicide	sulfentrazone + imazethapyr	liquid	sedges, with a focus on purple nutsedge, in warm season turf (excluding St. Augustine)
FMC Professional Solutions	Solitare	herbicide	sulfentrazone + quinclorac	75 DG -- 1 pound jar (treats 1 acre)	sedges, crabgrass and broadleaf weeds
FMC Professional Solutions	Segway	n/a	cyazofamid	39.2 oz container	pythium blight, pythium damping-off and pythium root dysfunction
Howard Johnson's Enterprises	Barricade	n/a	proflaminate	0.20, 0.29, 0.37 and 0.58 plus fert	turf



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Lawn & Landscape Pesticide and Fertilizer Buyer's Guide

Manufacturer	Product name	Category	Active ingredient	Formulations	For use in/on
Howard Johnson's Enterprises	binfenthrin	n/a	binfenthrin	0.069, 0.083, 0.1 G and 0.2 G plus fert	turf
Howard Johnson's Enterprises	Dimension	n/a	dithiopyr	0.086, 0.107, 0.13, 0.25, 0.172 and 0.27 G plus fert	turf
Howard Johnson's Enterprises	Eagle	n/a	myclobutanil	0.39 G	turf
MANA	MANA Acephate 90 Prill	insecticide	acephate	prill	turf
MANA	MANA Arrow 2 EC	herbicide	clethodim	emulsifiable concentrate	ornamentals and conifers
MANA	MANA Atrazine 4 L	herbicide	atrazine	liquid	turf, excluding not golf greens
Monsanto	Roundup PROMAX	n/a	glyphosate - potassium salt	liquid - potassium salt	annual and perennial weeds
Monsanto	QuikPRO	n/a	glyphosate and diquat	water soluble granule	annual and perennial weeds
Monsanto	Certainty Turf Herbicide	herbicide	sulfosulfuron	water dispersable granule	sedge control in turf
NuFarm	Iprodione E-Pro	n/a	iprodione	liquid	Brown patch, dollar spot, Fusarium, Alternaria and other diseases in non-residential turf, golf courses, ornamental applications
NuFarm	Magellen	n/a	phosphites	liquid	Pythium and yellow tuft diseases
NuFarm	Propiconazole E-Pro	n/a	propiconazole	liquid	anthracnose, brown patch, dollar spot and Fusarium
NuFarm	T-Methyl E-Pro	n/a	thiophanate methyl	4.5F, 50 WSB, granular	broad spectrum diseases of bedding, flowering and tropical foliage plants, shrubs, trees and flowers
NuFarm	TM + CTN E-Pro	n/a	chlorothalonil and thiophanate methyl	66.6 WDG, 90 WDG	broad spectrum diseases
Quali-Pro	Dithiopyr 40 WSB	herbicide	dithiopyr	water soluble bag	landscapes, turf
Quali-Pro	Glyphoste Plus	herbicide	glyphosate	liquid	golf courses, turf, landscape
Quali-Pro	MSM Turf	herbicide	metsulfuron methyl	granule	turf
Quali-Pro	Oryzalin 4	herbicide	oryzalin	flowable liquid	landscapes, turf
Quali-Pro	Oxadiazon 2G	herbicide	oxadiazon	granule	landscapes, turf
SePRO	Cutless Granular Turf Growth Regulator	plant growth regulator	flurpimidol	granular	terminal growth suppression in established woody ornamental plants and perennial ground covers
SePRO	Cutless 50W Turf Growth Regulator	plant growth regulator	flurpimidol	wettable powder	can shift the competitive balance from Poa annua infested turf to desirable perennial grasses
SePRO	Legacy Turf Growth Regulator	plant growth regulator	flurpimidol and trinexapac-ethyl	MEC (liquid)	growth suppression and discouragement of Poa annua
SePRO	Octane Herbicide	herbicide	pyraflufen ethyl	liquid	nurseries and ornamental plantings, sod farms, Christmas trees and established ornamental turf
SePRO	Junction Fungicide/Bactericide	fungicide/bactericide	mancozeb and copper hydroxide	dry flowable	broad-spectrum disease control

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Manufacturer	Product name	Category	Active ingredient	Formulations	For use in/on
Syngenta Professional Products	Meridian Insecticide	insecticide	thiamethoxam	wettable granule and spreadable G formulation	turfgrass, trees and shrubs
Syngenta Professional Products	Scimitar CS Insecticide	insecticide	lambda-cyhalothrin	liquid	ornamentals and lawns in landscape areas around residential, institutional, public, commercial and industrial buildings, parks, recreational and athletic fields
Syngenta Professional Products	Award Insecticide	insecticide	fenoxycarb	bait	trees, ornamentals, home lawns and landscaped areas around homes, non-crop areas, horse farms, sod-farms and non-grazed areas on the farms and nurseries
Syngenta Professional Products	Primo MAXX Plant Growth Regulator	plant growth regulator	trinexapac-ethyl	liquid	turfgrass
Syngenta Professional Products	Barricade Herbicide	herbicide	proflaminate	flowable liquid, wettable granule and on-fertilizer	established turfgrasses (excluding golf course putting greens), lawns, sod nurseries and landscape ornamentals
Valent	Tourney	n/a	metconazole	50 WDG	turfgrass diseases on golf course, public, residential, industrial and commercial, park, athletic field and sod farm turf

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Manufacturer	Product name	Category	Active ingredient	Formulations	For use in/on
Valent	SureGuard	n/a	flumioxazin	51% WDG	preemergence and/or postemergence control of selected grass and broadleaf weeds in outdoor ornamentals and landscape
Valent	Arena	insecticide	clothianidin	50 WDG	broad-spectrum insecticide for control of a wide spectrum of insects infesting turfgrass, ornamental plants, interior plantscapes and non-bearing fruit and nut trees
Valent	Arena	insecticide	clothianidin	0.25 G	broad-spectrum insecticide for insects infesting turfgrass, sod farms, landscape ornamentals, interior plantscapes and non-bearing fruit and nut trees
Valent	Safari	insecticide	dinotefuran	2 G	insect control on ornamental plants in outdoor landscapes and interior plantscapes



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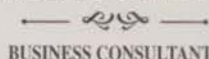
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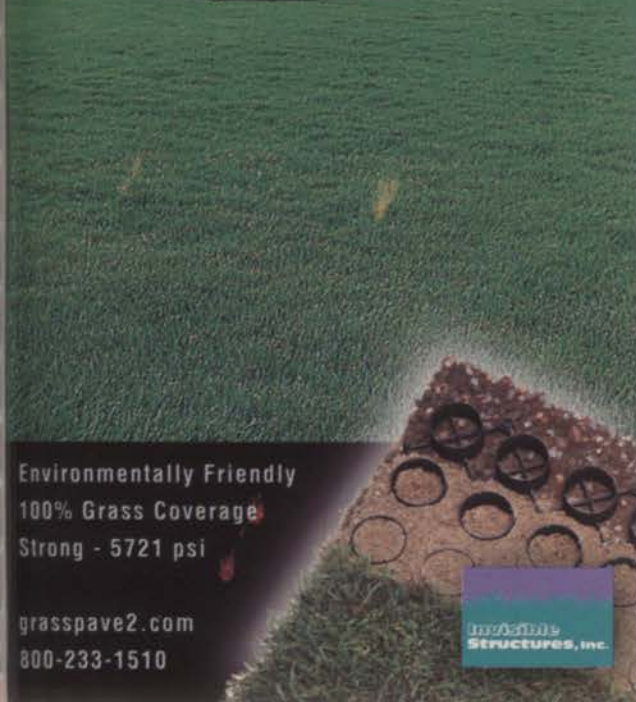
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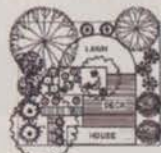
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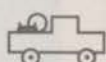
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{ SANDWICH STRATEGY }

As companies get into the swing of 2010 and try to make this year better than the last, they could take a page from Panera's playbook.

In the middle of a down economy, people aren't always keen to spend their dwindling discretionary income on such niceties as ham sandwiches and pains au chocolats. But Panera has bucked the trend; the store didn't lower prices and its profits were up 38 percent in the third quarter, according to a recent article in *Time* magazine.

Here's how CEO Ron Shaich described his philosophy going into the downturn:

"We understood that the fundamentals of the marketplace really haven't changed," Shaich is quoted as saying. "Unemployment went from 5 percent to 10 percent. There's 90 percent of society that is still employed. I couldn't capture all those people that are unemployed. They weren't eating out at all. All I could do was stay focused on who my target customer was, and not be reactive."

It also helped that the store was already popular with hungry consumers. And, in 2009, the company continued to invest, hiring more employees, taking advantage of low real estate prices by opening new stores and focusing sales efforts on popular menu choices like salads.

Shaich says the company's strategy has worked so far, but it won't hold up forever, especially with price-conscious consumers.

"It doesn't matter how cheap it is," he says. "If it isn't special, there's no reason the business needs to exist."

Nature is the mother of invention

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and what better model to imitate than nature's?

The Biomimicry Guild is a group of scientists that work with businesses to develop projects that copy designs and structures found in the natural world – like a solar cell patterned after a tree's leaf, da Vinci's flying machines designed like a bird's wings or the xBee wind turbine prototype, with blades shaped like a bee's wing.

The group has signed on companies like NASA, Nike, Seventh Generation and Patagonia, who have already used nature as a starting point for their products.

But it makes sense for all companies to look outside for inspiration. Plants and insects have been around a lot longer than landscaping companies, and they seem to have done all right for themselves. Trees only support the leaves that get sun; leaves in the shade wither away. Processes and people that work well in your company should be expanded and promoted; those that don't shouldn't.

Watch one of the guild's co-founders, Janine Benyus, give examples of ways in which nature is already influencing products and systems at www.lawnandlandscape.com/webextras.

And apropos of nothing ...

ZOMBIES

We all know that landscapes are important to people, and increase their property values and enjoyment of nature. But could they also save you in a post-apocalyptic setting?

The tables have turned in *Plants vs. Zombies*, a video game that lets you use plants to ward off an army of undead. The computer game, from Pop Cap, pits you against the zombies, and your only weapons are things like

peashooters, wall-nuts, cherry bombs and potato mines.

Players have to plant seeds of each weapon to ensure a continuous supply of ordnance as they move through levels and battle wave after wave of groaning, shuffling (and sometimes swimming) intruders – including a zombie bobsled team and zombie dolphins.

You can download the game at www.plantsvszombies.com.



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