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# Lawn & Landscape

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## 2012 Environmental Business Awards

Three real-world approaches to building sustainable companies.



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Water harvesting is making a comeback.

**Start fresh pg. 50**  
Plan and prepare for 2013 today.

**Calming troubled waters pg. 60**  
Learn how to resolve employee conflicts.

inside

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DECEMBER 2012

A GIE MEDIA PUBLICATION  
VOLUME 33, NUMBER 12

# Lawn & Landscape

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# 2012 Environmental Business Awards

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# ONLINE CONTENTS

Check out what's now online from **Lawn & Landscape**.

## New benchmarking app available from L&L

The next generation of the **Benchmarking Your Business Report** gives contractors a powerful planning tool.

*Lawn & Landscape* has released a new app designed to help landscape contractors and lawn care operators better benchmark their companies against their competition.

The **Benchmarking Your Business Report** and the companion app, both sponsored exclusively by Exmark, draw on extensive data *Lawn & Landscape* collected throughout the year from its national readership. Taken together, the report and app give contractors powerful tools to guide their business and plan for 2013.

The web app, an extension of the 2012 **Benchmarking Your Business Report** published in November, allows contractors to quickly see where they stack up against their regional and national colleagues when it comes to purchasing, rates of pay, revenue and overall scale of business.

You can access the app via any web-enabled device – your laptop, tablet or phone – at [bit.ly/benchmarkapp](http://bit.ly/benchmarkapp). The printed version of the report can be found here: [http://bit.ly/nov\\_2012](http://bit.ly/nov_2012).



## POPULAR POSTS

facebook.

LinkedIn.

twitter

Here are some links our followers and friends found the most intriguing across our social media platforms.

### When a small employer gets sued by a former worker

Jeff Herold got a "horrible feeling" in the pit of his stomach when he read an unexpected e-mail in mid-2009.

[bit.ly/LLsued](http://bit.ly/LLsued)

### Not dead yet

A local newspaper's readers donate and save a North Carolina man's lawn care business

[bit.ly/LLsavebiz](http://bit.ly/LLsavebiz)

### ChuckStrong

The Internet was abuzz with this motivational speech from Indianapolis Colts coach Chuck Pagano, who is battling Leukemia.

[bit.ly/LLchuckstrong](http://bit.ly/LLchuckstrong)

### Pick up the pieces

After Sandy, here's how small businesses can get back to normal.

[bit.ly/LLsandy](http://bit.ly/LLsandy)

### Husqvarna to cut 600 jobs

Half of the job losses will occur in Sweden.

[bit.ly/husqcut](http://bit.ly/husqcut)

## UP AND DOWN THE CHAIN

It's easy to get tunnel vision for the everyday challenges that your business faces. But taking a minute to look around might help you get a better grasp of what is going on in the industry. One way to get a better grasp of this industry (aside from reading *Lawn & Landscape*, of course,) is to find out what's happening in the supply chain.

And it just so happens our sister publication **Green Industry Supply Chain Management** is full of information from the supply chain. You can read the October issue here, [bit.ly/giscm\\_oct2012](http://bit.ly/giscm_oct2012), which features a cover story on new lines of product that dealers will be adding to their locations in 2013. You can also access previous issues by visiting [www.giesupplychain.com](http://www.giesupplychain.com) and clicking "current issue."



## H2B on TV

Steven Steele, director of operations for Keesen Landscape Management, spoke to CBS News about immigration as a key concern in the state of Colorado, where the Hispanic population has grown by 45 percent over the last decade.



Steele says the health of his company depends on immigration policy. Watch more here: [bit.ly/h2b\\_keesen](http://bit.ly/h2b_keesen) and read more about Keesen and its success with the H-2B program on pg. 27.



## More from the big show

We featured a wrap-up of 2012 GIC and the GIE+EXPO in our November issue, but there was so much going on, that wasn't enough space. The conference and EXPO featured great business advice as well as the latest products in the industry. So, to read more of our live coverage from the event, as well as to view any videos from the show, visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com) and search GIE+EXPO, and view the results under Oct. 2012.

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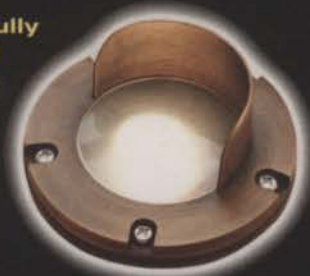


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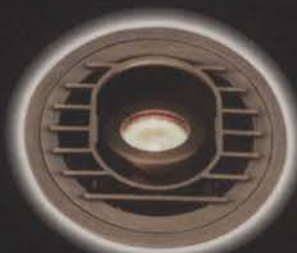
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# Resolve to tell your story

**A**sk 10 landscape contractors what their biggest problem is and 11 of them will tell you it's labor. Ask those same 10 guys what they're doing to help fill the labor pipeline with smart, talented people to hire, and you get what feels like 100 blank stares.

Turf and landscape programs across the country are under threat from budget cuts

and dropping enrollment. No one is going to deliver quality young employees to you for Christmas. You have to go find them – or develop them – yourself. You can do that by telling the landscape industry's story to anyone who'll listen.

There's a disconnect between the perception of landscapers in the minds of the public and the reality of what they do. Consider this page the Cliff's Notes elevator speech for the uninitiated.

There's more to landscaping than shovels and rakes. I'm preaching to the choir here, but the landscape industry provides legitimate careers to thousands of people. With the right mix of talent, ambition and (yes, in many cases) tireless work ethic, a young person can develop and move up the ladder at a landscape company, earning more money and responsibility with every step.

You can make good money. The average owner makes \$66,000 a year, according to our latest Benchmarking Your Business Report. That's higher than the median household income. Foremen, account managers and designers all pull down between \$30,000 and \$40,000 to start. That won't help you rub elbows with the 1%, but it's enough

to put food on the table and raise a family.

You can help people. I don't usually recommend this, but put down the magazine you're reading and go to our website. Search good works. Go ahead. I'll wait. We've published dozens of stories about landscapers who have pitched in to help their employees, families of veterans and communities through hard times and natural disasters.

You can improve the environment. Landscapers are on the front lines of some of the most pressing environmental questions facing us today. Name me another profession that every day can help positively impact the world through water management, erosion and runoff, carbon sequestration and heat mitigation.

Bottom line is this: Landscapers have a real, tangible impact on the world. Take just the companies on our Top 100 list. In 2011, they grossed \$6.8 billion and employed more than 62,000 people. That doesn't count the thousands more families they've supported, or the impact they've had on the communities where they work.

So here's your homework. Sometime this winter – before things get crazy busy in the spring – call up your local vocational school,



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Leading business media for landscape contractors.

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## To our readers

I asked our esteemed editor, Mr. Chuck Bowen, to give me a page in our final issue of 2012 so I could introduce myself to you and the 73,000 others who receive this publication every month. Given that Chuck and his team are tasked with producing nearly a thousand pages of original content every year, he seemed quite happy that the new guy was willing to take one off his hands.

First, I really am honored to be the new publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*, the industry's flagship publication for business success. What exactly does a publisher do? Well, in my case, the job description is simple: Don't screw up a good thing.

I'm not being flip when I say that. *Lawn & Landscape* has been the top publication in this market for decades. We have been number one in advertising sales since the Reagan administration. Year after year, we have the highest readership among the many magazines that serve this business. We have walls full of national

writing and design awards. We created the Top 100 concept, the State of the Industry Report and the Benchmarking Your Business study. We launched the first media website in the market in 1996 and we have been the first to offer other digital innovations like e-zines, content-rich e-newsletters and mobile apps.

In short, *Lawn & Landscape* is an institution in this community and we will continue to lead, grow and innovate because that's what you demand.

I'm new to *Lawn & Landscape*, but I've been in the green industry for four decades. My primary focus has always been golf (I also serve as publisher and editorial director of our sister publication *Golf Course Industry*), but my involvement in the turf business has helped me understand just enough about the world of lawn care, landscape contracting and the related disciplines to be dangerous. Now, as I learn more about your world and shortly after returning from a great week at GIE+EXPO, I have a few observations:

**1** As a friend of mine who has one of the keenest minds in the golf business said recently, "This has been a great recession – let's not waste it." I'm impressed by the number of contractors who saw opportunity in the downturn to get leaner, meaner and grow their businesses. Rather than bemoaning the economy or damning the lowballers, they acted to expand their businesses by outworking and outmarketing less-committed competitors. Just track our Top 100 and see who's moved up. Those are the companies that made the most of a bad thing.

**What exactly does a publisher do? Well, in my case, the job description is simple: Don't screw up a good thing.**

**2** Some years ago, I had the opportunity to squire the business guru Tom Peters around a trade show. I introduced him to an executive from an industry company who, when describing his management philosophy, cheerfully said: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Peters physically cringed when the hapless suit said that and promptly told him that he was doomed if he stuck with it. The folks who've grown through tough times were the ones who changed, innovated, invested and did not stick to business as usual or simply cut costs.

**3** Information – good, reliable data – is gold in this business. The up-and-comers in this market are those who are mining information for prospects, profiling likely customers and doing more than just relying on word of mouth to grow their businesses.

On that last point, I'm pleased to announce that *Lawn & Landscape* – which has always been the industry's leading source of reliable data and research – will expand that commitment in 2013 with a landmark study of consumer attitudes about professional landscaping and lawn care. We're partnering with a leading consumer research firm, Trone Brand Energy, to ask thousands of homeowners why they do or don't use professional services, which services they would value most and, most importantly, what messages would make them more likely to hire you.

The findings from this study will give you – our readers – new tools to grow your business.

And, finally, we've always prided ourselves on being at the forefront of technology. One example: we offer the only mobile media app in the industry. More than 30,000 of you have downloaded it to your phones and iPads and the feedback has been awesome.

Well, you ain't seen nothin' yet. Next month, we're going to release Version 2 of our mobile app, and I humbly suggest that it will blow your mind. Get ready, because your favorite publication is about to come to life before your eyes.

So here's to 2013! May it be as prosperous and exciting for you as we think it will be for *Lawn & Landscape*. **L&L**



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## What water means to you

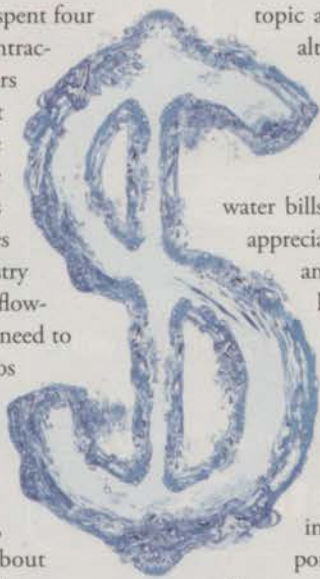
Even if you never touch a rotor and couldn't care less about flow rates, the water question is going to impact every landscape contractor in America sooner rather than later. By Chuck Bowen

ORLANDO, Fla. — This week I spent four days in Orlando, Fla., with contractors, distributors and suppliers for the irrigation industry at the Irrigation Show. They're bullish on the blue side of the green industry, and so am I. It's the one common thread that ties everyone in the landscape industry together. You need it to grow flowers and keep turf healthy, you need to manage it as run-off from patios and it's an increasing worry in the minds of homeowners and property managers.

So, even if you can't tell a solenoid from a string trimmer, you need to start thinking about water. Here are four reasons why.

1. Thanks to infrastructure that dates in some cases to the Roosevelt administration, water prices are going up, and they're not going to come down again. In the past 12 years, the cost of water out of the tap (which, for 99.9 percent of homes and businesses is the same water they spray on the lawn) has double and in some cases tripled.

2. Droughts aren't going to stop, either. Whether you think humans are to blame or not, science shows that temperatures are rising and we're seeing longer and more severe dry spells. Couple that with water shortages and water savings stops being a feel-good



topic and starts becoming a life-altering one.

3. Water management services have a quantifiable green message. You can show Mrs. Jones her water bills year-to-year and show an appreciable difference, with a dollars and cents connection. That's a lot more tangible than arguments — however science-based and accurate — about carbon sequestration or air quality.

4. Irrigation technology is among the most advanced in the green industry. The opportunity is best in this segment for a contractor to position himself as a professional and valuable adviser for his clients.

Peter Moeller, Toro Irrigation's director of marketing, said it best during the conference keynote: "Our weather is more unpredictable than ever. Water use will be more scrutinized and ... water will simply cost more. A lot more. We will face regulatory challenges, some known some unknown. Let's talk less about the weather and economic patterns we can't control and focus on the things we can control."

There's a lot contractors can control here, and they're positioned to take ownership of a core problem facing the country. It's not if they'll need to do something, but when.

## L&L ON THE ROAD



### RISE, CLA Proactively address industry issues at annual meeting

Topics stretched from government's solutions for problems to industry engagement on issues.

By Dan Moreland

AMELIA ISLAND, Fla. — RISE and CropLife America have never been afraid to take on the big issues, whether it's working with government officials to find solutions to complex regulatory issues or grappling with how to feed an exploding global population that is expected to top 9 billion people by 2050.



Dave Morris of Dow AgroSciences says it's essential for RISE members to "speak with one voice" on issues of importance to the association.

That's why a well-attended general session titled "The Seven Revolutions" featuring Johanna Nesselth Tuttle of the Center for Strategic & International Studies proved so timely, as 500 industry executives traveled to Amelia Island, Fla., just a month before the U.S. Presidential election to chart the future of the chemical industry.

"What's the world going to look like in the year 2030?" Tuttle asked those attending the bi-annual meeting of RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) and CropLife America. How policy makers respond to seven key issues with global implications in the years ahead – population, resources, technology, economics, information, security and governance – will likely provide the answer to that question.

Tuttle said there will be opportunities for government and industry "to find new paths forward" and address the challenges of population growth, security, and other issues of importance to people around the globe, and chemical suppliers are going to play an important role in shaping that new world, although "the role that your industry plays is going to continue to be challenging" given the complex nature of the issues facing policy makers.

Still, there is reason for optimism if industry representatives stay actively engaged on issues of importance to them. "Our theme for this week – political campaigns of the past – also reminds us how important our individual and collective participation in the political process

is – and how powerful it can be," observed Dave Morris, outgoing RISE governing board chairman and commercial leader of pest management and turf and ornamentals business for Dow AgroSciences.

"We are also reminded this week, that speaking with one voice is essential, though we represent many categories of product use," he said.

"Whether we are speaking about our shared issues or about those that are unique to our category, each of us must be engaged in the conversation about our industry and the important benefits we deliver to communities and countries."

Morris, who served as Governing Board Chairman for the past two years, said one of the first things he and RISE President Aaron Hobbs did upon taking on their new roles was attend an association management conference in Chicago.

Since then, Morris said, they have worked not only "in the association on issues," but also "on the association in structure, focus and operating discipline," creating a Strategic Oversight Council (SOC) as the association works towards becoming the catalyst for recognition of the

### What chemicals are being bought

According to L&L's 2012 State of the Industry report, which appeared in our October issue, 72 percent of our respondents bought fertilizers in the past 12 months, with pre-emergent herbicides coming in second with 64 percent.



(Left) Charlie Cook, editor and publisher of The Cook Political Report, and Jay Vroom, president and CEO of CropLife America.

human health and environmental benefits of pesticide products by legislators, regulators and the public they serve.

"The SOC gives us an internal GPS that helps us navigate successfully through our issues to determine what we will work on and what we won't work on," Morris said.

"RISE is focused on providing an advocacy platform for the specialty products field," added Jose Milan, chairman of the strategic oversight council and director of green business operations for Bayer.

Hobbs added that the SOC "has really done some great work" this past year. "They've helped us come together, integrating our approaches to issues management," including the popular 'Debug the Myths' program ([www.DebugTheMyths.com](http://www.DebugTheMyths.com)).

"I cannot overstate the strategic importance of leading and planning on a proactive and positive basis," Morris said. "It is a game changer for us — and our entire industry. Our com-

mitment to test and refine this approach through the Debug the Myths program over the past three years is paying real dividends on our investment.

"At RISE this year, we've continued our work to bring a positive and relevant voice to the conversation about our products at the local, state and federal levels," Morris added.

Through this discernment process, he said, the specialty chemical industry learned from policy makers three years ago it had "diminishing credibility" in the policy arena for two reasons:

- "Policymakers only heard from us when we didn't like what they were doing; and
- They never heard from their constituents about why our products are beneficial and necessary."

"The decision of the Governing Board to weave proactive capacity into the fabric of our advocacy, not only addresses those issues, but puts and keeps us in the conversation about our products and their many benefits," he said.

## L&L ON THE ROAD

### WaterSmart Conference stresses the effects water has on everyone

LAS VEGAS –The WaterSmart Innovations Conference and Exposition conference covered everything from greywater to social media and included a keynote speech by J. Carl Ganter.

More than 900 participants from 33 states and the District of Columbia and seven foreign nations participated in the conference, which took place in late October in Las Vegas.

"It's critical that we accelerate adoption of water efficiency concepts in urban environments," said Program Chairman Doug Bennett.

"As a peer-to-peer conference, our attendees have the opportunity to get the most current information on what's working."

Ganter, director and founder of Circle of Blue, told several water stories and the profound effects of water scarcity.

- In Mexico economies and industries have literally dried up resulting in more immigration to the United States.
- In India young girls spend several hours each day helping to haul water to the house instead of getting an education.
- In China the water hungry coal industry combined with drought has led to grasslands so parched that dust storms starting in Inner Mongolia blow all the way to Beijing.
- In the U.S. tar sands require an enormous amount of water for

processing after which the water has to be extensively treated.

While these stories may be a little gloomy, they are real stories about real people dealing with a real crisis with real consequences stretching across regions and borders.

"The need and the ability to solve these problems are greater today than ever before in mankind's existence," said Alan Harris, southeast regional sales leader for ValleyCrest.



From left: Richard Restuccia, Martha Golea, Colleen Donnelly and Alan Harris of ValleyCrest.

"Listen closely for the stories about water and share them often so they are heard above 'shouting' of the entertainment infatuated media"

For those who utilize social media, the conference was a great place to make valuable LinkedIn connections, exchange Facebook page info, and meet Twitter followers in person.

These tools serve as a pre-conference ice breaker and a way to keep in touch afterward, strengthening relationships on both sides.

Social media is one way to continue sharing ideas and resources about a sustainable water future long after the conference is over and to keep the excitement level high year-round.

Many of the sessions were tweeted live. Those tweets can

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be viewed on Twitter when you search #WSI2012.

In addition, technical tours to Hoover Dam, the Springs Preserve and The Venetian Resort highlighted Southern Nevada's water-efficiency practices and water resources, while an expo hall provided 60 exhibitors with an opportunity to share their water-efficient products and services.

The sixth WSI conference and expo is slated for Oct. 2-4, 2013, at the South Point Hotel and Conference Center in Las Vegas. More information will soon be available at [WaterSmartInnovations.com](http://WaterSmartInnovations.com).

## ACROSS THE INDUSTRY

### PLANET names first female Trailblazer

LAKE CITY, Pa. – Affiliated Grounds Maintenance Group announced that the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) named CEO Crystal Arlington to the status of Trailblazer.

Trailblazers are a select group of individuals nominated by their peers for being dedicated professionals who have made significant and long-term contributions to the green industry.

Arlington is one of 118 Trailblazers who has earned this designation and she is the first female to receive the honor in the category of Landscape Management.

"The PLANET Trailblazer mentoring program has provided assistance to so many companies and individuals," said AGMG CEO Crystal Arlington.

"I am proud to join this group of dedicated green industry professionals and I look forward to helping others achieve success in the exterior maintenance in-

dustry." This year, she became ASCA Certified with the Accredited Snow Contractors Association.

Affiliated Grounds Maintenance Group, headquartered in Lake City, Pa., has grown to encompass work in 39 states with more than 5,000 Affiliated Partner Contractors.

The company provides exterior maintenance services including landscape maintenance, snow and ice management, lot sweeping and power washing to some of the country's largest companies and property management firms. Learn more at [landcarenetwork.org](http://landcarenetwork.org).



Arlington

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## L&L INSIDER

### ONLA launches new certificate training method

WESTERVILLE, Ohio – The Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association (ONLA) released the new training manuals to be used with the Ohio Certified Nursery Technician (OCNT) Program.

This program assists in helping green industry employees improve and master their skills in three specialized areas: garden center, grower and landscape. The two books most recently updated were the Landscape Training Manual and the Core Training Manual.

Landscape contractors are relied on to provide horticultural advice as well as landscape construction techniques.

With help from the Landscape Training Manual, contractors will be educated in areas such as plant identification, plant usage, plant health, soils, turfgrass management, use of pesticides, construction techniques, design, sales and more.

The Core Training Manual brings a new idea to training in the green industry. Professionalism, safety and first aid are examples of topics covered in the core book.

The new Landscape and Core manuals include a written textbook and corresponding lectures/presentations provided on a self-guided CD.

"These manuals represent several years of hard work from our Certification Committee," said Kevin Thompson, Executive Director at ONLA. "This offers a learning experience that gives training through visual, auditory and written curriculum."

Next in line to be revised and updated are the Grower and Garden Training Manuals. These are expected to be released in the next couple years.

For more information on the Ohio Certified Training Program or to purchase copies of the training manuals, contact ONLA at (614) 899-1195. **L&L**



### Long-standing educational organizations come together

WAUKESHA, Wis. – Two long-standing educational venues familiar to upper-Midwest green industry businesses are hosting a collaborative program in 2013.

The Garden Center Symposium and the Midwest Perennial Conference will offer a joint educational opportunity for garden center and landscape operations on Jan. 23 and 24, 2013 in Waukesha, Wis.

"We're all in the same business, so the idea of asking people to choose from similar educational offerings amounts to a duplication of effort as well as expense for everyone concerned," according to Eileen Nelson, executive director of the Garden Center Symposium. "By providing a program with speakers and subjects relevant to a broader audience both groups feel they will be able to maximize their value to the industry," said Nelson.

Speakers scheduled include Anna Ball, Ball Horticulture; Bridget Behe, Michigan State University; Dan Heims, Terra Nova Nurseries; Stan Pohmer, Pohmer Consulting; Bobbie Schwartz, Bobbie's Green Thumb in Shaker Heights, Ohio; and Linda Zoerb, AAF CFD; La Crosse Floral, La Crosse, Wis.

All are leaders in the industry in their particular subject matter area and have been featured speakers at programs across the nation.

Presentations will be relevant to owners, managers and employees in garden centers, landscape and growing operations with topics including new plants (perennials) and their use, marketing to prospective customers, industry trends and directions and employee relations - keeping them happy and hard working.

Attendees will also have the opportunity for one-on-one conversations with the speakers through the a round-table event.



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## SnowCare for Troops seeks volunteers

IRON MOUNTAIN, Mich. – As Project EverGreen's SnowCare for Troops (SCFT) program enters its third season, the non-profit organization is recognizing the more than 600 volunteers who support the campaign's military families year-round by also offering landscaping services through GreenCare for Troops (GCFT).

Both programs are managed by Project EverGreen and connect military families who have a spouse or family member currently deployed in the armed forces with snowplow and landscape professionals.

SnowCare for Troops is a national program underwritten by THE BOSS Snowplow.

"It takes a very special person to give of their time and resources to back up our troops and their families and we want to thank our many landscape contractors and snow removal professionals who go the extra mile to make sure they're taken care of throughout the year," said Cindy Code, Project EverGreen executive director.

Before the first snowflakes fall this winter, Project EverGreen is urging its 4,000 volunteers supporting GCFT to also consider registering for the organization's SnowCare for Troops program. New recruits are also welcome to sign up.

In its first two years, the program has 1,200 volunteers signed up to help more than 1,500 military families needing snow removal assistance.

"We're proud to support the SnowCare for Troops program and to lend a hand to help our nation's military families who already carry so much on their shoulders," said Mark Klossner, marketing director for THE BOSS Snowplow.

In addition to volunteer participation, donations of money or gas cards as well as loans of snow removal equipment to volunteers and community groups are also needed.



Those interested can visit [www.projectevergreen.com/scft/](http://www.projectevergreen.com/scft/) to sign up.



## CLIMBING THE LADDER

Hires, promotions and career advancements

The Fockele Garden Co. named **Tony Haynie** as account manager for its Atlanta area customers.

In his new role, Haynie will coordinate landscape management for Fockele's customers in Fulton and DeKalb counties. He will supervise and train crew leaders and monitor scheduled services including fertilization, weed control, irrigation, and plant rejuvenation.

"Tony has been working in the horticulture industry for 27 years, and he has extensive knowledge of annuals, perennials, pruning, insect and disease control, soil preparation and plant identification," said Todd Brown, general manager of The Fockele Garden Co. "His experience will help continue to boost our presence in Atlanta and provide additional on-the-ground support for our customers there."

Haynie has previously worked in landscape management for Post Properties, Sandy Springs Lawnsapes and The Pruning Guru. Haynie is a Georgia Certified Landscape Professional and holds a Georgia Department of Agriculture Pesticide Applicator's License.

Ewing recently named **Kevin Schnautz** as national sales manager for turf products. In his new role, Schnautz will manage a U.S. network of sales representatives for Ewing's Turf Products Division encompassing agronomic, erosion control and sports field products.

Schnautz joins Andy Keeton, national product manager for the Turf Products Division, in shaping Ewing's sales



Haynie

strategy for the division. Keeton's focus is on regional turf products inventory strategy, vendor relations, merchandising and marketing programs, and other product related issues.

Specializing in turf maintenance and sports turf management, Schnautz previously served as Ewing's agronomist and turf products sales representative in Central Texas, providing contractor and employee training in turf management and best practices, and assisting with regional turf product selection and merchandising.

Prior to joining Ewing in 2004, Schnautz served as store manager for a large Green Industry supplier and was responsible for daily operations and increasing market share for agronomic products.

He is a member of the Sports Turf Managers Association (STMA), International Erosion Control Association (IECA), Texas Nursery and Landscape Association (TNLA) and the Texas Turfgrass Association (TTA). He holds a bachelor's degree in agriculture business from Texas A&M University.

Schnautz is based out of Ewing's South Austin, Tex., branch.

**Greg Hunter** was promoted to chief operating officer of Hunter Industries. In this expanded role, Hunter is responsible for executing company strategy and optimizing the day-to-day operations for all Hunter business units. He will also oversee the Hunter Executive Leadership Team.

Hunter assumes this role having held leadership positions within several key departments at Hunter including engineering, product management, information systems, and marketing. He is also a member of the Irrigation Association's board of directors and is involved with a number of other



Schnautz

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associations and non-profit groups. By trade, Hunter is an engineer with a degree in mechanical engineering from Cornell University.

Gene Smith, Hunter's current director of marketing for commercial and residential irrigation, has been selected to replace Hunter as the company's new vice president of marketing. Smith assumes the position after 12 years at Hunter, in which he has held leadership positions in engineering, product management and marketing.

In addition to his vast experience in the irrigation industry, Smith holds B.S. and M.S. degrees in engineering from the University of California, San Diego, as well as an MBA with an emphasis in marketing from California State University, San Marcos. In his new role, Smith will lead the marketing efforts for all Hunter business units including residential, commercial, and golf irrigation, FX Luminaire landscape lighting and Hunter custom molding.

**Suzanne Di Staulo** has been named sales manager at Spring Meadow Nursery, home to the Proven Winners ColorChoice shrubs brand. In her new position, Di Staulo will lead and direct the nursery's sales team, which serves growers and garden centers across the United States and Canada.

Di Staulo joins Spring Meadow Nursery as a twenty year sales and marketing veteran, with more than a decade of horticulture experience, most recently as key account and marketing manager with breeder Dümmer USA. She is actively involved in many industry associations, including the American Nursery and Landscape Association (ANLA), Garden Club of America (GCA), OFA – an Association of Horticulture Professionals, and America in Bloom.

"Sue is quickly establishing herself as an integral addition to our team," said Jeremy Deppe, general manager of Spring Meadow Nursery. "Her enthusiasm for helping customers succeed and growing the Proven Winners brand shows."

Di Staulo graduated with a B.A. in marketing from Notre Dame College. Her experience spans across many facets of the industry, including media, hard goods and annuals.

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## ASK THE EXPERTS



# CIGAR BEETLES, ENTRYWAYS, PAY RATES AND MENTORING

**ASK THE EXPERTS** is presented in partnership with PLANET's Trailblazers On Call program. Trailblazers are industry leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to give back to the industry.

**Q:** I have a current customer who is a manufacturer of cigarettes and is experiencing problems with cigar beetles. What can be done using plants to minimize the invasion?

**A:** The dreaded cigar beetle loves two things in life: cigars and heat. These pin-head size insects are always hungry and can turn paper into, well, dust. Their life cycle is only a mere 12 weeks, but in that time, they can do a great deal of damage. Dried plants are their favorite thing to feed on, so keeping landscape plants healthy can be one way to minimize the invasion. Otherwise, science is still trying to engineer a tobacco plant that is resistant to this dreaded pest that is already resistant to so many pesticides.

**Q:** I am working with a prospective customer that has a music festival premise that is used as a national

cultural facility for musical events and local theater productions. Currently, this customer has large plants that are in good condition placed at the front of the building. I feel there is a better use for this entryway and would welcome suggestions on approach and plant types for outdoor use.

**A:** The easiest approach to take, without seeing any renderings, photos, or chatting, is to use plants that have a welcoming fragrance and color. Your color selection could be reflective of the country colors or a bright warm contrast in pots around the larger plants that may already be planted around the building. Since many of the activities may take place at night, white blooming plants and variegation shine bright through

the darkness. Good luck with that prospect.

Kathryn Rudnyk, Monrovia Gardens

**Q:** How do I know if my hourly rates are just right or too high for my market?

**A:** I learned that this company had an almost 100 percent closing ratio for "qualified" leads. We looked into the company's finances and learned that the owners were not paying themselves nearly enough. The markup on materials was substantial, so my answer to their question was "You are not charging the client enough." It may be either your rates are too low or you are not charging for all your time.

As we dug in further, we learned that the owner was not charging enough for his own time. He billed himself out at the rate of his employees, which is not enough.

We also learned that he was doing run-around work on projects that he was not billing for.

We decided that this company's next step should be to re-calculate its hourly rates: do a budget, project the sales and hours sold, including owner's hours. (The conversation, and math, was a bit more complex than this.)

So, overall, first you need to know if your rates are right for you, then you need to know if your clients are buying you at your rates (closing ratio) and lastly, you want to know what the market rates are. However, this is less important in the residential market unless your closing ratio is poor. (But even then, this is not necessarily important.)

Jeffrey Scott, The Leaders Edge Peer Group

**Q:** How do I find a competent manager to work under the owner?

**A:** Besides recruiting from other companies, first look within your company for a proven employee who wants to move up, and start training him or her.

Another option would be to get connected with your local two- and four-year horticulture and agriculture programs.

Sign up to teach a class at the sophomore and junior level. Let the students get to know you and build bonds with the teachers. You could set up an intern program, which would provide a good source of bright students.

It could also help you plug into the alumni network, where you could find more experienced alumni looking for opportunities. This business owner loved teaching, so this was a natural fit for him. **L&L**

Jeffrey Scott, The Leaders Edge Peer Group

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# What vacation?

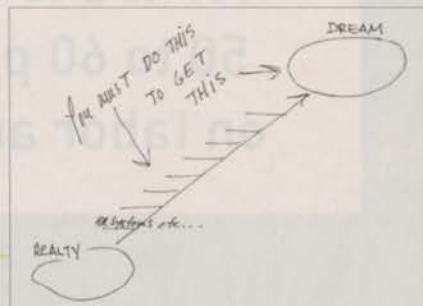
It's winter; time for some time off, right?

Wrong. Truly believe that our season is set up by what we landscapers do in the winter, more so than anything else.

So, this month's column is a list of things you should be doing this winter to help you and your team get the most out of 2013. For planning purposes, let's just say winter is from Dec. 15 to March 1 (or 11 weeks).

1. Go through every truck and piece of equipment and do the maintenance needed so you can avoid breakdowns during the season.
2. Buy Dr. John Maxwell's "The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork" on DVD and go through it with your team; take two laws a week until you are done.
3. Meet with your top 50 clients in person and ask them what you should stop doing, keep doing, and start doing.
4. Go see another successful landscaper in another state and benchmark your company against theirs.
5. Read one book on sales; I recommend "Brian Tracy's Be a Sales Superstar: 21 Great Ways to Sell More, Faster, Easier in Tough Markets."

6. Read one book on leadership; I recommend Mark Sanborn's "You Don't Need a Title to Be a Leader: How Anyone, Anywhere, Can Make a Positive Difference."
7. Read one book on branding; I recommend "Becoming a Category of One: How Extraordinary Companies Transcend Commodity and Defy Comparison" by Joe Calloway.
8. Read a book on business planning; I recommend Patrick Lencioni's "The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else In Business."
9. Sign up for three webinars or training sessions that you personally are going to participate in.
10. Go to Marty Grunder's GROW! 2013 in Nashville in February (sorry, shameless plug).
11. Take two hours a week to sit in a quiet place and think about what you want out of life and define the gap between the dream and reality.
12. Write out two procedures per week for things that you do that everyone seems to know but have never been written out.
13. Put together job descriptions for all your people.
14. Review the performance of your work in the last season and see what you can do to be more efficient.
15. If you don't use work orders for any and all work performed by your company, then change that and get work orders.
16. If you don't have a schedule board or some organized manner of planning any and all work, get one.
17. If you don't have ten job site signs that can be put up in your best projects, get them made.
18. Put a marketing plan in place, don't have one? Visit our website. ([www.martygrunder.com](http://www.martygrunder.com)) and download the example we have for you there.
19. Take every person on your leadership team to lunch once a month and talk, just talk. Don't worry about an agenda; it will find itself.
20. Start an exercise program and eliminate fatty foods and sweets from your diet and see if



you can establish some good habits before spring starts.

21. Take a look at your hiring process and make it better; see 22-28 for specifics.
  22. Define your ideal team member; have your team help you; be detailed.
  23. Design your employment applications to allow you to find more ideal team members by asking the right questions.
  24. Look into drug testing and background checks if you don't do them now.
  25. Keep in touch with all seasonal workers who have been laid off so the good ones come back!
  26. Write out what you can do better to *attain* more ideal team members in 2013.
  27. Write out what you can do better to *retain* more ideal team members in 2013.
  28. Write out what you can do better to *train* more ideal team members in 2013.
  29. Define your ideal client.
  30. Come up with a plan that allows you to communicate/reach out to more of these ideal clients.
  31. Go see mom, dad and anyone else that maybe you don't have time to see during the growing season.
- Look, the winter should be a time to rest and catch up on some things. I could go on and on with these ideas. Bottom line: use your winter wisely.
- Now is the time to get a plan together, both from a tactical and strategic perspective, to make 2013 the best year ever. **L&L**



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# The classics



**T**he last three articles featured what I refer to as "young guns" in the landscape industry. These are young entrepreneurs who are building strong teams and implementing good systems as they build their companies and pursue the American dream. We now turn our attention to some "Old guns" or entrepreneurs who have been in business for at least 25 years. Old guns are the survivors, contractors who have weathered many storms. What once was a dream to pursue is now a story to tell with many lessons for those willing to listen.

**Toddco Landscape Co.** Philip Giroux founded Toddco Landscape Co., a full-service landscape firm in the Los Angeles area that specializes in the ultra-high-end design build market, in 1978. Philip insists that "Toddco always makes their clients feel like individuals, not (just) part of a client mix...the client is our No. 1 focus." It's not unusual for Toddco to work on large, multi-

million dollar projects that employ multiple trades. He does not want "Toddco...to be seen as holding up a project. The 'weak link' in a chain on construction work." I've worked with Philip since early 1987 and have learned many lessons along the way – two come to mind.

**Bare-knuckle bidding.** During the recession of the early 1990s, Philip was bidding on Phase 2 of a large four-phase residential installation project. Four contractors, including the contractor who did Phase 1, were invited to bid on the project. The first phase was \$350,000. Subsequent phases would be in the same price range. Today, these phases would probably be priced between \$500-600,000.

The recession in Southern California was in full swing at this time. Margins were tight and Philip really wanted to get this job.

He had me spend a day with him bidding this project. We were unsure why the owners were putting Phase 2 out for bid, but thought they might be dissatisfied

with the original contractor. Consequently, we felt that, if we won Phase 2, we'd probably get Phases 3 and 4.

In the late 1980s, Philip would bid large residential installation jobs with a gross profit margin (GPM) in the mid to high 30 percent range. (We calculate GPM by adding the general and administrative overhead costs on a job to its net profit margin.) Two years later, jobs were so scarce and the market so tight that he had to bid work in the very low 20 percent GPM range. Philip decided to bid this \$300,000-plus job with a 17 percent GPM. He wanted to give it his best shot.

Of the four bids provided, Toddco. was the second lowest. We'd beaten the original contractor's bid by \$12,000, as he came in third. The fourth bid was much higher. The landscape architect and owners met and decided to throw out the low bid, which then made us the low bidder. My client was happy, and so was I, as I felt I'd done a good job for him.

However, the landscape architect called my client and informed him the owners decided that, for \$12,000, they didn't want to change horses in midstream. It was then we realized we'd been "shopped." The owners and landscape architect probably never did intend to change contractors. Their intention, we thought, was to keep their guy honest but at the expense of three other bidders.

Imagine! We bid this project with a 17 percent GPM, and still didn't get the job. The lesson is that things can get really ugly in a recession, and all the rules change. You had better know your numbers and know them well.

**Paydirt (or is it "PAYDRT"?)** – On a happier note and just prior to the recession of the early 1990s, Philip had me help him calculate pricing for a rather large residential time and materials (T&M) installation project. Philip got the job and after it was completed I queried him as to how it went. He said, "I did most of what you told me. However, I changed things a bit. Instead of adding a 20 percent margin to the cost of materials, I added 40 percent. Do you think that was alright?"

My response was that if the client paid it, it was alright. The client did pay Philip's prices with the additional margin included. Cost for materials alone were over \$500,000. Philip then bought himself a car that had just been introduced to the market. The personalized license plate on the Lexus read, "PAYDRT."

**Conclusion.** Philip and I have learned scores of lessons as we've worked together the last twenty-five years. Many I have shared with my readers and clients. I've learned that experience learned first hand may be more indelible but experience gleaned vicariously is far less painful.

What are Philip's greatest challenges as he plans to retire in the next five years? The present economy is his number one challenge. Second is maintaining a solid team that will carry Toddco Landscape Co. into the future.

His desire is to leave a *legacy* that carries forward all that he's worked so hard to build. Thereafter, it's fishing, biking, collecting wine and spoiling the grandkids.

Finish strong my friend. Your legacy *will* prevail! **L&L**





# Snow days

**T**his time of year I frequently get asked questions regarding pay practices due to weather conditions that effect business operations. The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) addresses compensation issues related to business closure regardless of cause. While certain nuances exist, below are examples of what to consider when determining if an employee should be paid during severe weather.

**Company is closed.** If a landscaping company is closed for an entire day, exempt employees must be paid even if they do not perform any work during that day. While the exempt employee's pay cannot be docked due to business closure, the employer can require that a full-day (i.e., 8 hour) deduction be made from that employee's personal leave (i.e., vacation) balances.

However, if the exempt employee does not have sufficient leave balances (i.e., 8 hours) to substitute for a full-day of business closure, the employee must still receive full pay for that day; in this case, the company should draft a policy requiring the leave balance shortage be deducted from an employee's future leave allocation or be treated as advanced leave.

If a landscaping company is closed for an entire week, and exempt employees do absolutely no work during that full week, they do not have to be paid for that week. Yet, exempt employees must receive a full-day's pay for every day they perform any work-related activities (e.g., telephone, paperwork, email) beyond the de minimis standard. So, if a landscape company is closed for a week due to flooding, and an exempt

employee makes work-related telephone calls from home, the exempt employee must receive a full day's pay for each day any such work is performed.

Conversely, non-exempt employees do not have to be paid when a company is closed for an entire day. Thus, if a landscape company is closed for a full day due a snow storm, a non-exempt Foreman does not receive pay for that day. However, if that foreman performs any work-related duties (e.g., telephone, paperwork, email) during that day of business closure, the foreman must be paid only for the actual time worked.

Depending upon company policy, the non-exempt Foreman may substitute available personal leave balances to receive compensation for that day. It should also be noted that a non-exempt foreman who is paid on a salaried, not hourly, schedule, must be paid for that entire day.

**Company is open.** If a landscaping company is open and an exempt employee cannot get to work due to bad weather, that employee's pay can be docked in a full-day increment as long as the employee performs no work during that day. Parenthetically, it is important to note that commuting to/from work, in and of itself, is not considered compensable time; yet if the exempt employee conducts business-related telephone calls while driving to, though not actually reaching, the office, that employee must receive a full day's pay.

For example, an exempt employee who fails to get to work due to severe weather and returns home, and performs no work-related duties that

day, can be docked a full day's pay. As stated previously, the employee must receive a full day's pay if any work is performed beyond the de minimis standard while driving or at home that day.

Similar to the situation cited above, the employer can require that a full-day (i.e., 8 hour) deduction be made from that employee's personal leave (i.e., vacation) balances. If an exempt employee does not have sufficient leave balances available, the employer can dock the exempt employee for a full day of pay and make no leave deductions.

The conditions are different for non-exempt employees in that they must only be paid for actual hours worked. If a landscaping company is open for business and a non-exempt employee cannot get to work due to inclement weather, the employer is not obligated to compensate that employee with a full day's pay. The employer is only responsible for paying non-exempt employees for the time they spend performing any work-related duties during that day.

**Summary.** As stated previously, there are nuances (e.g., reporting time pay, partial days, snow day policies) that may complicate application of these guidelines. Along those lines, it is critical that landscapers consider relevant state laws that may exceed FLSA standards. To play it safe, landscapers should always contact a qualified human resources professional for direction, rather than acting in a casual manner which all too often results in a serious fine, costly penalty or unnecessary lawsuit. **L&L**



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## Putting a damper on DOL rules – for now

The H-2B program has become virtually impossible to use.

Immigration reform has stirred up controversy over guest worker programs like H-2B. In June, the Senate passed a bill amendment to block funding during fiscal 2013 for two Department of Labor (DOL) rules that would have made the H-2B program nearly impossible to administer, if you ask Steven Steele, director of operations for Keesen Landscape Management, Englewood, Colo.

- Prevailing wage.** The DOL's proposed calculation methodology for prevailing wage would increase landscape services wages by 40 percent, or by \$3.66 per hour. That higher rate would become the "floor wage" for the company. "That doesn't take into account my management and other skilled positions that should get paid more," Steele says. Steele estimates that at the new rate, his payroll would jump up \$212,655, a 20 percent increase.

"Keep in mind, this is only the impact of increased wages for H-2B worker payroll and does not take into account the fact that all non H-2B employees performing similar jobs would also have a raised pay rate," Steele says.

- Program rules.** A litany of changes to H-2B program rules would have made H-2B



## Keep it legal

Keesen Landscape Management continues to use the H-2B program, despite its growing complexity and uncertain future.

**"W**e're not here the way we're supposed to be here."

That's what a group of loyal, longtime Mexican workers admitted to managers at Keesen Landscape Management in the mid-1990s, before the days of E-verify and scrutiny over "official" documents. "We recognized there was a liability on our side," says Steven Steele, director of operations for the Englewood, Colo.-based firm. "It was a real 'aha' moment for us. We had no clue (they weren't legal), and when we found out we had an issue, we had to do something about it."

So the company let go of those hard workers – many of them holding key field positions. And leadership promised them they'd do what they could to bring them back soon. That's when Keesen Landscape hired a high-powered immigration attorney and learned about H-2B.

Keesen Landscape began using H-2B in 1996

and was one of the first landscape firms in the Colorado to use the program. Because of H-2B, Steele says the company was able to rehire many of those former employees. Since that time, Keesen Landscape has welcomed a trained workforce of 85-120 Mexican workers back to the firm each spring.

"We have guys who have been coming up every year," Steele says. "H-2B provides us with a workforce that is trained and consistent."

"These guys are our lifeblood," Steele continues, emphasizing how the company treats their H-2B workers like family, holding get-togethers and even cooking breakfast for them several times during the season.

And the reality is, replacing these workers would be next to impossible. In 2010 when Keesen Landscape was denied its H-2B workers because of a Department of Labor (DOL) decision – 14 months later, the DOL admitted to making a "huge



**Keesen gives its H-2B team jackets for every five years of employment.**

"unworkable," Steele says. One of those rules would require employers to pay transportation and subsistence costs for workers hired under the program.

And, it would require employers to advertise for U.S. workers up to 21 days prior to the job-start date regardless of when a company's true recruitment process begins and is completed.

For example, a worker from Cleveland could decide to take an open job at Keesen Landscape in Denver. The company would be required to pay travel costs and subsistence (like meals on the road). "We would have to accept this worker up to three days prior to the time our H-2B people come," Steele says.

On February 25, H-2B workers are on their way to Keesen Landscape. Steele would have to take that worker from Cleveland despite the fact that this H-2B workforce is en route to Denver to work.

mistake" – the company had to rely on domestic workers to fulfill seasonal positions. That meant hiring 50 percent of the workforce within two weeks of the season start. Keesen employs about 240 employees during the high season, 120 of which are full-time American workers.

"That year, we issued over 500 W-2s," Steele says of the significant employee turnover. "If you came through the door and were legal to work, if you had a pulse, we'd hire you. We needed people. But the general stay for [a laborer] was a few days to a couple of weeks, and this lasted all season. And, we ended up having quality issues, which led to higher client turnover."

The following year, Keesen got its H-2B workers back and business flourished. "The labor pool for these types of jobs is tough," Steele says.

H-2B has provided labor relief for the company for more than 15 years. Though after 2013, that scenario could change depending on how legislation shakes out after the election.

**H-2B BEST PRACTICES.** The H-2B program has never been user-friendly, and over the years, it has continued to grow more complex, Steele says. Keesen Landscape is successful with H-2B

because it taps into resources that provide legal support, and the company is committed to the program and workers who come each year. "If you treat employees right, they will come back and they will bring good people with them," Steele says.

Brothers, cousins, friends – Mexican workers who have a positive H-2B experience at a company go home and tell everyone about it. And that assures Steele that the workers he gets each year are going to be just as committed as the regulars who return each season.

"Annually, we bring up very few new guys," Steele says, relating the low turnover in return H-2B workers. Keesen Landscape rewards its H-2B team with jackets for every five years of employment.

"When they get a 5-, 10- or 15-year jacket, that's a big deal to them," Steele says. "It's really a source of pride and something that says a lot about our culture here that our guys want to come back each season."

Meanwhile, continuing the program has required constant attention.

Early on, Keesen Landscape began working with the Federation for Employers and Workers of America (FEWA), a nonprofit that serves a voice for those who utilize guest worker programs like H-2B and offers

services to help members like Keesen Landscape navigate the H-2B process.

Essentially, FEWA administers the H-2B program for Keesen Landscape, Steele says.

"They take care of all the filings, and they represent us legally in any matter that has to do with H-2B." FEWA ensures that the company complies with requirements.

Keesen says partnering with an organization to help navigate H-2B has been critical to the program's success at the company. "It pays to have someone who understand the legal complexities of the program," Steele says, adding that there are a "maze of regulations that come a long with the program."

But it's worth the work involved in administering the program for Keesen Landscape. Steele considers what could happen to H-2B if the program goes away after 2013, after the expiration of a congressional block on funding the DOL's efforts to implement changes to program rules or the prevailing wage.

That's 85 employees the company would have to scramble to hire – 85 hard-labor holes to fill, which Steele reiterates is incredibly difficult, even in times of high unemployment.

"For 2014, things are totally up in the air," he says. If H-2B was not available, Steele says, "There are a number of options, and none of them are that good."

For now, Steele is focused on the 2013 season and bringing back the company's loyal workers. "They are like family members to us," he says. "It is a mutually beneficial relationship." **L&L**

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**The pitch:** The Trimmer Assist is a universal landscaping strap, as it works with all string trimmers, hand held blowers and edgers.



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**For more information:** [www.trimmerassist.net](http://www.trimmerassist.net)

## Gravely Edger and Walk-Behind Trimmer

**The pitch:** The Gravely edger (pictured) gives you the options of edging, trimming and beveling, and the Pro-Trim Professional Walk-Behind Trimmer



removes grass where mowers can't reach.

- The Gravely Edger offers a four-position height adjustment, 110-degree pivot head rotation for cutting, trimming or beveling.
- The trimmer features a reinforced 15-degree pivot head and 14-gauge steel deck for durability.
- The Pro-Trim also includes a 22-inch cutting width and 1.25- to 4.25-in. cutting heights.

**For more information:** [www.gravely.com](http://www.gravely.com)

## Oly-Ola Teco-Edg

**The pitch:** Oly-Ola Edgings' Teco-Edg is a 6-in. high L-shaped edge restraint made with heavy-duty 100 percent recycled PVC.



- The product's specially-engineered drainage slots and multi-purpose stake holes make it available for versatile "green" applications such as green roof systems, permeable pavements, aggregate pathway installations, and more.
- The L-shaped profile is available in rigid or flexible pieces for easy installation.
- Teco-Edg comes in 6 x 6 in. or 4 x 4 in.; custom sizes are also available.

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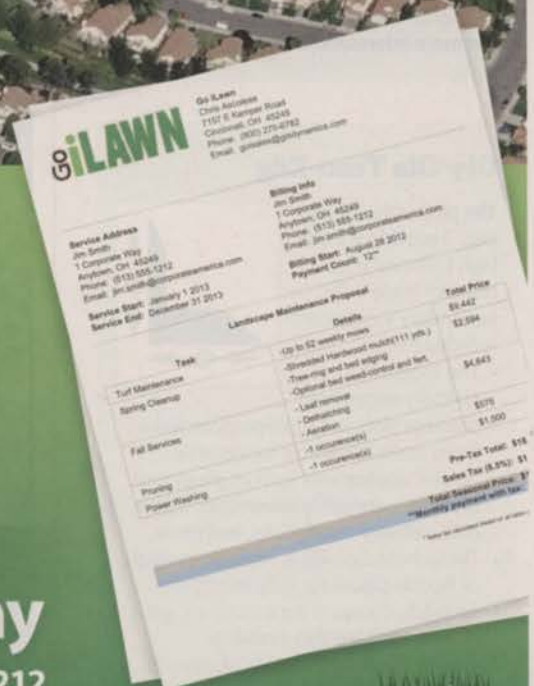


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## Spreading the word

A landscape and irrigation company owner develops a water management app that he is sharing with the industry – even his competitors.

**T**om Del Conte started his landscape business while he was still in high school in order to put himself through college. After earning a business degree he realized he was too passionate about the green industry to give it up and decided to stay in the business.

Since that time, he has grown not only a successful landscape business but also a green waste recycling company and a technology firm responsible for the development of an app and online program for water conservation.

Del Conte, president of Del Conte's Landscaping in Fremont, Calif., says that he's long known water management is the "next big frontier for landscape contractors." And while his company has been employing technology to better manage water for years, he also knew that many were lagging behind.

"Our irrigation division has always been

very aggressive in water management," Del Conte says.

One day in October 2010, his water manager, Logan Oates, suggested the idea of turning that technology into a mobile app that could be available to others. From there, the idea for Sprinkler Times was born.

In 2011, Del Conte founded Garden Apps using his knowledge of landscaping, irrigation, and conservation to ultimately develop the Sprinkler Times application. It was an enormous investment of time and money but Del Conte believes it's something truly unique to the industry. He has been helped along the

**Sprinkler Times includes one timer with 32 zones.**

Del Conte Landscaping has always been tapped into water management.

way by Oates, who is also now co-owner and senior irrigation specialist of Garden Apps.

The Sprinkler Times website and smart phone app help provide accurate watering schedules for sprinkler systems without much effort. The app is \$5.99 and Del Conte says is therefore a much easier sell than the installation of a smart controller, due to the initially high price (despite savings in the long-run).

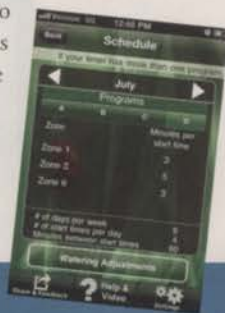
"If contractors can convince their customers to install a smart controller then that's really the ideal solution. But in the meantime, we hope to be another great solution," Del Conte says. "Customers have become more and more demanding that their steward of water management has solutions for conservation."

The initial purchase of Sprinkler Times includes one timer with 32 zones. Contractors can purchase additional timers once inside the program. Once a zip code is entered, Sprinkler Times utilizes 20 years of historic weather data along with entered data on plant type, sprinkler type, soil type and sun exposure for each zone of the yard in order to generate a monthly watering schedule that is specifically customized to the landscape.

The schedule can be viewed from the computer and accessed through an online account at any time.

Del Conte says that even though people are starting to realize the importance of water conservation, the time involved in smart management is a deterrent. He aims to solve that problem using simple mobile application technology that anybody can master.

"People are still just not going to spend that much time calculating and managing every zone they are stewards for," says Del Conte. "The Sprinkler Times website and app uses basic information from each property to develop a base schedule. The program even allows for adjustment factors so that every station can be fine-tuned over the initial periods to arrive at a greater water





## Research and development

Measuring and managing water correctly takes a lot of work.

**F**remont, Calif.-based Del Conte's Landscaping has always prided itself on using the latest science and technology into its business. That's why company president Tom Del Conte incorporated a specialized irrigation division with its own research and development programs focused on exploring advanced irrigation technology. "It's not uncommon for landscapers to just use the method of an educated guess and trying to get as close as possible to an appropriate water management goal," says Del Conte.

"But there's a lot more that can be done in the area of water management from understanding how many minutes are required for the landscape all the way to creating a budget and knowing how many gallons of water should be used on any particular site."

This is where the research and development program comes into play. Del Conte employs a tool that matches water use with real time demand.

Del Conte says that all of the extra effort doesn't typically return a quick profit. "As a company we are forgoing those short-term profits and making an investment in research and development as part of a goal toward our future," he says. "It's a long-term investment. We even do our own reviews of manufacturer's performance."

"The manufacturer will tell us what their performance is but then we go out and do our own research to verify that and come up with our own assessment. It's not always cost effective in the short run but it builds up to a better understanding of our irrigation management."

management program to both save water and improve plant health.

"This is how high level irrigation managers program, except it only takes minutes to determine run times for every month of the year rather than several hours to determine a schedule."

**A PASSION FOR SUSTAINABILITY.** Del Conte's passion for the green movement is why he strongly endorses smart timers even though it would eventually make Sprinkler Times obsolete. "We recognize that we may very likely be obsolete in about 10 years," he says. "We do believe that smart controllers will continue to catch on and are the way of the future. But what we're concerned with is what's going to happen in the meantime. That's where we come in."

Del Conte says there are roughly 25 million sprinkler timers out there. Of those, he says, only three to five percent are currently smart timers. "The industry has no answer for those other 95 percent of timers which is why we created Sprinkler Times," says Del Conte.

"The water auditing process and scheduling using scientific methods is extremely comprehensive and time consuming so it's not cost effective for contractors to employ such methods. Instead most take their best educated guess. But with Sprinkler Times you can now calculate the schedule for the whole year in about two minutes."

**AVAILABLE TO ALL.** Because Del Conte decided to make this available on the marketplace, he knew it would mean talking directly to his competitors, which has certainly been an unusual situation. Del Conte still considers himself a landscape contractor, first and foremost, but he knew that the product had too much

potential to keep it from the industry as a whole. "Saving water is a huge social issue so it was ultimately an easy decision to make this technology available to everyone," he says. "It's built for everyone to use."

It was one of Del Conte and Oates' main objectives to make Sprinkler Times so intuitive that truly anyone could use it. "We understand that people will spend a second or two looking at something and then want to be able to just push a button," Del Conte says. "So we had to make it incredibly simple. We have a ticker tape that gives instruction on every single page of the app. This allows people to always have the information of 'what to do next.'"

**THE BOTTOM LINE.** Del Conte says it's also an opportunity for irrigation contractors to add some dollars to their bottom line. The company offers templates of letters that landscapers can use to send out to their customers once adopting the Sprinkler Times technology.

"The letter explains that XYZ Landscaping Company has engaged a sophisticated computer program that will allow them to better manage their water," says Del Conte.

"They can charge the customer a little bit of extra money, which they'll have no problem paying because the customer will understand it could save them some money in the long run and help improve the management of their sprinkler system."

By adding an irrigation scheduling service through Sprinkler Times, Del Conte says contractors can charge an extra \$8 a month to the customer. After paying Garden Apps for the purchase of each unit, Del Conte says a contractor with 100 maintenance accounts would still make an extra \$9,000.

Del Conte adds: "Customers will be happy to pay an extra eight bucks in order to receive superior water management and contractors will find it's easy to add the extra \$9,000 to their bottom line – especially when it's for something they should really already be doing." **L&L**

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# The gift of water

Santa might not be real, but you can easily help bring clean water to the needy of the world. By Martha Golea

**I**f you're reading this, you're probably old enough to hear what I'm about to say.

Santa is not real.

All right, so you've probably heard that one before, but here are some similar hoaxes we all seem to buy into long into adulthood:

1. Water is everywhere and it comes from nature so it should be free.

2. Water will always flow magically from my faucet and hose.

When you were small, your parents shopped for months to find the perfect gifts, wrapped for days, and snuck around hours after you fell asleep to stash all the presents under the tree, only to give all the credit to Santa. But every time you turn the tap, it's Christmas. So much work goes on behind the scenes to bring you the water that magically appears whenever you demand it.



Golea

**WHAT YOU'RE PAYING FOR.** "Water should be free" is one of the most baffling statements I hear on a regular basis. Sure, about 71 percent of the Earth is covered in water but do you carry a bucket to a nearby river or ocean to get all the water you need to drink, bathe, irrigate and keep your household or business running? If you do, then you're absolutely right: It should be free. If you're traveling miles to fetch it, powering the pumps to suck it out, hauling it back home, cleaning it to drinking standards, and delivering it to your own faucets and hoses, then re-collecting it, treating it again, carrying it back to its source, and repeating the process daily, that water better not cost you a cent.

Why not? Because the process of retrieving

it already cost you a fortune in time, electricity and transportation.

And if you're hauling all these buckets of water every day, would you irrigate at all? Or would you search for the most efficient methods and products for watering because you know what a precious gift water is?

But this is America and someone else does all of those things for us. So why do we think we shouldn't have to pay them for the work they do? The water flowing from our faucets is not magic at all; it is engineering and electricity, pipes and pumps, toil, travel and treatment. It may come from nature, but it takes about as much work to put a gallon of water under your Christmas tree as an X-Box or a Barbie Dream Car.

**THE GIFT OF LIFE.** While your own children may think a gallon of water is a terrible gift, around the world, 3,000 children die each day from unsafe water and lack of sanitation facilities., according to UNICEF. Those kids would love nothing more than clean water for Christmas. In developing countries, where clean water saves lives, improves economies, and provides endless opportunities for women and children, what better gift could there be?

The \$30 billion it would cost to provide clean water and sanitation to the entire world sounds like an overwhelming amount until you consider Americans will spend approximately \$465 billion on Christmas this year, according to the National Retail Associa-

tion. Charities like The Water Project and charity:water help you provide clean water to one person in need for less than the cost of a Lego set.

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**"Water should be free" is one of the most baffling statements I hear on a regular basis.**





# Hello, again

The ancient practice of water harvesting is being brought back to life in the United States.

By Russ Jackson



**R**ising water prices, watering restrictions, drought, political confrontations over water rights and water shortages are just a few of the complicated factors that have landscape designers, home owners and business owners searching to find alternate, sustainable water sources for irrigation and domestic use. The search for a “new” water source has led many to re-discover water harvesting. Water harvesting is an ancient practice that is currently experiencing a strong revival in the United States and already enjoys widespread acceptance in many countries around the globe.

Water harvesting is the practice of collecting rainwater from roof tops, condensate from HVAC systems and, increasingly, stormwater from landscaped and impervious surfaces in a tank or cistern, and then pumping the water out to meet irrigation or domestic demand.

A properly designed and installed water harvesting system can provide safe and reliable water for the life of the system. The vessel used to store the harvested water is often the largest and most expensive com-





ponent of the water harvesting system, therefore choosing the right storage option is critical for the success of a system.

This article will compare and contrast the different storage options available for water harvesting systems.

The first option to consider when selecting a water harvesting storage tank is whether the system will be an above ground or below ground system.

Above ground storage tanks are usually the most economical to install, as no excavation and backfill are required for the installation. In addition, above ground tanks are generally more economical to manufacture since they are not manufactured to handle the structural loads below ground cisterns are exposed to.

However, due to freezing temperatures, above ground tanks are best suited to warmer weather climates in which the water can be stored and used year round without the likelihood of freezing. One of the distinct challenges of using above ground

tanks can be the conveyance of the water to the tank.

Collecting rainwater from rooftops can be made simple by locating the tank near a downspout. However, if it is necessary to collect off of multiple downspouts, routing the conveyance piping from the downspouts to the tank can be difficult and unsightly. The two most common types of above ground storage tanks are plastic (HDPE) and corrugated steel.

Most above ground plastic tanks can be purchased for 35 cents to 65 cents per gallon prior to shipping and installation costs. It is important to determine where the tank is manufactured in relation to the project location and choose a tank that is manufactured as close to the project site as possible.

In some instances, tank shipping costs can exceed the actual cost of the tank. Plastic tanks come in sizes ranging from 55 gallons to 12,000 gallons while corrugated steel tanks come in sizes ranging from 500 to

500,000 gallons. The installation benefits and challenges for corrugated steel tanks mirror that of above ground plastic tanks.

Corrugated steel tank prices vary widely in price, starting at 45 cents per gallon for large capacity tanks and going up to \$3 per gallon for a smaller tank prior to shipping and installation costs. Corrugated steel tanks are made up of multiple components which include, the corrugated steel panels, the liner that holds the water, tank ladders, and fittings to name a few. In addition, most corrugated steel tanks must be assembled on-site which can contribute to higher labor costs.

Many commercial and residential projects utilize below ground cisterns for a variety of reasons, and cisterns come with their own distinct set of benefits and challenges. When project real estate is at a premium, burying a cistern is a wonderful way to preserve space above ground, while also keeping the rainwater cistern "out-of-sight-out-of-mind." Additionally, most below ground cisterns can be buried deep enough so that the water level in the tank is below the frost line, which greatly reduces the time and effort needed to winterize the system.

Conveying water to below ground cisterns is also simplified due to the fact there is generally a large vertical distance between the downspouts and the inlet of the cistern, allowing plenty of room for gravity to pull the water into the cistern. The

Learn how one contractor practices and sells rainwater harvesting in our September Water Works newsletter at [bit.ly/rainwaterharvest](http://bit.ly/rainwaterharvest).

most common cisterns are manufactured out of plastic which can include polyethylene, polypropylene, or fiberglass.

The largest plastic cistern that is mass manufactured and available in the United States is 2,650 gallons, however the most common size is 1,700 gallons. Most 1,700 gallon plastic tanks are modular, so that multiple tanks can be linked together for overall capacities much larger than 1,700 gallons. Fiberglass cisterns are made-to-order for specific commercial applications, and cost a great deal more than mass manufactured plastic tanks.

Below ground cisterns can cost approximately \$1 to \$2.50 per gallon prior to shipping costs and installation costs, while fiberglass cisterns can cost \$1.75 to \$3.50 per gallon prior to shipping and installation costs. Installation costs for below ground cisterns are higher due to the additional cost of excavation and backfill, as well as higher initial tank cost.

Each water harvesting installation comes with its own set of challenges. Which type, size, and construction material of the tank or cistern is best for each project varies based on the project.

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Mercedes-Benz

## Winning acceptance

**Board approval isn't easy when a design/build project breaks the norm. Here is how one firm eased a community's concerns.**

**B**eary Landscaping had a vision for a landscape design that would fill a vacant lot in the center of historic downtown Frankfort, Ill. The trick was to illustrate the plan to skeptical villagers and earn their approval.

"You know in your heart what it's going to look like, and it was our job to help everyone understand the plan," says Mark McClure, sales manager at Beary Landscaping, based in Lockport, Ill.

Because this particular landscape design cut against the village's old-time grain (in-ground pool, travertine, full outdoor kitchen), there was plenty of buzz, and a fair amount of opposition before Beary Landscaping presented the project at the town hall.

"It isn't easy being in a board room and having a community against a project and trying to get them to accept it and believe in what you are trying to do," McClure says. But that is exactly what Beary Landscaping accomplished: approval and, eventually, praise from area homeowners.

Here is how Beary maintained a strong relationship with the village board while working to ensure neighbors of the

# Building history

**When design approval takes a village, communication and compromise help keep a project moving along.**

**T**he Village of Frankfort, Ill., was keeping watch on this landscape project. It wasn't like the rest in this 1890s Southland Chicago suburb, which is streetscaped the old-fashioned way with quintessential street lamps and charming, restored homes.

First, up went a new home on the vacant lot planted on the village's main drag, where an annual fall festival attracts visitors from all over and a farmer's market keeps the town bustling on weekends. The new construction caused a stir. And rumbling climbed to a buzz when the homeowner acquired the adjacent property to build a luxurious pool house and richly landscaped retreat.

This was nothing like usual Frankfort fare.

"There was a string of cars that would constantly stop and look at the project on any given day," says Mark McClure, sales manager at Beary Landscaping, which was hired to create a resort-quality outdoor living space that honored Frankfort's village feel and fit within the tight town property.

"A lot of tear-down and new construction is not done in Frankfort," McClure adds. This project took "new" in Frankfort to a different level. The plans included a house connected to the home by a cat-walk, a deck



of travertine and an outdoor kitchen with all the amenities.

McClure says the project ultimately resulted in building a new standard for the town's new construction projects. And once-skeptical neighbors were content at project completion, having gained some new landscaping of their own (the homeowner paid for it, too).

But getting village approval required diligence and preparation, and the sheer logistics of working in a tight town space presented challenges through-

out the six-month construction period. McClure shares how Beary Landscaping pulled off this unique project.

**PLEASING A VILLAGE.** It's not that the villagers intended to be a tough crowd. But there's a pride of place in Frankfort. There's an old-time charisma that people work to preserve, whether through restoring the old Victorian homes that line the town center's character-filled streets or participating in the village's many community events.



property-under-construction would be satisfied with the end result.

**Show, don't tell.** Pictures and samples help bring a rendering to life. While a complete drawing of the landscape project showed villagers the scope of the landscape project, the visual clues helped them understand how the property would blend with their historic downtown. "People for the most part are visual, and they like to see the prettiness because landscaping is a colorful thing when finished," McClure says.

**Respect the fear.** Villagers, and particularly neighboring homeowners, were concerned about the project because the town works together to preserve its history. Since this property was located on the main drag, its appearance became a public matter. "A lot of people are afraid for anything new," McClure says. "Work with them. Respect that fear. And help them overcome the fear of a new project coming in next door by listening and answering their questions."

**Stay in touch.** After gaining approval to begin the project, Beary Landscaping worked with village inspectors and kept open lines of communication with the board and village leaders during construction. "They wanted to make sure we didn't deviate from the plan once it was accepted, and we did what we said we were going to do," McClure says.

The people who live in Frankfort care about retaining the dignity of its history, which begins with tales of the Blackhawk Indians who built trails there before European settlers arrived.

Today, Frankfort is a choice location in South Chicagoland, dubbed "The Jewel of the South Suburbs."

And to keep the village that way, there is strict architectural review and oversight on building projects like the one Beary Landscaping proposed.

"A lot of people were against the project at first," McClure says, noting how the homeowner wanted to erect stone walls around the back of the project to blend with the town's look and add privacy. The owner respected the village's desire to maintain its old-time feel with the home construction, even painting the brick so it would blend with area structures.

But no resident had ever proposed building an in-ground pool downtown. And the downtown community wasn't sure about the homeowner's planned structures and usage of the space.

Before Beary Landscaping could break ground on the project, a presentation to the Village of Frankfort was required. Throughout the project, Beary Landscaping worked closely with the village board to keep everyone apprised of the construction process – and to ensure that all of the neighbors would be pleased with the results.

First, the plan was presented at a village meeting in front of community members and the village board of directors. "We decided to do a complete

rendered drawing so the plan was visible and everyone could see how the design would fit into the community," McClure says. Clippings and samples were critical to painting a vivid picture of the proposed landscape design. Photographs of key landscape features brought the rendering to life.

Then, the villagers began asking questions "It was critical for us to be there and talk to neighbors about the minimal impact of the construction and to assure them that it wasn't going to be a lengthy process," McClure says. "We proposed to get in, get the job done, and get out of there."

That sounded like a great plan to villagers who were highly interested in keeping their neighborhood peace.

Still, there was some opposition. But dissent was met with this welcome compromise: The homeowner funded the purchase of landscaping materials for neighboring properties to help screen views and soften hard features. Some were full-sized evergreens, spruce, hawthorns and multi-stemmed plants providing year-round coverage.

"The neighbors were thrilled with that solution," McClure says. "They got something that adds value to their properties, and the (large) project itself adds value to their homes because now it sets a new standard."

**SETTING A NEW STANDARD.** A majestic spiral-topiary juniper tree is a living centerpiece on the property, elegantly positioned among a travertine that borders the in-ground pool.

The homebuilder personally specified that tree and had it transported from downtown Chicago. The tree had to be just the right size to suit the plan. This attention to detail was maintained throughout construction.

And the property's impact is because of its polished appearance, from the curvaceous border beds to elegant water arches pouring in a perfect soldier-line into the pool.

The property is packed with flowers – "We wanted flowers everywhere," McClure says – and sophisticated landscape lighting brings the property to life at dusk.

All this was accomplished in a space no larger than 225 by 110 feet. That's a squeeze for an extravagant pool house with all the landscape dressing. "A lot of the area was covered with structure, pavement, travertine, hardscape ... and the rest was landscaping," McClure says of the materials mix.

This secret garden is not fully visible from street view, just as the homeowner intended. "Once the landscaping was done," McClure says, "area homeowners realize they were also gaining from this project." L&L



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# UTV

## VERSATILITY



Those hard-to-access areas don't have to be so difficult to enter. **By Jason Stahl**

**B**rian Vint just couldn't bear to fight another winter without an adequate tool to deal with the gobs of snow Ocean, N.J., can get. That's the main reason why the operations manager for Four Seasons Contracting acquired the Bobcat Toolcat 5600 utility vehicle in 2007. One of Four Seasons' accounts is a large shopping

center with sidewalks up to 15-foot-wide, so the prospect of making snow removal easier was tantalizing to Vint.

"Snow was the biggest selling point," Vint says. "The amount of snow it can handle and push is unbelievable. Plus, it has a great turning radius, and the fact that you can lift a bucket of snow 7 feet in a small area and stock-

pile it was huge for us." Four Seasons also services some large condominium communities, where they're constantly moving trees, shrubs and flowers around. That's where the pallet attachment comes in, allowing them to move up to 15 flats of flowers.

"(The Toolcat) has been huge for moving trees and shrubs around and doing sod work on

our 50-acre, 67-unit high-end residential condo site," Vint says. "We almost keep it there for the entire summer because it comes in handy so often. If we didn't have the Toolcat, it would be a real struggle trying to move some of those trees around using little tree carts and a couple guys."

They can even do tree and shrub spraying with an attach-



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ment that plugs into the Toolcat's cigarette lighter that runs a small pump on a 25-gallon tank. The recent purchase of an angle broom attachment allows them to clear snow from sidewalks in the condo community.

**WALK THIS WAY.** Walking is expensive. As vice president of operations for ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., Howard Mees knows that very well. That's why he relies on hundreds of utility vehicles to get his crews to where

they need to be fast. And as big of an operation that ValleyCrest runs, even a few minutes saved here and there can mean big bucks.

"On some sites where we were using trucks before, we're now using utility vehicles," Mees says. "Not only can they access tight areas, they eliminate guys having to go back to the truck, open the door, start the truck and move it. That whole process can take an additional two to three minutes compared to carts where you

can get in on either the drive or passenger side, press the pedal or turn the key and go."

Mees has a mix of different makes/models of utility vehicles: John Deere Gators (TS, TX, 650i, HPX), Club Cars (Turf 2 and Turf 6) and Kubota RTVs. Mees says that when the company was initially looking at acquiring UTVs, they underestimated the savings they would gain.

First, there was the upfront savings in the initial purchase: \$6,000 to \$7,000 for a new cart versus \$20,000 for a pickup truck. Then there was the time savings. They replaced a pickup

truck with two UTVs on large commercial sites and, after timing the crews, figured out that they were saving 25 percent on time since the crews could now access areas they previously had to walk to when they drove pickup trucks to the sites.

"Now we figure some of that efficiency into our estimates," Mees says. "If UTVs will work on the site, instead of 100 hours on the job, we can take 15 percent out and make it 85 hours and price accordingly. Everyone says that's not a big deal but it actually is." **L&L**

Jason Stahl is a freelancer based in Cleveland.

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# Challenge accepted

Peter Bugden turned a pesticide ban into a positive for his lawn care business.

**W**hen Peter Bugden looks back on when he first started his Nutri-Lawn franchise in Nova Scotia, Canada, 20 years ago, he feels as if he had access to a powerful magic wand. With a wave of his spray gun nozzle, he could make the weeds simply disappear.

That "magic wand" was chemical lawn care, of course. Bugden never advocated blanket spraying and chose Nutri-Lawn in part based upon the company's earth-friendly approach, yet he used pesticides daily to spot treat weeds on jobs.

That was before the city of Halifax implemented a pesticide ban in late 2000. The organic products that were recommended by local environmental and health organizations didn't kill bugs, so his customers began dropping like flies.

The near term result was a steep plunge in Nutri-Lawn's business and customer base – Bugden lost one third of his customers within the year, trying years following the ban.

Fortunately, the story doesn't end there. After several years of retooling, Bugden has flipped this dire situation around and all but doubled his customer base in a few years.

"I thought, 'Maybe we're attacking the new world of lawn care in Halifax as if we still have the magic wand,'" Bugden says.

"We began to finally accept that there was no such thing as the \$250 lawn care program anymore, not that's going to make the homeowner happy. They'll be happy with the price maybe, but not the results."

Bugden began to refocus on employee training, customer education and developing his knowledge of a new slate of chemical-free products to achieve the best possible results.

"Our customers now understand that they can have an attractive property that's not 100 percent weed free," Bugden says.

"Our lawns are probably healthier than they were 10 years ago."

**BUSINESS OBSTACLES.** Although he does not support the pesticide ban and believes that

it is based on poor science, Bugden said that Nutri-Lawn's growth shows how firms can accommodate increased concern about chemicals and adapt and thrive without using them.

In a lawn care environment in which pesticide use remains a hot topic, that's critical for companies seeking to remain on the leading edge of chemical lawn care management.

Back in late 2000, it wasn't just the pesticide ban that made Bugden's work tougher, but the fact that Halifax had the authority to ban use of pesticides but couldn't prohibit the sales of them.

"Halifax didn't have the authority to implement a sales ban, so customers could walk into the hardware store and purchase (a banned product) – but theoretically they couldn't apply it," says Bugden, hinting that many customers still used pesticides, knowingly or unknowingly.

"If we got caught using pesticides, we'd lose our business."

Products advocated by health and environmental groups simply weren't as effective – Bugden started using a product made out of sugar beets – and Bugden lost many loyal customers who were unhappy with the ban's effect.

"The inspectors would ask if you had tried to spray soap on your lawn, or they'd say that you didn't really have an insect problem, so they weren't going to issue you a permit," Bugden says. "We lost credibility with our customers, and it was very frustrating."

**BEYOND CHEMICALS.** After struggling with poor sales and customer defection for several



A pesticide ban in Canada in 2000, changed the way Peter Bugden did business.



years, Bugden said that the light bulb finally went on in his head in 2007. By then, many of his longtime staff members had left the company and even the industry out of frustration with the impact of the ban. It dawned on Bugden that it was time to hit the restart button his business.

Gradually, he began to focus on honing his techniques in a new, pesticide-free world. "We started looking at proper lawn care — things like aeration, PH control, using the alternative products we had more frequently, overseeing top dressing," he said. "Customer satisfaction increased as we began spending time with them."

Bugden attributes part of his success to the fact that many of the longtime staffers had left the business, and his newer staff members "couldn't remember the good old days."

He began spending a lot of time on employee education and training, carefully tying these efforts to an increased emphasis on customer service and overall education.

"If you can't give a customer the same type of lawn they'd expected many years ago, then it was important that you provide them with the very best service possible," he said. "As a result of this, our referral business really started building up again."

Nutri-Lawn's corporate programs amplified Bugden's targeted efforts at increasing

customer retention. "The company started putting emphasis on the Net Promoter Score system, and we got a little fanatical about it," he said. "If one of our clients gave us a good rating or comment, then we'd celebrate it and make a big deal out of it."

Bugden said his growth can also be attributed to the fact that customers have evolved, too. Whereas once homeowners might not have tolerated the presence of one yellow dandelion, they are now getting more relaxed about seeing the occasional weed.

"People are more aware of how to get the lawn that they want without pesticides. Are they 100 percent weed free? No, but they're better than a do-it-yourselfer lawn."

**KEEPING IT FAIR.** Nova Scotia implemented a province-wide pesticide ban in 2009, and with that new law came the sales ban that was missing in 2000.

That helped the lawn care operators who

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## A positive environment

When employee morale was down, Peter Bugden knew he had to make changes.

**P**eter Bugden knows just how important it is to maintain strong employee morale, so it irked him to no end when he saw people crossing the street to avoid his workers. The owner of a Nutri-Lawn franchise in Halifax, Nova Scotia said these harsh incidents led employees to feel like pariahs, and productivity suffered as a result.

When the incidents occurred, a pesticide ban had just been passed in the municipality of Halifax. Nutri-Lawn had stopped using pesticides for spot treating weeds as soon as the ban became law, yet in the case of pesticides, Bugden said, perception is reality.

"The perception of lawn care companies in our area was low, even though we didn't use pesticides anymore," he said. "The guys felt bad about what they were doing."

Yet over time, Bugden addressed the problem of low employee morale by hiring new workers who were able to cope with the pesticide ban, teaching his employees about new products that were permitted, and helping workers to better educate customers.

"We tried our best to make it a fun place to work and make them feel good about themselves," said Bugden. "We used it as an

were competing against do-it-yourself homeowners applying pesticides illegally. "That ban made more sense, because at least we have a level playing field now."

Bugden admitted that he and many other lawn care operators in Canada were a bit taken aback when the initial pesticide ban was first implemented in late 2000. He remembers attending public hearings in which the room was packed with supporters of the ban. Because lawn care operators were disorganized, he said, they had little input.

Nonetheless, he's happy to report that he's not simply in compliance with the law today, but actually growing within the confines of a ban that had once sent his business into a death spiral.

For the past four to five years, Nutri-Lawn has seen 20 percent annual growth, and he's now considering the possibility of opening a franchise in the U.S. market.

"The states are seldom behind Canada in anything, but I'd say they are 10 years behind Canada on pesticide regulation," said Bugden, who warns U.S. operators to remain involved so that any pesticide regulations put in place are based on science.

"My advice would be to pay attention to what's happening," he said. "Try to be a good source of information to the municipality or state government. Try to be organized." **L&L**



# Informed spending

Seed and sod season will be here before you know it. Be ready with these questions when you make your purchases.

By Carolyn LaWell

**H**ard to believe, but spring is only a couple months away. Your customers' lawns will be in dire need of seed or sod as they recover from the summer drought and winter conditions.

While you have downtime during the winter months, you should prepare for customer requests and determine how you can make the seed and sod selection process easier, faster and more productive. We spoke with distributors and suppliers and developed a checklist of questions you should have in hand when you make next year's purchases.

**CLIENTS.** The first conversation should take place between you and your client: What type of grass do they want? How long are they willing to wait for it to grow? Do they want a high-end upkeep or low maintenance property?

"If you're already talking



to the end user upfront and know what the outcome of the property is that they want, that just makes the process flow a little bit easier," says Lee H. Smith, turf and agronomic sales at Ewing.

Second, perform research before you head to your supplier. New varieties are always introduced and more and more seed and sod is being produced in hybrid forms for drought-tolerant and heat-tolerant conditions. State university extension offices and turfgrass associations offer access to the latest research and recommendations on the varieties that are best suited for your region.

**SUPPLIER.** Now you have an idea of what you might want to purchase and you're armed with questions to ask your supplier.

The first bit of information you should share with your supplier is what you're planting. "The application is important," says Evelyn Dennis, category manager for seed at John Deere Landscapes. "Are you planting an athletic field, home lawn, commercial lawn? What kind of traffic is there going to be? Is there sun? Is there shade? Is there a combination of the two? Also, what maintenance levels will be practiced?"

Next you should ask about the amount of water needed for the seed or sod to mature and whether an irrigation plan should be established.

Finally, what soil prep needs to be done before the application is set? At minimum, the soil needs to be raked and cleared of debris before seed is thrown down. When it comes to sod, you have to make sure the soil is compatible to the soil on which the turf was grown.

"The biggest misconception is a lot of landscapers think it's just dirt,"

Nick DiLorenzo, landscape division specialist at Horizon Distributors, says about soil. "The first thing that landscapers need to ask their supplier is: What is in the dirt? Do you provide soil testing?"

By now, the options should be narrowed. With a shortage in the seed and sod market in recent years, the next question should be availability.

"I think availability is the main key because the seed market fluctuates so rapidly," Smith says. "If they need something quick, how quickly can I get this product? Then you may start looking at how good the product is."

**TAGS.** Once you're debating a select number of varieties, it's time to review the seed tags. It's a red flag if the product doesn't have a seed tag. The seed variety will differ between suppliers, so items to check for on the tag include: pure live seed count, germination rate, organic matter percentage and types of weeds in the bag.

"I think it's important to buy seed products with all the varieties named," Dennis says.

Careful analysis might require reading the tag and then returning to the office to do more research. A trusted dealer should steer you in the right direction.

"Buying a quality product saves you time and money in the long run," says Michelle Williams, account manager for turfgrass sod sales at John Deere Landscapes. "Contractors don't want call backs." **L&L**

The writer is a freelancer based in Lakewood, Ohio.



## What's with the different colored tags?

**P**urchasing certified seed is important to ensure the product's quality. The seed tag can come in a number of colors and provide different information. Jim Novak, public relations manager at Turfgrass Producers International, describes in his own words what each tag means.

### White Tag

The white tag is used for the general truth in labeling laws. It contains the information to meet labeling requirements under the Federal Seed Act. Most often these tags are mass printed with the minimum requirements. As long as the test results are at or above those printed on the tag, the shipper feels comfortable that the tag represents the seed contents in the bag.

### Blue Tag

The blue tag was created to give the buyer some degree of confidence that the seed is indeed the variety he wants to purchase. There are minimum physical quality requirements that the seed test must meet before the blue tag will be issued; however, there is great misunderstanding about this. For example, certified perennial ryegrass can have up to 0.50 percent weeds, equating to more than 50 annual bluegrass seeds, exceeding 4,500 seeds per pound. The blue tag does not mean contaminate-free, it is an indication of genetic purity.

### Gold Tag

The gold tag, "Sod Quality Tag," was created as a step-up from blue tag. The testing behind this tag is an additional analysis of a specific quantity of seed in the search for any objectionable seeds. Since different U.S. states have their own list of seeds that are objectionable, the gold tag does not mean the same from each issuing agency. There is also the misleading belief that the additional search is a complete search. Kentucky bluegrass sod quality standards require that a search is done on 25 grams. However, further in the law it states that annual bluegrass is only searched for in the first 10 grams during the examination for the blue tag, not in the additional search for the sod quality tag.







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# Start fresh

A new year is around the corner and it's time to press 'reset.' What are your goals for 2013?

By Kristen Hampshire

**T**his is the season to reflect on 2012 and plan for the New Year. Now is when we pause to remember the good, the bad – and all of those surprises (yes, some of them ugly). It's time to celebrate success. And, to think seriously about how you will do things differently next year.

So, to rehash a favorite election question: Are you better off today? And, where do you hope your business will be after another calendar year passes? *Lawn & Landscape* spoke with three firms who shared their business goals. We'll avoid calling them resolutions since those (like going to the gym) are meant to be broken.

## Picture growth

**T**here are three murals painted on the ceiling at Team Lewis Landscaping's headquarters in Grantville, Pa. One illustrates how the company started, the second shows how the company looks today with maintenance and design/build crews and a crop of high-end clients. The future scene lays out multiple locations throughout the country. "That is our ultimate goal," says Seth Lewis, president.

### Team Lewis Landscaping

Seth Lewis, president **Location:** Grantville, Pa. **Established:** 2004 **Employees:** 30 **2011 Revenues:** Not disclosed **Customers:** 50% commercial; 50% residential **Services:** maintenance, design/build, snow removal

The visual reminder keeps Lewis on his toes, he says. "Every morning when I walk into the office, I can see where we want to go – and that is a big goal to reach, but it's there," he says. "That helps keep me accountable and reminds me: This is what we want to do, and why we are doing this."

Dropping Team Lewis operations all over the map won't happen in 2013. But continuing a 15-20-percent growth clip will position the company for continued expansion. And Lewis' ongoing goal to create a better work environment for his people will aid in recruitment, retention and customer service. "If we can take care of our people, they will take care of our clients," he says. "Our people will want to go above and beyond."

The steps to reaching that goal include building up the maintenance business to secure more recurring revenues. Currently, the business is 70 percent maintenance and 30 percent design/build. Lewis would like to gradually shift to a 50-50 mix, the "sweet spot," he says.

"Maintenance is stability and design/build projects are the gravy on top," he says. "If you have too much maintenance you are missing out on projects, and if you have too many projects you can have cash flow problems."

Missing out on the "gravy" means passing on nice profit margin opportunities. But Lewis recognizes that the maintenance side of the business ultimately feeds the operations. "When we build our maintenance services, it creates a stable environment, and that provides stability for our team members and our clients," he says.

For 2013, Lewis will work toward shifting the business toward a 60-40 maintenance-design/build mix. "We use a proactive selling approach," Lewis says, noting that the one, dedicated salesperson at Team Lewis focuses on new sales. Account managers handle existing customers and add-on sales. The company uses a combination of direct mail, social media and in-person networking with prospects to gain new business. The salesperson has his eyes on the target client: a high-end customer that values a partnership with his or her service provider.

As for finding these folks in a tough economy? "In a down economy, people still buy Mercedes," Lewis says. "And if we want to be that type of service provider, we have to identify those clients and focus on developing a plan that fits their budget."

Essentially, all of Team Lewis' goals fall into the four buckets: human resources, business management, operations and sales and marketing. And, looking toward 2013, balancing the service mix and increasing recurring revenues is an entirely realistic plan, Lewis says. Being a part of LandOpt, a networking group, has helped him set and manage goals, and the group holds him accountable.

"It's like training for a marathon or working out with a personal trainer in a gym," Lewis compares. "If I go to the gym to lift weights, I won't push myself as hard as if I hired a trainer to keep me accountable. Our success coaches make sure we are doing what we said we wanted to do in the beginning."

And every time Lewis looks up, he is reminded of exactly what those long-term goals are.



## QUICK TIPS

**Set a vision.** Show and tell your team about your goals for the company. Lewis does this with a set of murals painted on the ceiling of his offices that show the past, present and future of the firm.

**Be realistic.** You can't grow from a single location to a worldwide operation in a year. But how about cranking up recurring revenue or focusing on a reasonable revenue increase? Set manageable goals.

**Find a coach.** Who is holding you accountable for reaching your goals? When someone – a mentor, coach or colleagues – is regularly checking in, you're more likely to reach those targets. Consider joining a networking group for extra support.

## Stoking sales

### Grasshopper Lawns

Michael Kravitsky IV and Shawn Kravitsky, co-owners **Location:** Larksville, Pa. **Established:** 1964 **Employees:** 20 **2011 Revenues:** less than \$10 million **Customers:** 90% residential; 10% commercial **Services:** lawn care

**G**rasshopper Lawns was supposed to have a banner year in 2011. Everything was set up for success, or so the owners, Michael and Shawn Kravitsky, thought. Namely, the firm had invested heavily in advertising, particularly a direct mail campaign.

"Even though the economy was tanking, we felt we had all of our ducks in a row and we'd have a good year," says Michael Kravitsky, who in 1980 joined the family business his father started. His brother, Shawn, came on board four years later, and the two have kept the family business running strong for nearly 45 years. "We had certain sales goals we wanted to reach and we put a lot of money into our marketing," Mike says.

But 2011 turned out to be a real downer for Grasshopper Lawns. So in 2012, the company set a goal to simply improve over 2011, and it kept its advertising dollars in place. Except, the campaign was more targeted. Rather than simply sending out post cards to certain ZIP codes, the company singled out the demographic in its service area that is most likely to buy lawn care services: homeowners age 50 or older with expendable income. "It was more of a rifle approach than a shot gun," Shawn says.

The result: "Sales exploded," Shawn says, noting a 27 percent increase in 2012 over the prior bum year. "We took off at the beginning of the year and had a tough time keeping up," he says. "From selling the jobs to getting them services to getting product in...the business took off really well. And, it has been growing great every since."

The targeted marketing worked, and Grasshopper Lawns plans to continue this strategy in 2013 and set a goal to increase sales an additional 25 percent over 2012 results.

Why the significant sales difference? Mike says the company is simply doing a better job at following through on leads. Shawn adds, "We are chasing customers down more. We have more contact with them. If we can shoot them an e-mail, we do that. If we have a phone number, we call. We take every opportunity to stay in front of that customer."

Meanwhile, maintaining quality as sales soar will require another layer of management. Today, Mike and Shawn touch every job.

"We have light layers of people, but we want those folks to step it up to the next level," Mike says.

The company will promote from within, and it has a strong employee base for doing so. With eyes set on growth for 2013 – more sales, more managers and more people, with hopes to hire on three to five workers – Grasshopper Lawns is rolling into the New Year with an optimistic outlook.

"We'll just stick to our guns, keep our advertising in place and hope the economy keeps ticking along and (sales) will get better," Mike says.



## QUICK TIPS

**Start systems.** "We are big systems people," Mike says. Regarding marketing, the company keeps a calendar to organize its promotions. Systems also provide a record so the company can review the previous year's progress and make changes.

**Be flexible.** If you're preparing for a spring promotion and 6 inches of snow falls, you've got to regroup. Don't get so bogged down in systems that you fail to identify opportunities or adapt to change.

**Stay the course.** Set goals and work backward. If you plan to increase sales, how will that affect your staffing, scheduling, equipment needs and training obligations?

## A sunny forecast

**M**ike Stewart, Jr., is already tuned into winter weather forecasts for 2013. It wouldn't take much for the conditions to be better for his business than earlier this year, which brought a cold "drought" to much of the country, including the Columbus, Ohio, area where Stewcare services commercial clients.

Crews went out a handful of times to plow snow. And right out of the gate, 2012 revenues were way down. To top that off, at hot and dry summer slowed down mowing crews from their usual cut cycle to servicing clients every two to four weeks.

Stewart's No. 1 goal for 2013 – a goal he sets for every year, actually – is to simply

better the revenues from the previous year. "Coming off of a season like this, I don't think that will be hard to do as long as we get the weather," he says, noting a 17-percent decrease in revenues in 2012 compared to 2011 as of October. That number actually looks 3-5 percent better than it did before fall services kicked in and gave the company a shot of business.

But as Stewart says, much of his goal for 2013 depends on what winter 2013 will bring. He's read good things (for snow guys anyway) – snowfall, cold temperatures, icy salting conditions. "That would help us recover from 2012 and get us going on the right foot in 2013, hopefully moving us



Mike Stewart Sr., left, and Jr.

### Stewcare

Mike Stewart Jr., president **Location:** Delaware, Ohio **Established:** 1978 **Employees:** Seven in peak season **2011 Revenues:** \$290,000 **Customers:** 75% commercial; 25% residential **Services:** commercial maintenance, snow removal



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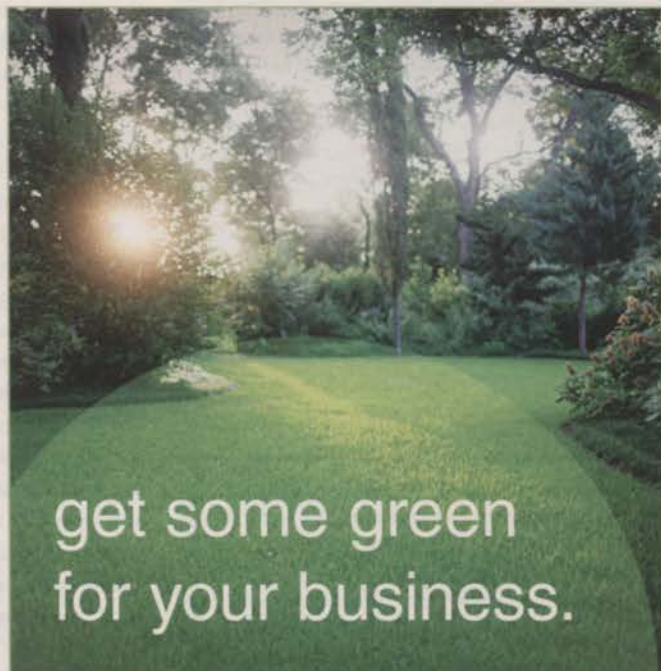
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toward my big goal in 2013." That goal: To add a fourth two-man cutting crew to his team. This requires approximately a \$50-60,000 investment in two reliable workers, two commercial mowers, a truck, trailer, string trimmers and edgers, and other tools. Most of all, it means Stewart needs to attract more business.

As for increasing sales, Stewart says efforts to ramp up the company's website and social media presence have paid off with incoming phone calls.

Then there's the investment in adding the crew – and Stewart has figured a way to make this happen by summer 2013, he hopes. Generally, the company retires one of its mowers at the end of each season. The machine is refurbished and sold, and proceeds go toward purchasing a replace-

ment. But the commercial cutter that's up for retirement still has a lot of life left in it, so Stewart wants keep this machine in service. "That will get us one step closer to having four crews," Stewart says.

Meanwhile, fall services have been a success thanks to a core aerator the company purchased in 2012. Stewart wants to expand this service with the addition of that new mower and an aerator attachment for that machine. "That makes us more versatile and able to do more aerating," he says.

Reaching these goals will depend largely on weather, Stewart says. And you can't control what nature brings. But Stewart has set realistic goals. "You have to start small and work your way up," he says of the way Stewcare has grown during its 35 years in business. "I'd stress patience." **L&L**



## QUICK TIPS

**Start small.** Stewcare's operation started 35 years ago with a walk-behind and tractor mower. "As the business grew over time, we built an inventory," Stewart says of the company's iron.

**Be patient.** You may want that new truck and trailer this year, but does that make financial sense? Be willing to wait so you preserve the stability of your company.

**Be creative.** Stewart wants to add a crew with two mowers. But he has found a way to accomplish his goal by extending the use of an older machine and adding just one new cutter in 2013. He'll space out the spending and buy another new mower in 2014 so he then can retire the aging piece.

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# 2012 Environmental Business Awards

Three real-world approaches to building sustainable companies. By Carolyn LaWell

**I**magine a lush landscape that never taps into city water. Imagine one maintained by alternative fuel and energy. Or one that only uses local plants and materials. The winners of *The Lawn & Landscape* 2012 Environmental Business Awards are committed to eco-friendly practices that provide long-term sustainability for their projects and clients.

The winners – The Fockele Garden Co., Sebert Landscaping Co. and WinterCreek Restoration – were chosen not only for their dedication to these principles but their ability to develop successful companies based on these practices. Read on for how each company's environmentally-focused landscaping choices have caught attention and led to business growth.





## The Fockele Garden Co.

GAINESVILLE, GA.

**F**ive years ago a client asked The Fockele Garden Co. to install a rainwater harvesting system. It was the first request of its kind for the Georgia company.

Now, 75 percent of The Fockele Garden Co.'s projects include sustainable elements that conserve water, build attractive environments and eliminate waste. The successful approach has been highlighted with regional and national awards.

"If you slow down and look around at what our communities look like now, it's obvious that we've done a lot of damage and it's obvious there are things that need to be fixed," says company founder Mark Fockele.

"We have too much pavement, way too much stormwater runoff; we have hot, dry, unshaded parking lots that go on forever. These are just not pleasant environments. That's one of the reasons we've been inclined to do this. Another reason is we have encountered clients occasionally who have pushed us into tackling more projects

of this kind and getting involved in more sustainable gardening techniques."

One of those clients was an urban Atlanta homeowner whose backyard flooded every time it rained. The project's goal was to collect the stormwater, create an attractive landscape and reduce the runoff problem for properties downstream.

"We captured a large portion of the water that was entering our property from uphill and used it to keep our water features full," Fockele says. "We created dry stream beds in the property that slowed the water down and promoted infiltration into a gravel ditch. Then we collected some of the water in cisterns so that we could use the water later."

The Fockele Garden Co. places a large emphasis on rainwater harvesting and stormwater management techniques to decrease erosion and supply irrigation.

For example, the company's Smartville project provides a local elementary school a sustainable garden and

teaching tool. A rainwater harvesting system was installed to collect water used two or three times a summer to perk up plants. The school hasn't tapped the city water for irrigation in three years.

The same garden also uses on-site compost to build soil health. All of the organic waste – sticks, limbs, tree trunks – is composted to eliminate adding to the landfill. Also, many of its components were designed to teach students about nature.

"The garden has a lot of bold colors and bold textures and weird goofy plants that kids really like," Fockele says. "We think that we're giving these kids an atmosphere that is likely to help them develop an appreciation for nature and love of the outdoors." Among The Fockele Garden Co.'s portfolio are a large number of gardens that



About 75 percent of the Fockele Garden's work includes sustainable elements that conserve water and eliminate waste while building attractive environments.



Fockele provided a local school a sustainable garden.

balance plush landscapes with hardscapes. Fockele takes a sustainable approach but one that allows the company to design, install and maintain its projects so there's a level of continuity.

"That problem becomes many times more important when you're trying to develop a landscape that uses sustainable features, because sustainable features as a rule are things that you can't accomplish in a month or two or in a year or two," Fockele says. "These are practices that require years and decades to bring to fruition.

"Fockele says he sees continual opportunity in this portion of the landscaping industry and he'll continue to embrace it.

"First, I find it a lot more interesting and rewarding to do this type of work," Fockele says. "Second, it helps attract attention and build our business. A lot of customers are recognizing the benefit and importance of this approach."



## Sebert Landscaping Co.

BARTLETT, ILL.

Sebert Landscaping Co. launched a quest to minimize its yearly fuel consumption. It started swapping gasoline mowers for propane and switched to battery-powered equipment. A decrease in carbon emissions was evident, but a conversation quickly started about how to use the equipment even more efficiently.

That's when Sebert Fleet Manager Ralph Meyer tossed out the thought of solar panels.

"When we started looking at battery-powered equipment as an alternative, it sparked an idea here on our end that what if we recharged the batteries on the equipment by utilizing solar panels that were fixed to the top of the trailer to recharge the equipment versus having to come back in the evening, plug the trailer in and recharge the batteries on the trailer," says Jeff Sebert, CEO.

Tinkering quickly began. Now, a solar film placed on top of the trailer and connected to an inverter converts the sun's energy and charges batteries for Sebert's chainsaws, trimmers and other equipment.

The rigged trailer worked just as planned. However, it came at a hefty price. The inverter cost \$5,000. "If we can eliminate that piece, we're making this very practical from a cost side to utilize within the field," Sebert says. In collaboration with STIHL, the company has experimented with how to take the solar charge right to the batteries. Sebert would like to have another model ready for the spring so more data can be collected. "We took the trailer out into the field, we took data not only from the solar aspect of it but from the propane aspect, as well, to determine what the cost savings are on doing something such as this," he says. "It works quite well. Now, it's more how do we trim the costs – how do we slim this down for mass form so that at the end of the day it truly is worthy of our cost."

As Sebert searches for the pay-off on solar, the savings on propane is already evident. In the last 18 months, half of the fleet has been converted to propane with the remaining half on a planned cycle. The propane mowers cost about \$1,000 more, so the savings is seen in the cost of the fuel. Sebert pays about \$1.80 a gallon for propane versus about \$3.80 a gallon for gas. Propane burns faster, so about a third to a half of additional fuel is needed to compete with gasoline. But still, there's a clear savings.

"It's so much better for our environment and it's safer for our guys to be working with," says Sebert, who uses a local vendor and may install a fuel station onsite. "Gasoline is so much more volatile, and you don't have the waste as well."

Sebert's dedication to environmentally-friendly ideas extends well beyond the field. Its headquarters is in the process of obtaining LEED Gold certification. The building dons solar panels, a green roof, landscaping with native and indigenous plants and water features that collect rain for onsite and customer irrigation.

"Everything we're attempting to do is looked at it from a strategy of minimizing the cost, producing a product that is sensitive to the environment and giving our customers the best product at the end of the day," Sebert says.

Sebert has a charging station in a solar trailer.







## WinterCreek Restoration >> BEND, ORE.

**A**fter Rick Martinson received a call that a local health insurance company wanted a completely native, ecologically functional green roof built, he immediately started research.

He couldn't find a single green roof based on the idea. He accepted the challenge. WinterCreek Restoration, where Martinson is president, has taken an ecological approach to landscaping for a decade. The company's niche is using native plants to blend landscapes with natural surroundings. The goal of the green roof was to replicate the environment on the ground in a 15,000-square-foot section one story in the air.

WinterCreek and insurer ODS Cos. are located in Bend, Ore., one of the state's more centrally located cities and home to a high desert climate that receives about 11 inches of rain a year. All of the materials came from within a 400 mile radius in order design and build a truly native green roof.

To start, WinterCreek had to engineer native substrate that would maintain as much moisture as possible. Martinson, who is finishing his Ph.D. in ecology-based horticulture at Oregon State University, worked with professors to develop the perfect blend.

"The substrate was constructed of local pumice kitty-litter size and a blended



compost that included mushroom compost, composted hemlock bark, locally produced compost from recycling centers, peat moss, etc.," he says. "We retained the fines in the blend to help with water retention and soil structure. The compost provided organic structure, minimal nutrients and, most importantly, fungal and bacterial communities critical for the ecological functioning of the installation."

The final result was a blend of 50 percent organic matter and 50 percent pumice. The substrate, which varied from 8 to 28 inches in depth, an additional 3 inches of pumice (from a local source, of course) and more than 42 different native species rounded out the growing portion of the roof.

The species included Mountain mahogany, Manzanita, Sickle-keeled lupine, Linear leaf fleabane, Naked buckwheat and Idaho fescue. "All of the plant material was propagated at our nursery from seed or cuttings

collected within three counties in central Oregon," Martinson says.

The idea was to create a space that offered environmental benefits, was aesthetically pleasing for employees to enjoy, controlled stormwater runoff and provided an ecological habitat for birds, pollinators and other organisms. To ensure that is maintained, WinterCreek studies the colonization rate of mycorrhizal fungi on the roof and how effective and efficient it is in artificial environments.

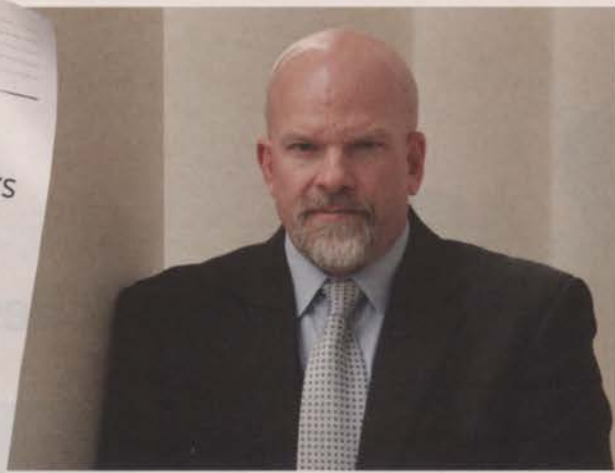
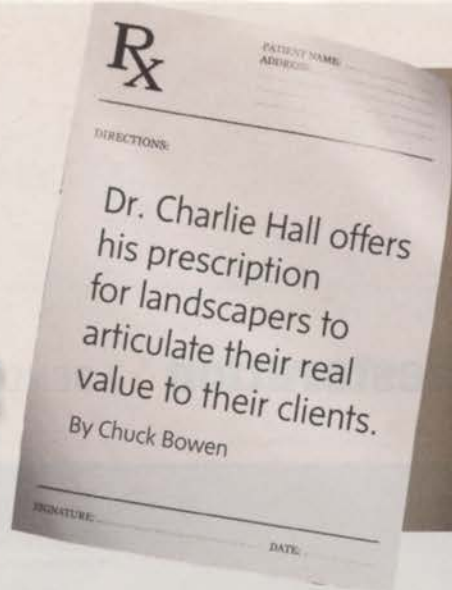
"These fungi form symbiotic relationships between plant roots, soil particles, bed rock and other plants," Martinson says. "They are essential for the ecological functioning of native plant communities. Ninety-eight percent of the plants in the world are dependent on these associations and reestablishing these organisms in created landscapes reduces the need for water and fertilizers, increases vigor of plants and results in physiological change in how plants function, especially under stress." **L&L**

WinterCreek picked plant material based on drought tolerance, survival rate in extreme conditions and rooting depth.



## L&L Q&A

# THE DOCTOR IS IN



Charlie Hall's litling hybrid North Carolina-Texas drawl belies one of the sharpest minds in the green industry. He's spent decades on quantifying the benefits of landscapes, and putting real numbers behind the push for sustainable practices.

Hall, who grew up on his family's nursery, is now a professor of horticultural sciences at Texas A&M University where he combines equal parts horticulture and economics.

Now, on the heels of one of the worst droughts in American history, his work is more important than ever. He gave the keynote at last month's Irrigation Association Show in Orlando, and we caught up with him to talk about the drought, sustainability and what Generation Y all mean for the future of the green industry.

### L&L: What projects are you working on right now?

**Hall:** It's almost easier to answer what am I *not* doing. I'm some research on the carbon footprint of shade trees right now. We call ourselves the green industry, but in many respects we're not quite sure how green we are. Of course, the use of water for outdoor landscaping is a hot topic. So we've got to know what our footprint is, both

in terms of carbon footprint and our water footprint for the future to be able to justify to legislators and to municipal leaders, why we need to continue watering landscapes versus putting a moratorium on outdoor watering.

And I'm doing a whole lot of consumer research on people's attitudes toward local, organic, sustainable plants. A lot of research has been done on food products but not necessarily on ornamental. So we're looking at their attitudes on does it make a difference if a plant's produced locally or whether it's produced in an energy saving manner or a water saving manner. Or whether or not the

**"We've got to figure out ways to conserve water. But the answer is not simply don't water plants, just water people."**

plants are water conserving in the landscape. Does that mean anything to folks right now?

### L&L: Can you share any initial findings from that?

**Hall:** I'd say in general people are more responsive and more willing to pay a premium for products right now that are energy conserving rather than

water conserving. But that's also dependent on which region of the country they are. So if they're in Michigan, they don't think too much about whether a plant's water conserving or not. But in Texas they do. Cause, you know in 2011 we lost a heck of a lot of plant materials down here in the state.

### L&L: What impact do you see the drought having on the green industry in 2013?

**Hall:** Well, you know in a lot of the cities have stayed on water restrictions. They never went off of them. And that may be the new normal is that some of these larger cities – Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Austin. We may see them stay in stage one water restrictions. And that's not necessarily a bad thing, because it enhances the recognition among homeowners that they've got to conserve water in a lot of different ways, not just in terms of watering outdoor landscapes but in terms of the appliances and the toilets that they use.

So I think there's a great recognition of a need to conserve. And a greater recognition that whether this really is anthropogenic climate change or whether it's just cyclical weather patterns,

whatever the case may be, we know that there's more divergence in the data that we see in terms of weather data. 2011 was the driest year since 1895 here in Texas.

### L&L: Will that spread across the country?

**Hall:** I was speaking Texas primarily, but I think the same is true for the rest of the country. It'll start in the drier areas in the country and then work its way even to Wisconsin and Minnesota and areas around the great lakes that they are water rich at this point. They're still going to be susceptible to some of the changes in water policies that we're talking about.

Remember back in 2007 where you had the drought in the southeast and just catastrophic impacts on the green industry. Thirty-one thousand jobs were lost in the state of Georgia alone.

Go ahead a year and a half and people are saying, 'What drought?' Lake Lanier starts filling back up and everybody forgets about it and then go back to watering or using water as they did before.

### L&L: As soon as the lake got back above normal levels, everything was fine.

**Hall:** You've heard the saying,

water's the next oil. We've got to figure out ways to conserve water. But the answer is not simply don't water plants, just water people. That's not the answer. Because of the economic and the environmental ecosystem, the services and the health and well-being benefits that we represent. So that's why this issue is so important, because unless we convey that to end consumers, unless we convey that to legislators, we're gonna be stuck and they're not gonna have an appreciation for the value that plants bring to both private and municipal landscapes.

And they're just gonna say,

'Well, we don't need it.' In actuality we really do need it. And you know flowers, shrubs, trees and turf provide a very important function in terms of enhancing the quality of life of individuals.

**L&L: What are the trends we need to watch in 2013?**

**Hall:** Long term – 20, 30 years—Gen Y is a very interesting demographic segment to study. These kids are the ones that I'm teaching now in the courses here at the university. It's the sharpest group I've ever seen of kids that are out there. I've been teaching over 25 years. And they have a

serious attitude problem, but they're incredibly sharp. They want to change the world and they have the ability to do it. They're that good.

But they're herders. And that herding mentality, you go to libraries here, they've got students all over the place. But they're not reading books. They're socializing. They're in study groups. Most of the market research says that herding behavior is going to carry over into their housing preferences. And they're gonna want smaller homes that are more environmentally friendly, if they buy or build a home. A

lot of them are gonna want to live in walk able neighborhoods and they're gonna want to be – they want the urban amenities. And so there's gonna be smaller landscapes. And so we're gonna have to remain relevant to that generation who didn't grow up gardening and landscaping with their parents or grandparents like we did. **L&L**

The author is editor and associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*. Email



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# Calming

# TROUBLE

# WATER

How to handle one of your toughest people problems.

By William J. Lynott

**C**onflicts between two employees or between an employee and management can be damaging to everyone involved and to your business as well. Sometimes it's nothing more than a simple feud between two or more employees. Perhaps more serious are those conflicts that result from a misunderstanding between

one or more employees and management.

Either way, these workplace conflicts can be time-consuming for the business owner and seriously damaging to the business.

"Workplace conflict is inevitable, especially in a challenging economy," says Craig Runde, director of the Center for Conflict Dynamics at Eckerd College in Florida. "Organizations have fewer employees, doing

more work, under more pressure. Pressure makes it tougher to think clearly. Emotions get the better of us. We may not like conflict but we're going to have to deal with it one way or another."

"Even something as simple as hurt egos can result in a loss of revenue and a lot of aggravation for many small business owners," says Tina I. Hamilton, President and CEO of hireVi-

sion Group. "And that's exactly what happens when conflicts get out of hand.

And when egos step in, all reason is put aside.

"You would be surprised at how often I see companies where management is either unskilled or not trained on how to deal with conflict," says Hamilton. "They are missing opportunities to remedy issues before they can ever appear. Regardless of your



personality type, conflict management skills can be learned and utilized to the benefit of you and your company."

Like most contractors, you probably do not see conflict resolution as one of your primary jobs, but as the experts tell us, conflict in every workplace is inevitable, so it makes sense to do whatever you can to sharpen your skills in calming troubled waters.

As owner or manager, you have a special responsibility to avoid the appearance of unreasonable bias in dealing with emotionally charged disputes, even when you are directly involved. Ideally, your approach will respect the dignity of others while emphasizing that solving the dispute is the goal -- not finding a winner or loser.

It's also important to make sure that good relationships are your first priority. You should try to make sure that you treat everyone in a calm and courteous manner. Keep in mind that the other person is probably not just being difficult. In most cases, sincere and honestly believed differences lie beneath the surface in emotional conflicts.

According to Jeanne Segal of [www.helpguide.org](http://www.helpguide.org), a non-profit website, managing and resolving conflict requires the ability to help reduce stress and bring your emotions into balance. You can ensure that the process is as positive as possible by sticking to the following conflict resolution

guidelines when you find yourself personally involved in a conflict:

**>> LISTEN FOR WHAT IS FELT AS WELL AS SAID**

When we listen we connect more deeply to our own needs and emotions, and to those of other people. Listening in this way also strengthens us, informs us, and makes it easier for others to hear us.

**>> MAKE CONFLICT RESOLUTION THE PRIORITY RATHER THAN WINNING OR "BEING RIGHT"**

Maintaining and strengthening the relationship, rather than "winning" the argument, should always be your first priority. Be respectful of the other person and his or her viewpoint.

**>> FOCUS ON THE PRESENT**

If you're holding on to old hurts and resentments, your ability to see the reality of the current situation will be impaired. Rather than looking to the past and assigning blame, focus on what you can do in the here-and-now to solve the problem.

**>> PICK YOUR BATTLES**

Conflicts can be draining, so it's important to consider whether the issue is really worthy of your time and energy. Maybe you don't want to surrender a parking space if you've been circling for 15 minutes. But if there are dozens of spots nearby, arguing over a single space isn't worth it.

**>> BE WILLING TO FORGIVE**

Resolving conflict is impossible if you're unwilling or unable to forgive. Resolution lies in releasing the urge to punish, which can never compensate for our losses and only adds to our injury by further depleting and draining our lives.

**>> KNOW WHEN TO LET SOMETHING GO**

If you can't come to an agreement, agree to disagree. It takes two people to keep an argument going. If a conflict is going nowhere, you can choose to disengage and move on.

It also helps to attack the problem or the issue, not the other person. Wherever possible, start with a compliment and be sure to listen without interrupting.

According to Anna Maravelas, founder and president of Thera Rising, the average person faces 30 frustrations (disagreements, disappointments, delays, etc.) a day. "We have a built-in negativity bias, and negative experiences are five times more powerful than positive events. That's why small disagreements can become so destructive," she says.

"It's important to remember that human nature is deeply

## PEOPLE PROBLEMS

flawed in this regard. We all have moments when we lack skill, insight and courage, but exaggerating the impact of an event, blaming and backstabbing doesn't solve the problem." To help deal with human nature's failings in this regard, Runde offers these tips for owners and managers thrust into the position of conflict referees:

### » ADJUST YOUR ATTITUDE

People have this idea that conflict is always negative. But that's not the case. Whether conflict is good or bad depends on how you manage it. If you think it's going to be terrible, it will be.

But, in fact, conflicts can result in positive outcomes.

### » DON'T IGNORE YOUR EMOTIONS

Conflict is all about emotion, yet, in almost every organizational conflict, people will try to suppress their feelings. Either they're fearful they'll look weak or their workplace culture doesn't support expressing emotions. But if you don't deal with your emotions, they'll deal with you.

### » BUT DON'T ACT OUT

As a result of not managing emotions when feeling scared

or angry, those feelings will simmer. Negative emotions end up driving behaviors that almost always result in poor outcomes. For example, a person might display their anger, demean colleagues or try to avoid the other person. Unmanaged emotions lead to poorly conceived behavior. Reflect on what's going on and consciously choose to do something more constructive.

### » HAVE A PLAN

Managers usually have some sort of implicit way to deal with conflict – too often by trying to avoid it. Rarely is there an expressed set of actions for

'Here's what we do when we have conflict.' Have a way of legitimizing effective responses when conflicts pop up.

It's obvious that having a plan for dealing effectively with workplace conflict requires time and effort. However, as the experts tell us, there is no way to avoid coming face-to-face with conflict. If we have to deal with it, it's best to prepare ourselves to resolve internal disputes before they escalate to the point where they cause permanent damage to the business. **L&L**

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

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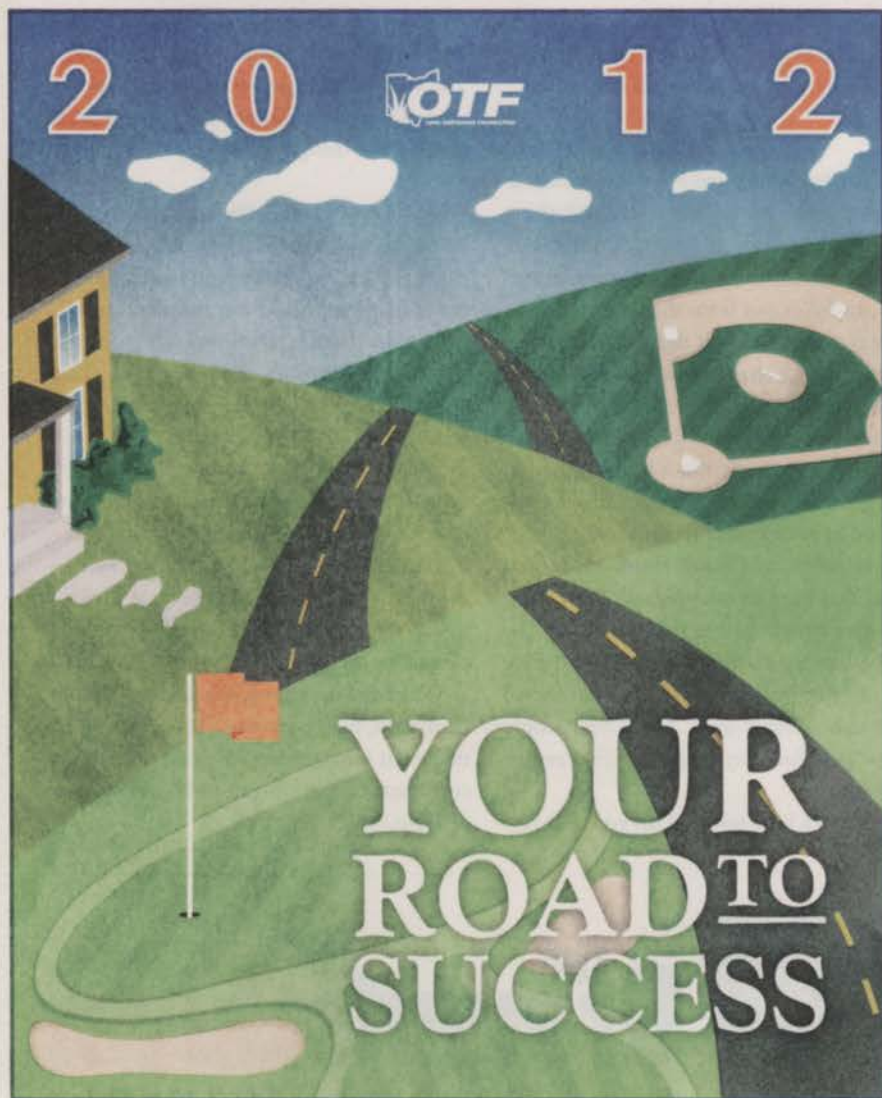


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## Mark Williams, Lawn Doctor



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[www.lawnandlandscape.com](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com)  
and search "Mark Williams."

**Why did you get involved in franchising?** I started my Lawn Doctor franchise in 1994 when I was working in a family business and had the opportunity to get out.

I liked Lawn Doctor's approach to agronomy and the environmental side, which they were doing way before it was in vogue. They're all about the customer. At the time, Lawn Doctor was not a big player in the south, so there was not a lot of competition. I was drawn to how I was treated, and continue to be treated, at a corporate level. I jumped in and here we are, 2,200 customers later, \$1.5 million in revenue.

**What are the advantages and disadvantages of franchising?** The success rate is higher with franchises because you're using a proven system and don't have to reinvent the wheel. Bulk material purchasing also gives you a huge advantage.

The cost savings more than pay our royalty fees. In terms of marketing, I don't have to worry about Google, our website, pay-per-click, any of that stuff. If there's a disadvantage, I guess it would be that you're kind of locked into one system.

That could be a downside if you're locked into a philosophy that you don't agree with. Lack of capital can also be an issue, but usually your franchise can help with that.

**What advice would you have for someone thinking about franchising?** Research the company by talking to lots of customers, getting online and looking for complaints. You can figure out from that one thing alone if they're doing it right.

One thing is that I think it's hard to be an absentee owner. You need to have equity, some skin in the game. Sure, there are a few, but usually that's because they have great technicians in place. You're only as good as your service technicians.

A lot of people don't think about exit plans. You have to ask yourself, 'How long do I give myself before this succeeds?' The failure rate for starting a business is pretty high. People don't think about what they'll do if this doesn't work out. I tell people not to quit their day jobs when they're just starting out.

Sure, it's a little stressful for you, but you

can work evenings and Saturdays until you get to a level where it makes sense. A lot of people don't realize what this job entails, too. You start out doing everything, from sales to service complaints. New owners have to think about those things.

**What type of personality is best-suited for being a franchisee?** Driver analytic. Sometimes analytic people will do better with the management side, but you definitely need to be a driver. Someone who wakes up every day fired up and ready to go. The guys that I know who are successful, most are drivers and slightly analytic.

**What is the biggest challenge you've faced as a franchisee?** We had a huge drought here in 2009, similar to what Texas went through last year. We tried to be as proactive as we possibly could about helping our clients' lawns to recover.

We ended up staying flat and not losing customers, but there was a huge amount that went into making sure that our customers didn't just can us because of the drought. L&L

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## NEW PRODUCTS /// For more products, visit [www.lawnandlandscape.com/products](http://www.lawnandlandscape.com/products)

### Billy Goat Dust-Free Debris Vacuum

**The pitch:** Billy Goat takes litter and leaf cleanup to the next level with the new 33-inch QUIETVAC.



- The new debris vacuum uses a cyclonic filtration and new dust-sock technology in the collection system to cut down on dust in dry conditions. It also runs quietly, at about 84.5 decibels.
- An optional on board hose kid expands to 10-feet allowing better reach when transitioning to clean between shrubs.
- The large capacity turf bag holds 51 gal. and loads/unloads with a two-latch bag system.

**For more information:** [www.billygoat.com](http://www.billygoat.com)

### CORE Hedge Trimmer

**The pitch:** CORE Outdoor Power released a handheld blower and hedge trimmer, both equipped with GasLess motor technology.



- The CB420 handheld blower (pictured) weighs 11 lbs. and produces winds up to 110 miles per hour.
- The 12-lbs. CHT410 hedge trimmer has run-times of up to 90 minutes.
- CORE Outdoor Power is also introducing the Quad Power Pak, which is compatible with all CORE products and functions as both a back pack, offering users four times the run time, and a mobile charging system.

**For more information:** [www.coreoutdoorpower.com](http://www.coreoutdoorpower.com)

### Ditch Witch SK Line

**The pitch:** Ditch Witch has introduced two new compact tool carriers to the SK line.



- Replacing the SK650, the Ditch Witch SK750 and SK755 offer upgrades including design improvements, productivity enhancement and operator comfort.
- Includes 800 pounds of lift capacity, 81-inch lift height, 30 percent more ground clearance and a high-drive track system featuring bolt-on sprockets, wide track rollers and replaceable spindles.
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## 2012 MOST VALUABLE PRODUCTS

# Examining An Alternative Way To Fertilize Turf

Applying conventional fertilizers on turf has been the way to go for decades. Now there is an alternative way to fertilize that can save you time and money, boost your productivity and reduce the environmental impact. This alternative way is to apply fertilizers Driven by Duration.

## The conventional way to fertilize.

Most conventional fertilizers are uncoated and may prematurely release due to excessive moisture. Fertilizers that are coated are known to crack or break down prematurely, which means they don't perform much better than uncoated fertilizers. Once conventional fertilizers, coated or uncoated, are applied:

- These fertilizers begin to release nitrogen (N) immediately after a rain or irrigation.
- Plants feed, but can only use a portion of the N that's applied.
- The risk increases that some of the N will leach away into the groundwater or be lost to volatilization.
- More applications are required to maintain turf color and vigor.
- Labor costs increase with each application.

## An alternate way to fertilize.

Duration CR® fertilizers feature a proprietary, patented polymer-coating. This advanced technology is proven to deliver a more reliable, controlled release of N that continually feeds turf for up to 180 days per application.

- N is released precisely when plants need it most; this controlled feeding eliminates the feast/famine cycle that causes plant stress, resulting in lush, green turf that's more resistant to weeds and diseases.
- The annual cost per square foot is less than conventional fertilizers, and with fewer applications, N use is reduced by up to 40%.
- Fewer applications leave more time for crews to perform other services for more customers on more properties.
- More N is taken up by the plants, leaving far less to be lost to leaching and volatilization.
- Controlled-release Duration CR fertilizers are available with longevities from 45 up to 180 days per application.

## A look inside the bag.

- Fertilizers Driven By Duration contain at least 40% controlled-release DURATION CR.
- Other fertilizers may contain controlled-release components, however, what gives DURATION CR an edge is the advanced-generation, polymer-coating technology (fig. A).
- With DURATION CR, N is released gradually throughout the plant's growth cycle, resulting in precise, consistent feeding lasting up to 180 days.

## A look at the technology.

### DURATION POLYMER COATING (fig. A)

Laboratory testing proves DURATION CR easily withstand normal handling and resist abrasions. Other fertilizers with inferior coatings can crack or break, allowing N to be released about as quickly as uncoated fertilizers.



fig. A

### HOW DURATION RELEASES (fig. B)

- 1) Water passes through this permeable polymer coating and dissolves the N inside.
- 2) When activated by soil moisture and warming temperatures, the dissolved N passes through the coating, directly into the root zone at a controlled rate.
- 3) Because the release depends on soil temperature, it isn't affected by rainfall or irrigation, which isn't true of other controlled- or slow-release fertilizer technologies.



fig. B

## Acceptance is spreading.

This controlled-release alternative to traditional fertilizers is gaining acceptance on residential and commercial properties, on sports fields and city parks, and around the golf course. For a more in-depth look at this advanced technology, visit [DrivenByDuration.com](http://DrivenByDuration.com).

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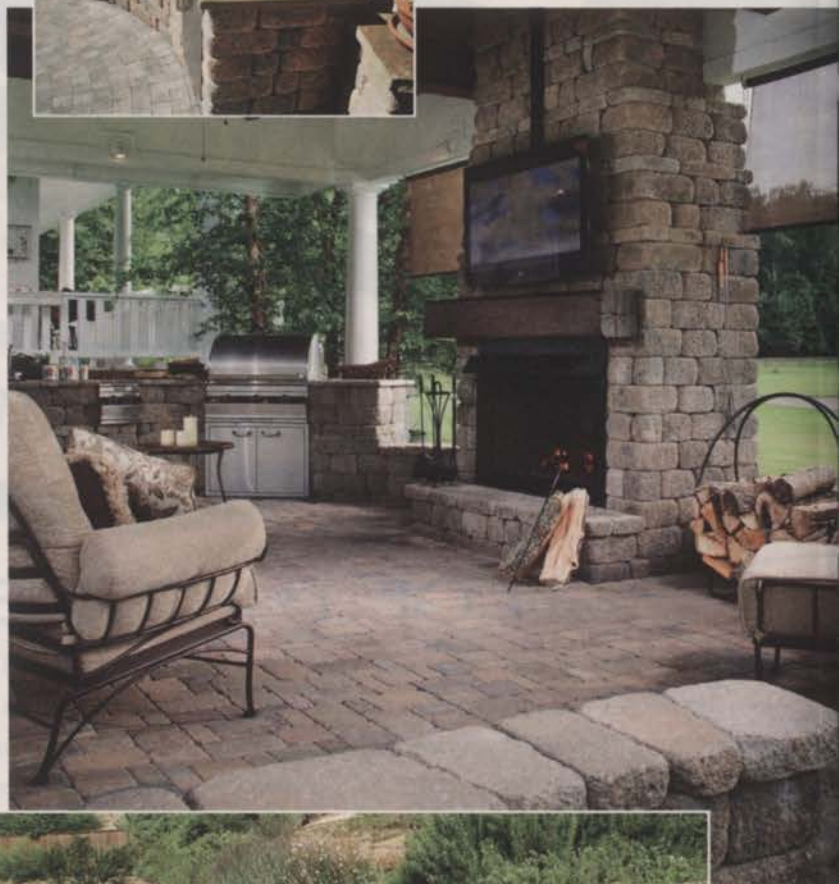
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Keystone Country Manor's design and construction versatility extends well beyond traditional segmental retaining walls. Each unit can be installed as an exposed end unit or 90-degree corner unit. With this design consideration, Country Manor is the perfect product for small free-standing walls, parapet walls, pilasters, columns, tree rings, stairs and outdoor living elements.

Keystone offers a line of Country Manor outdoor living element kits including bench, mailbox, outdoor table, column with planter, grill station, as well as an outdoor fireplace with additional add-ons including wood boxes and curved walls. Step-by-step installation instructions are available for download on our website at [www.keystonewalls.com](http://www.keystonewalls.com). New kits and installation instructions are currently in progress and will be added to the website upon their completion.

For over 25 years, Keystone Retaining Wall Systems LLC has been the global leader in the segmental retaining wall and hardscape industry. With over 180 industry patents, and more currently pending, Keystone continues to set the standard for excellence, innovation and aesthetic appeal. Keystone's products and services offer solutions for governmental, commercial, industrial, recreations, public works and residential applications. Keystone is a subsidiary of Contech Engineered Solutions LLC, the nation's leading provider of complete solutions for earth stabilization projects.



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## 2012 MOST VALUABLE PRODUCTS

# Drainage system installation generates new opportunities and increases profits

Many residential, commercial and municipal sites struggle with drainage issues. Soil type, soil compaction and slopes have a major effect on the amount of water that may accumulate in a particular landscape. Poor drainage can lead to flooding or soil erosion, both of which can destroy landscapes and cause structural damage to homes and businesses alike.

In some cases, drainage can be managed by properly grading the site. Other situations require a system of collection devices such as drainage grates and catch basins connected to a network of pipe to channel excess water away.

The growing popularity of water harvesting has also placed more emphasis on efficient rainwater and stormwater drainage. A properly designed drainage system can capture this water and divert it to a storage tank or retention pond for later irrigation use, reducing potable water use and the potential for flooding and erosion.

### A new solution from a trusted partner

Drainage systems present a revenue opportunity for contractors who haven't yet tackled their design and installation. However, those contractors – and even contractors who already offer this service – can benefit from the support of a trusted partner.

That's why Rain Bird Corporation introduced a new full line of drainage products that provide an effective and efficient water management solution.

"Because both drainage and irrigation are integral to efficient, environmentally-friendly water management, creating a drainage product portfolio was a logical next step for us," said Don Clark, principal product manager for Rain Bird. "Our products are designed to both efficiently manage excess water at any site and, if desired, harvest it for future reuse on the landscape."

Engineered with the same exacting standards as any Rain Bird spray head, valve or controller, Rain Bird's new drainage product line includes grates, catch basins, pop-up valves and basin adapters and accessories, all available in multiple sizes, shapes and styles to meet any landscape drainage need. Because aesthetics are critical, Rain Bird's grates

are available in green, black, sand or gray colors to easily blend into any area of the landscape.

The company constructs all its drainage system components in the United States to exacting tolerances to assure consistent, worry-free connections when they're used together. Rain Bird's drainage products are also compatible with



components from most other leading manufacturers, saving the day when a particular site needs an easy upgrade or fast replacement. And, because they're ruggedly constructed from the highest-quality materials, all products in the line come with a three-year warranty – the longest in the drainage product category.

### The best relationships are the most rewarding

Rain Bird's new product category gives contractors a single point of contact for both their irrigation and drainage needs – but the benefits don't stop there. "Those contractors participating in the Rain Bird® Rewards loyalty program also receive Rain Bird® Rewards points for any purchases from the drainage product line," Clark adds. "This makes it even easier for them to earn points toward tools, trips, gift certificates and marketing incentives."

With decades of irrigation and water management experience, Rain Bird knows this industry and its unique challenges inside and out. When questions or concerns arise, a Rain Bird water management expert is available to help – unlike some competing companies who outsource their drainage sales and service.

Rain Bird's commitment to its customers even extends to training, with drainage classes available for individuals of all skill levels through Rain Bird Academy.

"Rain Bird has always been in the business of helping its customers use water wisely," Clark says. "Our new drainage product line draws upon our years of industry experience to provide contractors and their customers with durable, trouble-free solutions to their water management needs."

For more information about Rain Bird's new drainage products, visit [www.rainbird.com](http://www.rainbird.com), call your local Rain Bird representative or call 1-800-RAIN BIRD.





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## 2012 MOST VALUABLE PRODUCTS

# Software solution for LCOs

For over 25 years, Real Green Systems, creators of the Service Assistant, have been the premier software provider to the green industry, providing our customers with the most current technology and the widest range of software features available in the marketplace. Real Green services more than 2,000 independent customers and six major service industry franchises, such as Scotts, Lawn Doctor and others.

The Service Assistant software concentrates on providing lawn care, pest control, tree care, landscaping and other service professionals with the most comprehensive list of tools and features available. Our software continues to evolve, incorporating the latest technology (Windows OS, network technology, internet applications, computerized mapping, global positioning, thermal printers, etc.) and is being used throughout North America and the United Kingdom by service organizations just like yours!

The following features are available to you through the Service Assistant software:

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**Easy to Use and Customizable.** Service Assistant is designed for small to enterprise service businesses that need to get up and running fast. The administration tools give you the options to change the way features operate so you'll get a customizable solution without the cost of custom software.

**Secure and Scalable.** Designed to manage unlimited employees, Service Assistant runs with the same simplicity managing a single location as it does managing multiple branches.

**Top Rated Training and Technical Support.** Implementing a new management system can fail without the proper setup, training and support. On-site training and installation proves invaluable to a successful and easy migration from your existing software or start up businesses. A responsive and dedicated support team backs Service Assistant. Clear and friendly advice is the hallmark of our client-focused Technical Support Department.

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### John Deere Z900

**The pitch:** The Z900 series of zero-turn mowers from John Deere gives contractors three choices: The B series, which has essential features



at a cost-conscious price point; the M Series for large fleet owners in need of efficiency and the feature-rich R Series for those who want it all.

- The B Series offers a large fuel tank and professional-grade seats.
- The M Series has fuel-injected engines, Mulch On Demand decks and diagnostic capability.
- The R Series offers a hydraulic cross-porting system, and a Break-N-Go foot pedal start.

**For more information:** [www.deere.com](http://www.deere.com)

### Mean Green Walk-Behind-Mower

**The pitch:** Mean Green Products introduced its new WBX-33 lithium-powered commercial walk-behind.



- The 36-volt electric mower comes at a 33-inch deck, running on one lithium energy module for about a 2-4-hour running time at 4-5 miles per hour per charge.
- The mower runs at 73 decibels and 16 hp.
- Each lithium energy module weighs 50-70 lbs. and lasts up to 1,500 charge cycles.

**For more information:** [www.meangreenproducts.com](http://www.meangreenproducts.com)

### Vermeer Brush Chipper

**The pitch:** With the ability to chip heavily branched material up to 9 in. in diameter, the Vermeer BC900XL can be used for line clearing and general cleanup needs.



- The BC900XL features a large 9- x 14-in. feed opening to help boost productivity by reducing the need to trim heavily branched material before feeding it into the chipper.
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Dow AgroSciences	www.dowagro.com	16, 17	
Exaktime	www.jobclock.com	12	14
GMC Truck	www.gmc.com	84	
Go iLawn	www.goilawn.com	32	29
Ground Logic	www.groundlogicinc.com	66	45
Grounds Guys, The	www.groundsguysfranchise.com	64	43
Irrigation Association	www.irrigation.org	42	32
John Deere Construction	www.johndeere.com	49	35
Kentucky Landscape Industries Expo	www.KNLA.org	67	47
Landscape Ontario	www.landscapeontario.com	43	34
Landscape Workshop	www.landscapeworkshop.com/ careers	52	36
Lebanon Turf Products	www.lebanonturf.com	9	13
LUSA Group	www.lusagroup.com	81	54
Mercedes-Benz USA, LLC	www.MBSprinter.com	38	30
MistAway	www.mistaway.com	76	53
My Landscape Website	www.mylandscapewebsite.com	43	33
Neely Coble	www.neelycoble.com	29*	25
Noon Turf Care	www.noonturfcare.com	62	41
Ohio Turfgrass Foundation	www.offshow.com	63	42
ONLA	www.onla.org	67	48
PBI/Gordon Corp	www.pbigordon.com	30, 44	26, 12
PermaGreen Supreme	www.permagreen.com	41	31
Permaloc Corporation	www.permaloc.com	31	28
PLANET	www.landcarenetwork.com	65	44
PROLandscape/Drafix	www.PROLandscape.com	2	10
STIHL	www.stihlusa.com	26	24
Superthrive, LP	www.superthrive.com	19	21
TruGreen	www.trugreen.com	52	37
Volt Landscape Lighting	www.vollighting.com	5, 30	11, 27
Walker	www.walkermowers.com	23	23
Winfield Solutions	www.winfield.com	13, 15	15, 17

### Most Valuable Products

Agrium Advanced Technologies	www.agriumat.com	69	49
Keystone Retaining Walls	www.keystonewalls.com	71	50
Rain Bird	www.rainbird.com	73	51
Real Green Systems	www.realgreen.com	75	52

\* denotes regional advertising



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## TIPS FROM THE TOP

Interviewed by Catherine Pomiecko

**Company:** Mainscape **Location:** Indiana **Ranking:** 21 **2011 Revenue:** \$47,790,000



# Mark Forsythe

## MAINSCAPE

President Mark Forsythe shares how Mainscape has found success with just the right combination of the basics.

**H**ave a little faith. That's what Mainscape has practiced from the very beginning. Faith in their people, faith in the quality of their work and the faith to step outside of their comfort zone is what has guided the company into the ranks of the Top 100.

When owner Dave Mazanowski was going to school at Ball State University, he was doing some summer mission work in the community and he and his group basically needed something to support themselves while they did that. So, they started a grass-cutting and general yard work company and they did that every summer and into the fall until they graduated. When they graduated, **Dave knew that he could either move on and get a different job, or he could**



Forsythe

**keep doing the landscaping thing**, so he chose to keep doing the landscape thing.

I started with the company in 2002 running operations in Indiana. The first big milestone was expanding outside of the state in 2004. We started doing some work out in California. **We were trying to learn then if we could do work that wasn't necessarily right in our backyard.** Since then, our average growth rate has been right around 20 percent a year.

About a year and a half ago, we went through a buyout from Dave's brother, who was 50 percent owner for about 20 years. So now **Dave is back to being the sole owner of the company.**

**We try to bring on the best people that we can find** – really good people – who have that mindset and mentality of continuous improvement and who are entrepreneurially oriented, people who want to grow and develop. That's what we focus on doing.

From a cultural standpoint, **when we make a mistake, we're very open to talking about it.** Every mistake we make, we are diligent about looking at what it is we did wrong and how we can fix it.

We can look back and say **we're better now than we were a year ago**, and I feel like we've always been able to say that. I think that's pretty important.

Growing requires a couple of different things, but one of them is a passion to go do it. If you don't have a deep-down desire to do it, you won't be able to do it. **It's got to be something you really want to do.**

**One of the most dangerous things about growing fast is losing control of what you've got.** It always seems like it's easier when you're talking numbers – 15 percent doesn't seem that big. But when you actually go do it, you have to add all those people and capital and coordinate and manage customer relationships and employee relationships.


I never feel like we are doing anything special or rocket science. It's all very basic principles that we follow. I read a lot of different journals and websites and **encourage our team to go and learn as much as they can about better ways to do things**, and take those things and apply them.

**I wouldn't say there's a specific best management practice put in place.** We're probably dabbling in all of them in some way shape or form. **L&L**

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 2012 Vincentric U.S. Model Level Analysis of full-size pickups in the retail market. <sup>2</sup> Dependability based on longevity: 1981-July 2011 full-size pickup registrations.

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