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POWER PLAYERS

58 Cover story

We gathered the industry's best and picked their brains about their businesses and the future of landscaping.







COVER STORY

58 Power players   
We gathered the industry's best and brightest and picked their brains about their businesses and the future of landscaping.



In every issue




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

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ONLINE Contents

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

Road warriors



Don't get too excited. You didn't open up your favorite landscaping magazine to also find an article about the awesome 80's WWE tag-team the Road Warriors.

Instead, it's something that's equally as enjoyable. Around this time, all of the writers from our horticulture magazines hit the road hard to bring you coverage from trade shows and events throughout our industries. So, check out our multimedia section at bit.ly/lawnmedia and watch all the videos from our travels.

You can also sign up for our Road Rally: California Spring Trial's newsletter, which will wrap-up every day of the event that runs March 24-29. You will get a sneak peek of all the newest plants being grown that your customers will want on their properties. Just visit bit.ly/caroadrally to sign up and the e-newsletter will arrive in your inbox every day with up-to-date 2012 Spring Trials coverage.

No Road Warriors photos were available, so you get "Rowdy" Piper and Sgt. Slaughter instead.

POPULAR POSTS

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LinkedIn

twitter

We've tweaked our Top Tweets section to include the most popular links across all of our social media platforms. Read on and find out what links our followers and friends found most intriguing.

Discover what customers want

Lawn & Landscape's parent company, GIE Media, is launching a new digital magazine that you're going to love. It's called *A Garden Life*, and basically it's for anyone who loves the urban outdoor lifestyle. There will be articles about new varieties for the backyard, gardening with children, sustainable practices, growing edibles and more. But why does it matter to you? Because the articles are going to feature products and ideas that your customer is going to want from you. You can read more about it at bit.ly/gardenlife. To sign up for the free digital publication, visit www.agardenlife.com.



EVERY OFFICE HAS THEM

Inc.com has listed the top 10 difficult employees and how to deal with them. How many of these are at your company, and, be honest, which one are you? bit.ly/difficultheemployee

BUSINESS BLISS

A husband-and-wife duo drives success with a strong marketing program and goal setting. bit.ly/businessbliss

NEW WEB-BASED SOFTWARE FOR CONTRACTORS

ServiceTask has been designed to help landscape and snow contractors better track and organize customers and schedule jobs more efficiently. bit.ly/servicetask

THE SMALL-BUSINESS CREDIT CARD RETURNS

Here is what you should know before signing up for new plastic. bit.ly/smallbizcredit

Video fun

We try to keep our blog fresh with content from inside and outside the industry. Recently, we've stumbled upon some videos we think are worth watching. Type in the bit.ly links below and find out why we were so interested in these clips.

Dear 16 year-old me

Most of you work outside in the sun. Here's a chilling reminder of why you need to wear sunscreen. bit.ly/sixteenme



To the top

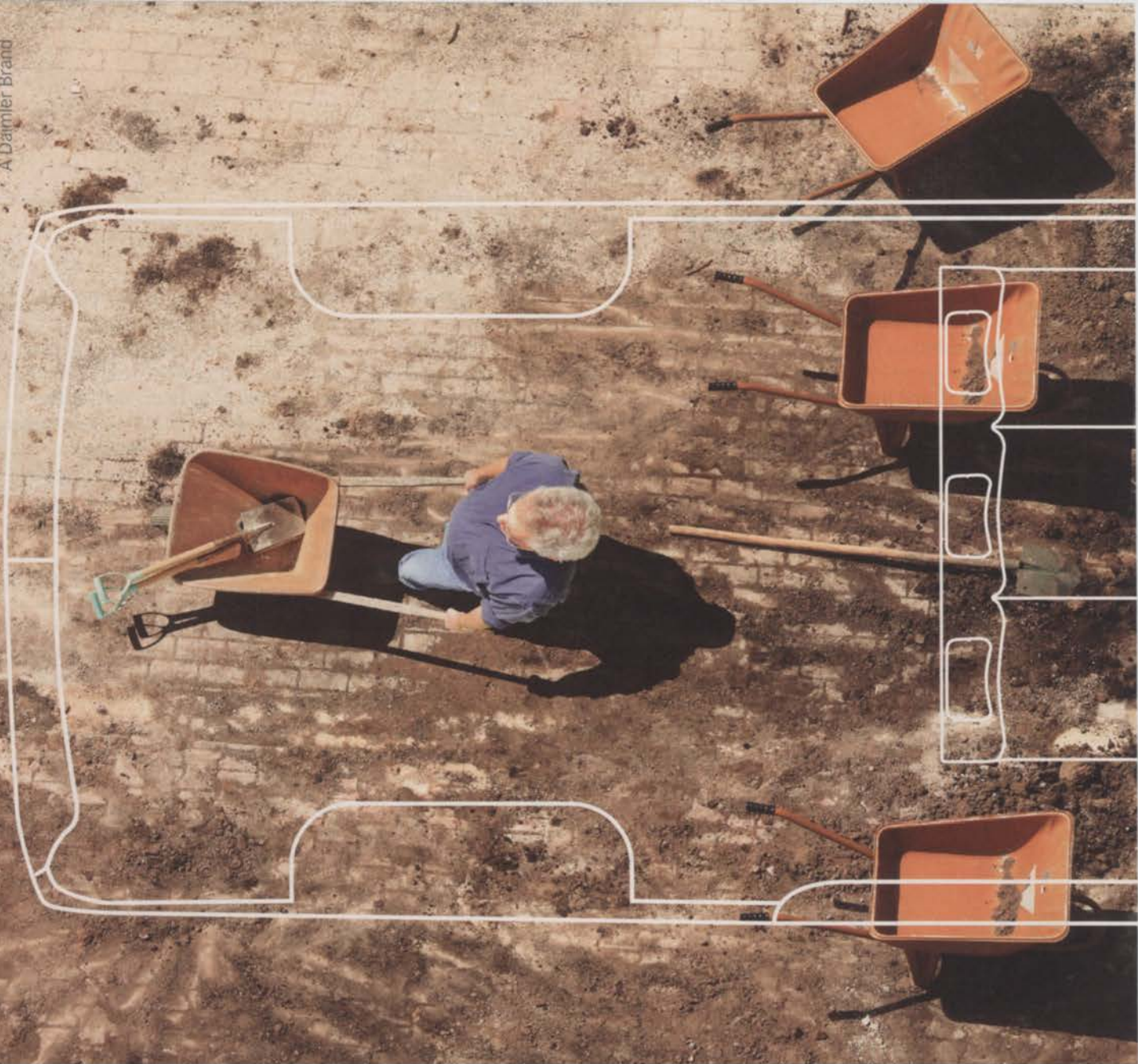
Take a video tour of the American Society of Landscape Architects' Green Roof. bit.ly/aslagreen



Croc vs. mower

Yes, it's a crocodile wrestling a lawn mower. Need we say more? bit.ly/croc mower





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** In base configuration.

'Just a landscaper'

McDonald's recently released a recruitment video that tells the story of a bright, ambitious young woman who takes an entry-level job. Her mother is not impressed, and thinks her daughter has thrown her life away and resigned herself to a career as a sweaty fry cook.

You can find it on our blog, and if you watch it all the way through, you'll be touched and realize a few things

about the value of work, forgiveness and the love of your family.

Now, I don't think McDonald's is a company deserving of sainthood. Ray Kroc's system of franchises has cluttered the American landscape and fattened millions of Americans (myself included). But the company does something amazing and very nearly impossible: They make the exact same things the exact same way, every day.

You can go into a McDonald's in Cleveland or Houston or London and the fries will taste the same. The milkshake will taste the same. There's a comfort in that expectation, and that consistency is part of the reason those golden arches are a symbol not just of fast food, but of America itself.

It's easy to make a hamburger taste *sort of the same every day*. Heck, it's easy to do most anything *almost* the same way – cook a burger, publish a magazine or mow a lawn. But to do it the exact same way thousands of times

a day in locations spread across the world is very, very difficult.

Any company should strive to have that same sort of consistency – in its production, in its interviews, in its customer interactions. Doing so makes it easier for your employees to execute, but also makes it easier for your customers to do business with you. There's no question about what they'll get in return.

And, more broadly, the landscape industry needs a video like this. Just as there's more to working at McDonald's than being "just a fry cook," you know there's a lot more to your work than being "just a landscaper."

Chances are your company has – or tries to have – the same things our heroine wants: friendly employees, opportunities for improvement and advancement, programs to give back to your community. What you do is valuable and helps others. It's time to start telling people that. – Chuck Bowen



▶ Watch the video on our blog: bit.ly/wantfries

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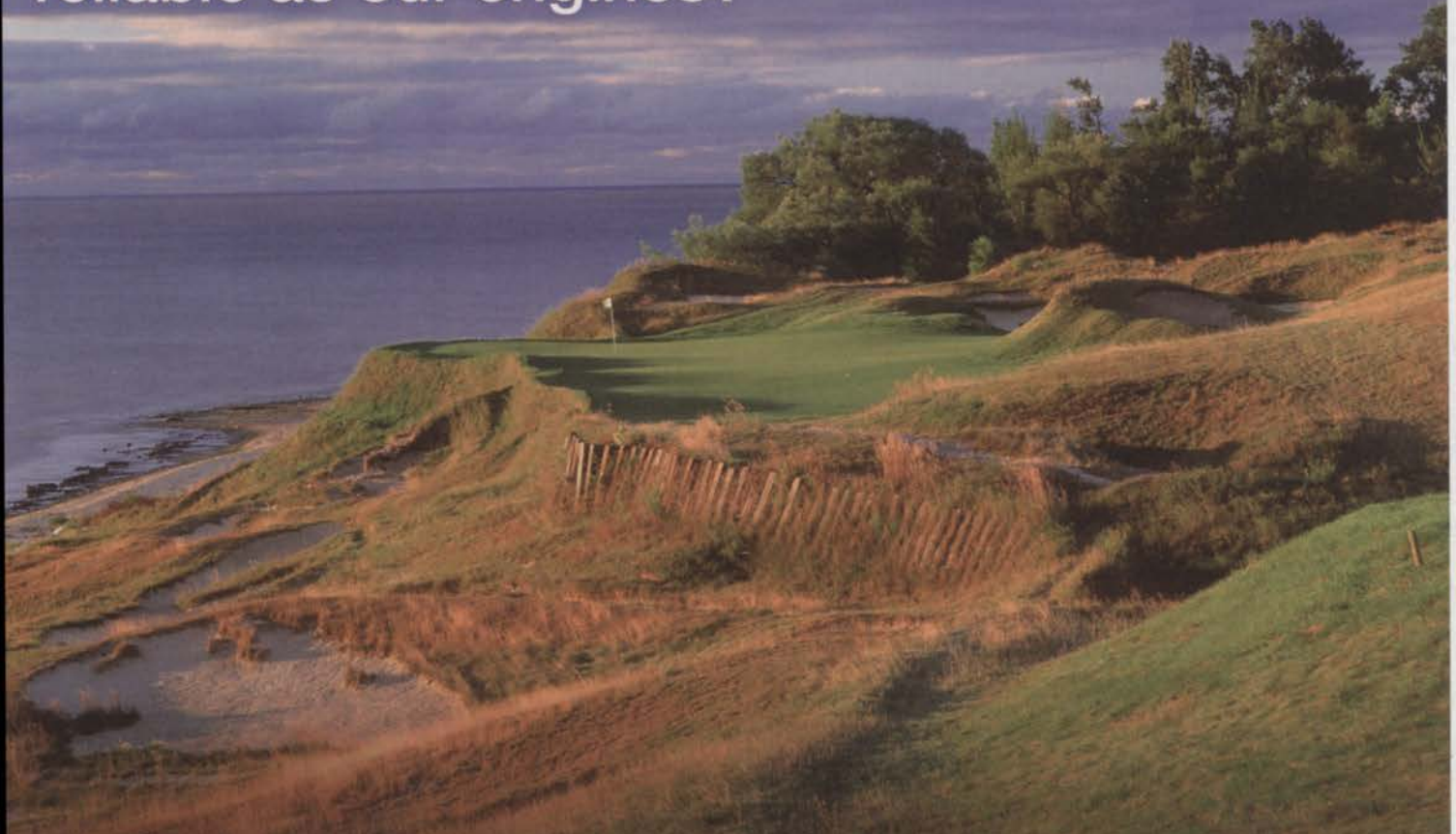
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Two 'Top 100' companies merge services



Dellecker



Schatz

BUNNELL, Fla. — Two of the industry's larger landscape companies have merged maintenance divisions to better serve commercial clients.

Austin Outdoor acquired Cornerstone Solutions Group landscape management division, allowing Austin to expand in four Central and Western Florida markets. Cornerstone's Jacksonville and Orlando locations will be consolidated with Austin's; in Tampa and Sarasota, where Cornerstone is well-established and has a long history, the operations will remain under the Cornerstone brand, the companies said. The terms of the agreement were not disclosed.

"This will make a significant difference in the growth of our business from a statewide standpoint," Austin Outdoor President William Dellecker said to *Lawn & Landscape*. "There is some overlap in certain markets where there are common clients. But many commercial clients, larger ones, will have a presence in other markets in the state, and that is a benefit as well. We're able to serve a client in

Florida wherever they may be, and that's another plus, potentially, for our customers on a combined basis."

With the addition of Cornerstone, Austin serves more than 500 properties and has revenue in Florida approaching \$40 million. Austin also has taken on about 100 Cornerstone employees. Dellecker said he expects to hire at least 50 more employees in the peak season.

Hemlock-killing bug spreads

The hemlock woolly adelgids was found for the first time in Ohio. The insect has spread to 18 Eastern states.

ASABE looks into available water for irrigation use

The American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers is developing a new standard based on available water for landscaping. ASABE is looking for participants for the project.

The Grounds Guys featured on "Undercover Boss"

Dina Dwyer-Owens, chairwoman and CEO of The Dwyer Group, The Grounds Guys parent company, went incognito on the reality show to see what it was like for her employees in the field.

Arborist release new guide

The Massachusetts Arborists Association has released a new study guide as a comprehensive resource for tree care professionals.

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NEWS ///

The merger allows two *Lawn & Landscape* Top 100 companies to join forces. Yellowstone Landscape Group acquired Austin in 2008. Yellowstone was ranked No. 11 on the most recent Top 100, with \$74 million in 2010 revenue. Cornerstone was ranked No. 58, with \$20.4 million in 2010 revenue.

John Faulkner, founder and chief visionary officer for Cornerstone, said the maintenance division was 50 percent of the company. Cornerstone is also a general contractor and landscape installer, both of which made up 25 percent of the business before the maintenance division was sold. He said he expects continual growth from the remaining divisions.

"We were growing so fast at a rate that was hard for me to keep up with," Faulkner said of why he decided to sell the maintenance division. "I've always had this passion to build big businesses and it just seemed like we could get there a lot faster if I teamed up with somebody that had the same vision and the same culture as our company."

While continuing his position at Cornerstone, Faulkner will help Austin maintain and grow market share in Tampa and Sarasota. Faulkner said he's been approached several times over the years to sell, but Austin was the first cultural fit.

"The merger of Cornerstone with Austin Outdoor is a natural fit," said Edward Schatz, Jr, Austin's founder and president of Yellowstone's Southeast region. Between the values they share and reputation they both have for high quality, these two organizations complement each other perfectly." — Carolyn LaWell

Sebert Landscaping rebuilds after fire



One truck was lost in the fire at Sebert Landscaping.

BARTLETT, III. — Sebert Landscaping didn't miss a beat after a fire destroyed the building at its Romeoville location in January. While the building, office materials, small equipment and one truck, were lost in the fire, the company's operations ran as normal, offering an important lesson in preparation.

"We concentrated most importantly (on the fact) that nobody was hurt, and we went right into making sure our clients didn't feel any of the effect of the misfortune," said Sebert's General Manager Steve Pearce

Emergency responders were called to the fire at 5:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 16,

Pearce said. The building wasn't occupied and no one was injured. At press time, the cause of the fire and its estimated damage were unknown.

The Romeoville branch has about 45 employees, 225 landscape clients, 100-125 snow clients and brought in about \$4.5 million of Sebert's \$20 million in 2011 revenue, Pearce said. With no building, the branch was still up and running the next day.

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NEWS

"The next morning we had a winter event that required salting and sidewalk crews to go out," Pearce said. "We made sure that happened without any hiccups. We got out and serviced our clients right away."

All business and client files were backed up on computers so, first thing in the morning, the administrative staff called clients to reassure them that while the building was lost, the business wasn't. Pearce said that voice to voice communication was crucial.

"It was good, we got a lot of support from our clients," Pearce said. "I also did put an email message out later in the day thanking everybody for their support - just another message to say we're going to be OK."

Logistically, the company decided to continue to run its snow operation out of the Romeoville location because there was still room for the trucks to park, Pearce said. Space was made for the Romeoville's management and support staff in the company's Naperville branch office until a temporary office could be put on the Romeoville site.

"We are already in the preparation of getting prepared to rebuild," Pearce said four days after the fire. "We will rebuild on the existing site, and right now our plans are to build our second LEED certified building to further enhance our belief in sustainability and what we believe in, which is being as green as possibly can be." - Carolyn LaWell



Sebert Landscaping's Romeoville branch lost its entire building in the fire.

(Formerly PLANET's Executive Forum)

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NEWS // For more news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com

Briggs & Stratton shutting plants

MILWAUKEE – Briggs & Stratton will shift its operations and close two plants to adjust to changes in the outdoor equipment market.

The Newbern, Tenn., facility, which manufactures walk-behind mowers and snow throwers, will close and move its operations to Briggs & Stratton's McDonough, Ga., facility. The company will also close its Ostrava, Czech Republic plant, which manufactures small engines for the outdoor power equipment industry, and shift that production to its Murray, Ky., plant.

The restructuring will affect about 690 employees at the Tennessee facility and 77 at the Czech Republic plant. It will also save the company \$18 million to \$20 million annually.

Since 2004, the U.S. lawn and garden market has declined more than 33 percent and Briggs & Stratton has felt those effects, company Chairman, President and CEO Todd Teske said in a statement.

"This significant and prolonged

market decline is unlike any other this industry has seen in decades, Teske said. "In addition, we have taken actions over the past year to reconfigure and reduce our capacity and costs at our Poplar Bluff, Mo., engine plant. The actions announced today to consolidate our manufacturing footprint further, will better align our production capacity to the markets we serve."

Operations are expected to wind down in the Czech Republic by March 15 and in Tennessee by approximately May 15.

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute issued a plan for manufacturers



to comply with requirements of the new British Columbia Ministry of Environment's Recycling Regulation. To prepare for implementation in July 2012, outdoor power equipment manufacturers must report estimates of their electrical OPE delivered to Canada overall. To read the plan and a form of common questions and answers visit www.lawnandlandscape.com, and search "OPEI."

Case unveils several new products

TOMAHAWK, Wis. – Case Construction Equipment has made several introductions for the market, including a new excavator digging system and a new wheel loader and improvements to its loader/backhoe product line, which meet Tier 4 interim emission standards.

First, the company introduced the new 621F wheel loader model. The new machine provides up to a 10-percent increase in fuel economy over the previous model, while delivering faster acceleration, quicker cycle times and higher travel speeds.

The new Case 621F wheel loader, like other models in the product line, evolved from the company's E Series machines. It features a 6.7-liter Tier 4 Interim-certified engine that delivers up to 162 hp. Classified as a 2.75 yd³ wheel



The Case Digging System is one of several new products the manufacturer introduced.

loader, the Case 621F has an operating weight of 26,641 lb.

Second, the company announced Case Smart Digging Systems components, including new pin-on buckets, coupler buckets, the Case Multi-Fit Coupler and SmartFit bucket teeth system.

Case pin-on buckets are designed for heavy-duty, high-capacity applications such as digging in dense soil, clay, loose rock and gravel.

The Case Multi-Fit Coupler offers



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hydraulic latching, enabling excavator operators to quickly attach and detach buckets and other components without leaving the cab.

Finally, a variety of improvements were made to the N Series loader/backhoe product line. The upgrades include the application of cooled exhaust gas recirculation (CEGR) emissions-control technology as well as important improvements in performance, productivity and maintainability.

The Case 580N, 580 Super N, 580 Super N Wide Track and 590 Super N loader/backhoes feature 3.4-liter, turbocharged engines, ranging from 78 hp in the 580N to 108 hp in the 590SN.

USDA releases Plant Hardiness Zone map

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Agriculture updated its Plant Hardiness Zone Map for the first time since 1990, shifting zone boundaries because of warmer temperatures.

The new map is generally one 5-degree Fahrenheit half-zone warmer than the previous map. The zone changes are mainly a result of the USDA using temperature data from a longer and more recent time period. The new map looks at a 30-year period, while the 1990 version used 13 years.

For the first time, the map offers a Geographic Informa-

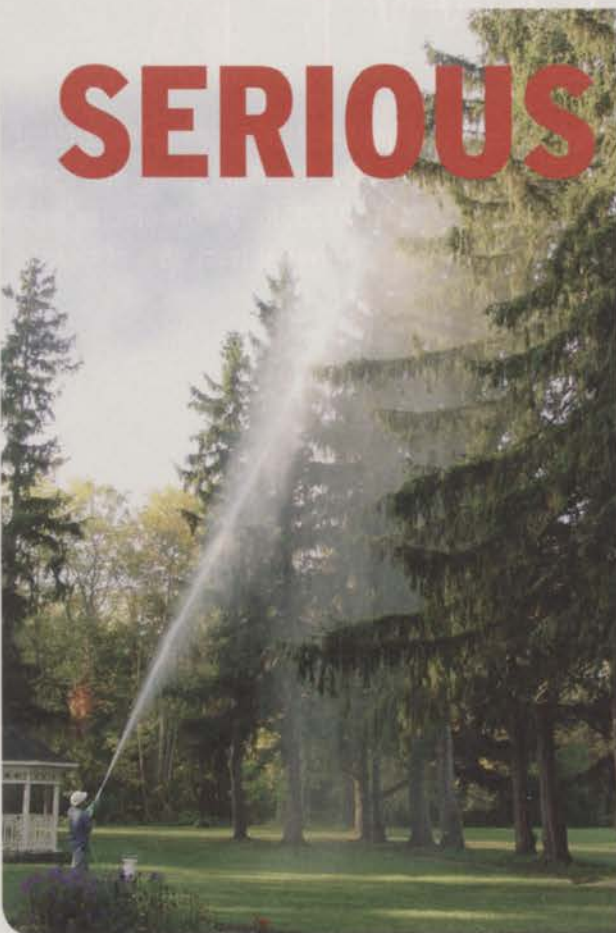


tion System (GIS)-based interactive format and USDA's website offers a "find your zone by ZIP code" function.

The updated version includes 13 zones, with the addition for the first time of zones 12 (50-60 degrees F) and 13 (60-70 degrees

F). Each zone is a 10-degree Fahrenheit band, further divided into A and B 5-degree Fahrenheit zones.

The USDA developed the map with its Agricultural Research Service arm and Oregon State University's PRISM Climate Group.



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ValleyCrest names CEO

Calabasas, Calif. – ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. has made more changes to its senior leadership team, promoting Roger J. Zino to CEO and naming Richard A. Sperber chairman.

Sperber has been president of the group of companies since 2011 and in 2008 was named co-CEO with his father Burt Sperber, the ValleyCrest founder who died last September.

Effective May 1, Sperber will take the role of chairman of the board, which the company said will allow him more time to focus on the

vision and direction of the family of companies.

As part of the transition, Zino will be promoted to CEO and will remain in his current position as the president of ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance. After a brief hiatus, Andrew J. Brennan has rejoined ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. as COO, a newly-created position reporting to Zino.

“The driver behind these changes is to keep ValleyCrest strong and on course for the next 62 years,” Sperber said of the company, founded in 1949. L&L



Sperber



CLIMBING THE LADDER: Hires and promotions

Eric Robinson was named to The Brickman Group's corporate leadership team as senior vice president of human resources. Prior to joining Brickman, he led the human resources function for Mohawk Industries Commercial and International business in Atlanta.



Robinson

Valent U.S.A. Corp. hired **Andy Lee** as its executive vice president and COO. Lee will oversee day-to-day operations for the company's agricultural, professional and consumer products business units in the United States, Canada and Mexico.



Lee

Syngenta promoted **Laurie Riggs** to lawn care market manager. She will be responsible for marketing to the company's lawn care, landscape and professional turf customers. Riggs recently worked for Syngenta's Pest Management group.

Rich Hanzel joined Rodd Landscape as the company's best practices manager. Hanzel, who worked for Rodd as a landscape maintenance manager in the late 1990s, came from ValleyCrest where he was a branch manager.

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HERE'S THIS MONTH'S QUESTION:

What do you love about working in the green/snow industry?



f Facebook:

Working in the green industry I have always loved that feeling of kindredness with plants. For example, I love the moments right before a rain, when the wind gets up a tad, during summer or winter, when the leaves of any green plant look even more green. It's like then you can actually see the vibration of the plants - & they are actually smiling - sending a message- that they are excited for rain. :) - **Melissa Patrick Allman**

I used to work for a Fortune 500 Co. for 15 years and I got so tired of hearing the corporate lies that I left and am now doing something that was a weekend thing I did at home and enjoyed it. Now it's a career and I LOVE! I am outside everyday and not stuck inside 4 walls for 9 hours a day. - **Kevin Moriarty**

in LinkedIn:

I love the smell of freshly cut grass! I love to be outside and to watch landscapes I have helped install and maintain become places that other people enjoy and appreciate - **Justin Carver, Grounds Maintenance Manager at Maxwell Landscape Service**

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I love the challenge, pure and simple. Especially when people have doubts about what can be accomplished. – **Philip Sissick, Director, landscaping and maintenance services at Yale University**

I haven't been in the business that long and a challenge that takes me out of my comfort zone can make me nervous. But, I have found that staying in that nervous mode keeps me focused on the project at hand and has given me the opportunity to give my customers quality service, every time. – **Barry Lewis, owner at Lewis Lawn & Landscape**

I have to agree with Phil & Justin — Love the challenge and who the hell doesn't like the smell of freshly cut grass? – **Bryan Ring, Ring Lawn Care**

It's not grass. I am thirsty for technical knowledge; pruning especially. There is always more to learn. Seeing a clean, crisp site after a new install is rewarding. – **Vas Sladek, certified landscape technician and ISA certified arborist**

I loved the flexibility, I was always "my own boss." If I wanted to work 14 hours a day, I could. But if I wanted to go on vacation for two weeks, I did. The people are just the best.

They love the earth and what it can produce. Very little gossip or back biting that you find in corporate America. Lastly, the potential in this industry is incredible. If you are smart at what you do, know the work and the business, the potential is there to make a lot of money. – **Ed Laffamme, partner at The Harvest Group**



Twitter:

The family-like atmosphere of everyone in the industry. They're always willing to lend a hand to help out another! – **@ITweetTurf**

Truly a 7 month job working hard unless you do snow. Big challenge is to make payments and keep good help off season. – **@LAWNFENCE14**

The color of the grass. How every blade of grass is manicured and (to) see what you just did and know you did it for someone else – to see the smile on your customers face when they pull up as you finish. – **@burkhartlawn**

NEXT MONTH'S QUESTION:

What do you do differently from other companies in the industry to prepare for the season?

Email Associate Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.

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Real Green Systems hosts LCOs at conference

Attendees of the three-day event learned how to run their business more efficiently and build their customer base. By Carolyn LaWell

ORLANDO, Fla. — The Real Green Systems Management and Users Conference took place the first week in January, offering lawn care company owners, technicians and office staff the opportunity to learn about everything from search engine optimization to creating a call center.

About 350 LCOs from across the country attended the annual event hosted by Real Green Systems. The conference included three

days of technical and management training, as well as time to network and have some fun. The nightly events included a vendor reception and magician and a casino night where the more attendees gambled (with fake money that had Real Green CEO Joe Kucik's face on it), danced, sang and had fun, the greater their chance was of winning more money and end-of-the-night prizes.

Jim Kucik, president of



Real Green's team showed attendees its custom marketing capabilities.

Synergetic Marketing Sales, gave several presentations on how companies can boost their use of the two main components of web market-

ing: search engine optimization (SEO) and social media. "The goals of social media are completely different than SEO," he said. "SEO is about

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Vendors, including Synergetic Marketing Sales, were on hand to provide business development and product updates to LCOs.

information. If they can't find what they need on a website, they'll just move to the next company, he said.

generating business immediately." Whereas, social media is more customer based and offers education, building relationships and staying in touch with clients.

Kucik said time and again he sees companies put effort into providing a good service, but then when he goes online, the company doesn't have a website or it has one that is poorly designed and offers little information. In today's world, potential customers want instantaneous

A good website should be well-designed and functional, should provide contact information and should make potential customers want to contact the company and buy from them. "Everything needs to make them want to call and buy," he said.

Also, websites need to be relevant and updated, which will help companies rank higher in search engines.

There are multiple ways to be ranked higher in Google, Kucik said. One is pay-per

click advertising where a company would spend money to be ranked at the top of the page. Second is Google places, which gives companies contact information and is based on location to the searcher and a company's number of Google reviews. Third is the normal list of websites ranked. The algorithm for the listing is mainly based on a perceived relevance a company has and the key words used on a website. "The text that you use on your website can help you get ranked," Kucik said.

When jumping into social media, companies need to define what applications they want to use (Facebook,

Twitter, LinkedIn), what they want to use them for and how they want to use them.

Kucik said it doesn't have to be overwhelmingly time consuming. Scott's Lawn Service in Lansing, Mich., which he's worked with, posts an estimated 1.8 times a day on its Facebook page.

Another tip Kucik suggested was that companies vary how they interact with customers on social media sites. A balanced model is: 20 percent of the time give an offer, 20 percent ask a question, 20 percent provide tips and 20 percent post viral information from the Web, meaning anything that isn't company specific. L&L

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A leadership nightmare

Managing difficult employees was one of the topics at the 2012 Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show in Chicago. By Brian Horn



Mid-Am featured plant and equipment exhibitors and education courses.

CHICAGO – When executive coach Rosemary Monahan used to work in corporate America, she had her fair share of challenging employees. A couple of them were great workers, but were always showing up late. And it wasn't until she actually asked them about it that she realized they had good rea-

sons – one had a transportation issues and the other had a special needs child, which provided for unpredictable mornings.

So Monahan worked out special arrangements with the employees allowing them to be 15 minutes late.

"Part of our roles as managers is to make sure our

employees are successful," said Monahan, president of Improve-ization.

Monahan told the story as part of her presentation,

"Turnaround: Managing the Difficult Employee," at the 2012 Mid-American Horticultural Trade Show in Chicago. The annual show for



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green industry professionals took place Jan. 18-20.

Monahan said the biggest issue managers face when dealing with employees is they delay confronting the problem. "We wait too long, and then we decide to act," she said. "(Managers) hope it will just go away."

Monahan said only about 5-10 percent of a workforce can be difficult, but that can take up 90 percent of your time.

But not confronting a difficult employee can have a negative impact on your entire organization, including forcing top employees to leave. She added you have to explain to the difficult em-

ployee how their actions are affecting the organization, and why they need to change.

"Because I said so" doesn't work," she said.

Sometimes employees (and clients for that matter) have no idea they are a problem. When Monahan had a consulting business, she was hearing from employees about a client who was very abusive to the staff, but when Monahan met with him, he was on his best behavior.

She couldn't do anything about it until she witnessed it herself because she wanted to avoid a "he said, she said" situation. One day, she snuck out of her office and saw the client "filleting" a secretary.

After speaking with the client, he said he was under stress and had no idea he was being rude.

"I said, 'I appreciate you are under stress, but there is a certain code of conduct here.' My approach was to help, but also send a clear message that this is not acceptable," she said.

Monahan said it normally takes between 30 and 45 days for a behavior to change, so it's important to confront the problem and then set up a time table. You should also check in once a week and update the employee on their progress, and be complimentary on the areas where they are doing better. Also, deal

with the specific problem and don't make every meeting a review of everything they do wrong.

"If they are a valuable employee, you want to help them succeed," she said.

But, there are some employees that are lost causes, and you may want to fire them. Certain actions, such as theft or violence, are grounds for immediate dismissal.

Ultimately, a difficult employee may also be the result of bad leadership by you.

"If you are a leader," she said, "and aren't setting the bar really high and being a good role model ... there's no surprise there are challenges." L&L



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CREW LUNCH BREAKS

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. How do other lawn care/landscaping companies handle how their crews take lunches? Do they pay them for the time when they eat? I am assuming they do not, but then, how do you track how long they are actually taking?

Following are responses from four PLANET Trailblazers:

A. Check with your state as to what is/is not legal. It really doesn't matter what other landscape companies are doing. They may or may not be doing things correctly.

We require our people to bring their lunch with them. The truck and trailers are not permitted to leave the work sites, so we never have a problem with employees going to a gas station or a restaurant. We are required by state law to give two 15-minute breaks and one 30-minute lunch, all on unpaid time. We elect to only deduct a 30-minute lunch each day from their time, thus paying them for their two 15-minute breaks. We have not experienced any pushback on this, but we have taken the time to explain this fact to our workers so they understand we are going above what we are required by law to do, and we are doing so to their benefit.

Kyle M. Webb, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, A to Z Lawn & Landscaping

A. We automatically deduct 30 minutes per day for all full-time employees for a lunch break, whether they take less or more time than that. Truth be told, I have more problems with our field employees not taking the time to have a lunch compared to problems with them taking too long of a lunch break.

We also encourage our guys to stop, wash their hands and take the time to eat a good lunch. Since we are working with pesticides, it's important to wash hands before eating, rather than just scarfing down a sandwich while driving between stops. And, in Oklahoma, it gets pretty hot in the summer, so we encourage our guys to go inside, drink plenty of fluids and cool off.

Sure, they may take a longer lunch sometimes, but with our system, it's not abused. They also have strong production, sales, and quality goals, so if they are consistently taking too long for lunch, they'll

not hit their goals. Not hitting their goals will then affect their pocketbook. I think it boils down to hiring great, honest people and trusting them to do what's right - for them and for the company.

So, give them a reason to only take 30 minutes for lunch and be productive, and you may end up having to encourage them to take that 30-minute lunch break.

Brad Johnson, Landscape Industry Certified Manager and Technician, LawnAmerica

A. We give our crews an unpaid, 30-minute lunch. There is no drive time factored into this number. We constructed a "bragging board" on which each crew posts its daily bidded man hours each morning. Upon the day's completion, they post the actual time it took to complete the work. This is tallied by day and crew and is a great instrument in keeping the crews goal oriented.

One of their top performance deliverables is completing all jobs within budget. The bidded vs. actual numbers from the bragging board get emphasized in weekly coaching sessions with their direct report. Great numbers earns accolades, more money, and continued

employment. The culture that has been created inspires staff to work within the system. Finally, if they run good numbers

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and want to take a long lunch occasionally, then great, why not? That is a perk of the job.

Maurice Dowell, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, Dowco Enterprises

A. Regarding lunch hours, it's my opinion that the best thing to do is to give your crews specific hours each day to do your work. We used to have large schedule boards where, at the end of each day, the foreman would come record the daily hours. Everyone could see if they were under, on time or over each day and each week. There was incredible peer pressure to stay on budget. If, at the end of the week, they were over on hours, they had to record the number in red. Then, we would take all the crews that were on or under budget and put them in our in-house lottery. On Monday morning, we had a drawing, and the winning crew received a cash reward. This was always a modest amount - back then, more than 10 years ago - \$5 a piece on the crew.

For about \$20 we pretty much kept all the crews on budget. We were running around \$1 million in work in this branch. In this way, I'm not really that concerned if they take 30-minute or 45-minute lunches because as long as they are on budget that's what counts.

Another suggestion would be to have an efficiency meeting every week. Review your crews' budgeted hours with their actual. Keep this a positive meeting; no finger pointing. If a crew is under budget, give them the "attaboy," if they go over, just ask, "Why?" Put the pressure on them. They won't like trying to explain the why in front of their group of peers? I have had clients increase their productivity 5-15 percent and more by using these methods. L&L

Ed Laflamme, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, The Harvest Group

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GOOD WORKS

A grateful embrace

The Ohio Nursery & Landscapers Association and the Ohio Lawn Care Association spent a day sprucing up two military cemeteries.

Nearly 100 people from the Ohio Nursery & Landscapers Association and the Ohio Lawn Care Association spent a Saturday in November doing landscaping work at two military cemeteries in the state as part of the 2011 Grateful Embrace.

Under the direction of Mark Grunmeyer of Buckeye Ecocare, about 40 volunteers helped fertilize and landscape Dayton National Veterans Cemetery in Dayton, Ohio. For almost two decades, volunteers

Volunteers beautify the entrance to the Memorial Garden with new trees, shrubs and mulch.



Approximately 40 volunteers from the Ohio Nursery & Landscape Association and Ohio Lawn Care Association gathered following the morning's ceremony.



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An honor guard prepares for the rifle salute commemorating the day's volunteer service at the Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery in Rittman, Ohio for a Grateful Embrace.



Volunteers and cemetery staff installed mulch and 40 plants, and about five acres of turf were overseeded at Dayton National Veterans Cemetery in Dayton, Ohio as part of the Grateful Embrace project.

have helped out at the cemetery as part of a Grateful Embrace, where about 85 acres of turf was fertilized.

About 40 more volunteers from the Northern half of the state helped to fertilize about 65 acres and landscape sections of the Ohio Western Reserve National Cemetery in Rittman, Ohio.

This year marked the first time the Rittman cemetery was part of a "Grateful Embrace."

In Dayton, the crew also installed 40 plants and mulch, and about five acres of turf were overseeded.

In addition, crews who are actually employed by the two cemeteries also pitched in for the early Saturday morning event.

"It's very rewarding for our members to have a chance to say thanks to our veterans – many of whom have made the ultimate sacrifice," Thompson said.

"If we can help beautify the grounds by offering our expertise and materials, it's just a small way to say thanks to the veterans and their families."

"It is a wonderful opportunity for me and all the volunteers to show our appreciation for what our veterans have done for all of us," says Chris Spellacy, vice president of OLCA.

"I think everyone who participates would agree with me that it is a great experience." **L&L**

Good Works is an occasional feature that highlights charitable projects our readers are working on. If you'd like to see your company's recent good work profiled, send an email to Associate Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.



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TORO

Count on it.

\$7 billion

The trend of buying fresh produce, plants and products from community supported agriculture like local farmers continues to grow. The U.S. Department of Agriculture said sales of **locally produced food is expected to generate \$7 billion in 2012**, up from \$4.8 billion in 2008. "Farmers markets are our new backyard veggie gardens and are becoming our local grocery store," said Susan McCoy of Garden Media Group.



While big corporations may know how to maneuver the tax code, small businesses may be a large evader of taxes. The difference between what the IRS is owed and what it collects grew from \$290 billion in 2001 to \$385 billion in 2006, according to a report in *The Fiscal Times*. And businesses that log income on individual returns – mainly small businesses and farms – accounted for the largest portion of that tax: \$122 billion.



\$122 billion

83%

What organizations or community causes does your company support? And do you publicize how you're giving back? A Cone Survey found **83% of consumers** want to see more brands, products and companies support worthy causes.



73%

How important is plant knowledge to be a landscape architect? A recent survey published in *HortTechnology* found 73% of landscape architects said the profession has distanced itself from plant materials knowledge compared to previous years. Also, 71% of the respondents said recent landscape architect graduates did not have a sufficient amount of plant materials knowledge. When rating themselves, 48% said they had an average amount of knowledge when it comes to plants.



8 in 10

A majority of small-business executives are fed up with the federal government, according to a U.S. Chamber of Commerce January survey. Eight in 10 respondents **said they would prefer Washington to stay out of the way** than provide a helping hand. The survey found 86% of the respondents would rather have more certainty from Washington than assistance (6%) to deal with the economy.

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MARTY GRUNDER is a speaker, consultant and author; he owns Grunder Landscaping Co. www.martygrunder.com; mgrunder@giemedia.com.



Stop wasting time

There are tons of things we landscapers do that waste time and hence money. Good time management shouldn't take much time.

Here are my top 10:

1. HITTING REPLY ALL TO EMAILS.

People frequently hit "reply all" to say "thanks," "great," "way to go" and so on. If you don't have anything to add that everyone must know, then don't hit reply all. We get enough emails that don't impact our lives, don't add to it. *Estimated weekly time saved by not hitting "reply all" and reading all those "reply all" emails: 3 hours.*

2. GOING TO THE BANK. If you are still going to the bank, or sending someone to the

bank with the deposit, STOP! A scanner can sit in your office and eliminate the need to take the time for trips to the bank and you'll get your money in your account faster. Win-win there. *Estimated time savings per week: 2 hours.*

3. LOADING AND UNLOADING TOOLS ON TRUCKS.

Think about how much time you waste by doing this, not to mention the accountability issues associated with lost tools. Your trucks and trailers should have boxes and everything they need, with the exception of your large pieces of equipment, should be on the truck.

Yes, this costs more to set up but, in the long run, you'll more than pay for those boxes. For a

photo of Grunder Landscaping boxes, go to my website, www.MartyGrunder.com. *Estimated time saved per week: 2.5 hours.*

4. NOT MEASURING THE JOB WHEN YOU ARE ON THE SALES CALL.

I have done this, still do it and I need to stop. I know it costs my company less money to take an hour right then and measure things. You know it, too.

So, what are we waiting for? You won't have to go out there again or pay an associate to do the measuring, not to mention you'll get back to your client faster and make more sales. *Estimated time savings per week: 1.5 hours.*

5. NOT HAVING A SCHEDULE BOARD.

You must have one. If you don't, you are wasting time. You should know when every single job you have sold is going to be done. At our company, my managers do not go home until they know exactly what we are doing the next day with a high level of detail.

We know the people, the equipment and so on. Years ago, we had a well-known production/financial consultant to the green industry come in to help us. He commented the night before that he "couldn't wait to see our morning circus." That was an insult to us. And we were happy to have him eat crow and say, "Wow, there's no morning circus here." *Estimated time savings per week: At least 5 man hours per crew in your company.*

6. NOT DOING A TO-DO LIST.

This old trick is the greatest process to follow if you want to get more done. I'm not even going to talk about it. Just do one. *Estimated weekly time savings: 10 man hours.*

7. HAVING A PERSONAL CALENDAR AND A BUSINESS CALENDAR.

Don't do this! Time is time and it's a waste to not look at everything on one

calendar. *Estimated weekly time savings: 1 hour.*

8. NOT HAVING WORK ORDERS.

Like a schedule board, work orders are necessary. When your teams know exactly what they need for a job and how to do it, you are improving your chances greatly for making more money. When you put your work orders together, pretend you won't be available at all when the work is done. If you do that, you'll see what you need to do. *Estimated weekly time savings: 5 man hours per crew.*

9. SMALL TALK.

Give your people time to get their socializing out of the way. Have lunches, do some things after work and, once in a while, let them have a coffee and donuts in the morning. Frame it by saying, "Listen, we all know we have a lot of work to do and we have to be productive. Today, sit down; we're paying you to have a donut and a coffee. We know you work hard for us and you deserve this. In 15 minutes we'll get to work."

Then at the end of the 15 minutes, let your team know what that meeting just cost the company and tell them how important it is to be productive and limit small talk. However, make sure you continue to give your people time so they know you value them and know you can't "go at it" 100 percent all the time. *Estimated time savings weekly: Varies, plus you get donuts.*

10. CELL PHONES. Can't live with them, can't live without them. Stay focused, set a good example with how you use your phone. *Estimated times savings: you tell me!*

There are all types of ways to save time and money in our small businesses. It all starts with your setting the tone for your team. The above will make you a ton of money if you follow them - I can promise you that. **L&L**



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Travels with JIM



JIM HUSTON runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm. www.jrhuston.biz; jhuston@jgmedia.com.

The highest of the high-end

Many of my clients service what I refer to as the "ultra-high-end" residential market. It includes the second (third, fourth, fifth...) home market as well. These residential clients often own numerous homes, not only around the country, but also around the world. One of my landscape installation clients was finishing up a million-dollar project when an armored vehicle pulled up to the residence. In it was his client's wine collection. I don't know about you but my wine collection doesn't come in an armored car. Often it comes in a box (with a handle on top).

This market is different in many aspects. It offers unique opportunities as well as unique risks and challenges. While this segment of the market took a severe financial beating in 2008 and 2009, in today's economy, this is where the money is.

WHO IS IT? This market is comprised of the world's who's who - the so-called "shakers and movers." Old money, new money, it doesn't matter. If you've got it, you're in. If not, you're not.

These individuals generally have a very unique perspective. They've quite often done it all, experienced it all, seen it all... This pervasive life experience often exposes a metaphysical void in the life of these individuals. It can manifest itself in the form of a longing, "Is this all there is?" Or, "What else is out there that I haven't experienced?" Or perhaps, "How can I experience peace, tranquility, serenity? How can I experience

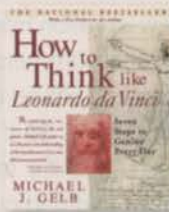
more beauty, more awe and more wonder-lust?"

WHERE IS IT? Geographically, you will often find this client inhabiting particular locations - near lakes, close to ski and golf resorts, along the Kenai River in Alaska, Beverly Hills, Malibu ... the list is almost endless. I have clients in all of these lovely places. But you have to realize that the residential customer living in these climates is as uncommon as the surrounding geography.

WHAT IS IT LOOKING FOR? To truly understand this market, and this individual, you must realize that often they are seeking something very different and often misunderstood. This client is often seeking a quality of life, an existential state that, in its essence, is a borderline spiritual experience.

Too often the contractor focuses upon the plants, trees, mortar, bricks and soil, but misses what their client is looking for - a quality of life experience. One client who specializes in this market put it this way, "Most landscapers take a pile of rocks, plants and trees from their yard and put it in their client's yard." They miss their client's "pain-point" all together.

To help you understand this individual, you should read Michael Gelb's book "How to Think Like Leonardo da Vinci." It's a great read and you should keep extra copies on hand to give to your prospective clients.



If your clients travel like this, then you have a high-end customer base.

WHAT IS SO UNIQUE? Apart from wealth, my clients have and understand some of the traits held in common by the ultra-high-end client. Here are a few.

- **Once burned, twice cautious:** Having recovered from the stock market crash of 2008 and 2009, this client is once again spending money but is looking for quality as much as a good deal.

- **Sophisticated:** This client is often market-wise and financially savvy. Know your numbers and be a straight-shooter with this individual. Do not attempt to pull a fast one on this client. You'll get burned and your reputation will suffer.

- **Project size:** Jobs are generally much smaller than they were four to five years ago. However, the margins on them are often higher.

- **Local vs. the ultra-high-end market:** Contractors must realize that they may be servicing two different markets. The expectations and pricing for the ultra-high-end customer dramatically differs from that of the local one. Initially, my clients often do not grasp this and under-price their work for the upper market.

- **Service oriented:** The

upper-end client demands excellent service. You must provide it.

- **Tough love:** My clients provide excellent service to these clients but will not tolerate disrespect. They often fire obnoxious clients.

- **Market quality of life:** As I said earlier, this client is looking for a certain quality of life. You need to help them find that quality of life but with the appropriate pricing.

CONCLUSION. Many of my clients around the country service the ultra-high-end residential market. It provides an unparalleled opportunity for the contractor who understands this customer and is prepared to service them.

This is a bright spot in today's economy. However, the contractor has to understand what this client wants. They are seeking a quality of life experience.

If you can meet their expectations and gain their trust, the purse strings often open up and you'll have a lifelong customer.

If you can't gain the trust and meet the expectations of this client, you're going to be in for a very rough ride and you should avoid this market until you are prepared to do so. **L&L**

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When an employee isn't an employee

Over the past couple of weeks I have received a large number of comments from landscapers stating they want to fill staffing vacancies with independent contractors.

By hiring independent contractors, companies can avoid paying burdensome administrative costs that will improve their profit margin. Yet, if the IRS or a state agency determines the independent contractor position should be classified as an employee, the company will face sizable fines, tax liabilities, interest charges and retroactive benefits costs.

EMPLOYER CONTROL. The IRS has determined that an independent contractor can be a legal solution if the hiring company satisfies three rigorous tests: behavioral control, financial control and type of employment relationship. These three tests are presented in Form SS-8, which can be downloaded from the IRS website. A company should review this form for every potential independent contractor.

In short, if the employer exerts control over the worker, the worker should be classified as an employee. Conversely, if the worker demonstrates control over his/her own work habits, the worker may be considered an independent contractor.

When preparing to classify a worker as an independent contractor, the company must ask the following 11 questions that correspond to the three IRS tests before making an advanced decision:

- 1) Does your company provide the worker with direction about required work hours, where the work must be done, or the sequence in which the work must be completed; let the worker use company tools, materials, or equipment; or specify where the worker must purchase supplies?
- 2) Does your company provide any training to the worker?
- 3) Does your company reimburse the worker for job-related expenses?
- 4) Does your company have more equipment, resources, or materials invested in the work being performed than the worker does?

5) Does your company insist the worker work only for your company throughout the duration of the contract?

6) Does your company pay the worker without first receiving an invoice?

7) Does your company have more profit and loss concerns for the work being performed, than the worker actually doing the work?

8) Does your company allow the worker to perform work without first signing a thorough Independent Contractor Agreement?

9) Does your company provide benefits (e.g., medical, 401k, workers' compensation, vacation) to the worker?

10) Does your company plan to provide continuous work for the worker beyond the completion date of the current project?

11) Does your company expect the worker to perform functions that are a key aspect of regular business operations?

If the answer is "yes" to any of those questions, the worker may actually be an employee, instead of an independent contractor. The more "yes" responses

there are, the more certain the "employee's" status becomes.

ACTIONS TO AVOID. Even when a company correctly classifies a worker as an independent contractor, certain actions can still create ambiguity regarding the worker's employment status. As such, the following key actions identify what a company must not do when dealing with an independent contractor:

- Subject the independent contractor to the same management control as an employee
- Employ an independent contractor lacking an IRS Employer Identification Number
- Introduce the independent contractor as an "employee" to anyone
- Allow the independent contractor to do the same work as company employees
- Distribute a company badge, uniform or vehicle to the independent contractor
- Hire an independent contractor who has not first completed the IRS W9 Form
- Represent the sole source of financial income for the independent contractor
- Invite the independent contractor to "employee" social functions
- Give a company employee handbook to the independent contractor
- Hold the independent contractor to the company's attendance, discipline or moonlighting policies

SUMMARY. To accurately select an independent contractor, extensive consideration must be applied to the position classification process, the content of the Independent Contractor Agreement and performance accountabilities.

A situation with this much impact should be discussed with a qualified lawyer, human resources professional and accountant before making a final decision. **L&L**

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{ By Kristen Hampshire }

Fueling the tradition

Stewcare has run an all-diesel fleet for 20 years and stands by this alternative for its efficiency edge.

Stewcare was an early adopter of diesel engine technology. When a mower manufacturer approached the company in the mid-1980s with this fuel alternative, founder Mike Stewart agreed to give it a try.

"We recognized the power and efficiency and longevity of the (lawn) tractor itself was going to be amplified by going to diesel," says Stewart's son, also Mike Stewart and now president of the family business in Delaware, Ohio.

Efficiency is a big deal when crews mow hundreds of acres each week. Stewcare's primarily commercial clientele includes 35 athletic fields in Central Ohio, three cemeteries, two of the area's largest school districts and a college campus. Plus, the company's 25-percent residential customer base is mostly estate properties 1-5 acres in size.

"Because we are running all diesel engines and all 72-inch cutting decks, the acreage we can mow in one day much less an entire workweek is almost mind-blowing," Stewart says, unable to pinpoint an exact number. All he knows is that each mower holds 8 gallons of fuel and tanks are replenished every other day. And that's really stretching fuel dollars for the volume of cuts Stewcare performs.

Sure, diesel fuel is more expensive. "But we are not using as much," Stewart says, adding that the fuel also seems to put less stress on engines. For instance, the company recently said goodbye to a member of its fleet: a 2004 mower with more than 4,300 hours on it.

BEST PRACTICES
MAINTENANCE



Mike Stewart and Mike Stewart Jr. switched to an all-diesel fleet in the mid-1980s and never looked back.



That's eight rigorous commercial mowing seasons. It sold for \$3,800. "That is unheard of in the world of used lawn mowers," Stewart says.

Stewcare is dedicated to running on diesel for many reasons: engine life, fuel efficiency, crew productivity and the ability to better compete in a tough maintenance market. Actually, longevity, in general, is a sort of theme at the 35-year old company, which Stewart's father propagated from a janitorial services firm he started in the 1970s. Large building clients asked him to manage snow and ice, then landscape maintenance, and the business evolved, specialized and flourished from there.

Now, Stewart "runs the show," according to Mike Stewart Sr., who is involved in daily operations but working a succession plan toward retirement. "I wanted my dad to know that his company would be here, and I'm looking to do what he has done and carry that on," says son Stewart. And that includes the decision to stick with diesel.



Read how Stewcare breaks down the numbers of using diesel vs. fuel and sign up for the A Cut Above e-newsletter at www.lawnandlandscape.com/newsletters.

TUNE IN

Mike Stewart was having one of those days where everything went wrong.

"I started thinking, 'I think there are a lot of people out there in our industry who could relate or experience the same things we do day in and day out – the good times, the bad times,'" Stewart says.

So in summer 2010, Stewart decided to start filming the everyday stuff with his cousin, a computer programming major in college who was helping Stewcare launch its new website.

Stewart created a YouTube channel called Mowing Pains, and he started with a basic introduction to the company: an interview with his father and a tour of the shop.

Then Stewart started carrying his camera along on job sites to document the crews at work. The result is a series of YouTube videos that share a true day-in-a-life experience with fellow landscapers and customers who are interested in knowing more about what goes on behind the scenes at Stewcare.

"Our target audience is other industry professionals and the average homeowner who, on the weekend, loves to get out in the yard," Stewart says. "I feel we can offer something of value to them because of our experience."

So far, the feedback on Stewcare's YouTube channel has been positive. "I got a comment from a 13-year-old who said he loves our videos and our company is inspiring him to go out and do this work," Stewart says.

Also, the exposure Stewcare gains from posting videos online is helpful for driving traffic to the company's website. YouTube is one more tool for getting the word out about the services the company offers.

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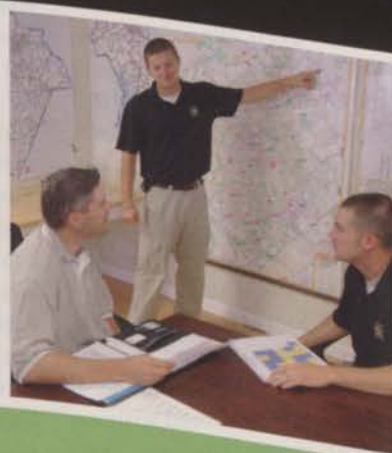
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Selling smart irrigation

Getting clients onboard with more efficient – and sometimes more expensive – technology means showing them the ROI.

Judith Benson, president of Clear Water PSI, says there are a couple approaches to getting more residential customers to buy into smarter irrigation practices. It can certainly be tricky considering the technology and services can be more expensive. But it's something that her Winter Springs, Fla.-based company has learned to do.

The first thing an irrigation contractor should do on a property that may be a good fit for smart technology is a complete assessment. "You need to qualify to your client what their water usage is and as a result, what the savings could be," Benson says. "The truth is it's not always going to generate savings. If



Benson

you have a very conservative property, the smart technology could actually increase their water use and would not result in any savings. But for those properties noted as an upper-end consumer, you should be able to easily identify return on investment for their water use. Before you do anything else, you need to show the client that information."

Getting the ideal contract in order is also critical. Benson says that performance-based contracting is something to consider on these properties, but admits it can be a matter of trial and error.

And that can be risky. But she says that once you get the confidence, a performance-based contract works very well. "You just have to do your homework to sell it," she adds. "That means showing the ROI. Then you may be able to hand them a full package."

But even after that happens, Benson says you can't just install the technology and walk away from it. In fact, she says that's one of the biggest mistakes that irrigation contractors can make. They assume the new technology is self-sufficient.

"In Florida, we can have some severe weather changes and the condition of a landscape can be altered within a week or two," she says. "You have to expect that you're going to need to do follow-ups. And you have to build into your contract enough profit to cover the expenses involved with follow-ups. That's an area where contractors can lose money because

they thought the technology would handle itself."

Contractors should also realize that learning about some of this new technology can take time. Benson says diving in can be a big mistake.

"You've got to be familiar with the technology before you start risking a \$25,000 landscape," she says. "Start out small and work your way up – just make sure you know what you're doing. You also need to realize that there's a lot out there. You don't need to go with the name brand just because you've heard of it. Consider looking past that and exploring the options. There's some really interesting technology out there today."

To read about more trends Benson is seeing in the Florida market and to sign up for the Water Works e-newsletter, www.lawandlandscape.com/newsletters.



Contractors can't install smart technology and walk away.

A STREAM OF OPPORTUNITIES

Over the years, the primary responsibility of growing the business has rested on Benson's shoulders and she says one of the smartest things she did in the early years was to introduce the company to local government.

"Working with local government gave us a nice stable base, which was under contract," Benson says. "In the beginning, stability counted for a lot."

Today one of the features that Clear Water PSI has become known for is what Benson has termed an "irrigation evaluation." It's something

that the local municipalities were very interested in, as they did not have the budget for a full audit.

"Irrigation audits are extremely detailed and that can also equate to being costly," Benson says. "I designed a copyrighted method that basically scales down an irrigation audit. It takes some of the irrigation audit perspective but dials it down to a more hands-on inspection. An evaluation includes water scheduling, maintenance that may have been overlooked, and sometimes may even include a bit of a tweak to the existing design. It's a service that we've become known for and that clients have appreciated. In Florida, Clear Water PSI has done approximately 6,000 irrigation evaluations and audits, combined."



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work Barnwell Gardens does is create and maintain the Signature Garden – a concept Barnwell developed in conjunction with grower Proven Winners – at the Hotel Iroquois, an intimate Victorian-style boutique hotel known for its quaint, cottage gardens.

“The exposure of having larger hotel/resort properties as clients has allowed us to really show off our unique gardening concepts,” says Barnwell. Not surprisingly, he looks to historic building or engineering feats for inspiration. “And then I try to translate that to my small world of plants and place,” he says. “It makes for some pretty wild days.”

A wild day as defined by Barnwell goes something like this: figuring out how to install 35 stone steps, using gigantic boulders and rock walls, on a sloped property. Each step is 6-8 inches thick and 3-4 feet deep. The landscape slopes down toward the water’s edge of Lake Michigan.

PLANTING MACKINAC AT HOME

The most surprising aspect of the gardens at Hotel Iroquois, according to Barnwell: “The fact that there are so many flowers and not a single weed.” That’s because flowers are packed tightly into beds for maximum impact. “This not only creates a carpet of color, texture, shapes and scent, but it also does not allow for any weeds to compete,” he says.

Barnwell’s high-impact design at the hotel is accomplished by planting densely, experimenting with different varieties and by implementing a cottage garden style that evolves as Barnwell digs into the project.

“I do come up with a color scheme and overall theme for the gardens by the previous January so I can get my (plant) order in, but a detailed design would be very hard for me to do for that particular property because of the gardening style,” he says.

Here are some design techniques Barnwell incorporates into the Hotel Iroquois gardens.

CONTAINERS. Pots of color bring fragrance and style onto porches and seating areas.

POCKET GARDENS. Private spaces for guests to enjoy and linger offer an intimate feel.

WINDOW BOXES. Color climbs the walls with the use of window planters.

SEATING SPOTS. Creating areas for guests to take in the surroundings promotes appreciation of the property.

Labor of love

Working by horse and hand, Barnwell Landscape and Garden Services designs and builds stunning resort displays using innovative techniques.

Jack Barnwell often tells his crew to “think like an Egyptian” while unloading and planting by hand everything from flats of annuals to 20-foot maple trees with 4-foot-wide burlap balls. The old-fashioned way is protocol on Mackinac Island, Mich., a throwback resort community that banned the “horseless carriage” (we know them as automobiles) in the early 1900s when the popping, backfiring engine noise scared horses.

The ban stuck. And today, landscapers like Jack Barnwell, president, Barnwell Landscape and Garden Services, have a slim two-week window of time at the beginning or end of the vacation season to use machinery for digging foundations and such. The rest of the back-breaking labor must be done by horse and hand.

This requirement has ac-

tually inspired Barnwell to work smarter and invent ways of hauling materials (by bike cart), placing step-sized boulders (by pulley) and placing plant material by hand. “Look at some of the most monumental, beautiful structures in the world and all over Europe,” Barnwell says. “There are huge, stone sculptures and arches and incredible bridges that were built before there were excavators, front-end loaders and forklifts. There was knowledge of how to do things without killing yourself,” he jokes. “And unfortunately, that art has been forgotten because there is an easier way (with machinery). I feel really blessed that I have been forced to relearn some of these alternatives to doing the work we do.”

Specifically, the



Barnwell



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The great debate

Here's why one LCO uses liquid over granular applications.

There is an age-old debate among landscape companies as to whether liquid or granular fertilizers offer better results, efficiency and cost-effectiveness when it comes to turf management. Yet for industry veteran Andrew Adams, president of Capital Turf Management in Huntingdon Valley, Pa., that contest was settled long ago.

"Liquid fertilizers are less expensive, more accurate and there's a lot less cleanup," says Adams, whose \$1.5 million company has offices in Pennsylvania and Maryland and provides commercial turf management. "As long as you get solid coverage with liquid fertilizers, you're going to get good results."

Since 2003, when Adams founded Capital Turf to focus on commercial turf management, he has subcontracted with large landscapers to maintain athletic fields, swim clubs, churches, high schools, colleges and universities, just to name a few. Over the years, he's developed a business model that allows him to apply fertilizer to large properties both economically and profitably.

"I'm preloaded for five acres, whereas with granular, you can put four to five bags in and only do one acre," Adams says. "My guy is just spraying, spraying, spraying."

Of course, Adams hasn't sworn off granular fertilizers entirely – they're often good for small-scale residential



Liquid fertilizers can save time and money.

use and late fall applications when weed control isn't an issue, he says. Yet he maintains that more and more turf management companies are following his lead and switching to liquid-only applications. Here's why.

BLANKET COVERAGE. Liquid fertilizers are preferable, Adams says, because they allow turf management companies to provide fertilizer and weed control in a single, blanket application.

"You can put crabgrass pre-emergent herbicide, weed control and fertilizer into one application, and then blanket spray over everything," he says.

Getting it right the first time is important when you are servicing hundreds of commercial properties every year.

"It's very hard, in my opinion, to do a 90-acre site and do a spot treatment for weed control," he says. "In the commercial realm of things, you can often only do two applications a year, so we have to almost be perfect."

EFFICIENT APPLICATION. Granular fertilizers can be effective when covering a small, focused area, yet bigger guns are needed to do an application to a large commercial property.

"If you're doing granular, there are good machines out there, but they go 6-7 miles per hour and have a boom that allows you to spot-treat," Adams says. "That makes it harder to blanket spray, and sometimes you have to go over sites twice."

By way of contrast, Capital Turf's crew members employ a 300-gallon boom sprayer with handguns, allowing them to spray liquid fertilizer in broad, 15-foot swaths. "We can cover everything," Adams says. **L&L**

Adams has six more reasons why he prefers to use liquid over granular applications. To read them and sign up for the Growing Green e-newsletter, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/newsletters.



PROFITING FROM SNOW – WITHOUT A PLOW

The extreme winter weather that's been hitting the Northeastern U.S. in recent years has often made it tough for plows to clear the roads effectively. Yet that has led to a profitable side business for Capital Turf Management.

"If there's a storm, cities and towns will call us in to pre-treat the roadways," Adams says. "We have a truck with a modified boom arm, and we use that to apply a combination of salt and magnesium calcium. We will put lines in the roadway, and when temperatures get to a certain level, that helps to melt the snow."

Perhaps the best part is that Capital gets paid for the service

whether it snows or not, unlike plowing businesses that are sometimes dependent upon the snowfall an area receives.

"It's a crapshoot for people," Adams says. "We'll get a call and do it, and if it turns into rain, then we still get paid."

Adams believes that add-on services such as this one, if they are properly thought out and managed, can be very profitable for landscape companies.

"As much competition as there is, it's not a bad idea to diversify a little bit," he says. "As long as you stay focused on your main thing and it doesn't take away from what you know best."



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Winning bids

Customers are shopping and property managers are collecting multiple bids. How do you win business in this environment? By Kristen Hampshire

How low can you go? That's what prospective clients want to know today – and they're inviting multiple companies to the bidding table to collect proposals for landscape services, and any service for that matter.

"Owners and property managers are much more active in shopping all of their facility services," says George Gaumer, vice president and general manager of

the commercial grounds management division of The Davey Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio.

Existing clients want to know how you can nip-tuck that contract so the price looks svelter. Residential customers call for your services, but let you know they're collecting offers to work on their property. (As if you needed the reminder that you're not the only game in town.)

Property managers have orders from the "big man" to "cut costs across the board." And that means deflating the size of the check that goes to you, too.

So how do you compete and win in this stifling bidding environment? *Lawn & Landscape* spoke with three firms that shared their approach to creating proposals that please prospects without sacrificing profit.

Prequalify before proposing



Davey Commercial Grounds Management, a division of The Davey Tree Expert Co.

George Gaumer, vice president and general manager, commercial grounds management
LOCATION Kent, Ohio **ESTABLISHED** 1880 **EMPLOYEES** 7,000 in season **2011 REVENUES** \$600 million **CUSTOMERS** 100% commercial **SERVICES** tree care, lawn care, landscaping

Not every customer is "the one." That's why prequalification is such an integral part of the sales process at Davey Commercial Grounds Management. Managers make sure a job fits the company profile before bidding on it.

"It's best to understand and learn which customers are the ones that will fit your company's capabilities best, because they are going to be the ones you will have the highest batting average on in terms of closing ratio," says George Gaumer, vice president and general manager for the commercial grounds division at The Davey Tree Expert Co. in Kent, Ohio.

Special attention is paid to these job characteristics before any bid goes out: location, property size and how the property is used (retail, HOA, etc.).

If a job is a match for Davey, then it's on to the bidding process, which Gaumer says has become more competitive over the last few years. "More owners and property managers are shopping all of their facility services, not just landscaping," he says.

For Davey, this means more opportunities to bring on new business, Gaumer says. And it also means sticking to that prequalification process.

About 40 percent of the commercial grounds division's business today comes from bid invitations from qualified companies. The remainder stems from negotiated sales: a customer calls Davey, but is also comparing its proposal to other service providers' offers.

Gaumer says another change is the scope of work requested from clients.

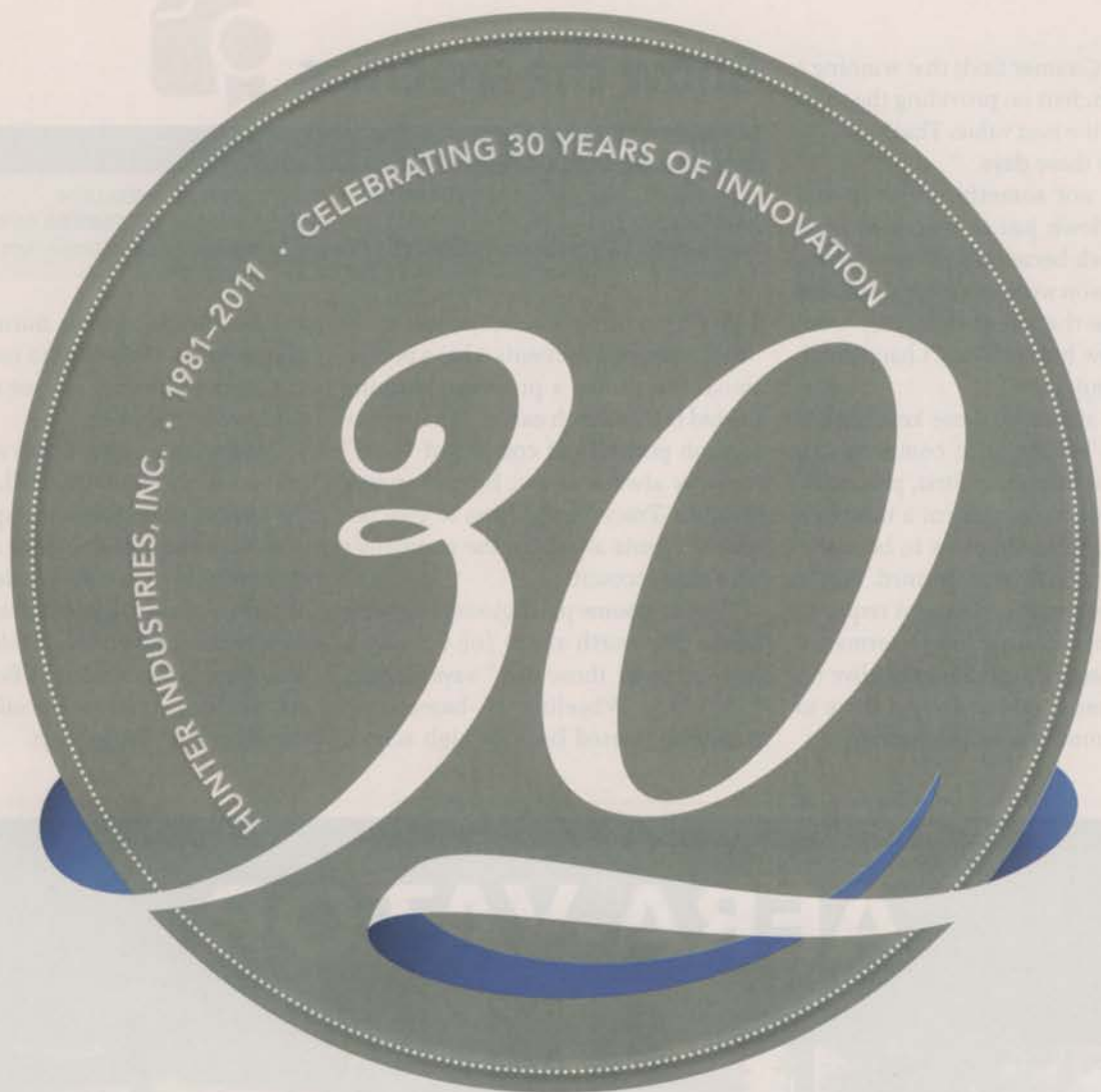
QUICK TIPS

Define the ideal. What type of customer is the best fit for your company? Consider this question seriously and filter prospective customers before you bid on any job.

Quantify and customize. What does a job truly entail? And, given the budget, what services can you perform and still make a comfortable profit? "A universal change in the business is having to be more creative in the scope of work to give consumers what they want," Gaumer says.

Monitor the job. Winning a bid also means retaining the job, and this requires constantly managing the property to ensure that the work performed matches bid specifications.

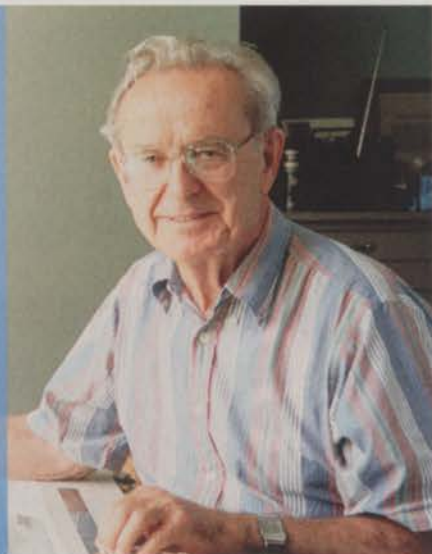
Davey has to be creative because "the customer doesn't want a lot of extra frills," he says. In years past, if Davey estimated a job and recommended five lawn care applications rather than the client's requested four, this suggestion would be presented and generally accepted by the client. Same goes for landscape enhancements and maintenance. "We can't do that anymore," Gaumer says. "There is no room in the price for that."



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Instead, Gaumer finds that winning a bid is dependent on providing the most service for the best value. That's just the way it goes these days.

Price is not something Davey will negotiate down just to win a job. And it's lost work because of it. Sometimes Davey has won work it previously bid on because the client originally went with the low bid and wasn't happy with the end result.

Gaumer stands by these key steps to winning a bid that the company can service up to standard: First, prequalify the prospect, then perform a thorough quantification of all assets to be maintained and tasks to be performed. Figure in labor hours and equipment required to do the job. Manage the performance of the job and ensure the results live up to the bid promise. Finally, continue to focus on running a lean operation.

Show the specifics



Bertog Landscape

Tracy Bertog, founder and CEO **LOCATION** Wheeling, Ill. **ESTABLISHED** 1974
EMPLOYEES 100 to 110 in season **2011 REVENUES** \$7 million **CUSTOMERS** 50% commercial; 50% residential **SERVICES** design/build, maintenance, irrigation/lighting, snow

When Bertog Landscape can show prospective clients what a professional can do for a property, winning the bid is that much easier. Sure, a photograph portfolio of completed "wow" projects always helps. But whenever possible, Tracy Bertog likes to give potential clients a tour of the company's blue chip accounts.

"We have some prestigious properties across the north shore (of Chicago), and we point those out," says Bertog, CEO of the Wheeling, Ill.-based firm, which he started back in high school

and has steadily grown during the last four decades. "We offer to meet clients at a property so they can see the type of work we accomplish."

Quality costs more. That's why it's important to show, not just tell, prospects the kind of value they can expect.

Also, Bertog aims to make all bid presentations in person at the client's home or office. "If we can get in front of them, walk them through the whole proposal and share how we do it at Bertog, they get a better feel and see the value in what we are doing," Bertog says.

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Spelling out this quality is more important now than ever before. Because clients and prospects are asking for more – “Will you throw in this service ... add this shrub?” – and expecting that the company pick up the tab as a favor, an extra. “It’s becoming difficult to say no, and hold your ground and let them know what’s not in the contract,” Bertog says.

And it’s even harder to walk away from a job or opportunity to bid. But Bertog does if he recognizes that price is the only factor a prospect cares about. “I don’t know how some companies can afford to do the work as cheap as its being bidded out,” he says. “And unfortunately, some clients are willing to accept lower quality to save money. Standards have dropped. And a lot of companies aren’t following specifications.”

Bertog points out, companies like his can win back those clients. “We

had a blizzard here last winter and a lot of companies didn’t perform well, so we picked up new business that way,” Bertog says.

In the end, he finds that sticking to his high-value prop wins the best clients.

And being flexible also helps. For existing clients that threaten to bid out the work to get a lower price, Bertog does work to tailor the proposal to meet a new, lower budget. One of Bertog’s “Big 19” clients needed to shave 5 percent off its costs. “I said, ‘When we get to the late summer months, we can skip two (mowing) visits,’ and that got us down the 5 percent.”

Bertog is glad when existing clients ask how they can lower the bill. “We can help them work through it,” he says.

What he isn’t pleased about and is seeing much more is that 30-day notice from clients with multi-year contracts.

QUICK TIPS

Show them quality. If possible, give potential clients a tour of winning properties you care for to show them what theirs could look like if they accept your bid. At the very least, show a portfolio of your work.

Offer budget solutions. If an existing client wants to keep your service but needs to trim back the landscaping budget, review the scope of work and find ways to trim back services, Bertog says.

Hold your ground. You can’t work for free. There’s a cost to the services you provide. “Work with your bookkeeper to know what your numbers truly are and continue to strive to stay profitable,” he says.

“A competitor comes in and says they’ll do the job for half of what you were getting paid and the client sends you a 30-day notice and cancels the contract you priced based on being there three years,” Bertog says.

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There's really no way to plan for this. "If out of the blue, a clients says, 'We are sending this job out to bid,' then you drop your bid," he says, "... and the others come in under you, and you still don't get the work back."

Bertog says the company can't ride

on getting work like this because these types of clients aren't sustainable.

So instead, his crews work hard to exceed expectations. "If a customer only cares about money and doesn't care what the property looks like, that's not a good mix for us," he says.

Education by explanation



Mariani Landscape

Lee Keenan, director of construction project management **LOCATION** Lake Bluff, Ill. **ESTABLISHED** 1958 **EMPLOYEES** 400 in season **2011 REVENUES** \$30 million **CUSTOMERS** 90% residential; 10% commercial **SERVICES** design/build, maintenance, snow, seasonal retail

It's not unusual in this environment to compete with a dozen companies for an attractive account. But if you're the company that wins the job, the success could stoke a feeling of insecurity.

Did you make a mistake in your pricing? Did you forget to specify a service, include certain materials costs, figure in subcontractor labor? Uh, oh.

"After the excitement of getting the big project comes fear and questioning whether you made a mistake somewhere because there were so many people bidding on the project," says Lee Keenan, director of construction project management at Mariani Landscape in Lake Bluff, Ill.


Mariani Landscape is generally not in this position because the high-end design/build firm usually doesn't produce the lowest bid. And, importantly, the company takes care to compete at its level. "We know we can't always be competitive in every arena, so we focus on (jobs) that are in our scope and fit our company," Keenan says.

The sweet spot for Mariani is high-end residential design/build projects that may eventually turn into long-term maintenance/enhancement accounts. Even so, the firm feels pricing pressure like any landscape company these days. "In the world we live in, people are being more conscientious than ever to make sure they get value for their dollars," Keenan says.

That's why explaining proposals in detail is a big part of winning the bid.

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Mariani Landscape's proposals are extremely thorough, listing out services and descriptions of exactly what each line item entails. For example, bringing on a masonry contractor for an outdoor living space, or identifying each step in amending soil to improve drainage.

Ultimately, the proposal doubles as an estimate and an educational tool.

"When there are multiple bids, it's important for clients to understand that we are their advocate," Keenan says.

And it's equally important for clients and prospects to understand fully what a proposal includes so they can make a smart decision among service providers. That means including every dirty detail.

"We cover every specification of a project and explain our process – we explain that we are not going to take steps one or two, but our processes

might involve four or five steps that, in the long-term, ensure the best finished product," Keenan says.

Clients are only expecting the best, he says. "We have to explain why our number might be higher than someone else's and how we bring value to the project."

The more information a proposal includes, the better, Keenan says. Clients do not want to see added costs mid-project because a proposal didn't cover every material, labor hour, you name it. "We don't want to go back to the client for extras," Keenan says, adding that project prices are well thought out to avoid this.

Mariani Landscape also reviews the maintenance investment design/build projects will require before any contract is signed. "We don't want clients to be surprised at how much it will cost to

QUICK TIPS

Give them details. Use the proposal as a tool to educate clients on how your company performs work so customers understand the costs associated with your services.

Choose your position. Who are your competitors in the industry? The answer is not everyone. Determine what your value proposition is and stick to it. Don't allow low-bidders to tempt you to drop pricing if being the low-priced provider is not where you play.

Know when to walk away. And when to run. Remember, you run a for-profit business that is sustained by the fees you collect on services rendered. In other words, set limits on how low you are willing to go – and don't work for free.

maintain the landscape and keep it moving forward," Keenan says. **L&L**

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

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POWER PLAYERS

BY CHUCK BOWEN

We got the best and brightest to weigh in on their own challenges, opportunities and the future of the landscape industry.

Last fall in Louisville, *Lawn & Landscape* invited the owners and executives from top companies across the country to sit down and talk. Regional to international. Two million a year to \$600 million. They do tree care, commercial maintenance, high-end residential design/build, snow removal, lawn care.

The idea was to bring together strong, intelligent voices and take a pulse of what the industry's best minds think about 2012 and beyond. Over the course of three hours, we talked sales, pricing, closing contracts, labor and regulations.

All year, *Lawn & Landscape* will be running excerpts of the conversation. In the first installment, we discuss the crumbling H-2B program, \$19-an-hour production rates and what to do when your own church cuts your bid.



BOB GROVER

Pacific Landscape Management
Hillsboro, Ore.



MAURICE DOWELL

Dowco Enterprises
Chesterfield, Mo.



CHRIS KUJAWA
KEI, Oak Creek, Wis.



SCOTT JAMIESON
Bartlett Tree Experts
Stamford, Conn.



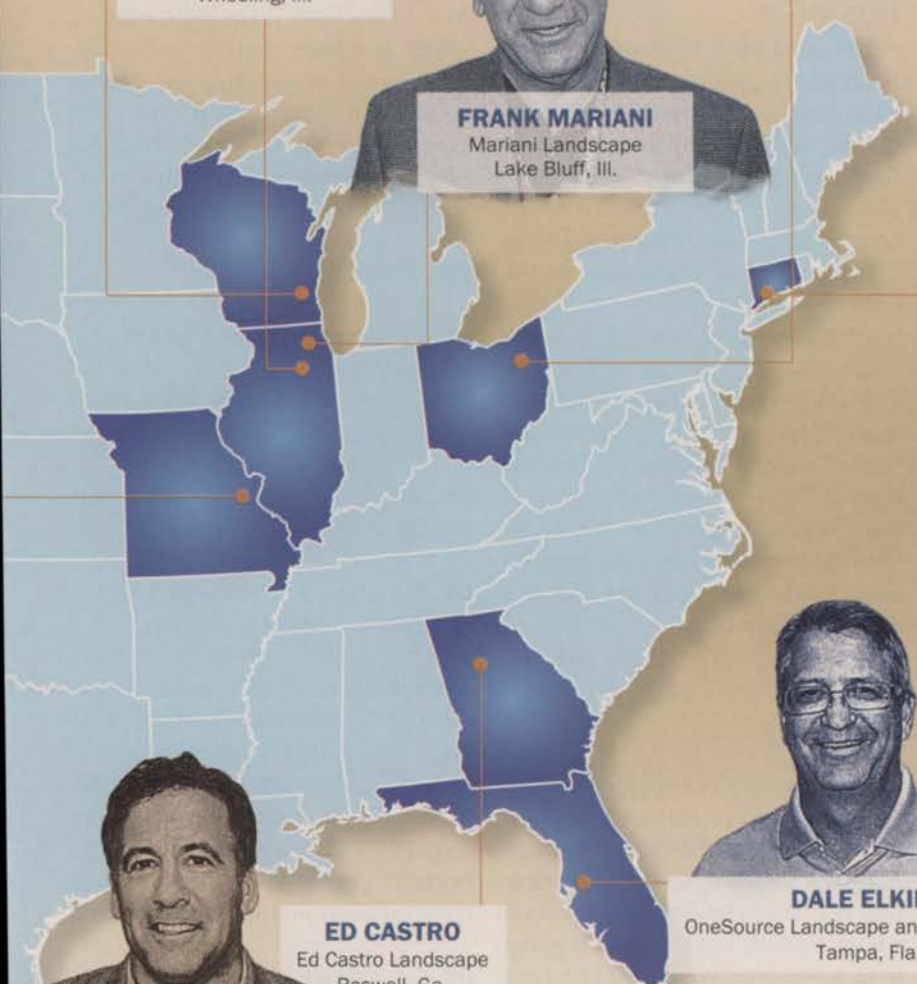
TRACY BERTOG
Bertog Landscape
Wheeling, Ill.



GEORGE GAUMER
Davey Commercial
Grounds Management
Kent, Ohio



FRANK MARIANI
Mariani Landscape
Lake Bluff, Ill.



ED CASTRO
Ed Castro Landscape
Roswell, Ga.



DALE ELKINS
OneSource Landscape and Golf Services
Tampa, Fla.

L&L: When you look at this year and 2012, what do you see as your biggest challenges to your companies? What are you working on to stay ahead of the curve?

Chris Kujawa: I think the biggest challenge is just going to be, in general, the uncertainty of the economy. We have it pretty well; a lot of our clients are the Fortune 100 companies that are headquartered in Milwaukee.

The upcoming presidential election are going to be a major factor. If it goes status quo, then it's going to be another soft four years, but if it turns around, then it could turn around fast.

Labor for us has not been a problem at all. If we would put ads in the paper we would have guys come in tomorrow who are guys with experience. We don't want to sprint ahead, but just keep a steady pace, and find mid-level to upper-level people to handle that load, that's our challenge. Materials, production, and pricing are not really a challenge for us.

L&L: Are the rest of you guys seeing the same things?

Maurice Dowell: I wish that people were just walking in our door, production line people. We don't see that. But we're dependent on H-2B and that's one of our concerns. It's a huge challenge. Looking into the future, with the unemployment rate the way that it is, I don't think that Congress is going to be sympathetic to our needs. But I do see a lot of Americans that do need work.

"It's a responsibility that we're going to have to take in that we have to **reenergize America's workforce**. It's a tall order but I think it's essential. This \$30,000 job is going to be the new norm, and you're going to have to learn how to raise a family off of that. That's that factory job that my grandfather or my father had."

- ED CASTRO

"Even **my own church** that I've been going to for 30 years called and told me they got an unsolicited bid 15 percent less than what we were charging. 'We hate to do it but what can you do for us?'"

- TRACY BERTO

Bob Grover: Speaking of the H-2B program, we're reliant on that ourselves, but we have made a strategic decision to move away from that because it is so uncertain. Combined with that is the growing pressure to implement E-Verify. So I think that the whole labor issue is going to be one of our biggest challenges, and we're probably all going to be in the same boat, but the uncertainty there of where our labor will come from is definitely our biggest concern.

Frank Mariani: I think that any time you have to partner with Washington, chances are you're going to lose. So at Mariani, as far as we're concerned, H-2B is dead.

The good news is a couple things: Number one, all of us talked about what our revenues were, and I think that is probably the worst thing about the members of our association; they focus on the top line instead of the bottom line. So one of the things we're doing at Mariani is focusing on the bottom line.

Secondly, I think as tough as things are, personally, if you look at the amount of revenue that is available to all of us, I just look at Mariani and think, "Well, I'll just take the Chicago market," and I'd be very happy. So I want to get a bigger piece of the pie. Obviously we couldn't do all the work that's available to us in just Chicago. So I just have to figure out how to beat my competition. And I like that challenge.

Ed Castro: We had a lot of concern on immigration reform in the state of Georgia and in Alabama. Migrant workers are not even coming through Alabama to get to Georgia because they're going to be arrested. Atlanta is a huge market, and the labor is going to be a problem. We have 22 percent minority participation, but they are all

new. They are all new. We're going to high schools now. Trade schools, also. Not just college graduates.

It's a responsibility that we're going to have to reenergize America's workforce. This \$30,000 job is going to be the new norm, and you're going to have to learn how to raise a family off of that. That's that factory job that my grandfather or my father had.

Dale Elkins: We're finding people in Florida. Did anyone go to the Kevin Kehoe talk to see that \$19/hour rate on his map chart? The state has always had that pressure, but it's been extremely difficult in the past two years. You couple that challenge with the foreclosure issue in the HOA market, which is a huge market in Florida. So it hasn't been hiring the people so much in Florida but it's the price pressures, to not only keep work but to sell new work, that's eating away at your discretionary and training spend.

FM: What's the \$19/hour?

DE: I interpreted it as the retail rate for man hours. (Kehoe was citing the prevailing rate for basic commercial maintenance in Florida. - Eds.)

FM: People should be killed for that kind of number.

DE: There's no way you could bid that number and expect to survive.

FM: I think when those numbers get out, the 15 percent profit margin, \$19/hour, I think that it's all bullshit.

And unfortunately I think that sometimes at these types of events like GIC, it almost perpetuates itself, because people start throwing out these numbers that are just ridiculous.

DE: You haven't seen anything unless you come to Florida.

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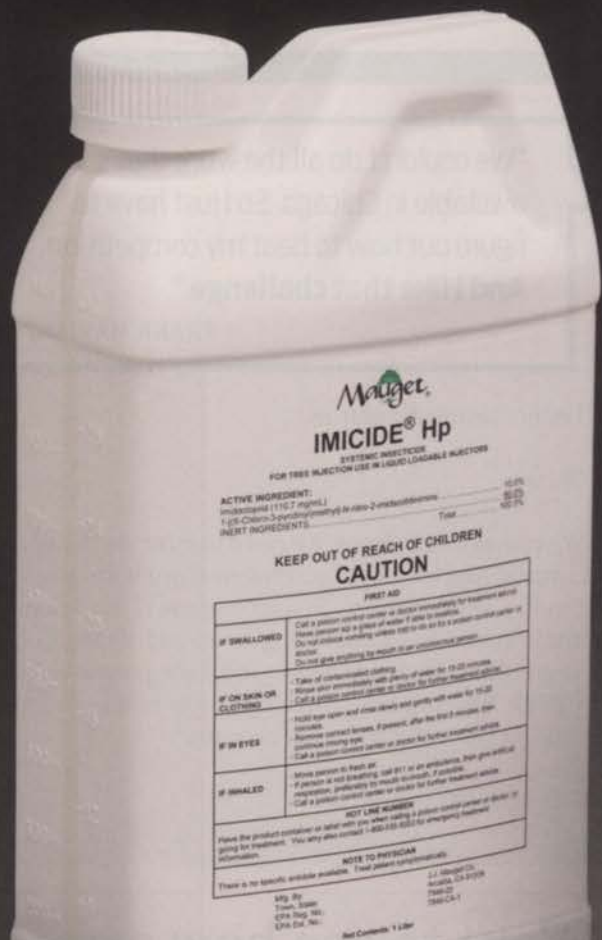
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Inject the Best.



"We couldn't do all the work that's available in Chicago. So I just have to figure out how to beat my competition. **And I like that challenge.**"

— FRANK MARIANI

FM: I'm not saying it's untrue.

DE: Oh, it is.

FM: We can go to the dance, we can dance, or we can decide not to dance. And for that 15 percent gross profit margin, \$19/hour stuff, I'm not dancin'. You go to some of the seminars and conventions and somebody gets up and shows a chart that says, "This much per hour," and I see people writing, and I think "Jesus Christ. There's going to be a guy at \$19/hour and 15 percent gross profit margins."

EC: And he thinks that it's OK.

DE: He's going to bank on getting the enhancement work to make up the "magical" difference. He's going to bank on all this money coming from a different supplemental profit. And that's where it's more dangerous.

FM: At \$1 million it works, but at \$5 million, you're really going to be losing money.

MD: It's really not even the smaller guys, these are the bigger guys that are at \$19/hour. And our consultants come in and say, "You know if you're going to be competitive, you have got to go below \$30/hour for maintenance. And the closer you get to \$20, the more successful you are going to be at getting those contracts." That scares the heck out of me.

FM: I think that that is a flawed philosophy. I think that you have to figure out how to differentiate yourself and your services from everybody else so that you can charge the appropriate dollar amount. I mean our business has grown 9 percent this year, and it's not because we were the lowest bidding contractor in Chicago.

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Tracy Bertog: I'm finding there's a lot of loyalty with our residential clients, but our commercial ones we're finding that guys are putting in unsolicited bids, and then we get the call, "Hey I hate to do this but times are tight ...". Even my own church that I've been going to for 30 years called me one day and told me they got an unsolicited bid 15 percent less than what we were charging. We hate to do it but what can you do for us?

We split it, and they stuck with us, but I'm seeing those unsolicited bids showing up everywhere now that are ridiculously lower than where we're at. And these are accounts we've had for 15-20 years. But luckily our residential clients have been very loyal.

"Money is tight, but there's two things tighter: **time and talent.**"

- CHRIS KUJAWA

L&L: What do you do to combat that?

TB: We do what we can. With the church we dropped 7.5 percent, but we had to take out a fertilization and we had to cut back the scope of work that we do.

CK: I'm very blunt about it. I tell them there's a reason that you have unsolicited bids. We've actually gotten two rather large maintenance accounts because they were afraid that the guy who had been servicing them was going to go out of business - that the bank was going to call to loan, that things were shaky; they needed somebody that they knew that they could count on. I bring it right up. I say, "There's a reason that we're KEI. There's a reason there's only a couple other guys like us in town. And there's a reason that there's all of the other guys." Nine times out of 10 that flies, because money is tight, but there's two things tighter: time and talent. **L&L**

In the next installment, our panelists discuss how to compete with lowballers, closing a commercial contract and where they see opportunities in 2012. Stay tuned. - Eds.

The author is editor and associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*. Email him at cbowen@gje.net.

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2012

Hardscape Guide

5 details not to neglect pg. 66
Growing in a small market pg. 70
New products pg. 71



HARD knocks

Don't let your hardscape projects suffer by neglecting these five details.

One of the things I enjoy most about hardscaping is taking all the ideas in my head and turning them into reality for my client. I've learned a lot about what it takes to turn design drawings into finished spaces, and have made five notable observations of commonly neglected areas on a hardscape project.

These items are deliberately subjective to help make an immediate impact in the safety, performance and profitability of your company. Share this list with your entire team and encourage their feedback and suggestions.

#5 Work-flow plan.

Every hardscape project offers challenges when it comes to moving trucks, equipment, people and materials on the site. Consideration must be given for dumpsters, Porta-Potty rentals, large equipment and much more. Additionally,

many project sites are small, have limited parking, limited access and even temperamental neighbors who are just waiting for you to make a mistake. Creating a work-flow plan will help you overcome these challenges and ensure a project runs efficiently.

A work-flow plan is a combination of a material list and a written scope of work, broken down for every day the project is under construction. Done correctly, this plan will dramatically improve profitability by breaking down large projects into a list of sequential operations. The work-flow plan is a living document that gets updated daily to reflect changes as work progresses.

To create a work-flow plan, begin by walking through the project in your mind. Imagine wheelbarrows moving material, masons chipping stone, concrete trucks arriving, dump containers filling up and more. In your mind's

eye, you'll begin to see the logical order in which all construction activities need to progress. Continue by documenting all material deliveries, subcontractors, equipment needs and staging locations. A plan like this takes time to put together but goes a long way to ensure that you won't have valuable resources (labor, time, equipment) being wasted.

#4 Cleanliness.

A hardscape job can be lengthy, loud and dirty, but that does not mean that getting from start to finish has to be a miserable experience for your client, or the neighbors.

As leaders in our company, we are not only trying to complete a project on time and on budget, we are also marketing our company to the surrounding neighborhood. The best way to begin doing this is to simply show respect

for the look and cleanliness of the project site.

Managing site cleanliness begins by explaining to the client how long the project will take and how much dust, noise and trash will be generated by construction activities. Be sure to have a plan in place that assigns responsibility to your crew leader for making sure small trash is picked up and removed from the site on a daily basis.

All tools and equipment should be neatly stored in a designated area and in a manner that cannot pose a threat to children.

Don't leave cleanup until the very end of the day. Unless you welcome visits from the local code enforcement department, a crew member should be assigned to keep the road and driveway free of loose dirt or debris at all times. Minimize dust by lightly misting the area with a hose. Airborne dust makes a mess

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What goes into a new client communication policy? Find an example at www.lawnandlandscape.com, search "Hard knocks."

on cars, windows, siding, plant material and nearly everything else it comes in contact with. So if you really want to earn more business and land valuable referrals, you'll have to be respectful of the impact your work has on everyone in a community.

The job site should be immaculate, both during and after construction. At Sarros Landscaping, we contract with a pressure washing company to clean the street, driveway and any other areas that were impacted by the construction process. It's a very small price to absorb to leave the area looking better than when we arrived. Consider giving car wash gift certificates as a way of thanking the client who had to park her car in the street while the project was under construction. Remember that these small gestures go a long way to earn trust and demonstrate your value to the client.

#3 Communication. Nearly 90 percent of stress, headaches, problems and "emergencies" are preventable in the presence of great communication. I see situations where clients, contractors, vendors, neighbors and employees are all frustrated and feeling deflated because no one is on the same page.

Communication is a two-part process: speaking and listening. Listening is the most important part. From the moment you first meet with a client, your ears should be open and you should be documenting the conversation. When a proposal is submitted, it should clearly outline the scope of work including sizes, shapes, colors and styles. If you agree to do something extra or for free, then include it in the proposal with a zero dollar line item. It can sometimes be several weeks, or even months, between the

time a project is proposed and the time actual construction begins and having a detailed proposal will ensure that nothing is missed.

The best way to improve communication is to write a communication policy that outlines your plan to exchange information between clients, vendors and employees. For example, when handling potential clients who have expressed an interest in your services, you may want to create a new client communication policy that defines what steps should be taken in process.

#2 The "small stuff." You don't have to be detailed oriented to be a hardscape contractor, but you better have someone on your team that is. In the presence of time constraints and a hectic schedule, a contractor can be tempted to overlook

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a sloppy cut, misplaced stone or other small detail. It's our job as leaders to build a company that places value in excellence, where each team member recognizes the importance of quality.

Attention to detail is a reflection on the leadership of the company. If you don't care, then no one else will, either. If your employees see you throwing things around and being sloppy, then they will do the same thing. Conversely, when employees see that you pay attention to the small details, they will begin to do likewise.

Your job as a leader is to train your crews to take time and step back from their work to evaluate it. Be sure to walk the site several times each day. A worker building a stone wall or laying a paver patio has a different perspective than a foreman or client who is standing at a distance and seeing the pattern develop.

Upon completion of the project, encourage the client to continue to inspect the work and invite them to bring any possible mistakes to your attention. A final walk-through is not the last opportunity for a client to find your mistakes.

#1 Safety. You don't have to look far to see jobs where workers have no eye protection, hearing protection, work boots, gloves and more. It's one of the most overlooked and undervalued parts of our business despite statistics that clearly show the abundance of injuries in our industry. Due to the physical demands of our work, the nature of most injuries are generally very serious and yet, in the same breath, they are entirely preventable.

There is a wealth of online resources that make written safety guidelines and policies available for small-business owners. You don't have to reinvent the wheel. At a bare minimum, every company should have a documented safety policy specific to the work conditions of each employee class (e.g., laborer, foreman, operator, receptionist). No employee should be allowed on a job site without the proper personal protective equipment (PPE).

Imagine someone calling your house to tell your spouse and children that you just died because a skid-steer ran over you while you were texting on a job site (true story). Look folks, the work we do is incredibly beautiful and rewarding, it is also very dangerous. We cannot allow ourselves to become complacent or comfortable. Job site vigilance is a must, and having a written policy will dramatically reduce your risk for accidents. **L&L**

The author is president of Sarros Landscaping in Cumming, Ga. He can be reached at psarros@giemedia.com.

For more safety information, a PPE handbook can be found by visiting OSHA's website: <http://1.usa.gov/zni53K>.



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A numbers game

This Indiana contractor doubled down on design/build and came out on top. By Chuck Bowen

Joel Wihebrink's market is small. In a northern Indiana county with 70,000 residents, only about 5,000 fit his target demographic.

Wihebrink's market is small, but it's healthy. Warsaw, Ind., is in lake country, full of second homes for Chicago natives and first homes for employees of the state's booming medical device industry.

During the recession, he says, he had low debt and high levels of cash on hand. His company held its own and gained market share, thanks to a small but solid team focused on stellar customer service. He didn't try to reinvent himself as a maintenance company or try to add on

another segment. He danced with the one that brought him.

"We stuck to our hardscape guns," Wihebrink says. "Because that's how we've branded ourselves."

SIREN SONG. As Wihebrink grew, the competition shrunk or folded. Four years later, his maintenance segment is growing, as is lawn care. But it's the hardscapes that got him this far, and the hardscapes that will keep him going.

"Several contractors in my market are gone. The guys that did install quality projects seem to be doing OK, but they don't have the steam they had years ago," he says.

As things got tight, many of his competitors were tempted by the hardscape segment's siren song: big impact and big price tags.

"They see the price tag of jobs but don't understand the risk and how they can go broke quicker," he says.

KNOW YOUR NUMBERS. Wihebrink says it was his attention to his budget numbers that got him through. That, and pricing jobs by the time it takes to actually install them, not by how many square feet of pavers they require.

His advice is simple. "Be able to read profit loss and balance sheet," he says. "If you don't know where you

stand right now financially, it's absolute suicide to venture into another service you know nothing about, especially hardscape. The numbers get big and the risks can be large."

Wihebrink does at least 10 paver repair jobs a year, fixing somebody else's slapdash or shoddy work – somebody who might not even be in business anymore.

"If you don't know your numbers, you don't know where to go," he says. "If you're going to go broke, why not go broke fishing?" **L&L**

The author is editor and associate publisher of *Lawn & Landscape*. He can be reached at cbowen@gle.net.

HARDSCAPE PRODUCTS

Belgard Domino Paver Collection

THE PITCH: The Domino Paver Collection was specifically designed to provide a dimensional paver surface with reduced installation time and waste.

- Domino Pavers offer a natural stone look and texture in a design that is based on the concept of an actual domino.
- The rectangular shaped paver has a combination of variegated color tones, 3-D texture and scored surfaces.
- Domino Pavers offer the design flexibility of installing in a running bond, herringbone, or basket weave pattern.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: <http://www.belgard.biz>



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FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.danver.com



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THE PITCH: CalStar Products introduced permeable pavers that are suitable for vehicular applications.

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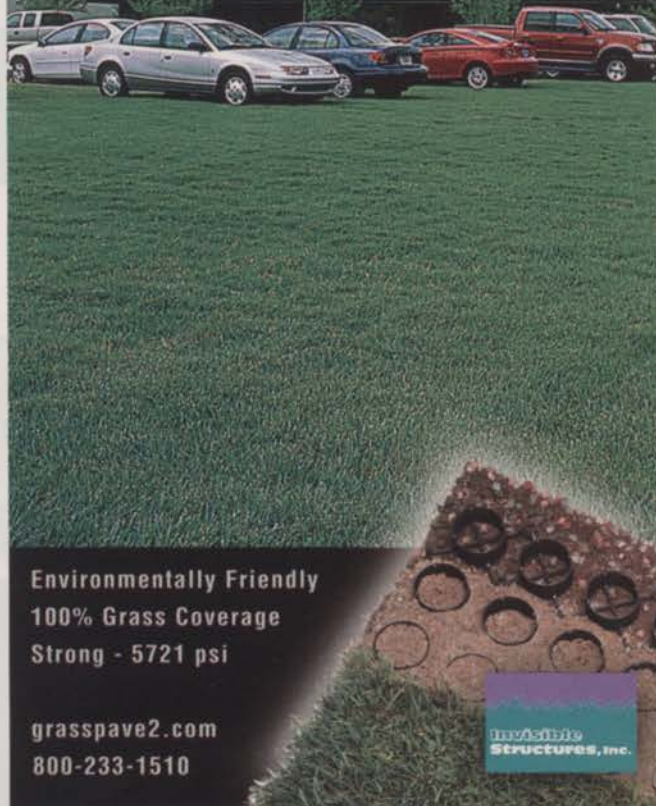
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2012 Hardscape Guide

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THE PITCH: The FFC Side Discharge Bucket by Paladin provides an alternative for operators that need to place materials.

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- There are no tool adjustments to switch discharge direction.



FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.paladinconstructiongroup.com

New Holland's 200 Series Skid-Steer Loaders

THE PITCH: New Holland Construction has launched seven new skid-steer loaders that feature vertical lift Super Boom design with forward dump height and reach.



- The 200 Series skid-steers load material to the center of trucks with a 53-degree dump angle.
- A new self-leveling bucket feature on five of the seven models allows attachments to maintain the preset location throughout the lift cycle.
- Five models have a Super Boom loader arm design for enhanced lift and reach, and two compact models feature a radial lift design for digging.
- The engines have 20 percent more hp than the previous L Series models.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: www.newholland.com

Olsen Pavingstone's Infinity Cobble Collection

THE PITCH: The Infinity Cobble Collection is Olsen Pavingstone's new line.

- You can choose the size of the paver, the shape, the color, the texture, tumbled or non-tumbled, and the pattern in any combination you want.
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Joining forces

ANLA president offers more insight on its new venture with OFA.

By Todd Davis

Not too long ago PLANET and American Nursery & Landscape Association discussed combining in order to better serve the needs of members and the industry. Those conversations stalled, and now, ANLA has announced a joint venture with OFA, the Association of Horticulture Professionals, which could lead to a future merger. Todd Davis, publisher of *Lawn & Landscape's* sister publication *Nursery Management*, caught up with Bob Lyons, ANLA president and owner of Sunleaf Nursery in Madison, Ohio, to find out the implications of this joint venture on the green industry.

So let me get this straight, this new joint venture doesn't mean the end of ANLA and its 135 years of history?

You are correct. ANLA is not going away. We are combining some of our strengths with their's to provide the members of both organizations a combined 215 years of leadership, service, knowledge and history to better meet the needs of both groups in these challenging times.

How long have these discussions been going on with OFA, and how were they different from the discussions you had with PLANET several years ago?

We have been having discussions about working with them since 2008, but with the untimely death of their executive director, John Holmes, it was not until 2011 that we renewed our discussions in earnest.

With PLANET, we were seeking

a true merger in short order. The proposed joint venture with OFA will focus at first on education and advocacy. As we move forward, if it makes sense to collaborate on more things, then we will certainly consider it. Both organizations have many strengths and we want to focus on those strengths and avoid duplication of efforts. It's the same sort of thing that's going on with strategic alliances in our industry businesses.

The ANLA Management Clinic is your organization's premier educational event. Do you see it continuing beyond 2012?

We are in the process of deciding what will follow this year's clinic. This joint venture offers some exciting opportunities for a premier educational event in 2013 that will attract both organizations' owners and senior management teams us-

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ing the strengths of both the ANLA and OFA staffs.

How do you think ANLA's lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill will be affected by the joint venture? Will our leaders in Washington have to be reintroduced to our industry association?

There will be no re-introduction.

The ANLA's lobbying and regulatory staff will remain in Washington, D.C., and will be configured to meet the needs of both ANLA and OFA members.

Many of the concerns of government intrusion and regulations are the same

for members of both organizations so it is a natural fit.

Will there be a joining of the boards of directors of both OFA and ANLA? Is there going to be a new leadership structure for the two organizations?

There are no current plans to join

EDITOR'S NOTE:

New endeavor will lead to industry change

In January, the American Nursery and Landscape Association and OFA (the Association of Horticulture Professionals) announced a new joint venture.

This venture is the first step toward a formal merger of the two groups, one consisting of mainly nursery



Davis

growers, the other mainly greenhouse growers. For now, the associations will be combining efforts in education, national lobbying and other member benefits. But you can bet, after a few years of shacking up, the two groups will do the right thing and tie the knot all-legit like.

But first things first, we need to come up

with a name for this new association if and when it does merge.

As longtime advocate and self-appointed spokesperson for both these fine organizations, I recommend the following names:

- Association of Coordinated Horticultural Owners and Operators (ACHOO).
- Society of Plantsmen, Landscapers and Tradesmen (SPLAT).
- Floriculture and National Nursery Industry Experts (FANNIE).

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boards and leadership structures. It is easy for the mind to jump forward and say, "This is going to be one organization." At some point in the future it might be, but currently we are focused on education and advocacy. We need to be successful at these things before we think about doing more.

What about the Wholesale Nursery Growers of America and the Horticultural Research Institute?

The same holds true for these groups along with the retail, landscape and distribution divisions. The "community within the community" that they represent will remain an important

part of our organization. It is our hope that HRI will attract new donors as we do more activities with OFA and their members see the valuable research that is being done. L&L

The author is publisher of *Lawn & Landscape's* sister publication *Nursery Management*. He can be reached at tdavis@gie.net.

What does it mean?

In all seriousness, whether the merger ever takes place or not, this will lead to change. For reasons that have always astounded me, nursery and floriculture folks in this nation have rarely crossed paths. And what they do is remarkably similar, and morphing into each other more all the time.

About seven years ago, ANLA was having merger talks with PLANET. I stood up and addressed a group of maybe 300 ANLA members and asked, "Rather than merging with a landscape group, shouldn't

we be looking at merging with OFA, whose members are a lot more similar to us? We both grow plants that people plant in their yards."

Nobody had a good answer. It had just never been considered before.

Stronger, better

But you can count on it happening now, and we'll be better for it. Both groups host great educational events. When you start getting both nursery and greenhouse folks together at these events, exchanging ideas

and thoughts, we're all going to benefit. When we approach legislators on Capitol Hill as a more united group, then we have a stronger voice. From a lobbying standpoint, when greenhouse and nursery growers stand together, we will be a force Washington will have to listen to.

As proud members of FANNIE, we will stand for nothing less. — Todd Davis

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Irrigation conservation

Landscape water usage was one of several topics covered at the international conference in Las Vegas.

By Brian E. Vinchesi

The 4th Annual WaterSmart Innovations Conference provided landscapers water-conservation insight.

The event, held last October in Las Vegas and hosted by the Southern Nevada Water Authority, covered a broad range of water-related topics geared to the water purveyor and, specifically, their water conservation department. Landscape irriga-

tion (emission devices). Each year at the conference, in conjunction with AWE, the Environmental Protection Agency has its WaterSense Partners of the Year awards banquet.

Awards presented included the Irrigation Partner of the Year, which went to Christopher Curry, a principal at Sweeney + Associates Irrigation Design and Consulting in Orange, Calif.

“Each of us has a water footprint of 800 gallons per day, the equivalent of 12 bathtubs of water.”

tion is always a major subject of interest at the conference, which has a global approach. The conference comprises eight presentations on different subject themes, one of which is landscaping.

The conference included a number of pre-conference events including committee meetings and the annual meeting for the Alliance for Water Efficiency (AWE) and committee meetings for the new International Code Council's (ICC) sprinkler standards (officially called

The keynote speaker for this year's conference was Brian Richter from The Nature Conservancy. He detailed water use throughout the world and pointed out that each of us has a water footprint of 800 gallons per day, the equivalent of 12 bathtubs of water. Richter says that currently half of the world's river basins experience severe water shortages for some part of the year. He also commented on the drought in Texas, saying that it will have a long term

effect on the state and that Texas does not have, and will not have, enough water. The Texas drought was the subject of much discussion at the conference.

Landscape sessions included talks by various irrigation contractors, consultants and manufacturers. Updates were provided on the Irrigation Association's Smart Water Applications Technology (SWAT) initiative and the EPA's WaterSense programs.

David Zoldoske of the International Center for Water Technology in Fresno, Calif., gave an interesting presentation on performance testing of soil moisture-based irrigation controllers. The design and installation of rainwater harvesting systems was the subject of several presentations, with the speakers touting the benefits of rainwater as an irrigation water source. Conversely, Karen Guz of the San Antonio Water System presented a session on the “Top Problems with Rain Water Harvesting Systems” and “Three Ways to Succeed or Fail.”

The Southern Nevada Wa-

ter Authority presented the results of a study of when people are most inefficient in their watering. The results showed that Las Vegas residents are most inefficient during the months of October through January.

As a result, Las Vegas's water restrictions are more severe in those months than in the peak summer watering season, which results in more water being saved.

Other presentations dealt with proposed new green codes and their effects on landscaping, landscape water budgeting and outdoor water efficiency programs. As with any water conference, especially one geared toward conservation, outdoor water use is a big topic of discussion and the focus of many presentations. **L&L**

The author is president of Irrigation Consulting in Pepperell, Mass. He can be reached at bvinchesi@irrigationconsulting.com.

Slides from the conference are available on the WaterSmart Innovations website www.watersmartinnovations.com.



Charles Fishman, author of “The Big Fish,” talks about the role of water in the modern world.

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DRIP IRRIGATION

The anatomy of CHANGE

New drip irrigation technology offers
contractors big benefits. By John Ossa

The Irrigation Association awarded the 2011 Man of the Year award to Howard Wuertz of Sundance Farms in Arizona. Sundance Farms are irrigated by conventional sub-surface drip irrigation (SDI) technology. In his acceptance speech, Wuertz stated that SDI was far more efficient in terms of water and energy use than any other technology, was reliable and that he fully expects any system he installs

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DRIP IRRIGATION

to last 25 years. Wuertz concluded that these factors make SDI the most cost effective way to irrigate.

Through hard work and perseverance, pioneers like Wuertz have solved many of the shortcomings of early experiments with SDI.

Over the past 30 years, there have been very significant improvements in drip irrigation hardware, the practices by which it is usually installed both in agriculture and turf and landscape, and in the understanding of how to maintain and manage the systems.

TECHNOLOGY UPDATES. Emitter design has greatly improved from the perspective of consistent output, resistance to clogging and consistency of the product. Pre-embedded emitter tubing is the advancement that enabled the ability to establish a grid of emitters over a given

area, leading to much higher uniformities of application than had been possible before.

A new class of irrigation hardware entering the market is even more reliable, more efficient and cost effective to install and manage. SDI technology developed in Australia, and deployed around the world in a variety of rugged environments, is setting the standard for reliable ultra-efficient systems.

These products incorporate geotextiles within a configuration that accelerates the principle of capillary action already at work in the soil, while suppressing the negative properties of a bare textile.

The result is a highly consistent wetting of the soil in the root zone, without

“ A new class of irrigation hardware entering the market is even more reliable, more efficient and cost effective to install and manage.

flooding or waste building in the spray hardware.

Installation practices have evolved to include use of supply and collection manifolds, creating a looped system essential to a successful SDI system. Installation of flush valves and air relief valves are necessary and help ensure the long-term viability of the system. Installation of in-line pressure gauges before and after filters, and the provision for easy reading of operating pressure at the collection manifold of systems, are inexpensive and easy ways and means for system management. The new class
(Continued on pg. 84)

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Designed for drip

New drip irrigation technology continues to role out, making watering landscapes efficient and easy. *Lawn & Landscape* asked some of the biggest suppliers in this field for an update.

Hunter Industries new ECO-Mat is a tool that allows irrigation of turf and small plant areas from completely under the surface. It was designed to accelerate lateral water movement through the soil while protecting the emitters from root intrusion.

The ECO-Mat consists of fleece-wrapped PLD tubing (PLD-Enhanced Subsurface Dripline) that is woven between two layers of water-holding fleece material. The mat is placed under the plant material, where it becomes fully soaked and then provides a constant water supply directly to the plant's roots. It also can be customized to fit any area, even the oddest shaped designs and green roofs can grow healthy plants and turf.

Netafim USA opened a California recycling center that repurposes used polyethylene

tubing into a variety of plastic products, including its landscape drip line. PHX Recycling, a subsidiary of Netafim, oversees the recycling process.

Used landscape drip line from all manufacturers is accepted if the tubing meets Netafim's product testing and quality control standards. Before tubing is accepted by PHX, a sample must be submitted to Netafim to determine material content and age.

Rain Bird launched its newly designed 17mm XF Barbed Insert Fittings that connect pipes and branches to its XF Series Dripline. The new design offers better performance and installs faster, saving time, money and wear and tear on a contractor's hands, the company says. The new features include a larger center flange for increased leverage and improved grip and a better tapered angle of the barb and a longer lead-in to provide a smoother transition into the tubing.

"During the internal testing, contractors who used our new FX Barbed Insert Fittings were able to cut their installation time in half,"

says Kevin Rantin, senior product manager for landscape drip irrigation.

Toro's new pressure-compensating 1/2 in. threaded Drip Bubblers were built for tough environments. The bubblers are easy to install, virtually maintenance-free and more robust than drip emitters connected to 1/4 in. tubing, Toro says. The features include: A self-sealing screen eliminates the need for plumber's tape on every riser. A self-cleaning product, it flushes at startup for reliable operation and less maintenance. The bubblers have pressure compensating to 2 and 4 gph over a range of 5-50 psi.



Toro's Drip Bubblers use a commercial-grade plastic for harsh environments.

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DRIP IRRIGATION

(Continued from pg. 82)
of hardware can also be installed at deeper depths than conventional SDI, protecting the product from accidental breakage.

WHAT IT MEANS. What the reliability and

efficiency of these new products mean to irrigation contractors is the ability to sustain landscapes that customers demand, using much less water than previously possible.

The availability of potable water to irrigate landscapes is on the decline. Like

it or not, contractors need to embrace the new technology and learn the simple steps required to make it work for them, as opposed to struggling to meet water use mandates with wasteful spray irrigation hardware.

Of interest to installation contractors is the configuration of this new class of subsurface hardware enables significantly greater spacing between the rows of the "grid." This means a faster installation than conventional SDI.

Fewer rows mean less labor is required for installation. Wider spacing means it is easier to plant around than conventional SDI.

This next generation product is a boon for contractors because it is likely to be a more profitable installation when compared to conventional SDI hardware.

Since there are no moving parts exposed to the elements, accidents or vandals, for maintenance contractors, there is less to repair and adjust than conventional spray hardware.

With ongoing inspection and confirmation of the basic hydraulics of the system – gallons per minute per zone, and operating pressure at the valve and at the end of the system – maintenance contractors can spend more time on horticulture and less time dealing with the consequences of broken hardware, overspray and runoff.

Other significant benefits include the potential to use a fertigation system to reduce the labor required to apply fertilizer and use of that same system to apply organic vertebrate control products.

The evolution of subsurface products is rooted in science and leverages principals at work in nature.

Contractors across the country are discovering that with the new hardware, and reorienting their approach to monitoring and managing these systems, they are leading the change required for more efficient and ecological irrigation system installation and management. L&L

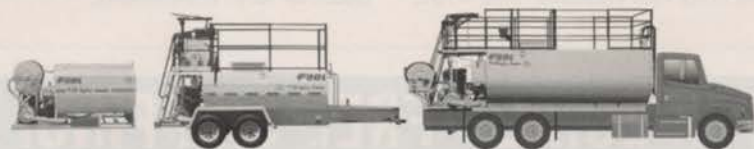
The author is the national accounts director at Irrigation Water Technologies America and owns Irrigation Essentials. He can be reached at jossa@giemedia.com.

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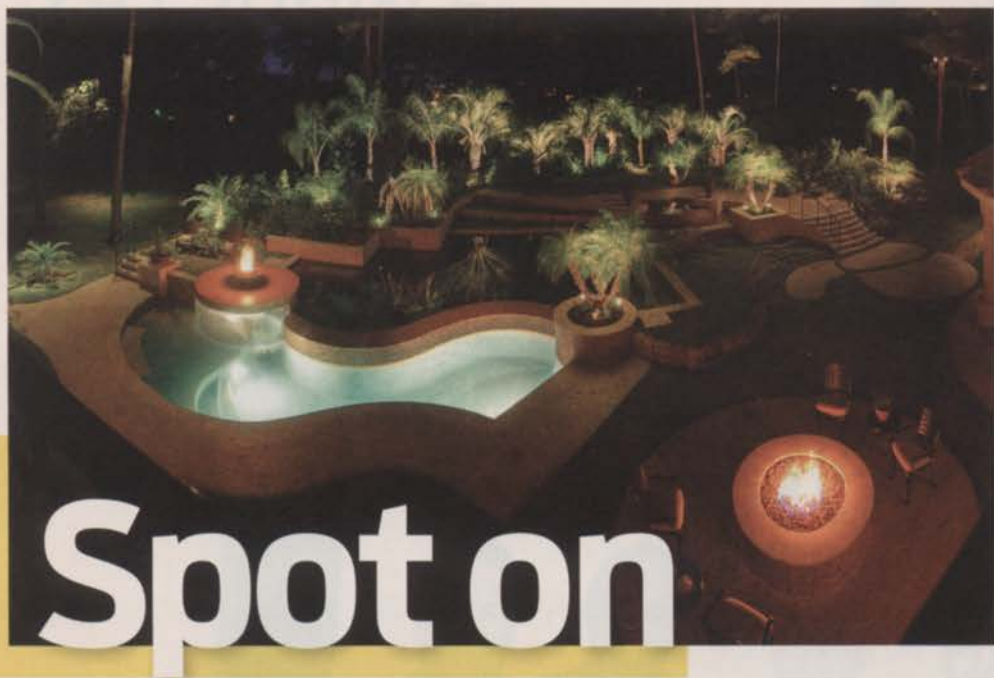


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Spot on

Going from bulk lighting installer to custom designer means working hand and hand with customers. By Bernie Granier

As a bulk lighting installer, estimates are easy. You provide a fixture count and leave that estimate on the door for the homeowner, no meeting required.

No custom designs necessary. For some, that's perfectly adequate and all that's needed. But, what about that special homeowner that wants more than just a standard bulk-lighting install but does not know that a custom designed alternative is even an option? Are you prepared to provide an in-depth design or even the option to do so? If the answer is no, then you may be missing out on valuable opportunities to expand your client base as well as your expertise.

Here are important steps to take when creating custom lighting designs for clients.

LEARN THE CLIENT'S VISION. As

you advance to the project's design phase, it's important to take into account not only the architecture and landscaping on the property but also the client's goals and desires. Often times, the client will already have a vision in mind, and as a responsible designer, you should take the time to learn what that is in order to provide the best possible design that will make that vision a reality.

Of course, this does not mean that we always give the customer exactly what they describe. More often than not, a client will not be fully educated on the many lighting options and techniques available, thereby unknowingly limiting themselves on what can be achieved. The main goal is to listen to what the client *desires*; not how they suggest you achieve it.

While we will politely lis-

ten to their take on how we should achieve their goals, we will also take the time to then educate them on the preferred method of application to obtain the desired lighting effects. After all, we aren't going to create a runway of path lights down a sidewalk or driveway when moonlighting from the available trees will provide the needed lighting but with a superior effect. As the professional designer, it is your job to expose them to the difference and effectively communicate why your way is the right way.

GET IT RIGHT – THE FIRST TIME.

In order to accomplish this goal, you should make it a point to meet with all the involved decision makers during your initial site visit.

Take the time and ask the required questions so you can establish the goal. Is their



Lighting designers can help clients discover hidden potential in their landscape by defining spaces the client couldn't previously envision.

primary concern safety, or to beautify their environment? Do they want to draw attention to an area or create privacy?

For example, the swimming pool pictured above was designed and landscaped in a way that was intended to create privacy, without making it feel closed off or overwhelmed. As such, it was important to carry this plan through in the lighting design. In order to accomplish this, we made it a point



The No. 1 criteria for creating a lighting design is matching the client's personality.



to light all of the bordering plant material in such a way as to fashion a wall of light that would stop the eye of those looking in from outside, while at the same time creating a lot of depth and drama when viewed from the poolside and lounging area, without being glaring or harsh.

To accomplish this, it's imperative that you physically walk the property with your client and ask questions about how they use their property to be sure that you are designing from *their* viewing perspective. For example, if they're going to be inside most evenings in a specific part of the home, you'll want

to view the landscape as it's seen from inside this area as well. This allows you to create complimentary lighting in the landscaping as it will be viewed from the interior of the home, with the viewing window acting as a frame.

Time is valuable, so be sure you are focusing your efforts on the correct areas. While it may take some extra time, find out what parts of the landscape the clients most enjoy and, maybe even more importantly, what they don't. The last thing you want to do is spend a great deal of time getting the lighting "just right" on a piece of statuary or some specimen planting, only to discover after the fact that

it's something that the client hates but has not yet had an opportunity to remove.

DISCOVER HIDDEN POTENTIAL.

Often times, a client will only focus their attention on the obvious areas. Take this opportunity to help your customer discover and define spaces that they may not have used much in the past, simply because they could not envision how it could be enjoyed.

The picture to the left is one of our clients' properties and is a perfect case in point. By day it was a charming area, although lackluster in its usability, because at night it became a black hole isolated from all other activity.

However, we saw something very different, something that was just begging for attention.

We made the wall fountain the focal point by highlighting its stonework and water basin while washing the vines in the planters on either side, sending shadows along the walls and draping the area in soft, romantic lighting. Because of this change, the client now sees this area as a relaxing, inviting grotto with a bistro table and drinks for two, not a forgotten corner.

MATCH THE PERSONALITY.

Now that the technical questions and obvious tangibles have been hashed and re-hashed, there's one final element that many designers fail to consider: The client's

personality type. Above all other criteria, this should play the front and center role in your design.

This approach is not some New Age gobbledygook, but rather sound common sense. Submitting a design that is going to boldly light the property of a client whose demeanor is one of understated elegance is not likely to be successful. You must incorporate this element into the application that will properly and artistically address the lighting desired.

SET YOURSELF APART. This is not always an easy task, but as a professional custom lighting designer, and not a bulk lighting installer, it is one that is seen as a much welcomed challenge. After all, what designer does not live for the challenge that will be marked at completion with "ooos" and "ahhhs," the real validation of a success?

So, when you receive a call from a homeowner who wants something out of the ordinary, but asks you to leave a fixture count estimate, find excitement in knowing that it's an invitation to begin the process of illuminating the distinction between a bulk lighting install from custom designed lighting. **L&L**

The author is a lighting designer a StarShine of Texas in Houston. In 2011, he won four awards of merit from the Association of Outdoor Lighting Professionals, including Best of Show, for the project pictured here.

MOWER MAINTENANCE

Ride on!

HERE ARE 6 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR MOWERS IN TOP SHAPE THIS SEASON. By Chuck Bowen

Based in Sussex, Wis., Jerry Kienast is service director for the Reinders dealership – four brick-and-mortar locations plus a half dozen mobile mechanics. We caught up with him to get some winter mower maintenance tips.

1 Stay on schedule. Each piece of equipment comes with an operators guide with a recommended maintenance schedule. Follow it. "That's the biggest thing I would recommend," Kienast says.

2 Sweat the small stuff. Hour totals, spark plugs, timing belts, oil changes. They're minor and cheap to replace, at least compared to an entire machine. "Next thing you know, they're calling me needing a new \$9,000 or \$10,000 engine," he says.

3 Don't get hosed. Oil, gasoline, hydraulic fluid. Engines run on wet stuff. And you need good hoses to get those fluids from point A to point B. Regularly check tubing – especially if it's exposed to the sun – for cracks or broken seals.

4 Don't forget. A lot of grease points are hidden from easy view, especially on axles. So are brakes and the seals on your differential. They're easy to overlook, but a problem could knock you out for a few days.

5 Keep clean. To see where a machine might be leaking, Kienast steam cleans it and then runs it for a few minutes. "It just looks dirty, but after you've cleaned it you see the oil," he says.

6 Keep a record. If you get into a spot and can't fix the machine yourself, make sure you let the mechanic know what's wrong. "Talk to the operator and tell me what's wrong with it. There's nothing worse than going all the way through a winter maintenance check not knowing that on a hard left turn the machine starts to stubble," Kienast says. "I want to make sure you're profitable. That's my job. If I have a good road map for success, I'm going to get you there." L&L



Still need to work out some kinks on your machines? You can download Reinders winter maintenance guide at bit.ly/mowerfix.

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Ryan Meinika, Spring-Green Lawn Care

Interviewed By Lee Chilcote

Every month, we'll feature five questions with someone who can give you tips on the world of franchising. This month, we spoke with Ryan Meinika, who, with the help of his wife Leaha, runs a Spring-Green Lawn Care franchise in Columbia City, Ind. For the complete interview visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "Meinika."

1 Why did you get involved in franchising and how long have you been doing it?

I started my franchise in fall of 2005 to take advantage of the proven systems of an established company. I knew that I could adopt their methods and design, and benefit from their trial and error over the years without having to take all of the risks myself.

2 What are the advantages and disadvantages of franchising?

The most important, useful advantage is the system itself. You have a marketing department and call center, things that a small business couldn't have on its own.

All of the franchises have a system called Frame Connect, and we get on it and ask questions and learn what's going on. Anytime we need advice or to talk to someone else that's going through the same situation, we can do that and it's invaluable.

Another advantage is collective buying power. If I was by myself, my little business would be paying full prices on everything.

I don't want to sound like you just buy into a franchise and it all works out. There is obviously still a lot of risk involved, but you can minimize that risk by following the proven model you are buying into.

You might be a franchise, but it's still your business. You are free to do what you think works best for your individual market and nobody knows your business like you do. There will be mistakes made, but you can learn from them and your business can come out stronger and actually benefit from them.

3 What advice would you have for someone who is thinking about buying a franchise?

Follow the system. It's a franchise because it works. At the same time, you still have to make decisions for yourself and your business. They give you an outline and you have to color it in. Every market is different and you can make subtle changes.

4 What type of personality is best-suited for being a franchisee?

You have to be hard working, willing to put in 80 hour weeks and do what you



Ryan Meinika is a franchisee at Spring-Green Lawn Care. To the right, his wife Leaha.

need to do to make it work. You have to be persistent and confident.

To fully utilize the franchise system, you also have to be able to work well with others and take advantage of the system. Within my contract, there are things that I can't do. The trucks have to be uniform and look the same. There's a list of approved services. Yet, overall, I am still free to make decisions for the business while benefitting from all the tools of the franchise system.

5 What is the biggest challenge you face being a franchisee?

Getting and keeping customers while staying competitive can be challenging. Initially, I was also just unfamiliar with the system, and I had to adapt and learn as I went along. That's why the support center is there – they give you everything that you need to learn as you go. They can't do everything for you, though; you have to learn for yourself. **L&L**

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How to: Build a rain garden

Rain gardens have become more popular as a proven and effective way to decrease water runoff and soil erosion and increase a habitats diversity.

"The overall purpose of putting one in is to allow the runoff to infiltrate into the soil," says Julie Evans, vice president at The Fockele Garden Co. in Gainesville, Ga. "What that does

is it helps with ground water. It also filters the water before that water would reach our streams and lakes. It also helps clean our water as it percolates through the soil."

Another beneficial aspect is that the plant variety can increase the diversity of insects and wildlife, which leads to a more balanced garden, Evans says.

The first step in building a rain garden is finding the proper placement so it catches the majority of the properties runoff. So that it doesn't stick out like an eyesore, Evans says it's best to blend it into the landscape design.

"From my point of view, I would want it to fit into the surrounding landscape with additional plantings," she says. — Carolyn LaWell



1

Determine where the rain garden should be placed. Factors to take into account are where the water runoff will easily reach the rain garden and how close the space is to the house or the building.

2

Specific calculations need to be used to determine how big to make the rain garden. Then the shape and depth can be decided. "It's important to know how much water you need to intercept and infiltrate so you don't have a washout," Evans says.

For a manual with the calculations visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "rain garden."

3

Undertake the construction of the rain garden basin, which is primarily done by digging and excavation. "It has to be level so that when water runs into it, it can spread throughout the garden and not puddle in one place," Evans says.

4

A berm should be placed around the rain garden to contain water, Evans says. The size of the berm will depend on the depth of the rain garden. "You need some sort of container around (the rain garden)," Evans says. "The dirt you excavate out of it you can berm up."

5

Once the basin is shaped and level, plants can be placed and watered into the rain garden.

"You want appropriate plants for a wetland in your area – a wetland that will also dry out," Evans says. "Certain plants can do that."

BOB-CAT ProCat SE

The pitch: New to the BOB-CAT ProCat line of premium mid-sized commercial riding mowers are two commercial models.



- The new BOB-CAT ProCat SE features an open frame design for enhanced visibility and a low seat platform for an enhanced center of gravity.
- Features a high back seat that adjusts to fit the rider, and a custom operator zone with controls.
- The ProCat SE comes with a choice of 52- or 61-inch deck, Kohler Command Pro engines with canister style air filters and an EPA-compliant fuel system with 14-gallon fuel capacity that offers ground speeds up to 11.5 mph.

For more information: www.bobcat-turf.com

Knaack PACK RAT Drawer Units

The pitch: Knaack and WEATHER GUARD Products' PACK RAT Drawer Units for truck and vans offers access to hundreds of pounds of tools and supplies while leaving floor space open for hauling materials.



- Made from 14-gauge steel.
- Anti-skid strips on top of the drawer assembly offer traction for wet and muddy boots.
- Drawers can carry up to 425 pounds of equipment.
- Full weather stripping protects against the elements.

For more information: www.weather-guard.com

Plant Haven Helleborus Ivory Prince

The pitch: Helleborus Ivory Prince ('Walhelivor') has ivory flowers flushed with pink and streaked with green and rose hues that deepen with time.



- The outward-facing blooms appear late winter to early spring.
- The silvery mottled evergreen foliage makes Ivory Prince available through all seasons and is a highly desirable plant in the border or container.
- It prefers well-drained, moist, fertilized soil.
- In mild climates, it will tolerate full sun and plant in part shade elsewhere.
- In cold areas mulch will help protect the plant during winter.

For more information: www.planthaven.com

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Ride-Rite Air Helper Spring Kit

The pitch: The Firestone Ride-Rite air helper spring kit for the 2012 Dodge RAM 2500/3500



Trucks is designed to use air pressure to help maximize the truck's safe load carrying capacity and brake effectiveness.

- The system features individual inflation valves that allow for separate side-to-side or front-to-rear adjustment.
- Features double convoluted air springs that provide maximum load support for trucks.
- The no-drill Ride-Rite kit is designed to use the truck's factory holes and mount between its frame and axle.

For more information: www.ride-rite.com

Samson's Vortex Climbing Line



The pitch: Samson's Vortex climbing line combines high strength performance with lightweight and flexible ease of use.

- The 24-strand cover line is a full half-inch in diameter.
- As a double-braid climbing line, Vortex is constructed with a stabilized nylon core and polyester cover.
- Part of this family of climbing lines from Samson are designed specifically for arborists who often use mechanical ascenders, prusik knots and split tails.

For more information: www.samson-rope.com

Worksaver's Skid-Steer Pallet Fork

The pitch:

Worksaver is adding the SSPF-3748 skid-steer pallet fork into its active product line.



- The pallet fork features a one-piece backstop with class II forks rated at 4,000 lbs. (for the pair).
- Can be used specifically to handle pallets of bricks or boxes.
- The SSPF-3748 features an all welded design and can also fit tractor loaders that use skid-steer attaching systems.

For more information: www.work-saver.com

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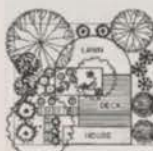
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Terracare Associates
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There's a first time for everything – the first sale, the first expansion, the first mistake and maybe even the first award. To help gain insight into the successes and lessons learned by successful business owners, every month *Lawn & Landscape* will talk to companies who have surpassed those milestones and have become some of the newest members of the Top 100 List.

COMPANY: Terracare Associates

LOCATION: Littleton, Colo.

TOP 100 RANKING: 43

REVENUE: \$25 million



What does it mean to you to have been named to *Lawn & Landscape's* Top 100?

It means we are making progress. Our goal has been to grow our business in a very intentional and measured way. We have been very fortunate to do so and appreciate the recognition.

What has changed about your company as it has grown?

I call them the three D's: detail, development and discipline. We have to be more detailed than we've ever been, not only on the work, but how we run our business. You can't just take a swing at it; you have to have market research.

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every year, and we train our senior staff, not just our field staff. So we're taking folks that are middle managers or higher, and we're putting them through significant management training to bring them to the next level.

The discipline is having a plan and everyone sticking to that plan. This allows you to go back and understand what the results of our discipline were.

The other side is culture, creativity and communication. We've had to make a lot of changes in our culture. We've had to be incredibly competitive. Our people are very dialed in, and we know what our market is and what our production rate is for every single thing we do. We're able to chart that on a weekly basis and look back to see "did we hit it or did we not?" So we've had a pretty significant change in culture



Terracare Associates focuses on details in the field and in its operations.

to be more aggressive, more accountable. On the creativity side, we're encouraging our people to come up with a new and better way – "What have you heard? What did you try? Did it work?" – and that's kind of an interesting dynamic. We have these conversations internally, because you have to be careful. If you want to encourage people to be creative, but if you beat people up when they make a mistake, then they won't do that. So you have to encourage people to take chances and think outside the box a bit.

We also have a structured communication process, starting with me, all the way down the line. We make sure everyone talks.

How has your role changed as your company has grown?

One of the challenges to manage is what level of detail to be involved. As the company grows, I can't really live off of the to-do list. It's a question of where we're going. I have to ask myself every day, do I work in the business or on the business?

How do you and your company avoid getting complacent?

We communicate about it constantly. We have a set

of values: leadership, integrity, value and environment (L.I.V.E.). We are constantly pushing next. For example, right now, three new technologies that are truly right on the edge of what's available are in the hands of our field staff for testing. We've created a culture that says change is not frightening, change is good. And that's the only way to live, or else you get left behind. We also spend a fair amount of time looking at the world of business. What are other industries doing? You can apply a lot of things outside the industry to the industry because they are general business principles.

Is there an aspect of your company that you'd like to change or improve?

There's 50. We're never finished. There's never any aspect of the business that's exactly where we want. For example, we've been a large snow removal contractor for 27 years. We're doing some things new this year that we've never done before, like the way we route. We want to improve everything that we do. And it may just be just a little bit, but that's OK. We'll get a little bit better tomorrow. **L&L**

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