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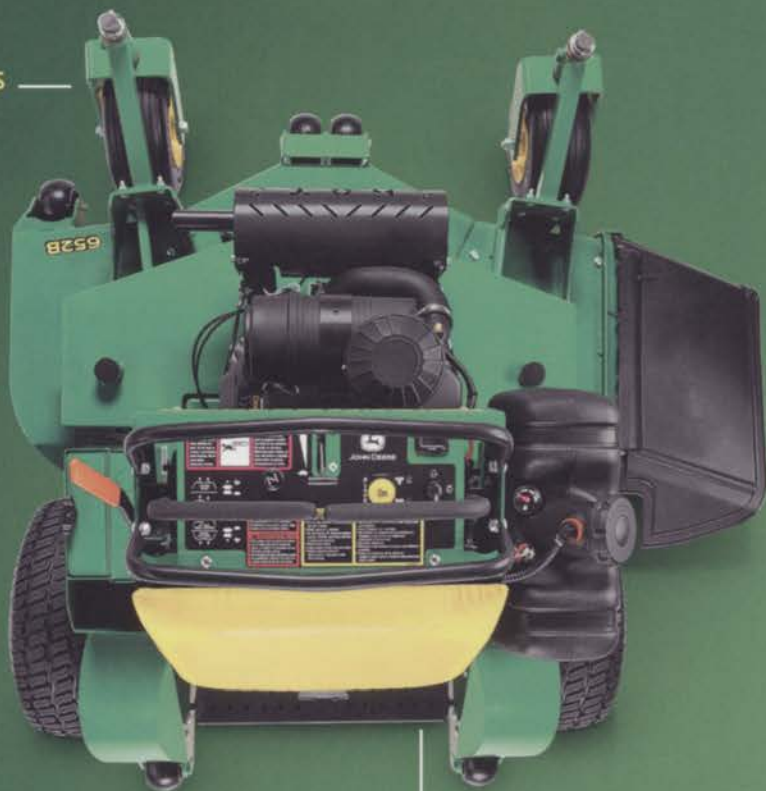
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ONLINE CONTENTS

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

5 STEPS TO improved fuel efficiency

With these easy tips, you can use less gas, keep your vehicles in top shape and save some cash. By Julie Collins Bates

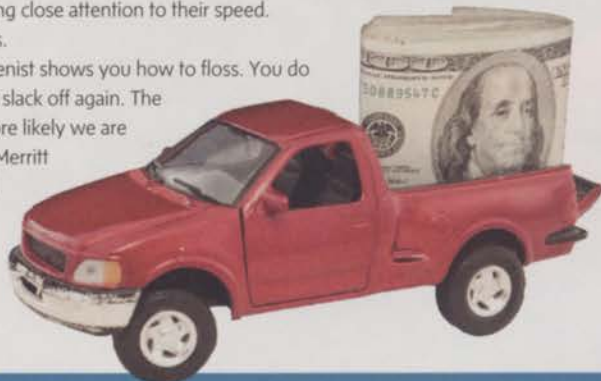
A few simple moves can result in serious savings for your vehicle fleet. In a webinar hosted by inthinc Technology Solutions, a global provider of telematics, fleet management and driver safety solutions, inthinc account development manager, Chace Merritt, provided a rundown on five steps companies can take to improve fuel efficiency.

1 Obey the speed limit. Vehicles that honor the speed limit maintain a higher miles per gallon ratio – in fact, the most fuel efficient speed to travel is 55 mph. The longer employees are on the road, the more likely they are to start speeding or stop paying close attention to their speed.

"It's like going to the dentist," Merritt says.

"They tell you to floss more and the hygienist shows you how to floss. You do pretty well for a few weeks and then start to slack off again. The less reminding or coaching we have, the more likely we are to fall back into bad behaviors." That's why Merritt recommends implementing a coaching and feedback system.

For more tips on fuel efficiency, visit bit.ly/1lfueltips for the full article.



See EXPO FROM THE AIR

The *Lawn & Landscape* team brought the first-ever quadcopter drone to the 2013 GIE+EXPO to get a bird's-eye view of the 19-acre demonstration area. In three minutes, you get a great perspective on the scope and scale of the industry's largest trade show. What are you waiting for? See the show like you've never seen it before by visiting bit.ly/lawndrone.



Irrigation education

Lawn & Landscape has teamed up with Rain Bird to conduct six free Irrigation Profit Booster webinars. We've already completed two.

In the first one, participants learned how to add irrigation services to an existing landscape business. The second webinar featured key strategies on how

to make your customers' existing systems super efficient.

Here's some feedback from a recent one. "Great webinar!!! I learned a lot

of useful tricks! Webinars like this are great for young guys like me to learn tricks to the business! Thanks for all you do!" – Matt Denyer, owner/ operator, Brevard Outdoor Services.

You can listen to the webinars at bit.ly/rbwebinar. Just give your name and email address and you'll have access to the webinars as they are added.



POPULAR POSTS

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Hit the books

Need some new reading material for 2014? If so, *Inc.* listed its best books for entrepreneurs in 2013. So, if you missed them last year, don't make the same mistake this year.

bit.ly/1lbestbooks

Late retirement

An obituary from the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, details the life of Horace O. Gibson, who stopped working in his landscaping company, Gibson Landscaping and Maintenance, two years before his death at 95.

bit.ly/horacelandscape

Landscaper fined in stump-grinding death

OSHA fined Urban Tree Service \$4,900 for shortening a remote control cord to a stump grinder that contributed to a landscaper's fatal injuries.

bit.ly/stumpdeath

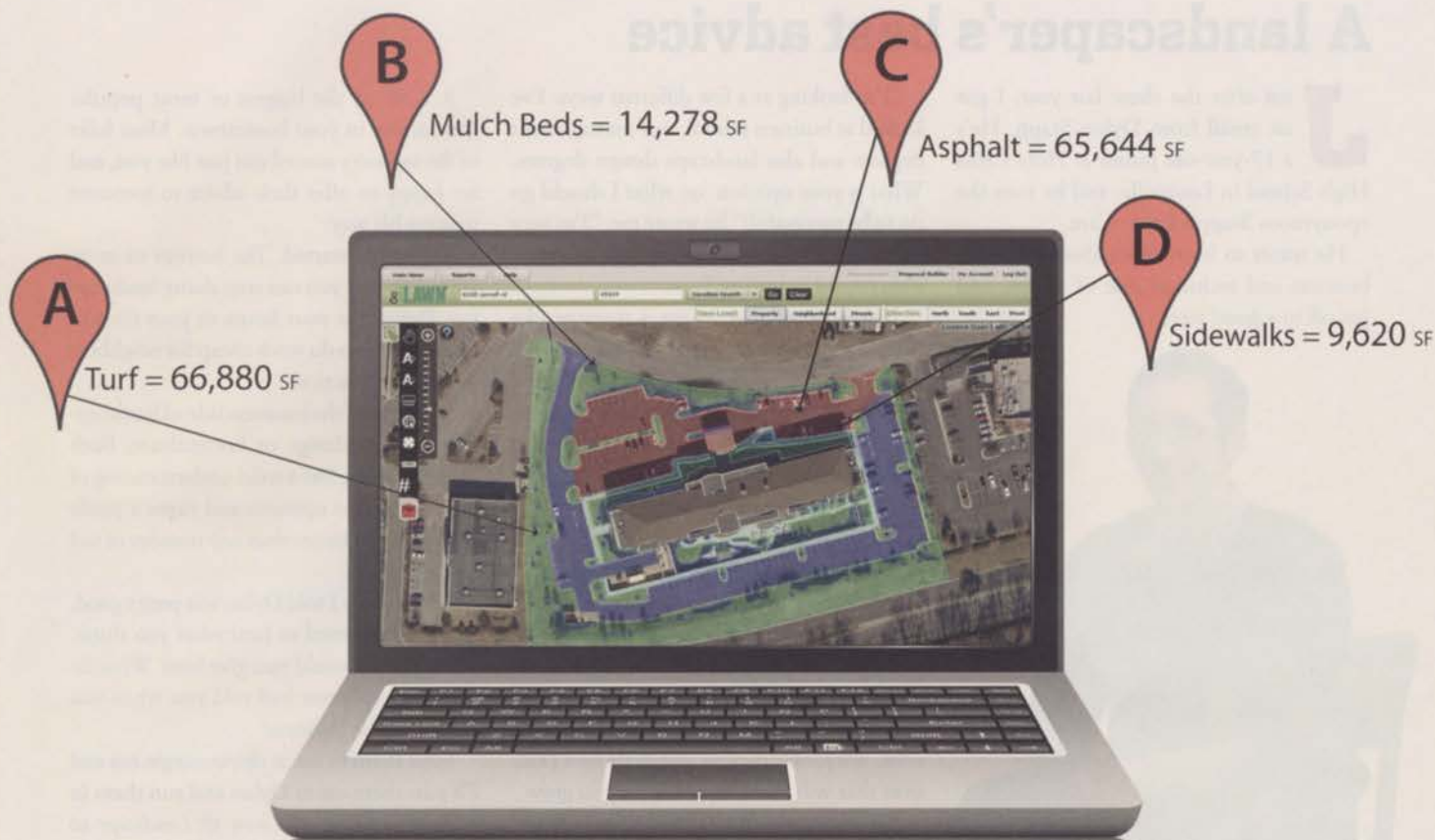
Landscaper trucks drunks

A New Jersey landscaper used his fleet to cart around those who had too much to drink on "Blackout Wednesday."

bit.ly/truckdrunk



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A landscaper's best advice

Just after the show last year, I got an email from Dylan Stapp. He's a 17-year-old junior at Holy Cross High School in Louisville, and he runs the eponymous Stapp's Lawn Care.

He wants to learn more about both the business and technical side of things, and get off to a good start.

"I'm looking at a few different ways: I've looked at business school, turf management degrees and also landscape design degrees. What is your opinion on what I should go do to be successful?" he wrote me. "I'm very passionate about lawn care and want to run a successful company."

It was heartening to get a message like that, especially as I'd been on the road for what felt like weeks and had just heard dozens of contractors and educators lamenting the future of the next generation of landscapers.

The labor picture isn't rosy, but Dylan's a living, breathing example of someone who's excited to get involved in the business. Here's what I told him:

1. Read *Lawn & Landscape* every month. (A shameless plug, yes, but I only recommend the best.) You can get us on your iPad or iPhone, or at www.lawnandlandscape.com. We profile owners and share best practices that will come in handy as you grow.

2. Attend your state's annual trade show/turf conference. You'll be able to meet other owners and talk to them about how they got started.

3. Call up the biggest or most popular contractors in your hometown. Most folks in the industry started out just like you, and are happy to offer their advice to someone making his way.

4. Just get started. The barriers to entry are so low that you can start doing landscaping. Practice at your house or your friends' houses, offer to do work cheap for neighbors so you can practice.

5. Focus on the business side of landscaping, not just design or horticulture. Both are important, but a solid understanding of how a business operates and turns a profit will serve you better than any number of soil science classes.

I think what I told Dylan was pretty good, but I'm interested to hear what you think. What advice would you give him? What do you wish someone had told you when you started in the business?

Send them to me at cbowen@gie.net and I'll pass them on to Dylan and run them in a future edition of *Lawn & Landscape* so other new owners (or old hands who maybe could use a reminder) can learn something, too. — *Chuck Bowen*



Lawn & Landscape

Leading business media for landscape contractors.

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GOOD WORKS

Volunteering for vets

A pair of irrigation suppliers volunteered to help a couple of good causes involving veterans.



Chef Rodney Veal (left) and GrowGood Project Director Brad Pregerson (right) in the kitchen at the Salvation Army Bell Shelter.

Netafim did its part to help grow food for homeless vets

FRESNO, CALIF. — GrowGood, a non-profit based in Los Angeles, spearheaded a program to create a kitchen garden in partnership with the Salvation Army Bell Shelter, located in Bell, Calif.

The shelter provides transitional housing, counseling, job training, health care and many more services for homeless vets with PTSD and other individuals.

GrowGood, founded by Andrew Hunt and Brad Pregerson, undertakes agriculturally-oriented projects in urban environments.

As a corporate partner, Netafim USA teamed up to provide dripline irrigation materials and a series of irrigation workshops.

"We target underserved groups and believe in the power of food to unite people and lay foundations for healthy communities," Pregerson said.

"Our goal is to achieve multiple positive outcomes," he said. "The Bell Shelter Garden is intended to grow enough fresh produce to feed hundreds of residents daily, while encouraging better nutrition and opportunities

to learn new job skills."

He and Hunt mustered a corps of volunteers and contacted corporate sponsors for materials to make the garden bloom.

Netafim USA supplied more than 2,000 feet of Techline dripline for the project. Netafim District Sales Manager, Bill Millward, also lead a series of step-by-step irrigation workshops for shelter residents.

"The workshops provided hands-on irrigation training so the shelter clients would be involved in the installation," said Millward, who conducted the training along with Master Gardener Mel Crudge.

"The sessions were a great chance to gain real-world job experience in irrigation system planning and installation. They covered construction of the raised planting beds, trenching, installation of the irrigation controller, pipe, main lines and valves, along with a Netafim dripline system."

Residents were joined by volunteers from the Master Gardeners association and college students from USC and UCLA.



"Participation in the construction of the garden, and the commitment to keep it flourishing have provided our clients with benefits on many levels," said Steve Lytle, director of the Salvation Army Bell Shelter.

"It is very therapeutic for residents with PTSD to be involved in a meaningful activity and

work outdoors in a structured environment. Our residents are very proud of their results. The Bell Shelter also has a nearby vocational school with instruction in landscape maintenance and the garden has provided a pathway towards this program."



The OTF show in review

Growth and changes were on tap for Ohio's turf conference.

By Chuck Bowen

I sat down with OTF Executive Director Brian Laurent at this year's Ohio Turfgrass Foundation show to pick his brain about the state of the industry, tradeshows and what green industry professionals in the Midwest can expect from the association in the coming years.



Laurent

L&L: OTF has seen some ups and downs in the last few years. What made this year's show stand out to you?

Laurent: We have certainly seen our fair share of obstacles over the last several years. Fortunately, we're moving in the right direction as indicated by a great turnout at this year's conference and show. There were many highlights, including another exceptional series of educational presentations, a show floor occupied by 124 companies representing all areas of the turfgrass industry and a packed house for our keynote speaker, Jim Tressel.

What will stay with me when it's all over are the comments received from our exhibitors, especially first time participants and those returning after taking many years off. These companies were very pleased with the foot-traffic and number of qualified leads they received, even some from markets that may not be their primary target.

Our show is unique in that our attendees come from all sections of the industry ... lawn care, golf, sports and more. This opens the door for new opportunities in many cases. It's always nice when they tell you that they're looking forward to returning again next year.



Hunter participated in a trio of Home for Our Troops projects

SAN MARCOS, CALIF. — Charitable work is one of Hunter Industries four corporate values, and the company showed that with its participation in Home for Our Troops.

"Home for Our Troops is an ongoing project with several homes in process across the country at any one time," said Todd Polderman, Hunter Product Marketing Manager.

"Hunter Industries supported the irrigation needs to three homes near the company headquarters in San Marcos, Calif."

The three homes are complete and the tenants were in various stages of moving into the homes as of early December. Hunter was approached by Volvo Rents to take part in the project.

On the days Hunter employees volun-

teered, the focus was on planting shrubs and laying sod, Polderman said.

Hunter was also responsible for installing drip irrigation zones to irrigate the shrub material, and the company provided all of the irrigation equipment to the installing contractor and provided technical expertise on the sites.

Each project took four to six months to complete, while the landscaping was completed in two weeks. Planting took one day.

"A big challenge with any volunteer project is to get the volunteers trained quickly and to make sure their work is quality," he said. "We held a quick drip emitter installation seminar and then assigned a skilled Hunter person to each crew to make sure everything went smoothly."

L&L: What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing your members right now?

Laurent: One of the biggest challenges facing our industry is a lack of qualified and dedicated labor. At nearly every meeting that I attend, this topic is always discussed.

It seems as though many organizations are having a hard time finding enough quality people willing to show up on time and perform the tasks necessary to get the job done.

Communicating the fact that there are several options for long, successful careers in our industry is crucial to opening the door to future leaders of our industry.

Regarding opportunities, it seems as though we're in a period of recovery and people have more room in their budget to attend events and spend more time investing in their own personal growth.

There are several opportunities for individuals to network and interact with their peers through social media, webinars and other online mediums, and of course at some of the many events held throughout the year.

Taking advantage of these resources is a major benefit to our members and is crucial to the immediate and long-term success of their programs.

L&L: What was the most interesting thing you saw or heard on the floor this year?

Laurent: Trying to pinpoint just one thing from the floor would be very difficult.

There were several new and innovative products and services on display this year.

One popular attraction on the show floor was the hover-craft golf cart made famous by the Bubba Watson YouTube video. Windy Knoll Golf Club in nearby Springfield, Ohio has two of them and they were kind enough to bring one over for display. It's not every day that you get to see a hover-craft golf cart.

Also, it was rewarding to have nearly 1,000 people in attendance as we recognized several students and industry professionals for their achievements over the past year during our awards and scholarships ceremony on the show floor.

L&L: What can attendees look forward to at future conferences?

Laurent: We're excited to be moving the 2014 conference and show to Kalahari Resort and Convention Center in Sandusky, Ohio.

Having our conference, tradeshow, hotel rooms, hospitality options and more all under one roof will provide our attendees and exhibitors an experience unlike anything we've been able to offer before.

Additionally, the move will make it more affordable for many of these individuals and companies to attend.

The Foundation will benefit from reduced expenses as well, allowing us to utilize revenue generated from the event to further support our mission instead of going towards overhead costs.

Dangerous duo

Tree care and racing came together at the 2013 TCI EXPO.

The Tree Care Industry Association injected some racing into its annual tradeshow in November in Charlotte, N.C. The EXPO's keynote speaker on Thursday was Jeff Hammond, a previous crew chief and current FOX Sports NASCAR commentator. Hammond's talk was titled "Teamwork at 200 MPH" and highlighted how his experiences on a pit crew could be related to the tree care industry.

"You've still got to have communication, you've got to have teamwork, and let's face it, your business is dangerous," he said in comparing the two industries.

NASCAR was a recurring theme throughout the week, with the EXPO's welcome reception taking place at the NASCAR Hall of Fame Thursday night.

Along with the trade show floor, which allowed attendees to get an up-close look at this year's newest equipment, the EXPO also featured educational sessions. Throughout the EXPO, seminars highlighted topics on safety, business and arboriculture.

A large focus of the educational sessions was how to make sure your team is as safe as possible, whether it's by hiring the best employees, training with the most successful outcome or making sure your employee handbook highlights the proper procedures.

A forum was held so young business leaders could ask questions and get advice from others who had been in the industry for years. One topic discussed in length was how to promote your new business. Suggestions included using direct mail fliers through the post office, and promoting yourself on Angie's List.

Another topic discussed was the idea of seeking out a mentor in a neighboring city that could give you some tips and advice if you run into a snag with your business. Next year's TCI EXPO will take place Nov. 13-15 in Hartford, Conn.



Attendees could try their hand at a pit-crew simulation, as well as other interactive exhibits.

Tree shortage could be hitting contractors right now

While business may be picking up for landscaping companies across the country, some may hit a bit of an obstacle when deciding what plants to include in a project. A nationwide tree shortage has hit the industry, and it doesn't look like it will end anytime in the near future.

"Tree shortages (mainly in the 2-2.5-inch caliber range) that are appearing right now are just the leading edge of a much more severe, widespread shortage of desirable trees that will be needed for landscape construction projects throughout the country," says Nancy Buley, director of communications for J Frank Schmidt & Son Co. in Boring, Ore.

Trees can take anywhere from 5-10 years to propagate. When nurseries closed their doors during the Great Recession that meant fewer trees were being propagated to hit the market right now.

"Oregon nurseries propagate a large percentage of the nation's shade trees, and everyone suffered significant decreases in their annual sales," Buley says. "Some major tree nurseries in Oregon and other propagation centers went out of business, leaving fewer propagators in the business."

Kevin Finley, general manager of Mariani Nurseries in Wisconsin, said you won't see nearly as much of a shortage in container and perennial plants because those don't take as long to propagate.

"That inventory, you can evaluate it and respond to demand a little quicker," Finley says. "There's not quite the build-up of inventory. But with trees, when things were really, really strong I think a lot of growers were having a hard time meeting demand; there was a big buildup of field stock – shade trees, that type of thing."

"With demand, it didn't just drop a normal recession level of say 10 or 12 percent. In some cases it dropped 50 percent."

That left an abundance of trees with nowhere to put them, which meant nurseries were losing money on them. That access in-



A shortage of certain trees will leave procrastinating contractors scrambling in upcoming years.

ventory is now gone and Buley says Schmidt is expecting eight years of shortages.

"It's going to take years for our nursery customers to recover from the recession," she says.

"Even though the nursery economy appears to be steadily improving, growers won't be able to afford to ramp up production right away. Many will have to spend money gained from improved sales on deferred capital improvements, equipment purchase, wage increases."

Buley adds that it's not only the recession that caused the shortage, but also the havoc wreaked by Emerald Ash Borer, Asian Longhorn Beetle, and other diseases, along with natural disasters and droughts that have hit the country.

"They're still mopping up after Hurricane Sandy, but eventually the trees that were lost will have to be replanted," she says.

WHAT NOW? So what does this tree shortage mean for landscapers? For one, you'll have to be more careful about what trees you place in a bid, which is a change from years past,

Finley says.

"The pendulum swung so dramatically from two years ago when they would bid jobs and they wouldn't even think where they could get the product because the product was so plentiful," he says.

Buley said contractors shouldn't assume the trees they want will be available at the bargain they bought it at last year. She also said contractors should be willing to expand the distances they travel for trees, be prepared to place deposits to hold trees for future delivery and align with quality nurseries and listen to their advice on upcoming availability and site-appropriate substitutions.

"Send your want-lists to nurseries as early in the design process as possible – give them a heads-up as to the varieties and quantities you anticipate needing in the future," Buley says.

"Landscape architects can no longer assume that the trees they draw on their plans will be out there for the contractor to find. They'll need to make sure the trees exist before they specify." – *Brian Horn*



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ASK THE EXPERTS

GROWTH ADVICE AND THE COST OF CUSTOMERS

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



Q. I do consumer lawn care and I am considering buying another vehicle and hiring my first employee. What should I consider when doing this?

A. Don't begin your truck or vehicle search until you've determined the type of vehicle or truck that meets your performance needs. Let's concentrate on your truck needs. For example, if you do snow work or if you are pulling heavy equipment, trucks with more power are needed. Most contractors drive their trucks 14,000 to 18,000 miles per year. Gas vs. diesel depends on how many miles per year and your power needs.

Ron Lester, president of Archterra, in the Chicago area, reports that his truck rarely clock more than 10,000 miles per year. I know successful contractors that buy pre-owned trucks and get good performance from them. Kevin Rantanen, owner of Perrysburg

Lawn and Landscape in the Toledo, Ohio area, has purchased a number of used Isuzu landscape trucks with excellent results and suggests not ruling out pre-owned vehicles as you grow your business. Gas may be a better option today for normal landscape service truck use.

Diesel trucks are the best choice for special power needs and if higher mileage is expected. Don't feel that you have to spend big dollars on expensive trucks. Well-maintained, clean trucks give clients a positive first impression and will serve your company for many years.

As for hiring your first employee, job descriptions and your training abilities are the most important issues to consider when hiring, especially your first employee. Unless you hire an experienced lawn care specialist, look for someone with a can-do attitude and train to the job responsibilities. Do a background check and be sure a potential new hire has a clean driver's license and no background

issues that would prevent him or her from working in your job environment. This may cost a small amount but will prevent major problems down the road. When interviewing potential employees look for people that seem ready to accept responsibilities and want to advance their careers. A good candidate may ask questions about the potential to advance as the company grows.

Don't be concerned by these questions and give detailed responses. Offer information about work hours and the expectations you have so everything is out in the open. Once you've hired the right person, train them in actual, on-the-job situations and conditions. Many contractors ask their employees to take industry-specific training courses and become certified in the areas of responsibility.

Remember, your competition watches what you're doing, as well as your customers. Don't lose customers because they see that your employees are unqualified or not properly trained. Or, never lose a good employee to a competitor that sees the value the employee brings to the company. Don't rush into hiring your first employee, and don't hire based on the low wage factor. Good people can accomplish great things; weak people can't perform normal tasks.

Q. What is the average cost in obtaining a new customer?

A. While there's a variety of ways to find and get new customers, some are better than others. The most effective and least costly way to obtain new customers is through referrals from your existing customers. A testimonial by a satisfied customer is the most powerful and compelling reason for a new customer to contact and consider your company.

Direct mail, door hangers, and local papers all are good for target marketing. You can choose your target area and concentrate on the potential customers in it, rather than the shotgun blast approach that is generally more expensive. Let's say your current volume is \$1 million and you plan to reach \$1.1 million next year.

If your average revenue per customer is \$2,000, you'll need 50 new customers, including your current base, to achieve that number. Your advertising and marketing efforts should be focused on obtaining 50 new customers.

A budget of \$20,000 for promoting the company and getting new customers means your cost to obtain a new customer is \$20,000 divided by 50 or \$400 per new customer.

This is simply a guide because your advertising and marketing budget expenditures also reinforce existing customer confidence, help to retain them, and can add additional business from them.

If you stop marketing/advertising, you'll not know the impact of doing so, until it's too late and competitors have started taking away your customers. **L&L**

Rick Cuddihy, owner, LaFayette Property Maintenance

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MARTY



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

Lessons from everyone you meet



Recently I had one of my ACE Meetings and there was something that came out of it that I wanted to share with you. ACE stands for Accountability Creates Excellence. These groups of landscapers are on a journey towards success by sharing, exploring and implementing better practices in business and life.

A lesson I learned from my pal and fellow speaker/teacher/author Mark Sanborn is that there really are no best practices, there are only better practices. The notion that any of us have a best practice isn't logical. It implies we have it all figured out, and that's bad.

Mark says we should be pushing ourselves to constantly find better ways to do things and hence the term better practices. So, the ACE group focuses, in a large part, to find better ways to do everything we do. From sales to operations, to financials and equipment, we

cover a lot of ground when these groups get together to work on our businesses that always searching for better practices.

In our last meeting, we were in a heated discussion concerning the issues that all of us have in our businesses and how so many of them come back to people. One of our members was lamenting the fact that he is always dealing with people with issues. That's when my colleague Matt Caruso said something magical. He said, "Everybody we meet is an example to learn from." I can't stop thinking about that.

So many times in life we see someone behaving badly or doing something with their life or their business that we just don't understand. I remember years ago meeting one of my clients, Sid was his name, at his retail store in downtown Dayton, Ohio. I was there to go over a quote with him

for some landscaping. I found Sid in the store walking around. He saw me and told me to wait a minute for him. As I watched him, I could not believe what I saw as he completely ripped a young employee to pieces in front of me for not taking care of a customer the way he wanted.

I felt about as uncomfortable as one could. I actually felt sorry for the young man he just tore apart. Now, his point may have been valid; however, the manner in which Sid did what he did in public made me do two things. One, I never thought that highly of Sid again and two, I realized that you praise people in public and you chastise them in private. So, even though I don't care that much for Sid today, I did learn some good things from him by watching him do something I did not think was right.

Recently, someone I know behaved so selfishly with a matter towards me, I felt and learned

firsthand what selfish behavior does to people. Again, I learned something. Like Matt said, "Everybody we meet is an example to learn from." Man, that's good stuff, isn't it?

I am disappointed I never looked at things through the lens Matt does. If I had the wisdom to think like he did 10 or 20 years ago, there's no telling how many things I would have learned.

I think we all have a tendency to think a little too highly of ourselves at times. I know I do. There are a lot of days I think I am smarter than I really am. There are days I am arrogant and don't listen well. There are days my behavior could be better.

And since I see that, I want to thank Matt for pointing out to me that we can learn from everyone and it's important to pay attention to all those little lessons. Seeing people do things we don't like or agree with is tough but in many ways they are great, life-changing experiences for us, if we are prepared to look at them like that.

Bottom line? We would all be better to look at everyone we meet, do business with, or come in contact with as a person we can learn from. Yes, even in bad times, there is a lesson to learn. A lesson that, if we do learn it and practice it, will find success a lot faster than most will. We are all a work in progress, looking for better practices, not best practices.

Best practices imply we are done learning. Better practices imply there is more to learn. Like my pal Matt says, "Everybody we meet is an example to learn from." I encourage you to look at experiences that way. You will become a better leader, entrepreneur and person in the process. **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@giemedia.com



Beware of those around your money

The CEO of a multi-million dollar landscape company in Maryland shared with me how his controller, a long-time friend, during a period of almost 20 years, had embezzled more than \$1 million from the company. The controller, due to a guilty conscience, confessed to the CEO what he had done. Otherwise, the CEO may never have discovered the fraud.

A bookkeeper worked for another California landscape contractor for more than seven years. Upon her departure, the owner noticed cash flow seemed to improve significantly. A fellow office staff member, shortly thereafter, shared with the owner that prior to her departure, the bookkeeper spent almost three days shredding and destroying files. Connect the dots.

An irrigation contractor in Michigan had to terminate a bookkeeper who just wasn't up to the job. Months after she left, the new bookkeeper noticed a gasoline credit card bill that seemed suspicious.

Upon further investigation by detectives, the gas station security cameras showed the terminated bookkeeper filling up her car's gasoline tank using a duplicate company credit card. Legal action followed.

The unlocked lock. Why is there so much abuse and outright fraud within the small business community? Here are some of the reasons.

1. Roughly 70 percent of my clients use QuickBooks or a version of it for their accounting. The security features within it are less than foolproof. Once posted, transactions can easily be erased or altered to cover up fraud.
2. Entrepreneurs are optimistic and trusting individuals. They tend to think the best of people and sometimes overlook prudent safeguards, and checks and balances within their organizations.
3. This is sure to be controversial, but tax code accounting is not an operational necessity. It adds little intrinsic value to the organization other than



to meet arbitrary tax code requirements. If the tax code was replaced by a value-added tax (V.A.T.), a national sales tax or a flat tax, 90 percent of what bookkeepers do would be eliminated. Job costing, for example, has nothing to do with the tax code, but everything to do with a company's profitability. I tell clients that my job is to help them make as much money as possible.

Their CPA's job is to make them look like they are going broke and to keep them out of jail. Ninety percent of what a bookkeeper does to meet tax code requirements is arbitrary, meaningless and would be eliminated by a V.A.T., flat tax or national sales tax.

People with arbitrary, meaningless jobs tend to be insecure. Driven by insecurity, a small percentage of them tend to bend the arbitrary rules, in their favor, for personal gain.

4. A lock is not meant to keep a thief out. Rather it is meant to keep an honest man honest. Many entrepreneurs simply do not know how to implement simple safeguards in their company.

Ronald Reagan was right. Fraud is common place within the small business community. When discussing this topic with Mark Pendergast, president of Salmon Falls Landscaping in Berwick, Maine, he stated, "In the end, you have to trust your people."

Otherwise, you'll spend all of your time mistrusting everyone and looking for abuses." I agree. In the end, like Ronald Reagan said, you have to "trust but verify." Here are a couple of good rules for entrepreneurs to follow.

First, open all bank statements. Second, have tight controls for the signing of checks. Third, personally hand out payroll checks at least once a month. Fourth, if you suspect fraud, hire a forensic CPA (Google "forensic CPA.")

You can't eliminate fraud entirely. However, with the proper procedures, and checks and balances, you can discourage it. Like Mark Pendergast said, "You have to trust your people." But add to that the words from the "Gipper," "Trust, but verify." **L&L**

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HR House Call

STEVE CESARE, PH.D. is an industrial psychologist with the Harvest Group, a landscape consulting group. www.harvestlandscapeconsulting.com; sc Cesare@giemedia.com



KEEPING SCORE

With January now upon us, landscape companies should be in the process of determining, approving, and/or publishing their 2014 annual goals. Readers, clients and colleagues are well of my advocacy of the balanced scorecard model for incorporating four interdependent goal perspectives essential to sustain long-term organizational success.

Balanced scorecard

- 1) **Financial perspective:** Addresses the company's fiscal objectives;
- 2) **Customer perspective:** Focuses on the customer experience;
- 3) **Efficiency perspective:** Directs attention on the effectiveness with which the company's internal processes are conducted;
- 4) **Human resources perspective:** Summarizes the quality of all people system initiatives in contributing to organizational results (e.g., staffing, training, safety).

Human Resources metrics. While landscapers are familiar with empirical indices related to the financial, customer and efficiency perspectives, they frequently have difficulty identifying quantitative performance metrics associated with the human resources perspective. This article provides a basic list of common human resources metrics that landscapers should consider in helping them achieve their 2014 organizational goals.

Staffing

- **Total cost of hire** – Add all recruitment, selection and orientation costs related to each new hire.
- **Average time to hire** – For every vacancy, measure the elapsed time between time of posting and time to start, then divide that sum by the number of positions filled.
- **Employee referral rate** – The percentage of new employees who joined the organization during the present year based on a referral from a current company employee.

Safety

- **Injury incidence rate** – Add all first aid and medical care injuries that occur within each month, divide that sum by the total number of payroll hours for the measured business unit during that month, and then multiply that quotient by 10,000.
- **Injury costs** – Track the total costs associated with all company injuries as summarized by the Loss Run Reports sent to the landscaping company by its workers' compensation provider each month.

Training

- **Certification rate** – The percentage of employees within a job classification that attained a professional certification during the year.
- **Learning index** – The difference between a trainee's knowledge test score taken upon completion of the training course compared to the trainee's score from the same knowledge test taken before the training course began.

Employee engagement

- **Performance linkage** – The percentage

of employees who state they have a "strong" or "very strong" understanding of how their individual job performance directly contributes to overall company results, on an employee attitude survey.

- **Executive level trust** – The percentage of employees who respond they have a "very high degree of trust" in the company's executive team, on an employee attitude survey.

Development

- **High-potential promotion rate** – The percentage of employees designated as "high-potentials" (i.e., likely to be promoted within 18-24 months) who were promoted during the current year.
- **Performance evaluation rate** – The percentage of total company employees who received a formal written performance evaluation during the current year.

Efficiency

- **Revenue per employee** – Total revenue sustained by a given business unit divided by the number of field employees in that business unit (e.g., installation, maintenance, irrigators).
- **Gross margin per employee** – Total gross margin dollars generated by a given business unit divided by the number of field employees in that business unit (e.g., installation, maintenance, irrigators).

Retention

- **Key employee retention** – The percentage of valued employees who remain employed by the company throughout the entire year.
- **Intent to turnover** – The percentage of employees who state they "will likely leave" or "will definitely leave" the company within the next year, on an employee attitude survey.

Summary. During the month of January, landscapers must develop annual empirical goals for all four categories within the balanced scorecard, and monitor them each month. That point being said, landscapers should rely on key human resources metrics, tailored to their unique strategic plan and organizational culture, to help achieve their company goals for 2014. **L&L**

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Passing the baton

Barry Phillips' children started doing "ride alongs" with dad before they were doing long division. Any opportunity to help in the field and behind the scenes was utilized as a fun tutorial in disguise. His three sons and daughter learned the ropes early when the business was maintenance-only.

Work ethic runs in the family – you could say it's a core value for the family. "I had a full-time job when I was eight years old – my brother and myself, father and mother, we had a great work ethic, and my sons and daughter do, too," Phillips says.

Phillips' son, Barry Jr., 37, currently works in the operation. Since the passing of Phillips' brother, Barry Jr. is tuning in more carefully to some of the business operations. He's learning exactly what a "typical day" as owner of Phillips and Sons Landscaping means.

"I might be welding on a pickup truck or changing oil on the trucks," Phillips says of the hands-on activities he participates in as owner. It's not all admin., but the client service piece is the most important aspect of Phillips' role as owner.

Phillips is giving his son a taste of some of the decisions he makes and will shift more responsibility to Barry Jr. in the next five or so years. Phillips says, he's getting ready. Slowly.

"When I leave, it's probably going to be better than what I would have done if I was there."



Along with maintenance, Phillips and Sons offers design/build services to customers.

Time tested

Phillips and Sons Landscaping shares some hard-won experiences that helped shape its success.

"The only thing that stays the same in life is change," says Barry Phillips, reflecting on more than 35 years in business at Phillips and Sons Landscaping in Somerset, N.J. In 1978, the company started as a humble outfit – just Phillips and his father working nights and weekends. Phillips remembers fastening a flashlight to their mowers so they could work past sunset to finish jobs.

During those early days, Phillips was also working a full-time job in the chemical industry. But that future didn't look so bright.

"The EPA started closing down a lot of the chemical plants, and I decided that it would be a good time to do something for myself," says Phillips, who served in the military overseas for six years until 1972.

From the start, Phillips and Sons has been a family affair, and it officially became a full-time pursuit for Phillips in 1983. Then, once in el-

ementary school, his three sons joined the business as young helpers, lending a hand on weekends or days off school. His daughter was involved, too.

Phillips laughs, remembering how he taught his daughter to drive a dump truck when she was 10. "She said, 'Daddy, how do you drive this?' So I said, 'Get over here,' and I showed her how. It cost me \$1,200 for a new clutch, but she now can drive anything in the lot – a dump truck, a bulldozer, any of the equipment."

Phillips' children are grown now, and his son, Barry Jr., still works in the business and will take over the operation once Phillips decides to slow down.

In the meantime, there's a lot of knowledge stored in Phillips' mental bank to pass down. Here are some of the experiences that have shaped Phillips and Sons during its 35-year history, along with Phillips' time-tested tenets for running a successful landscape firm.



Barry Phillips made Phillips and Sons Landscaping a full-time pursuit in 1983.

COMMUNICATE WITH CARE. What does it take to stay in business for several decades – to persevere through economic ups and downs? “It takes someone to stay on top of phone calls – personalization with the customer,” Phillips says.

Particularly, homeowner associations and corporate accounts require “a lot of finesse on the phone” and in-person meetings.

“I like to deal with everyone face to face.”

Phillips might make the first few contacts by phone, and use e-mail to follow up and stay in touch with clients, but never as a sole form of communication. Personal contact with each client is how he assures customers are satisfied, and suggests enhancements.

“I always go out, walk the property, take notes – I go over that with the client and I produce a contract and I make sure they are satisfied,” he says. “I give the crews a copy of the contract so they know what they are supposed to accomplish.”

Keeping in touch with clients is critical, Phillips adds. Many times, you won’t know about a problem until you call. And if you aren’t reaching out, who knows how long a client could simmer over an issue that could be quickly solved.

“Clients appreciate when you stay in touch with them – when you treat them as more than a paycheck at the end of the month.

They mean much more than that to your business.”

NOTHING’S A SURE THING. Today, Phillips and Sons has nine employees and generates about \$1.5 million in revenue. At its peak in the mid-1990s, the business had 16 people on staff and ran four to five crews. “It grew by word of mouth – we did a good job, we did an honest day’s work for an honest wage, and people appreciated that and I always backed everything up. If they lost a plant, I replaced it,” Phillips says.

The commercial side of the business took off during the firm’s boom time, and Phillips and Sons acquired corporate contracts that ultimately resulted in business expansion throughout New Jersey.

But project volume has decreased since the homeowner association/condo business has slowed, and since the economic recession is still not bouncing back in Phillips’ mind.

“It is not the money-making market it used to be,” he says.

“You could make a good buck on the associations and condos, but most of the

large corporations have put on their own maintenance crews and it’s cheaper for them to do that,” he says.

There are plenty of low-priced contractors willing to work, he adds. “I don’t know how they carry their insurance policies and provide all of the services they say they do.”

Actually, Phillips does know how: by providing a lesser quality service. “You cannot provide excellent service and only break even,” he says. So Phillips took a hit by losing some condo and association work; but he gained an attractive corporate account, Darden Restaurants (Red Lobster, Longhorn Steakhouse and others).

ADAPT AND LEARN. Flexibility helps a business weather 35 years of winning, and losing clients – expanding in robust times, and running lean in the recession. The ability to be nimble, to ramp up or tighten up, has served Phillips and Sons well in its time.

“It’s not easy,” Phillips says of running a business and staying in business.

Sometimes, it’s downright painful. Like two years ago, when a \$350,000 client never paid in full.

“It came down to the last \$75,000 payment – that was my payday – and the client went bankrupt,” he says.

“You have to push against the wind, and that’s exactly what I did. We cut back: no more frills and extras. No more two or three trucks going to a job. We squeezed

into two or one truck. We scurried around to overcome that dilemma and, you know, we are still paying for that.”

But going back to his mantra about change, Phillips knows this will not be the last unexpected riff his business experiences. And because the company keeps its eye on what matters most (customers), Phillips is creating a rich legacy to pass on to family.

“I’m looking forward to the next five years as the economy starts to recover and my son is going to take on more responsibility.” **L&L**



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Tricked Out

Here's a look at some of the accessories to give your zero-turn mower that extra something.



By Katie Tuttle

➔ **W**hen it comes to zero-turn mowers, obviously you always want the best. However, with today's advancements in mower technology, sometimes it's hard to distinguish between two different mowers from two different companies. Which one do you choose?

Because of this dilemma, we wanted to look beyond the basics and highlight accessories customers can add on. We've compiled a list of each company and what it offers for zero-turn mowers, making it easier for you to determine which mower option is best for you.

BOB-CAT

Dump-From-Seat Collection System

Available on ProCat, Predator-Pro and FastCat models
Upgrade

Coming out in early spring of 2014, BOB-CAT will offer customers a new collection system unique to the company.

Featuring a dump front seat, the company's collection system will give operators the capability to dump on seat.

The patent pending design differs from other collection systems out there because it allows you to dump within the footprint of the mower instead of the system increasing the length of the mower when dumping. If you're dumping into a trailer, you are able to get within an inch of the trailer and still be able to dump.

BOB-CAT's collection system will be available in multiple styles. For the ProCat and Predator-Pro models, customers can purchase a dump from seat or a 3-bag system. Both styles will have a 12 bushel. For the FastCat model, there will be a dump from seat and 2-bag system, both with an 8 bushel.



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Another plus of the collection system is that improvements to it now allow an operator to take it on and off the unit easily. Only one person is required to remove the baggage system from the back, and the front weight kit has a handle on it, allowing it to easily be taken off the machine.

BOB-CAT's design allows you to look into the hopper without needing to take the time to take it somewhere to dump it. If there's a clog, or something needs to be cleared out, that can be done right on site. You can get off the mower, go to the back, and just lift up the cover to see what the issue is. There's no need to take the mower offsite to dump it first.

For more information: www.bobcatturf.com

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When it comes to accessories, Exmark sees operator comfort as something very high in demand. Because of this, it's created an air ride suspension seat to meet customer need.

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the standard seat, it will also incorporate Exmark's 3D Iso mount system, which will maximize comfort for the operator while driving on tough terrain.

With the air ride suspension seat, companies will see an increase in productivity because operator fatigue will decrease. A rider can sit in the mower for eight hours and, due to comfort, his body may feel the fatigue of a four-hour work day.

Exmark's seat will be released in March, and will be made to fit all its current laser models, as well as any laser model built after 2009.

For more information: www.exmark.com

GRAVELY

Discharge Chute Blocker



Available on all Zero-turn mowers.
Upgrade

Everyone's had one of those jobs that require you to mow extremely close to parking lots, making you watch cautiously as your grass clippings shoot towards unsuspecting cars parked there. Gravely offers a discharge chute blocker on its zero turns which allows you to temporarily close off the chute.

While it shouldn't be engaged all the time, closing the chute for short durations can cut back on extra time you or your crew would spend cleaning up grass clippings from parking lots, flower bed edges, or around trees.

It also improves the appearance of the yard, because even if you take the time and effort to rake up those clippings, you're still likely to leave some in the mulch beds. Being able to close

off the chute completely allows you to cut

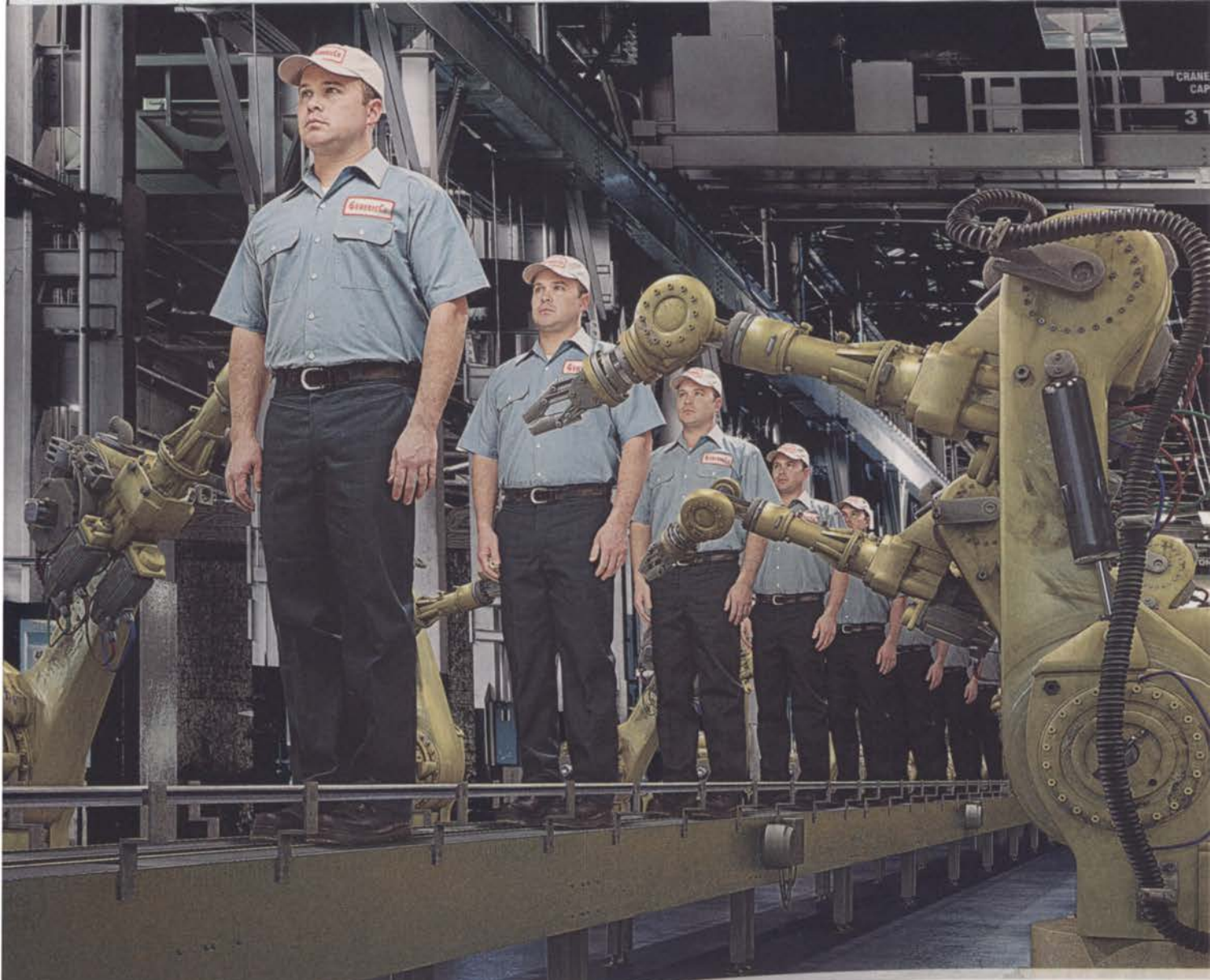
close to the edge of the bed without blurring the perfect lines.

A large benefit of Gravely's chute blocker is that you can take it out of the box in a matter of minutes, put it on the machine and it's operational.

The accessory itself doesn't affect cutting quality, so disengaging it has the same outcome as mowing without it attached at all. Because it's easy to engage and disengage the accessory while you're mowing the same piece of property, you can keep it on the mower even when you're not using it.

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HUSQVARNA

SmartSwitch

Available on RZ series Zero-turn mowers.
Upgrade

Available in February, Husqvarna is offering SmartSwitch, a microprocessor enabled electronic interface that will be available on select RZ series Zero-turn mowers, as well as the GT series garden tractors. Some of the features of the SmartSwitch include key-less operation, one touch starting, safer reverse mowing, and system monitoring. The reason behind the creation of the SmartSwitch was that when asked what

they'd like to see on mowers, Husqvarna customers responded with "Make it easier to start," "if something is wrong, tell me somehow," and "can you make it more secure around my children?"

By providing the key-less operation, the SmartSwitch eliminates the fear of misplacing keys, as well as saving energy because the system automatically shuts down after a certain amount of inactivity. The headlights are controlled by one touch, and can be programmed to shut off at pre-set times.

System monitoring on the interface shows current battery status, as well as status of the reverse operating system. There is also an indicator to signal if the parking break, cutting deck, or steering levers need to be corrected prior to a start attempt.



For more information: www.husqvarna.com

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Found on John Deere zero-turn mowers, the company's Mulch-on-Demand (MOD) decks allow the operator to move a lever from the operator seat, converting the mower from a true side-discharge deck to a true mulching deck.

Because of the ease in changing decks, MOD decks can benefit operators by allowing them to adjust the deck performance the best fit each job. One job may require you to use a side-discharge deck, and the very next job may require a mulching deck. Because of John Deere's MOD, both jobs can be done with the same mower, just by pulling a lever. You're even able to switch deck options while working on the same job,



saving time on site.

Another advantage of the MOD decks is that it's designed to save the operator time in clean up. This is done by giving them the ability to close the discharge chute when mowing around areas that grass clippings are not wanted, thus saving them from having to sweep up afterwards.

For more information: www.deere.com


KUBOTA

Maintenance Lift Kit

Available on Z200, Z300, and Z700 models.

Upgrade

A convenient attachment for any zero-turn operator, Kubota offers a stand-type maintenance lift kit attachment for most of its Z Series mowers.

A photograph of two men in a garden. The man on the right is smiling and holding a small green plant. He is wearing a dark blue polo shirt with a "U.S. LAWNS" logo. The man on the left is partially visible, looking at the plant. The background is a blurred garden scene.

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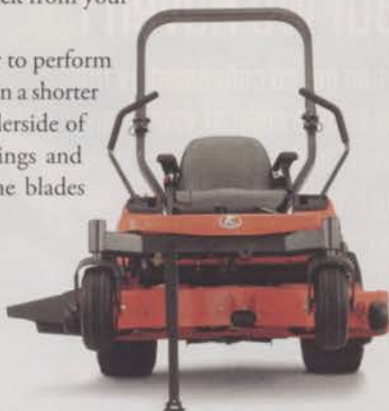
The attachment acts like a built-in jack and allows the front of the mower to be raised without removing the deck.

Because the attachment is attached to the mower, there's no need for owners to have a separate jack in the shop or on the trailer, thus saving some much-needed space.

A bonus of Kubota's maintenance lift kit is that if something goes wrong with your mower on site, you're able to immediately check the problem without needing to take it back to the shop, or take the time to unload a jack from your trailer.

Having an attached jack also allows the operator to perform routine maintenance and cleaning much easier and in a shorter amount of time. You're able to easily give the underside of the mower a thorough washing to remove clippings and debris. The attachment also makes sharpening the blades much easier.

For more information: www.kubota.com



Product Roundup

FOR MORE zero-turn mowers, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com/products

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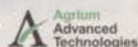


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Altoz XC Zero-Turn Mowers

The pitch: The 2014 Altoz XC Series of zero-turn mowers is the flagship line from a new brand of mowers built by an experienced team of engineers and lawn care industry professionals.



- They can reach speeds of 19 mph.
- The tapered roller bearings in the front casters are the same ones used in the automotive industry.
- Deck spindles feature massive cast-aluminum housings for optimal cooling and permanently sealed bearings with machined surfaces for extra durability.

For more information: www.altoz.com

John Deere Z950M

The pitch: The new Z950 joins the M Series of ZTrak commercial mowers, designed for productivity and efficiency.



- It has a top speed of 10 mph.
- The model is offered in 60-inch, 60-inch Mulch On Demand, and 72-inch widths, and comes equipped with a 7-Iron deck for maximum durability.
- The new model has the option of an isolation seat or a fully-adjustable suspension seat.
- For easy cleanup on the jobsite, an optional, integrated material collection system provides a Dump-From-Seat option.

For more information: www.johndeere.com/mowpro

Kubota Z700-Series

The pitch: The new Z700-Series includes three models: the Z723, Z724 and Z725. The new Series is a high-quality and productive zero-turn mower, at a competitive price point.



- The Z700-Series boasts powerful Kohler Command V-Twin Engines and integrated Parker 14cc pump and wheel motors.
- Available with a rugged commercial deck in three popular cutting widths (48-inch, 54-inch and 60-inch).
- The Z700-Series comes equipped with a wide operator platform, a thick high-back adjustable seat and a convenient deck height adjustment dial.

For more information: www.kubota.com

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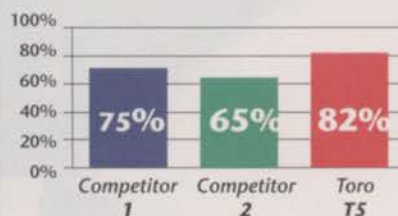
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TORO

Count on it.

Separate brands

When Treasure Coast began in 1996, it started as an irrigation company. But more than five years ago, Scott Fay had the opportunity to purchase Rood Landscape, a well-known brand in Fla.

"Rood already had such a big and wholesome brand that we wanted to keep it separate," Fay says of purchasing the company but not morphing it into the Treasure Coast brand. "Rood is an old and unbelievable brand here in Florida and Roy Rood, who passed away at age 92, has become a legend in this region. That's not something we wanted to change."

Adding Rood Landscape did change the brand lineup. In addition to Treasure Coast Irrigation, Fay made Rood Landscape an affiliate company that retained its landscape identity. For clients that needed both landscaping and irrigation, Fay formed a third brand – TCI Rood.

Having the separate brands has also worked well in continuing some of the subcontracted work Treasure Coast has received over the years. "Treasure Coast works for other landscape companies," Fay says. "They know we're connected to Rood Landscape."

Since adding Rood to the lineup of 12 other companies Fay has bought (he calls Rood "lucky number 13"), he says it has been a unique opportunity. "We can cross market and it's very symbiotic," Fay says. "Each company has its own leadership but we're all in the same building and very much work together. We've enjoyed blending the brands while also keeping them individualized."



One man's trash

Treasure Coast Irrigation & Landscape was about to go bankrupt until Scott Fay got his hands on it.

Scott Fay has a knack for taking failing companies and transforming them. In 1996, that's how his success story with Treasure Coast Irrigation & Landscape, in Hobe Sound, Fla., began. It was just a tiny service company going bankrupt when Fay began to work his magic. He transformed it into a business that did more than \$13 million in revenue last year. Today, Fay has formed a business that compiles 13 other distressed companies that were all going out of business.

"I tell people that I'm not gifted enough to take a good company and make it great – but I know how to take a broken company and fix it," says Fay, who runs the company with his partner Tom Balling.

"I have worked out a formula that allows me to take a failing company and fix it. We have an infrastructure already in place so the first thing we do is get rid of the senior level people at the company. That's the expensive part. But I already

have a fantastic leadership team in place. From there, we go to work on rolling that business into the main company. There are a number of philosophies and strategies that come into play for that."

In fact, Fay has a variety of core philosophies that he operates his entire business on. His belief in the importance of operating under business principles also led to a book, "Discover Your Sweet Spot." Fay says it's these philosophies and strategies that have set his company apart and he recently shared some of the ones that have helped him grow his business from the ground up.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP. A lot of people build a company based on trade, Fay says. There's no doubt trade is important. In irrigation, contractors need to be skilled at installing systems and troubleshooting maintenance problems.

But Fay says that the real key to success is leadership. "We drilled down on trade only after



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Irrigation contractors need to be skilled at installing systems and troubleshooting maintenance problems.

the leadership was already in place," Fay says.

"I want leadership that has the same underlying business beliefs as me but bring different perspectives to the table. That includes what we focus on as the four posts of business: Top, Bottom, Inside, and Out." Fay breaks them down:

- **Top.** "Sales is the top line. It's your

income. Everyone has to believe in the importance of sales to be on my team."

- **Bottom.** "The bottom is profit. I have to surround myself with people that believe in profit. There are people who are put off by profit; who say they're uncomfortable with a focus on making money. I don't want people who are put off by profit."

- **Inside.** "My inside customer is my team. We believe that everyone is a customer and that includes the team. It's just as important for my inside customer to have a great experience as my outside customer and I need leadership that believes in that too."

- **Outside.** "Leadership also has to believe in the importance of a great experience for the outside customer."

The company keeps an eye on these four posts to ensure they always work in harmony. Fay feels focusing on leadership first is key in setting his company apart.

"There are a lot of really good irrigation contractors out there who are quite good at what they do," Fay says. "But they haven't taken the time to develop their business and they certainly haven't developed their team."

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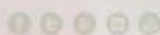
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How Fay trains his employees shows up in the finished product.

EXTENSIVE TRAINING. Training is actually one of the most important ways Fay says employees are prepared for the job. The company has a 30-step in-house training program that happens in three components: a lab, a ride-along field experience, and classroom/lecture-based training.

"It's definitely over the top – but by intent. If we have an average program, we're going to be an average company."

Fay says philosophy and business models are a huge part of the training. "Part of being trained means listening to me lecture on the philosophies of our business," he said. "If I get an irrigation tech who really doesn't want to talk about philosophy and resists the training, then that person isn't right for us."

Treasure Coast also offers a unique training experience with an actual lab. "We take equipment that was either broken in the field or we've purposely broken it for teaching purposes," Fay said.

"It's a great training opportunity. I use non-functioning valves or clocks – especially electrical and mechanical components that aren't working – and demonstrate how to repair and diagnose. There's nothing more fun than taking a new guy who thinks he knows everything and putting some broken equipment in front of him. I say 'Don't tell me how to fix it – show me.'"

A MAINTENANCE FOCUS. Like every other company, Treasure Coast was faced with determining how to continue thriving despite the recession. For Fay, maintenance was an obvious answer.

"Maintenance is a backbone," Fay says. "It may not be sexy, high gloss or even technical – but it's steady. It's constant revenue and that's what has helped us build a fantastic clientele list that becomes loyal to the other services we offer as well."

In his training, Fay teaches about the value of maintenance by using Olympic sites as prime examples. "Olympic site designs were built in a magnificent way and were truly incredible designs," Fay says.

"But now that nobody maintains them, they look absolutely terrible... They've lost that magnificence... I have a passion for maintenance and really believe in its importance." **L&L**

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Everything's wetter in Texas

News and notes from the IA

AUSTIN, Texas – Four thousand attendees and more than 300 exhibitors traveled to Texas in November to attend the Irrigation Association Show. With the state still recovering from one of its worst droughts, water conservation and system efficiency were top discussion points.

NEW PRODUCT CONTEST. The 2013 show saw 50 entries to the new products contest, its highest number since the contest began. Entries were judged on innovative qualities, increased water efficiency, ease of use, cost benefits, time savings and design quality.

The winner in the landscape/golf category was the Toro Co., for its EVOLUTION Series Controller. Honorable mentions went to Hydro-Rain for the HRC990 Battery-Powered Controller and Moisture Sensor Plug-In and Rain Bird Corp. for the ESP-SMTE controller.

The winners in the specialty category were Hydro-Rain for its Irrigation Audit App and Hydro-Rain Sprinkler Catch Cups. Honorable mentions went to the Illumicare Group, Woody, and to RainHarvest Systems for the RainMaster 5100 Pro Rainwater Harvesting System.

NEW BOARD. During the show, the association named Warren Thoma, of Warren Thoma and Associates, Crystal Lake, Ill., as

its incoming president. Other executive board members are President-Elect Aric J. Olson, Jain Irrigation, Fresno, Calif., Vice President Jay Robbins II, Irrigation-Mart, Rustin, La., Treasurer Greg Hunter, Hunter Industries, San Marcos, Calif., and immediate past President Robert D. Dobson, Middletown Sprinkler Co., Port Monmouth, N.J.

"Our volunteer and staff team have done an incredible job setting us up for success in the years to come," Thoma said. "In 2014, we plan to follow through on our revised mission of promoting efficient irrigation while working toward our vision of being the recognized authority on irrigation."

Three additional board members were named to their positions after the show. Jeff Lanan, senior vice president, John Deere Landscapes, Troy, Mich.; Chris Roth, president, Reinke Manufacturing Co., Deshler, Neb., and Ed Santalone, CEO/president, Atlantic Irrigation Specialties, White Plains, N.Y., will serve through 2016.

IA AWARDS. During the show, the association gave its Industry Achievement Award to Vince Nollelli, Paige Electric Co., Fresno, Calif. The award was established in 1966 and recognizes an individual whose career



The Irrigation Association Show took place in November in Texas and featured a new products contest, the naming of a new board and award presentations.

demonstrates outstanding contributions to the advancement of the irrigation industry.

Nollelli is recognized for his outstanding contributions to the industry, which include introducing the first commercially available microprocessor-based irrigation controllers, the KCS system and increasing awareness of best management practices for electrical aspects of irrigation systems.

David Zoldoske, director of the Center for Irrigation Technology, California State University, Fresno, won the IA's Person of the Year award, which recognizes those outside the commercial irrigation industry who have made outstanding contributions toward the acceptance of sound irrigation practices or policies.

As the director of the Center for Irrigation Technology, Dr. Zoldoske has established the center as an internationally renowned irrigation testing facility – a facility that is now

the primary testing lab for WaterSense-labeled irrigation products. He also served on the IA Executive Committee for five years and was president from 2004 to 2005.

NEXT YEAR. The 2014 Irrigation Show will feature keynote speaker Lowell Catlett, regents professor in agricultural economics and agricultural business and extension economics and the dean of the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences at New Mexico State University.

The 2014 show will again include exhibitors and education sessions from both the International Professional Pond Companies Association and the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association.

The 2014 show will take place in Phoenix Nov. 17-21. In 2015, the show moves to Long Beach, Calif., Nov. 9-13 and in 2016 heads to Las Vegas Dec. 5-9. **L&L**



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Little cuts can go a long way

When Lifestyle Landscaping looked inside for ways to lean its operation during the recession, managers were surprised to learn that they could trim a few thousand dollars by simply deactivating cell phones that were "in use" but not being used and reviewing their plan.

But other operational decisions aren't so obvious.

For one, deciding to keep a full-time mechanic on board has saved the company significantly in the equipment repair and purchase department. Lifestyle Landscaping's fleet mechanic has been on board for some 15 years.

"If the mechanic is highly skilled and he knows how to fix a hydraulic pump and install a \$20 part vs. buying a \$2,000 pump – If you have a mechanic with a good diagnostic ability and great mechanical abilities, that can save you money like you wouldn't believe," says Kevin O'Brien.

The savings add up to thousands each year – enough to justify the salary of a mechanic and then some.

But maintaining a holding yard for plants was another story.

The company cut out its 5-acre nursery about seven years ago.

"It got so expensive to maintain, and now we are relying on suppliers to find us the plant material that we need," O'Brien says.

The challenge is accessing special material that can make or break a project.

"We just have to search a little harder for it now," O'Brien says, noting that the company does not price shop its suppliers.

"We are relying on them to help us out. Your suppliers are your partners, so you have to treat them as you would want your customers to treat you."



Different by design

Lifestyle Landscaping takes the guesswork out of customer expectations.

Lifestyle Landscaping doesn't sell pavers, shrubs, annuals or stone. Brick and mortar is one business, but creating outdoor living spaces for clients who value a creative, naturalistic environment is another. "We don't sell trees, we sell shade – and we sell color and outdoor entertaining space," says Kevin O'Brien, landscape designer at the North Ridgeville, Ohio-based firm.

Word choice can play a role in how clients perceive a plan, O'Brien finds. So he is sure to speak their language. "If a homeowner has two proposals to review, it's not about the numbers," he says. "I provide the numbers – and then something else."

O'Brien and designers at Lifestyle Landscaping – including owner Don Hoffman and his brother, Dave – dig deep during initial interviews with clients. They listen. They ask questions about family, hobbies, pets, outdoor activities, socializing preferences, down to whether or not the fence gate needs to be closed at all times so a dog doesn't get out. They take notes, and come proposal time, they can reiterate clients' demands in a way that strikes them emotionally.

"We refer back to our notes and use their words to describe the project during our presentations, and they get this look on their faces like, 'That's exactly what we wanted,' but they don't remember that they told you that," O'Brien says, adding that, "you really have to dig."

So Lifestyle Landscaping's "building" begins long before breaking ground. The full-service firm, is keenly focused on nurturing client relationships. "A strong customer base is your bread and butter," O'Brien says. "They pay for everything you own."



A careful eye is critical for the sustainability of a design/build firm.

GIVE THEM THE DETAILS. "If you have a customer problem, you don't just solve it – you solve it creatively," O'Brien says. "That

immediately puts you in a different category."

Typically, prospective clients Lifestyle Landscaping has not

served in the past are shopping their project. The key to winning a project – and ensuring the project is equally good for the business – is to stay away from price wars and focus, instead, on delivering creative ideas. So O'Brien is always looking for the X-factor on a project: What's the one thing (or several) that is the make-or-break on the property?

"We do whatever it takes to address that X factor so our plans are different," O'Brien says. "Whatever it is, I need to make that design different enough that our plan is on a different shelf (than competitors) in the customer's mind."

Differentiation begins with a deep interview. And it continues with casual conversation. It's not unusual for O'Brien to pull out his notepad and whip up some sketches while walking the property. He'll "test" these designs with potential clients. "It's cheap at that point to change a design," he quips. "So, spending that time upfront is well invested."

That way, when the time has come to present the design, O'Brien and designers at Lifestyle Landscaping know their work is an accurate reflection of their prospects' wish lists.

And during presentation, O'Brien says clients want to



THE DIFFERENCES ARE



know you listened to their goals. "It's amazing how many designers talk about materials and equipment and they are not talking about benefits for the customer," O'Brien says. "You have to show them the benefits of the plan and show them attention to detail."

SMART BY DESIGN. Detail-work is not only important for creating designs that make winning impressions – a careful eye is critical for the sustainability of a design/build firm, or any company, during tougher economic times. Lifestyle Landscaping was founded in 1976 by Don and

Karen Hoffman, who began in landscape installation and eventually added maintenance services – an organic extension of their core business.

"We are their one-stop shop: there to install the work, help them take care of the property, and then we're there for phase 2 or 3 work when they're ready."

Those second and third phases of projects weren't happening when the recession hit hard.

Lifestyle Landscaping did not cut prices. But the firm helped its clients cut costs. "We worked with clients to help them reach the desired price point," O'Brien says. "Customers were just cau-

tious – they wanted to see the value."

O'Brien notes that many clients choose to work in phases. "We'll do a patio and a portion of the landscape, and once we have shown them what their yard could be, then stage 2 happens – that water feature we talked about, or the landscape structure."

Over time, customers return to Lifestyle Landscape for enhancements, new projects and ongoing maintenance. The company is structured to encourage and grow these trusted rapportos.

Designer/salespeople nurture a client list and also oversee

maintenance on those completed projects. They're in touch with clients all the time, tending to their needs and anticipating what's next.

"That personal relationship carries down to the crew level, where we try to keep the same foreman going to the same project, so there is some recognition there from the homeowner," O'Brien says. "It's gotten to the point where our guys know every single nuance on a property and how they can take care of it. That close working relationship with long-term customers is something we have enjoyed for more than 30 years." L&L



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BRING IT LIKE A BOY SCOUT

Be prepared
the next time
you need to
shop for a
skid-steer.

Skid-steers can be an expensive purchase, but they are also a huge help for contractors. And going to buy one can be overwhelming if you haven't done your homework.

But first, you need to know when you might want to look into replacing one.

"I base that decision off of the intended use of the machine and the level of reliability it requires," says David Fairburn, president of North Point Holdings, an outdoor property services company in Derry, N.H. "If the equipment is contracted at a zero-tolerance snow removal account, the reliability must be high. In that case, I would recommend no more than 1,500 to 2,000 hours. If the machine is used in the role of a yard machine at the shop where reliability is not such a factor, I believe a well taken care of machine should provide 3,000 to 4,000 hours of use."

We checked in with a couple of contractors to find out how to make shopping for a skid-steer easier.



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Waiting until the last minute to buy a skid-steer can hit your bank account hard because you'll have no time to do any homework, and you'll be forced to over pay. "If you need a skid-steer in April, you don't want to start looking two weeks before you need it," says Eric Lloyd, co-partner of Serene Surroundings in Plymouth, Mich.

Lloyd spent three months researching skid-steers before he made a recent purchase – and it paid off. He was able to find a used machine that had only a third of the hours it should have had considering its age.

Fairburn says he never buys a new machine on the fly and also creates a two to three-month window of research.

"We like to ensure that there is plenty of work and long term contracts and projects for it prior to purchase," he says. "We utilize magazine comparison articles, Internet and vendor support to research the pros and cons of competing equipment and models."

Don't let the location of a sale deter you. Lloyd will look nationally for a deal, and will pick it up himself or ask someone who works for him to do it. He's also bought from dealers and from private sellers. **W**

When buying from a private seller, make sure you bring a mechanic with you to check it out so you know how much work is needed. "As far as I'm concerned, it's worth the research and it's worth the time," he says.

KNOW YOUR DEALER

Buying a brand of skid-steer sold by a dealer close to your location and who you have a good relationship with is a must if you want to eliminate downtime when the machine breaks down.

"It's important to me, whatever brand of skid-steer that I buy, that it can get serviced quickly and close to my location," Lloyd says.

Lloyd said he used to have a mechanic who could fix skid-steers, but he would still send it out to be serviced for certain repairs because he didn't want his mechanic tied up trying to fix something that took multiple days to finish. "It was important that I had service so I didn't have a lot of downtime," he says.

Fairburn says the relationship you have with a dealer also comes in handy when it's time to replace a skid-steer. Fairburn said he and his partners realized early on in their business that growing a relationship with key vendors was important, and did so by being open and honest and sharing the story of their business.

"These guys typically have extensive knowledge of what machines and equipment have worked for their different clients over the years," he says.



APPLICATION

Always take into account how you are going to use your skid-steer. Will it mainly be used for hauling pallets, or will you need it for a number of different jobs, which will require attachments? When Lloyd bought his first loader, he made sure it could support an excavating attachment to save him money on buying or renting a backhoe.

Fairburn says don't be afraid to buy big, and find new ways to use the machine.

"Find a machine that can fulfill multiple roles over various seasons," he says. "Don't be afraid to purchase a machine that you can grow into. Buying a smaller machine to save some money will typically hurt when your business grows into different project levels and property sizes. Larger skid-steers that can easily lift a full pallet of paver, wallblocks or sod

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Chris Casselberry, from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, always knew that "You can't put value on working with family." So when he started Green Seasons in 2000 he was determined to have the right tools in place to make the company able to support himself, four of his children, and even two of his grandkids! CLIP Software has been one of his greatest tools to achieving his dream from day one - helping with scheduling, project management, customer management and efficiency ratings. CLIP ensures that Chris gets the profit he needs on each of his jobs, keeps his customer routes tight, and watches his costs on every landscaping project. Chris says, "I especially love using the new CLIP2Go because it allows us to know where our crews are at all times and has completely eliminated our paper route sheets!"

To help Green Seasons reach the next level, Chris attended the annual CLIP Conference a few years later and he has never regretted it. "At the first conference we went to they talked about the H2B program so we went home and started using it ourselves - since then we have learned something new at every conference we go to!" By using the tools and ideas of the CLIP Conferences, Green Seasons has been able to reap profits from the H2B

program, piecework system, innovative marketing ideas, and so much more. Ever since CLIP started their own lawn care company (CLIP Lawn Care), Chris has been given even more great business ideas to implement into Green Seasons.

Today, Green Seasons is looking forward to growing their company to almost 200 employees in 2014, and offers a

"I especially love using the new CLIP2Go because it allows us to know where our crews are at all times and has completely eliminated our paper route sheets!"

variety of services such as lawn maintenance, Christmas decorations, irrigation, tree work, landscaping, and window cleaning, all powered through CLIP! Chris' key to success? "Treat your customers like they are supposed to be treated and you'll create a life-long relationship with them."

At CLIP Software we agree, "Your Success Is Our Business." We love helping thousands of companies like Green Seasons continue to grow with our software solutions and knowledge of the green industry compiled through our first-hand experience since 1987! Give us a call to request a FREE demo and see how CLIP can make you more successful.



will pay dividends over one that cannot safely lift a full pallet from a trailer and transport it around the job site."

Lloyd does a lot of high-end residential, so he invested an extra \$10,000 in an all-wheel steering machine with special tires to make sure he was leaving the property in pristine condition. "It was important to me that I wasn't going to be tearing up property," he says. "Repair costs and sodding your way out of projects gets costly. Over the course of two years, that would pay for itself, that extra cost."

And don't forget that a skid-steer can be used to plow snow.

Even if you don't plow snow, Lloyd says to consider renting your machine to a company that does.

"If you are using your machine for snow removal it is best to have a two-speed machine," Fairburn says. "The time savings of a two speed machine plowing snow is significant."



The size of the properties you work on should be a factor in what kind of skid-steer you buy.

If most of your work happens in areas with small entry points, you should invest in a smaller machine instead of renting.

But if a small percentage of your work comes in a large area, then look into renting a large machine instead of buying. "Most of the residential I do are pretty large homes, and have good accessibility," Lloyd says.

Silicon Now Designated Plant Beneficial Substance by AAPFCO

Silicon-Rich CrossOver™ Turf Addressing 21st Century Problems in Lawn Care Management

Offering the best solutions to meet your clients' lawncare needs may require specialized services that deal with problems outside of basic service contracts as well as programs that address a new set of 21st Century problems that may keep even your basic programs from performing to the expectations of your clients. Examples of these problems include:

- Soil quality and functionality
- Overcoming water restrictions (drought)
- Salt problems that may be introduced through the mandated use of effluent water
- Metal toxicity
- Phosphorus restrictions
- Environmental stresses caused by heat, drought and freezing conditions

Despite an abundance of products available to optimize fertility and control diseases and pests, lawn care operators continue to face significant challenges caused by abiotic stresses such as heat, cold, drought, salinity and metal toxicity – challenges that can be highly problematic since they can adversely affect plant function, growth, development, color and other turfgrass quality parameters.

A New Direction - A better approach

Today, management of good quality turfgrass may require lawn care operators to be open to new directions and new approaches. For example, the frequency, strength and extent of stress factors such as water availability and water quality are intensifying as state and local governments are regulating and/or placing restrictions on water usage. Environmental concerns have resulted in a growing number of states restricting or prohibiting uses of phosphorus -- an essential turfgrass nutrient.

There is a clear need for a multi-functional soil amendment / soil conditioner that can perform geochemical corrections in the soil as well as enhance plant tolerance to abiotic stresses. A soil amendment that meets these desirable characteristics is available now — CrossOver™ Turf.



CrossOver Turf is a highly refined calcium and magnesium silicate soil amendment in pelletized form. Following its application, CrossOver Turf establishes a reservoir of soluble calcium, magnesium and silicon in the soil that has been proven to provide unique benefits to turfgrass as well as improve the soil physical characteristics.

When compared to calcium, gypsum and limestone products, CrossOver Turf's mineral constituents offer a significantly better and more comprehensive set of geochemical solutions.

Dealing With Soil Problems

Correction of chemical imbalances, nutrient deficiencies, structural instability (deflocculation) and ion toxicity issues are examples of silicon activity in the soil.

Soil Stabilization. The silicon component of CrossOver Turf participates in the creation of unique binders that enhance soil particle aggregate formation with far more stability than calcium amendments alone—ultimately promoting a more favorable soil structure.

The silicon constituent in CrossOver Turf adds a new dimension to soil stabilization.

Phosphorus Management. CrossOver Turf is particularly effective in promoting the release of phosphorus from the soil that subsequently becomes available for use by turfgrass. Its effectiveness is closely tied to the release of soluble silicon released from its granular formulation. Silicon has been shown to enter into a number of chemical processes that contribute to improved phosphorus availability.

CrossOver Turf is truly unique, inasmuch as it behaves as a functional hybrid. As silicon released from CrossOver Turf is absorbed by the plant, it "crosses over" from its involvement in soil reactions, becoming an active participant in numerous plant biological processes that enhance the ability of turfgrass to resist and tolerate abiotic stresses and further regulate metal toxicity.

Environmental Stress. Many turfgrasses have an evolutionary predisposition for the uptake and use of silicon in tolerating stressful conditions and in quickening and enhancing recovery after stress. Lack of soluble silicon in the soil can produce a plant that is silicon deficient and weakened, preventing it from reaching its full genetic potential.

Stress responses have been identified in the following areas:

- Alleviation of salt stress
- Reduction of drought stress, heat stress and chilling
- Promotion of balanced nutrient availability and transport
- Improvement in plant structural strength
- Increase in root activity
- Increased photosynthetic activity
- Improved recovery from abiotic stress conditions

Silicon (Si) is now designated as a "plant beneficial substance" by the Association of American Plant Food Control Officials (AAPFCO). Silicon formulations that meet AAPFCO's standard for plant available silicon can now be listed on fertilizer labels with the new designation backed by an established protocol for product quality, production, and accurate labeling for commercialization of silicon fertilizers.

Purchase information for CrossOver is available at:

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Bobcat Tier 4 Skid-Steers

The pitch: The Bobcat S570 skid-steer loader is part of the new M-Series line of compact loaders are designed to provide increased uptime, improved visibility and a more comfortable cab.



- The vertical lift path provides increased lifting capacity and greater forward reach at full lift height.
- The S570 has a rated operating capacity of 1,950 lbs. and an operating weight of 6,395 lbs.
- Complemented by a variety of snow removal attachments, the S570 offers the hydraulic power and performance to tackle winter storms.

For more information: www.bobcat.com

CASE SR210 Skid-Steer

The pitch: The SR210 radial-lift skid-steer is a new Tier 4 Final model that features EZ EH controls.



- The new machine increases its rated operating capacity to 2,100 lbs. when compared to its predecessor, the SR200.
- The cooled exhaust gas recirculation engine design with particulate matter catalyst helps reduce maintenance and increases engine power by 10 percent.
- Weighing in at 6,970 lbs., the SR210 is an all-purpose skid-steer that offers standard (24.2 gallons-per-minute) and high-flow auxiliary (33.2 gpm) hydraulics for excellent power and attachment versatility.

For more information: www.CASEce.com

Caterpillar D Series Skid-Steer Loaders

The pitch: Caterpillar has four new D series skid-steer loaders and is updating two current D series machines to create the D series line featuring a completely redesigned cab and new lift arm design for improved sight lines.



- The line now encompasses six skid-steer loader models ranging in rated operating capacity from 1,800 lbs. to 3,700 lbs.
- The 236D and 242D are models and can be as narrow as 60 inches.
- To provide broader selection for skid-steer buyers, the 236D has been redesigned to a smaller platform size.

For more information: www.cat.com

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JCB Tier 4 Final Skid-steers

The pitch:

JCB recently updated its skid steers with the company's own Ecomax engine that meets all EPA Tier 4i (small platform models) and Tier 4 Final (large platform models) regulations, without the need for exhaust after-treatment or diesel particulate filters (DPF).

- No after-treatment or DPF to service means machine downtime is minimized.
- Large platform loaders will feature the electro-hydraulic control levers already proven on the small platform machines.
- Attachment/bucket changes are faster due to an optional electronic quick-hitch.

For more information: www.jcb.com



Takeuchi TS Series Skid-steer Loaders

The pitch:

The Takeuchi-US TS skid-steers range in operating weight from 6,500 lbs. to 8,600 lbs.

- Loaders have a rated operating capacity ranging from 1,500 lbs. to 3,000 lbs.
- Optional two-speed transmission provides travel speeds up to 12 mph.
- Options include: AM/FM/MP3/Weather Band radio, hydraulic quick attach and block heater.

For more information:
www.takeuchi-us.com



Terex TSR50

The pitch:

The Terex TSR50 radial lift path skid-steer loader has a 50-hp, turbocharged Perkins engine with load sensing and variable flow hydraulics.

- Has a rated operating capacity of 1,500 lbs., with 115 inches of lift height and 22 inches of reach.
- The push power and loader breakout forces on Terex radial lift path skid-steers allow these units to perform digging and grading tasks efficiently.
- The TSR50 offers 10.5-in ground clearance and 28.3 degree rear angle of departure.

For more information: www.terex.com



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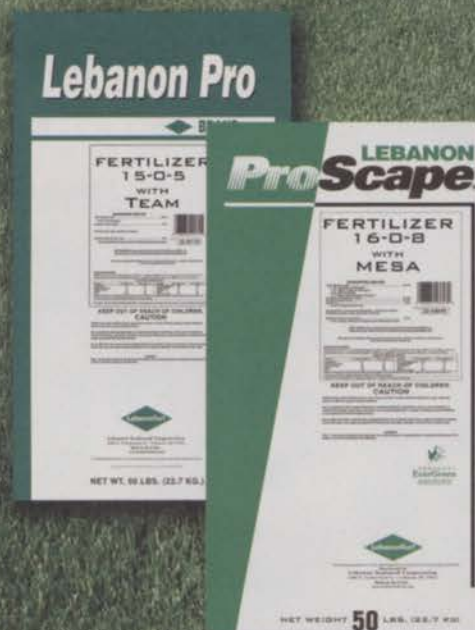
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Work by the Golden Rule

Wayne's Environmental Services keeps its promise to deliver top-notch service as it diversifies service offerings and expands into new territories.

For 40 years, Wayne's Environmental Services has been known as a company that cares for customers. But since its leaders began to define precisely how they care for customers, the Birmingham-based company has expanded into service offerings and territories that weren't possible 40 years ago.

Wayne's began as a pest and termite control company. By the time President Steven Splawn acquired it from founder Wayne Lagel in 2001, the company had about 20,000 customers who were happy with Wayne's pest control, but shopped elsewhere for services outside that scope.

The new president realized it would be easier for customers to have one provider (and one phone call) to manage similar services.

Though additional services

would require different expertise, Splawn knew that success in any discipline boiled down to one basic commitment: to deliver "World Class Service – Every Time." He defined four core values that supported that commitment, and backed it up with Wayne's World Class Solutions Money-Back Guarantee.

That commitment became the foundation for the company's diversification. First came a lawn care service line – offering solutions for weed control, fertilization, trees and shrubs, mosquitoes and fire ants – which has grown to serve 7,000 customers.

In 2009, Wayne's added landscape maintenance and installation – which has grown even faster than the first. Most recently, Wayne's launched home services for renovations and remodels.



Wayne's Environmental Services has 7,000 lawn care customers.

"Because we had the infrastructure already, we've been able to grow," says Brian Ethridge, lawn and landscape services leader, who joined the company in 2003. The challenge of Wayne's diversification isn't just growing numbers, but maintaining quality.

BUILDING EXPERTISE. To be a world-class, multi-disciplined provider – not just a pest control company that offers lawn care – Wayne's team hones its technical expertise within each discipline.

"Our desire is for all of our professionals to be experts at their craft," Ethridge says. "To

Fulfilling the guarantee

As it's written on the website by Steven Splawn, company president, Wayne's World Class Solutions Guarantee reads: "We commit to provide you with world-class service every time. If you do not receive world-class results, we will return to your home and resolve the issue at no charge to you. If we fail to resolve your issue in a timely manner, we will refund you for your most recent treatment."

Ethridge explains the four pillars – and core values – that compose Wayne's guarantee:

- Integrity is simply making the right choices in the moment. It can be easy to decide not

to address something seemingly small and insignificant, but that's a mistake, and that's where larger problems begin.

- Courage is sometimes required to do what's right. We want our team to be willing to have a difficult conversation with a customer when necessary.
 - Perseverance is having the drive to stay engaged in a problem until it's resolved.
 - The character of our company is based on the cumulative decisions and actions of our employees following these values.
- Of the hundreds of thousands of services

Wayne's performs annually, only a few take advantage of the money-back guarantee. But, to avoid any hiccups fulfilling the guarantee, each employee in the company – from supervisors to office staff – has the ability to grant it if requested.

"We believe in the services we provide, and the guarantee gives our customers peace of mind knowing we stand behind it," Ethridge says.

"Whether it's the guarantee, the service we provide or the way we talk on the phone, our decisions are always based on the perspective of: If we were the customer, how would we want to be treated?"



make that a reality, we invest resources in developing and delivering the best training possible."

In 2004, Wayne's developed a technical

services division, pulling the most seasoned staff – with 60 years' combined industry experience – to lead training. Their efforts begin as soon as new employees are hired, in

an orientation course that doubles as evaluation.

"Before any new team members are allowed to perform services solo, they are required to complete one week of classroom



Ethridge

training and three weeks of on-the-job training," Ethridge says. "In that time, they must demonstrate the ability to learn and retain the information, and use it to solve problems presented in real-life situations."

Through internal training known as Wayne's Environmental University, multiple forms of monthly education keep employees primed in their respective roles, from whitepapers to train-the-trainer workshops to seasonal best practice sessions. Recently, for example, Ethridge traveled to Wayne's four facilities, conducting hands-on training to properly calibrate spray rigs, mix and apply pesticide applications and complete corresponding paperwork.

But training isn't just technical. Because Wayne's core values are founded on the Golden Rule, employees hear mantras like, "Treat the customer's property as if it were your own." Splawn emphasizes these values in weekly video conference culture meetings.

Beyond just talking training, supervisors and service line leaders follow up with coaching in the field to help employees put training into practice, as well as random audits to seek development opportunities.

"Being engaged in the field with our folks is critical to make sure we're living up to what we put on paper," Ethridge says.

MEASURING RESULTS. For Wayne's expertise to result in world-class service, it must be matched with execution. While the technical services division focuses on training, service center leaders at each office make sure their teams deliver.

The goal is to solve issues before customers call – and before the money-back guarantee is evoked. Technicians are expected to seek issues proactively before they become bigger problems. But if customers do call in with service requests, complaints or cancellations,

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call center data is tracked daily so leaders can identify and respond to issues immediately.

"If you drop the ball on any fundamentals, you'll see it in your daily metrics," Ethridge says. "It's very important that you gather data and utilize it to understand where your business is going, but you can't just sit behind a desk and look at numbers. The numbers are a red flag telling you to get engaged."

"When we see some sort of anomaly in our data showing a change in a specific service plan, route or service, then we get together to figure out what the problem is, what caused it and how to correct it."

A surge of retreatment requests, for example, could either point to performance or product. Ethridge visits the site to evaluate whether issues are isolated or broad-scaled,



Employees at the company can exercise a money-back guarantee policy for a customer.

whether caused by issues in application (like walking too fast) or environment (like weed resistance).

With this proactive approach to service, employees solve most issues before they become bigger problems. Part of the solution involves open, honest communication with customers about expected results, and part of it involves continued training to prevent future problems. By pairing customer feedback with call center data and internal audits,


Wayne's team tailors coaching opportunities to continually improve service.

"It's always a work in process, but your retention numbers are proof of your success delivering a quality product and executing your brand's promises," Ethridge says, citing Wayne's retention rate of 85-88 percent. "It's constantly trying to make sure that we're living up to what we put on paper." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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MASTER



No surprises needed

Plan ahead with preventative treatments and environmental controls to keep fungus-loving conditions from partying on your clients' properties. By Brooke N. Bates

When Elite Grounds' crew left the property, the freshly mowed lawns looked green. But three days later, the HOA president called back with a big problem – and a lot less green, because something was quickly killing the grass.

Kris Ashby, owner of the lawn and landscape company in Pleasant Grove, Utah, visited the site for a closer look. He identified brown patch fungus, which was rare in the typically cool, dry climate – until an unusually hot, humid July created the perfect environment.

"The biggest problem I see is

the amount of misdiagnosing," says Ashby, who received calls from competitors' misdiagnosed customers, and picked up sub work from fungus-frustrated LCOs. "I walked onto several projects this summer where they didn't even diagnose it as fungus. They diagnosed it as insect problems and put down insecticides, and that didn't do anything.

In the day it took to diagnose and treat, the fungus grew about 25 percent, spreading

Fungus will spread quickly under prime conditions.

over thousands of square feet. Because fungus can spread fast under prime conditions, the pressure is on LCOs to properly identify and treat damage – and proactively prevent spores.

IDENTIFICATION. The first step is understanding which plants and conditions are susceptible to which fungi. Integrated Pest Management illustrates this with the disease triangle.

"It takes three things to have a disorder on a lawn: the host plant, the fungal pathogen, and the proper environment,"



says Peter Estournes, who owns Gardenworks, a full-service landscape contracting company. "You could have a host and the pathogen, but if it's not the proper environment – like hot, wet weather – you don't have the disease."

That's why Estournes doesn't see much fungi – or fungicide – in Sonoma County, Calif. But fungi-prone regions with hot, rainy climates rely on preventative treatment for control.

Where fungi are prevalent, technicians grow familiar with the blotches, rings and color legions associated with common fungi. Still, fungi is easily mistaken. Different fungi can inflict similar symptoms (compare brown patch and dollar spot), and one fungus can look different on different plants.

Unfortunately, by the time you notice the damage, it may be too late, anyway.

"A lot of spores become active in the spring, but damage appears in the summer," Ashby says. "You see necrotic ring when it gets hot, but you can't treat it then because the spores are inactive. Preventatively, you have to go after certain fungi without ever seeing it, because spore activity happens at a different time than the symptoms."

Spores are usually predictable, but changing conditions, as in Utah, invite exceptions. If you're stumped by fungus, send photos to fungicide manufacturing companies, local universities, extension offices or even other LCOs for help.

TREATMENT. While identification is crucial for effective treatment, certain treatments

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can cover the bases. Because fungicides work differently, some recommend multi-purpose fungicides for maximum results.

"A lot of funguses look very similar, so we use fungicides with dual modes of action," says Joe Weiss, owner of Green Rx in Saint Charles, Mo. "If you take a targeted approach, you may not even be targeting the proper fungus due to misdiagnosis. Even if you do get the diagnosis correct, you're still susceptible to other types of fungus. We use broad-spectrum applications to cover all potential fungus because when you have one, conditions are right for others."

If the conditions are ripe for fungus, according to IPM's disease triangle, perhaps the conditions should change.

"A lot of fungal diseases are treatable with a change in cultural practices," Estournes says. "They're brought on by the lawn staying too wet for too long. Usually it can be taken care of by drying out the lawn and cutting back on water, because most fungal diseases are waterborne."

So when Brown Patch popped up in Utah after abnormally humid nights, Ashby adjusted watering schedules to drip irrigation during the day. Others, like Steve Okros at Heron Pest and



In the day it took Elite Grounds to diagnose and treat brown patch fungus at this HOA, the disease grew 25 percent, spreading over thousands of square feet. After treatment, it stopped immediately, recovering half its area within a week and nearly disappearing after three weeks.

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Lawn Control in Orlando, Fla., recommend soakers over misters to saturate roots rather than leaf blades.

Like human bodies, healthier turf is stronger against disease. Weiss's treatments include organic applications to amend soil and strengthen roots.

He also recommends amino-acid based stress-reducing treatments for reinforcement. Ashby's applications include bio-enhanced fertilizers to balance soil.

Besides water and fertilization, consider shade, slopes, and other conditions that contribute to fungus.

"It's almost always a secondary issue," Okros says. "Fungus just doesn't say, 'I'm going to go attack this healthy plant.' You get fungus because the plant is weak or vulnerable because it's buried too deep, getting



Green Rx Lawn Care recommends four annual fungicide applications to treat a lawn.

too much shade, or too much water. You can throw fungicides at it, but a hawthorn that requires full sun and receives regular shade will always be dealing with fungus, even if we spray it every two weeks forever, because the conditions are favorable."

TEACHING. Ultimately, fungus control requires educating customers to weigh treatment options and set realistic expectations. "Lawn fungicide can get confusing for customers," says Weiss, who provides pictures and tips through Green Rx's Facebook page, email newsletters and invoices. "It's very weather-dependent."

By helping customers manage environments and select resistant species, LCOs can condition lawns to resist the warm, wet temptations of fungus. Sometimes, the best treatment is not treatment at all.

"The biggest mistake with fungicide is overusing it," Okros says. "Don't throw fungicides at it to correct the problem without looking at what's causing it." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



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By Kristen Hampshire

PUMPING IRON

money into

We talk to contractors about their smart buying strategies when it comes to the equipment that does the heavy (and sometimes light) lifting to get the

Tight budgets can put a squeeze on equipment expenditures – but pushing veteran equipment past its limit will jack up maintenance and repair costs. No one wants to pour hard-earned profits into keeping tired equipment alive.

Many contractors who held off on buying equipment during the recession are buying again, restoring their fleets and retiring the old soldiers that spend more time in the shop than the field. This month, *Lawn & Landscape* spoke with three landscape firms to find out how they buy smart.

Buy now

Dave's Landscape Management Co.

David Rykbost, president, **Location:** Hudson, Mass. **Established:** 1987
Employees: 35 on average 2013
Revenues: \$2.7 million **Customers:** 90% residential, 10% commercial
Services: maintenance, design/build, irrigation, snow

Dave Rykbost is an early adopter of equipment technology. "I like to think of myself as a pioneer," he says, quickly adding that he might not be the very first to buy a new toy. "But I do like to have the latest and greatest equipment as opposed to buying something that's not so good," he says.

He'd rather buy more power now than realize in the field that he could use an extra 10 horses.

Efficiency can depend largely on the equipment that's running in the field, and Rykbost is eager to branch out if he figures an advancement will ultimately propel his bottom line. "I've had a mulch blower for 15 years, and at the time when I bought mine, there was just me and one other guy in the area that had one," he says.

Rykbost isn't boasting about his fleet. In fact, equipment expenditures have been modest at Dave's Landscaping in Hudson, Mass., since 2008, which was a big spending year. The company bought five trucks, a slew of mowers and covered trailers because Rykbost acquired another business. "We had an increase in work to do," he says.

The following years were less eventful in terms of equipment purchases. But by 2012, Rykbost says his repairs were "majorly up." Specifically, the numbers had

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FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

jumped by about \$80,000 for equipment repair and parts. That was following a heavy winter. The snow season destroyed trucks, plows and more. "With snow, there is lagging repairs – they don't necessarily happen right after the snow storm," Rykboost says.

He tracks usage and repairs and buys accordingly. Trucks usually last for 10 years "I should probably sell them in five or six years instead," he says.

Rykboost constantly seeks the next best thing – but he minds his financials. "Anytime we can shift away from labor and more on equipment, we are going to be better off," he says, explaining a more powerful tractor purchase at year-end 2013 to assist with blowing snow in condo complexes. "We are going to try doing something a new and better way," he says.



TAKE-AWAY TIPS

Buy up. Better to purchase more horsepower than underestimate what's required to efficiently complete jobs. "The guys never want to use anything that is less powerful when they have an option," Rykboost says.

Watch and learn. A contractor in Canada was blowing snow using a high-powered tractor. This year, Rykboost is acquiring the iron to try the same method.

Tap into technology. Rykboost now uses iPads for estimating and an app that allows him to take measurements, photos and even create drawings. Clients can sign the proposal on the iPad and documents are stored electronically and e-mailed.

Smooth sowing

Thomas Turfgrass

Emory Thomas, owner **Location:** New Braunfels, Texas **Established:** 2002
Employees: 35 **2013 Revenues:** \$6 million
Customers: 75% commercial, 25% residential
Services: growing and installing premium sod and sprigs for athletic fields, golf courses, commercial and residential properties

Last year's expansion called for new heavy equipment at Thomas Turfgrass in New Braunfels, Texas. The company was adding another farm, where it cultivates sod and sprigs for a range of clients from company headquarters to backyards. Today, the company is 100 percent growing, filling and installing turf.



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The 15 tractors in the Thomas Turfgrass fleet range from 60 to 100 horsepower. "They are used for mowing and cultivating fields before we plant," he says. Thomas can expect the tractors to last about eight years. "Then we'll probably keep them at least another four years," he says. It's time to trade them out when repairs pile up. "We'll look at the function or age of the equipment, maybe the way it has been treated, but hopefully the latter is not the case," he says. "It's usually just age."

Thomas doesn't always seek out brand-new tractors. These are significant investments, and equipment auctions can be a goldmine if machines are properly checked out before purchase. Thomas will send his in-house mechanic to an auction to review any options.

"There have been some instances where there were hidden problems we didn't real-

ize — mainly electrical problems — and that burned us a little. But for the most part, we've had good experiences," Thomas says.

He makes sure not to purchase a used tractor with more than 2,000 hours on it, and mowers should not exceed four years of age. About 20 percent of Thomas Turfgrass equipment is used. To make it last, an in-house mechanic meets with employees at least every two weeks to remind them about equipment care basics.

"We try to continually train our people, and we find that we have to remind them about what they are supposed to do," Thomas says. Routine tasks like checking oil and water daily and air filters weekly can be overlooked. "When we are cultivating (soil), we may have a lot of dust, so those air filters may need to be changed or cleaned every day," he says.



TAKE-AWAY TIPS

Eye on the auction. You can find quality, used equipment at auctions — just be sure to bring a trained mechanic to review any prospective purchases.

Enforce routine maintenance. It's easy to do and easy to forget: basic checks like oil and air filters. Thomas emphasizes to all employees the importance of daily equipment checkups.

Consider leasing. Buying isn't always the best deal, and Thomas has found a cost advantage to leasing certain equipment — particularly irrigation systems. Crunch the numbers, then decide whether buying or purchasing works for your budget.

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Columbia Landcare

Jed Taylor, president and CEO **Location:** Columbia, Mo. **Established:** 1996 **Employees:** 80 **2013 Revenues:** \$4.7 million **Customers:** 70% commercial, 30% residential **Services:** maintenance, landscape installation, irrigation, snow

"The companies that make their equipment last longer are the ones that are going to make more money," says Jed Taylor, president and CEO of Columbia Landcare in Columbia, Mo.

Contractors in the green industry have two variables to "combat" that will destroy profitability, he says. One is labor. The other is equipment. Both are difficult to manage, which is why Columbia Landcare works to train its crews so they can take the best care of equipment possible. Safety training videos demonstrate the basics of gas engines and how to operate equipment.

"All new-hires are required to go through a certain number of those (video) courses before they can set foot on a job site so they get a basic knowledge of how the equipment works," Taylor says.

Then, the responsibility of ongoing training and overseeing equipment use falls on supervisors in the field. "Management must constantly remind crews – it's a daily battle,"

says Taylor, adding that "stuff happens" to equipment, and issues must be dealt with on the spot. A daytime mechanic handles minor repairs – flat tires and other basics.

Two evening mechanics change mower blades, oil and filters, hit the grease points and fuel up equipment so machines are ready to go in the morning. When major repairs crop up – and they do on a regular basis with commercial crews that run hard – equipment goes to the care of dealerships where Columbia Landcare holds longtime relationships.

"There are companies that jump around to different dealerships to save a dollar here or there, but there is something to be said for sticking with a relationship, because in the long-run you will save money," Taylor says.

As for purchases, Columbia Landcare is in the third year (out of five) of a propane transition that will result in a total propane mower fleet. So far, the fuel savings are significant, with propane running about \$1.60 a gallon compared to \$3.50-plus for gas.

As for less maintenance because of cleaner-burning propane: Taylor isn't seeing that yet. "We run that equipment so hard that eight times out of 10, the bodies of the mowers fail before the engines do," he says.

Meanwhile, the company is getting a rebate of \$1,500 per mower from a state program. "That basically pays for the added expense of buying the propane mower, which makes it a wash and a no-brainer," he says of the decision.

Taylor sets expectations for how long equipment *should* last if it is cared for properly. Trucks should get 10 years – trailers can last 12 or more years. Mowers range from four to six years, and skid-steer loaders run as long as possible. "That might go from six to 10 years, depending on what they are doing and where they are going," Taylor says.

"When you get into older equipment, you have repairs and that chews up your P&L," Taylor says. And he's watching that, because as he said, the companies that care for equipment reap the rewards at the bottom line. At the end of the day, he says, "That is the philosophy we follow." **L&L**



TAKE-AWAY TIPS

Teach them well. Educate crews on the importance of routine maintenance and basic care of equipment in the field.

Adopt a dealer. Stay loyal to equipment dealers that provide valuable services, such as loaner equipment, efficient service, parts just in time and education about the latest equipment offerings. "We take care of our dealers, and they take care of us," Taylor says.

Get fuel perks. Not only did Columbia Landcare win an award from the Missouri Propane Research Education Council (MO-PERC) for its move to propane, the company gets state rebates to the tune of \$1,500 per machine purchase.

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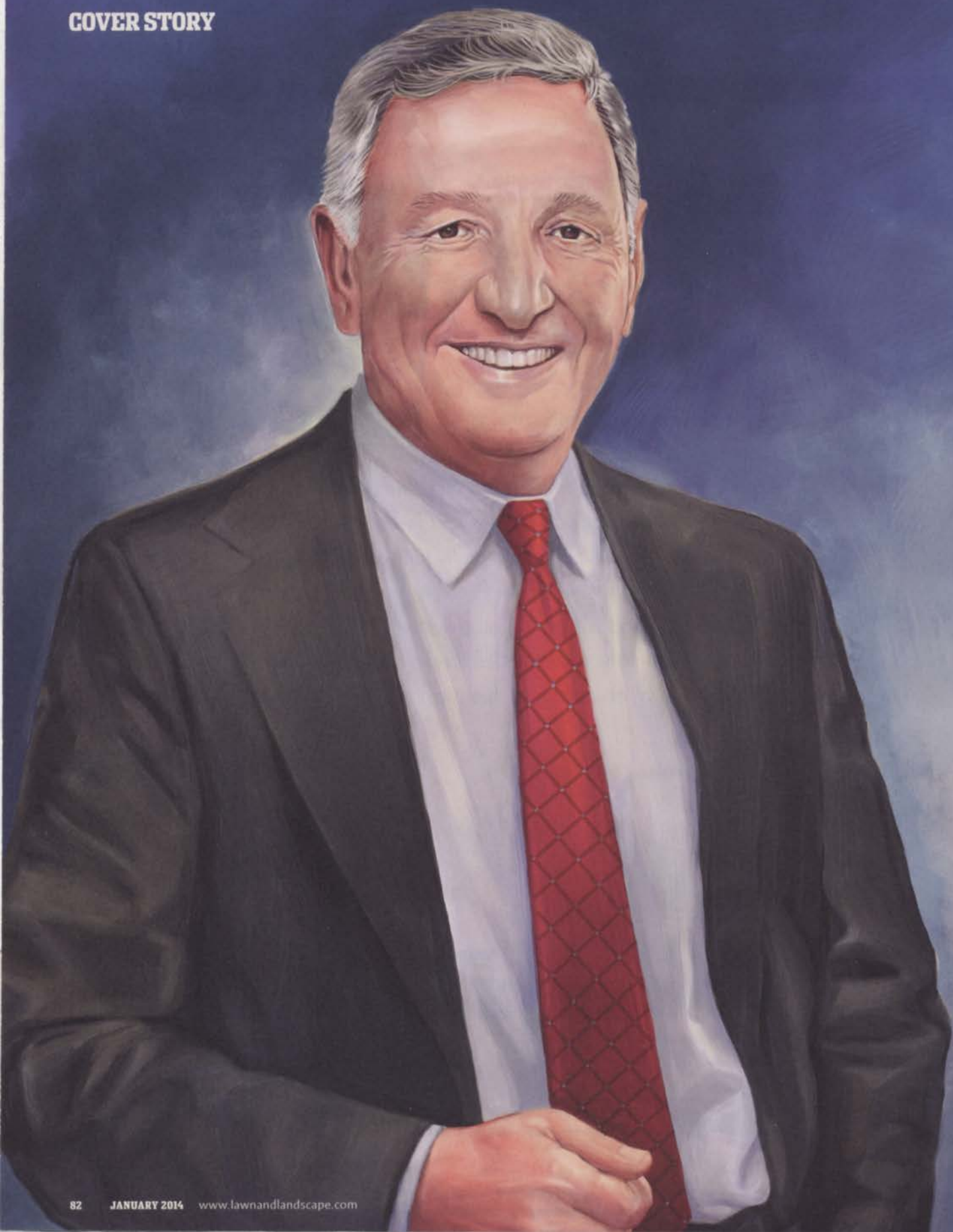
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COVER STORY



MATT COLLINS

The Tao of MASSEY

By Katie Tuttle

When it comes to running a successful business, there are few who have more knowledge and experience than Harvey Massey.

Massey has owned and operated the Orlando-based Massey Services since 1985, when he purchased Walker Chemical and Exterminating Co. Prior to the company purchase, Massey served in senior management at both Orkin Pest Control Co. and Terminix International.

Since the company purchase, Massey has built Massey Services to the fifth largest company in the pest management industry and the largest privately-owned family company in the business, while landing at 18 on *L&L's* Top 100. In 1984, the company ended its fiscal year with \$3.9 million. In 2012, with 1,400 employees and more than 370,000 customers, the company closed out with \$150 million in revenue.

Massey has received numerous industry-based awards and recognition, as well as honors in the Florida community for his service and support.

At the ASCA meeting this past summer, Massey was the keynote speaker, giving a talk on "How to Succeed in the Service Industry." Massey discussed the basic foundation the company has created, as well as a few of the lessons he has learned during the past 50 years in the industry. The insight he gave is something every business owner can learn from.

According to Massey, an important part of creating and growing a business is to build a basic company foundation, which involves four key management disciplines: image, planning and budgeting, hiring, and training.

ELEVATE THE APPEARANCE. The first step a company needs to take is to work on its image.

"Everybody in this room, at one time or another has heard the old expres-

AFTER THEY'RE HIRED

Whether we like it or not, every business has to make a new hire at one point or another. It's a tricky task, but something that can be trickier is how to train the person after they're hired to turn them into the perfect employee. According to Massey, there are three C's to training a new hire: confidence, conviction and commitment.

When you train someone, you want to give them enough training so that when they're out on the job, they have a level of confidence that they can do the job.

"You've got to give them the confidence to go out in the market place and do whatever you've been telling them to do," he says.

After an employee's confidence is built, you take the training to the next level, what Massey calls the "level of conviction." After you show them what to do, they do it a few times and they begin to believe that they can do the job.

The last step to successful training is commitment. It's commonly referred to as loyalty, and that's something a team member has after they believe they can do the job correctly, and that you trained them well. When team members reach this step, their language changes to "we," "us" and "our."

COVER STORY

sion that you only get one chance to make a great first impression," Massey says.

The most obvious first impression a company gives its customers are with its team members and fleet. Feeling he needed an upgrade, Massey developed a uniform program and put all team members in brand new uniforms. The company did a similar thing with its fleet, which Massey described at the time as having been in "deplorable condition," and purchased 68 new vehicles.

This is important said Massey, because in the service business, "if you don't get the look right,

"It's important to understand your very best ideas will not work unless you do."

— Harvey Massey

you'll never get the act right. The public, as well as the people on your payroll, will believe more about what they see, than by what you say."

KNOW THE NUMBERS. The company next had to set up budgeting criteria.

"A lot of companies budget from the top down, but we budget from the bottom up," Massey says. "To budget from the bottom up, you get the ideas,

the concepts and the plans from the people below. Budgeting is not someone sitting down, saying 'Well, we're going to do this much revenue, we're going to spend this much money, and what's left over is called operating profit.'

"Budgets are put together from the bottom up and budgets are used, not only as a planning device/discipline, but are used as an educational tool to teach our people how this all fits together."

To this day, the company budgets every trimester.

"Budgets are based on a set of operating standards and goals, which reflect how the 100 pennies in a dollar are allocated and spent," he says. "We have daily productivity standards, which minimize travel and maximize service time and, finally, we have new sales rate cards which determine how we price our service."

BUILD THE TEAM. After the image and the budget, focus on finding employees. "We trained our managers on interviewing and hiring techniques," Massey says. "We backed it all up with three



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levels of approvals on every new hire and termination, and to this very day everyone who is hired or terminated, goes through three levels of approval, from the service center, to the region, to the executive vice president's office."

PAINT THE PICTURE. The fourth and final corner of a company's foundation is training. The company also created job descriptions for every job in the company, something that hadn't been created before.

"Our job descriptions lay out the primary responsibilities and the duties of the job," Massey says. "We constantly reminded

our managers that training is an ongoing and never-ending process, and from day one when we put someone on our payroll, we teach and train all our managers to take the people through what we call the critical levels of the learning process." (See Sidebar)

THE FINAL FOUR. Along with the steps to building a basic foundation, Massey also spoke about four very important lessons he's learned throughout his career.

- "You can't manage what you don't know. You have to know why people buy from you, why people don't buy from you, and why they cancel

your services. If you have a clear understanding of these, you'll know what to do in marketing and operationally.

- "It's not what you know about business that makes the difference; it's what you do with what you know. It's important to understand your very best ideas will not work unless you do.

- "I have also learned the importance of ownership. This has nothing to do with stock options, stock, equity, acquired assets, how much you pay someone, or how much you make. It has to do with the connection between the head and the heart, where all of a sudden the

language, the thinking and the action is we, us, and our.

- "It's important to learn the difference between making a living and making a life. As Winston Churchill says: 'We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.'

"Whether you are dealing with your family, your community, your religion or your business, I'm personally convinced that when you take a lot out, it's important to put something back in. In other words, you can't go through life with catcher's mitts on both hands — sooner or later you have to throw something back." **L&L**

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So many apps, so little time



THERE SEEMS TO BE AN APP FOR EVERYTHING TODAY. SAVE SOME TIME AND DOWNLOAD THESE TO BECOME MORE EFFICIENT AT RUNNING YOUR BUSINESS.

By Bill Brown



The turf, grounds and landscape industries are becoming more and more technical. Most of us carry a very powerful mini-computer in our pockets or on our tool belt. As the use of smartphones and tablets continues to grow, so does the application markets that support them.

Today, you can find just about any app your heart desires. Apps for games, productivity, weather, social media, data collection, the list goes on and on. Here is a list of apps that can make your work days more productive, whether you're in the truck, in the office or out in the field.



Weatherbug

This app gives you access to the world's largest network of weather and lightning sensors to generate forecasts and fast alerts. The recently addition of "Spark" lightning detection is a great feature giving the estimated closest distance where lightning is detected. The app offers realtime accurate forecasts out to 10 days. The radar display is also very detailed and one of the best.



Invoices2Go

Invoices2go allows users to create invoices, estimates, purchase orders and track which invoices have been paid. You can also link the invoices to payment services like PayPal. The app stores your products for sale, if you sell hard goods. Customer information is also stored and easily accessible.



PayPal Here

Accept payments with PayPal and the PayPal Here card reader. Get paid right on you device from anywhere with an internet connection. Swipe using debit and credit cards for a low transaction fee. Track cash payments, checks and PayPal payments, and generate invoices right from the app.



Measure Map

Measure Map gives you the ability to measure distances, perimeters, and area with sharp accuracy. GPS location services are utilized to provide the measurements. Use the app in areas large or small. After measurements are taken share them out with customers or your co workers.



GoogleDrive

This app is Google's office suite. The app offers data storage for videos, images, documents and other files. Edit and create documents and spreadsheets with Docs and Sheets. Use Sheets to track various data for clients, product applications or anything that fits in a spreadsheet format.

Docs and Sheets are very easy to share and are effective ways to collaborate with others. One of the more powerful features of Google's drive system is the ability to make interactive forms. Forms can be used to collect surveys, quotes, invoices or site assessments. Get started with up to 15GB of free storage.





➤ Sun Seeker

This has a flat view compass and 3-D augmented reality viewer that shows solar paths for winter and summer solstice, rise and set times. Use this app to show customers sun and shade patterns over the course of the growing season. The app can be used to show why a tree needs to be removed or trimmed, based on the shade pattern. Or, show why turf is struggling under or around a tree. The app will also let you export a screenshot to share with your customers.



➤ QuickOffice

QuickOffice is an app that allows you to create and edit Microsoft Office documents, spreadsheets and presentations. The app also syncs to cloud based services like Google Drive, Evernote, Dropbox, Sugar Sync and box.net. PDF files can also be viewed in this app. There are not many apps that allow you to create a folder structure for file. This app does, and it is as easy as drag and drop.



➤ PDF Expert

PDF Expert is an All in One Pdf solution for a mobile device. It lets you read and annotate PDF documents, highlight text, make notes and draw with your finger or stylus. The changes and annotations can be exported and

viewed in most PDF viewers. PDF Expert creates usable forms. Form creation supports text fields, check boxes, radio buttons and other form fields. With this app you can have company marketing materials, catalogs and contracts right on your mobile device. Have customers sign a contract or work an agreement on site quick and easy.



➤ iMovie

This app can be used to create and edit movies for your business. iMovie makes it very easy to be your own movie producer. Shoot and edit the video right on an iPhone or iPad. You could video staff at work to make training and safety videos, or show customers short videos of your service offerings. You can also post videos to your company website or social media accounts.

Costs for these apps varies from free to about \$10. Some of the free versions have paid in app purchases to further use the app. Most of these apps are available for both Android and iOS devices. The bottom line is apps and mobile devices give users the ability to run their entire operation away from a traditional office. **L&L**

The author is CEO of Turf Republic and the winner of the 2013 Kaminski Award for Leadership in Social Media.

A few more apps that landscapers will find useful in the field



PRO Landscape Companion. Using an iPad or Android tablet, the user can produce their landscape designs right out in the field.

Working in conjunction with PRO Landscape design software, Companion gives the user access to more than 11,000 high resolution images of plant material for all climate zones, groundcover, hardscapes and much more. This gives the designer all the materials they need to generate high-quality, professional-level designs for their customers.

The designer can also transfer their designs between the tablet and desktop/laptop version of PRO Landscape, giving you flexibility on when and where you want to design and present. PRO Landscape Companion is available for free from either the iTunes App Store or Google Play Store.



NexTraQ Connect. NexTraQ's mobile solution, NexTraQ Connect, helps employees and managers stay connected between the field and the office. The mobile app allows team members to clock hours, assign and receive jobs, find the easiest driving route and more. The Time & Attendance module is a free feature of NexTraQ Connect that allows workers in the field to remotely clock in/out and record all breaks during the workday.

NexTraQ Fleet Mobile is the solution's native app that works on any device with Internet browser capabilities. It allows managers to access important fleet data while in the field and gives them direct access to the mapping and monitoring capabilities of the NexTraQ Fleet Tracking Solution. Users can locate and view the status of vehicles, find locations and addresses, pinpoint the closest vehicles and view fuel purchases.



Alternative Fueling Station Locator. The app allows iPhone users to select an alternative fuel and find the 20 closest stations within a 30-mile radius. Users can view the locations on a map or as a list with station addresses, phone numbers and hours of operation.

PERC and propane marketers assisted with the development by providing information to Clean Cities to help ensure accuracy. Landscapers running propane might find it useful.

"If you drive an electric vehicle, for instance, you can now use your iPhone to effortlessly identify, contact, and navigate to the charging station that's most convenient for you," says Project Manager Trish Cozart of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory.



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CHAMPIONS OF INNOVATION

Champions of Innovation is a quarterly series presented by *Lawn & Landscape* and sponsored by Hunter Industries. Each story will shine a light on the smartest and most dedicated people in the irrigation industry.

The **Water Smart** way

How John Taylor shifted his growing irrigation business to focus 100 percent on conservation.

By Kristen Hampshire

“Is that really what irrigation is doing?” This very simple question stumped John Taylor, owner of Taylor Irrigation Service and an EPA WaterSense Partner of the Year.

His 10-year-old daughter wanted to know, where did all the water go? They were walking out of the theater after watching the animated film *Rango*, where the characters in the desert town of Dirt eventually follow a water pipeline to lush Las Vegas where lawns are being watered during the daytime.

Taylor's daughter knew this was a big no-no. “I was shocked, too,” Taylor admits of the stark social commentary. “I felt like I was punched in the stomach.”

“I felt put on the spot – I’m a veteran of the Marine Corps, and I feel if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem,” Taylor says. “I said to my daughter, ‘Well, we offer a high-efficiency system,’ and she asked, ‘How many people use that?’ The truth was, at the time, only 5 to 10 percent of our client base.”

Taylor went home after the movie outing and crunched the numbers. Sure, the high-efficiency irrigation system costs about 30 to 40 percent more to

install – but some households will earn back that investment in a single year of savings on water bills. And most everyone realizes the ROI within a few years.

“Anywhere from 50 to 70 percent of the water we consume in this country is irrigation related,” Taylor says. “You can install all the high-efficiency shower heads in your bathroom that you want, but the only real change we are going to make in terms of eliminating wasted water is with irrigation because that is where the bulk of water is being used.”

Taylor set out to sell irrigation services in a different way than his company had before, focusing on ROI rather than the actual irrigation system – auditing water bills and forecasting savings. It’s working.

THE ‘SAVE MONEY’ LANGUAGE. Taylor Irrigation Service has been offering smart controllers for about a decade.

“It was viewed as the high-end Cadillac system,” he says. And it wasn’t really selling – until Taylor made a bold decision to only offer a water-efficient irrigation solution.

He told his wife that the company was going to change the way it did things and take a gamble by only offering the Cadillac system.

“At the time, I felt like I had



JOHN TAYLOR,
Taylor Irrigation Service

everything riding on that decision,” Taylor says. “I felt like this could lead me to look for a new job!” Initially, he lost about 25 to 30 percent of his client base who wanted a cheaper product. “What I did not expect is to bring in a new client base, so this widened who we could serve.”

Word passed that Taylor’s systems were efficient and saved money – and kept plants alive. He began to field calls from large landscape firms in Houston that were installing significant jobs and wanted plant health insurance in the form of a solid irrigation system.

“They want to make sure the landscape thrives, and by using our system, they are losing fewer

plants than they did before,” Taylor says.

Taylor’s systems are all drip technology with “smart” evapotranspiration controllers. Before installing the system, an audit is performed on the existing irrigation infrastructure to determine its efficiency. The property is evaluated and a system is designed to suit its watering demands, with conservation top of mind.

This process does cost about 30 to 40 percent more. But selling the more expensive service is easier now that Taylor learned how to pitch it to clients. “We focus on selling ROI,” he says.

Show clients the numbers – that’s what he learned. Also, be careful to manage expectations. “You can’t take one of our smart controllers and put it on an antiquated donkey system – that doesn’t make the system efficient,” Taylor remarks. “We need to make sure the system is up to snuff.”

Education is the key to selling a more efficient irrigation system. Taking that a step further, teaching industry members the importance of water conservation and irrigation efficiency is critical for preserving the industry. “This is where we need to be focusing,” Taylor says. “It’s responsible. It’s the right thing to do. And everyone makes money doing it.”

“Irrigators have to learn to be adaptable,” he continues. “Raising the bar of what we call irrigation makes us all more professional, and that raises prices and makes it tougher for unethical business to take place.” **L&L**

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Exmark S-Series and X-Series Walk-behind Aerators

The pitch: After more than two years in development, Exmark will offer its S-Series and X-Series walk-behind aerator models in 2014.



- With Kawasaki V-twin power, the X-Series is capable of aeration speeds of up to 6.5 mph.
- The S-Series features a 21-in. aeration width.
- The S-Series is capable of speeds of up to 4 mph, allowing aeration of nearly an acre of turf per hour.

For more information: www.exmark.com

Inter-Fab WOK Waterfall

The pitch: Inter-Fab's WOK waterfall is a classic waterfall that works with any outdoor living design.



- The WOK waterfall is 36 inches in diameter.
- Comes in two different pedestal heights and has optional matching planters to complement the pool area.
- Available in a true copper color.

For more information: www.inter-fab.com

Netafim Octave Water Meter

The pitch: Octave is an ultrasonic water meter that utilizes double-beam sensors to monitor flow.



- Octave's water flow path is unrestricted.
- The meter's measurement method is based on dual-beam sensors that determine the length of time it takes an ultrasonic wave to travel between the two sensors located in the meter's body.
- The sensors alternate as senders and receivers with the ultrasonic waves travelling with and against the flow.

For more information:

www.netafimusa.com

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The pitch: NexTraq's VT-2400 series includes technology that monitors aggressive and dangerous driving behaviors such as harsh braking, cornering and jack rabbit starts.



- NexTraq's latest vehicle tracking device tracks in one-minute intervals and comes with a built-in accelerometer.
- NexTraq's associated Driver Safety Scorecard Report can show results for further driver coaching.
- Also offers gyroscope technology to ensure tracking of a vehicle's movements.

For more information: www.nextraq.com

JAWZ Grabbing Tools

The pitch: Paladin Attachments has partnered with Star Hill Solutions to introduce the new Bradco JAWZ Grabbing Tools.



- The attachments feature a patented set of T1 steel fingers (pinchers) powered by dual cylinders.
- For more compact jobs, the Bradco Mini-JAWS mounts on a compact tool carrier.
- The grabbing tools are also capable of handling specialized materials like boulders and logs.

For more information:
www.paladinattachments.com

Silver Creek Stoneworks Woodstone Collection

The pitch: Silver Creek Stoneworks Woodstone collection's debut landscape tile has the look of weathered white pine, with soft edges, deep splits and detailed grain on five sides.



- Available in ash; a blend of brown and dark gray.
- Available in multiple looks for patios and pathways.
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LETTERS
 to the EDITOR

Call or e-mail Chuck Bowen
 at 330-523-5330 or
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Most insurers will not provide coverage for damaged lawns as a result of **your work** as defined in all standard General Liability policies. If your tech is negligent, the product applied is improperly mixed or agitated, a rogue employee intentionally damages the yards, or perhaps the lawn was not properly diagnosed, there is no coverage for the damage done to the customer's lawn as a result of **your work**. Some insurers call this the business risk exclusion.

Other common endorsements that have been added to General Liability policies in the past such as the Pesticide-Herbicide Applicators endorsement and various forms of Contractors Limited Worksite Pollution endorsements will not cover damages to your customer's lawns based on the issues discussed above and damages caused as a result of **your work**.

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TIPS FROM THE TOP

Interviewed by Chuck Bowen

Company: Swingle Lawn, Tree and Landscape Care **Location:** Denver **Ranking:** 65 **2012 Revenue:** \$19.7 million



Tolkacz, center, with other members of the Swingle team, accepted an award from *Colorado BizMag* for being one of the largest 250 companies in the state in 2012.

Tom Tolkacz

// CEO, SWINGLE LAWN, TREE AND LANDSCAPE CARE

I got a degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in forestry and turf management. **I came out to Colorado on an internship to work golf courses.**

That's what brought me out west. **I tell everybody I watched too much "Ponderosa" growing up.**

Eventually I got fired from my first job at a golf course. I had a softball game that I needed to get to and the assistant superintendent wanted me to continue working. We were putting in 12-, 14-hour days completing a golf course, and I thought my softball game was more important.

So, that caused conflict.

I ended up working for Barefoot Grass Lawn Service in Denver.

And they were fabulous. I love selling and they gave you your own territory and said, "Knock a home run off if you can." **I went after it as hard as I could.**

I moved over to Swingle in 1987 to help Swingle expand their lawn care division. I had an opportunity in 1997 to buy into the organization and then in 1998, my partner passed away – Dave Dickson.

When I originally purchased the company, we were doing about \$6 million worth of business and **we'll just cross \$20 million in sales this year.**

We've been very blessed. The team's done a great job.

This year we had our worst

spring weather that any of us can remember. We had eight snowstorms eight weeks in a row starting in March.

It was, without a doubt, the most difficult financial year for our organization. People were down to less than 20 hours a week over a three to four week period. **It was just impossible to get out and do our normal services.**

It was about May 17, we had temperatures that hovered around 20 degrees. **And we started that recovery about June 1.**

The biggest challenge facing us is recruiting, retention and development. **We're going to have to attract people to our company, attract people to the industry.**

But we have to provide solid training so people will understand that they're learning a skill that can carry them on in their future.

We identified a year ago that we truly needed to have an on-staff recruiter whose primary duty and responsibility was to make sure that we were sharing our opportunities with as broad an audience as possible – **both traditional and non-traditional.**

As we were looking at professional recruiters coming from different industries, many of them looked at us and said, "We just don't think you have enough opportunity to keep us busy full time." **And I sat down with the one we hired and said, "Trust me. The opportunity is there and you will be plenty busy."**

The best technician isn't gonna

be your best finance person. You have to go out and find a professional finance person. It's not to say that those of us inside the industry can't migrate and move to different positions, but that's not gonna be the case all the time.

It's not what they call you. It's what they pay you. People will respect you for what you're doing and you keep working hard and it's gonna reward itself.

The irony that I share with people is we make more dollars per hour doing aeration than we do in irrigation. Isn't that just terrible that we, as an industry, can't convince our customers that our irrigation technician is worth more than our aeration technician?

Certifications are wonderful. I believe wholeheartedly in them and we're a massive supporter of certifications because it demonstrates people's commitment to the industry.

I don't think that's gonna change what a customer pays us.

Answer your phone, return your calls, show up on time, do what you say you're gonna do, do it for a fair price. And, by the way, if you're a certified technician, that's great.

The fact is, we're truly the environmental stewards – we just have to conduct ourselves in that fashion.

You have to know who you are. And if that's where you want to be, know that that's where you want to be. **L&L**



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