

DECEMBER 2015

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Leading business landscape contractors

BETTER TOGETHER

HOW BOB WHEELER AND BEN HELTON **STOPPED COMPETING,**
STARTED COLLABORATING AND BROKE THE **\$10-MILLION MARK.**

PG. 38

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“The teams have embraced each other pretty well because they’re excited to see how the other side does it.”

Bob Wheeler, left, co-owner,
Cutting Edge Landscape

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BETTER TOGETHER

HOW BOB WHEELER AND BEN HELTON **STOPPED COMPETING,**
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“I learned about being outdoors, hard work, long hours at times, but (also) the enjoyment of improving property, improving spaces and beautifying the world.”

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Feb 10 & 11, 2016

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Feb 16 & 17, 2016

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Raleigh NC

Mar 7 & 8, 2016

Las Vegas NV

Mar 9 & 10, 2016

Pittsburgh PA

Mar 15 & 16, 2016

Toronto ON

Mar 17 & 18, 2016

interview

THE LANDSCAPE OF A FAMILY OWNED BUSINESS



BY:

JUSTIN O'CONNOR

With over a decade of experience, Justin O'Connor knows the landscaping business inside and out. After graduating from Penn State University with a Bachelor's degree in Landscape Contracting (with options in both Landscape Design/Build and Landscape Management), he gained the foundation needed to become President of Growing Seasons, a family-owned and operated company located 15 miles South of Pittsburgh.

Here, he shares his insight, discusses the steps taken along the way to achieve his company's current success and tells us how real-time technology has helped his landscaping company thrive.

Q: Can you tell us about your family history and the generational transition involving the management of your business?

A: Growing Seasons Landscaping is family owned and operated and we're located 15 miles south of Pittsburgh. We took ownership in 2007 after the previous owner decided to sell the company. Before we took over, the company was geared more towards turf and landscape maintenance at the time. We decided that we also wanted to pursue landscape construction and focus more on business-to-business projects, as well as snow and ice management. With the growth of the gas and oil industry in our area, we also expanded our services to include erosion control, which has also helped our company grow over the past several years.

In addition to our unparalleled Landscape Division, Growing Seasons also offers a 24/7 comprehensive Snow & Ice Management service and a USDA certified Firewood Division for residential and restaurant use.



Q: Family-owned businesses can be as unique and distinctive as the families that own them. How does being family-owned and operated work to your advantage, and how does it help set you apart from your competition?

A: [Jim O'Connor]: Being faced with the task of managing the business along with two of my sons, we decided to hire a business coach. What this has done for us is to keep each of us in "our lanes". What I mean by lanes is Justin is in charge of sales and estimating, Josh is in charge of operations and equipment and I am in charge of finance. We discuss our areas and do help each other when needed, but hiring a coach keeps us focused and accountable.

My middle son Ryan doesn't work in the business, but he is our insurance advisor. My wife Sue does not work in the business, but she is a huge asset in keeping us all grounded. There is nothing more rewarding than seeing your sons grow,

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mature, and be hard working honest business people, helping each other achieve their goals and solve their problems. Please don't think we have it all together, we go through a lot of problems as well. But knowing we are all focused on the same goal is a huge asset to us. We invest in education, seminars and visiting other companies when we can. Education is a big part of our growth and success.

Q: How has technology helped contribute to your company's success?

A: Our company uses and relies on LMN. We had looked at several software programs and knew we needed to streamline our company's process to a single platform. After meeting Mark Bradley, Founder of LMN, in a food line at the Green Industry and Equipment Expo in 2013, we got started with LMN shortly afterwards, in early 2014. We wanted to implement it right away and there wasn't any training class near us at the time, so we used all the online resources and short videos. It made the process simple and straight forward.

We were able to build our budget for the year and setup all of our estimating catalogs. The videos on www.learnlmn.com also gave us a better understanding of our companies' numbers and how to recover all of our costs. Once we had everything setup, we immediately saw results in the speed and accuracy of our estimates. Our customers compliment us on how professional and easy to read they are. When you know your numbers it gives you the ability to bid with confidence.

In the past year, we have transitioned a lot of our work to commercial construction and erosion control. With this growth, LMN has been a big part in our estimating and job costing on projects. We had a very big year for growth, without adding any additional management or estimators.

Q: Can you give us a specific example of how LMN's software and training have boosted your company's success?

A: This past summer, we had an opportunity to bid a commercial construction project with a fast turnaround time. By understanding our numbers and our overhead through LMN, we were able to adjust our numbers not by cutting our price, but by understanding how this particular job offset our overhead costs. Because of that, we were able to lower our bid amount and win the project. If we didn't end up making these changes, we would have lost the bid and the opportunity to work with this client. This was all because of LMN's resources and its education, which gave us the insight and understanding we needed to achieve our goals.

Q: With the upcoming snow season right around the corner, how will your company thrive during this busy time of year?

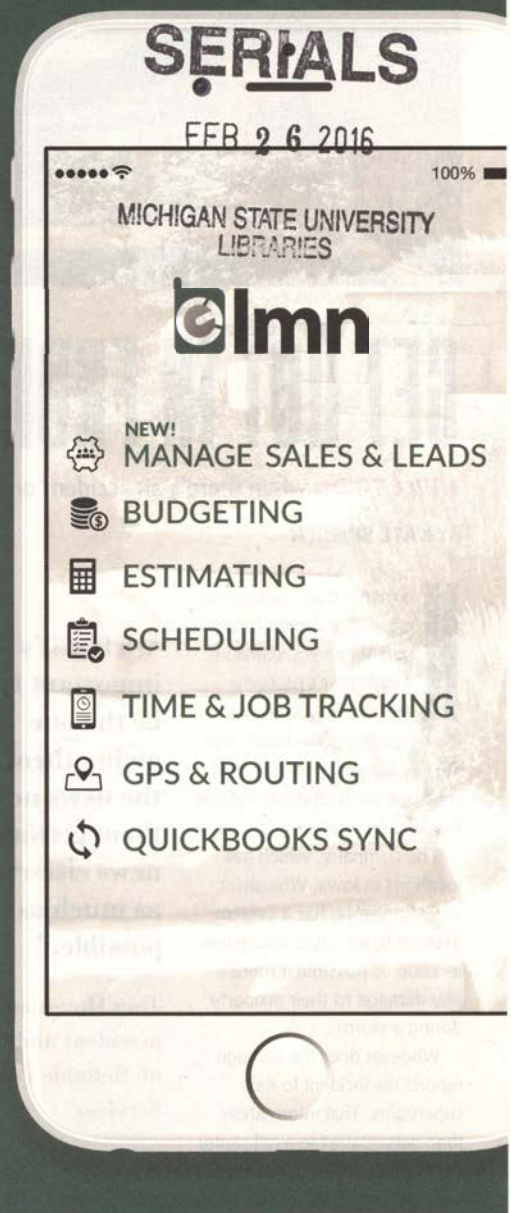
A: We attended a landscape business management workshop this past July taught by LMN and held at our local Caterpillar dealer. The workshop was geared towards snow and we are now converting all of our snow operations to LMN. LMN is not only going to help our field staff, but also the office staff - by boosting their efficiency and eliminating paper route sheets. The GPS time stamp also gives us the ability to confirm when our trucks leave our on-site.

In combination with LMN, Jobsite Watch, is giving us another competitive advantage. We plan on using this app for a client that we service over 50 of their sites. Jobsite Watch is going to allow our client to see in real-time which sites have been serviced and at what time. This application is allowing us to offer something that our competition is not. Our commitment is providing the best service in everything we do. We strive to build a long lasting relationship with every single client, while exceeding their expectations every step of the way.



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For more information about Growing Seasons Professional Landscaping please visit www.gslpgh.com

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ONLINE CONTENTS

Check out what's new online from **LAWN & LANDSCAPE**.



GET OUT IN FRONT OF DAMAGE

WHAT TO DO when there's an accident on your customer's property.

BY KATE SPIRGEN

No matter how careful your crews are, accidents happen. When you damage a customer's property, the best way to manage it is by getting out in front, says Tom Hougnon, president and chief operating officer of Reliable Property Services.

The company, which has locations in Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota, has a system in place to let customers know as soon as possible if there's any damage to their property during a storm.

Whoever does the damage reports the incident to their supervisors. That information then gets relayed to a call center which will alert the sales team to call the client and explain what happened. Crews are equipped with tablets and cellphones so that they can take photos of the damage to send to the customer or anyone working on repairs.

"We feel it's important to be the one giving them the news not them getting the news elsewhere as much as possible," Hougnon says.

Reliable tries to get properties back to normal,

"We feel it's important to be the one giving them the news not them getting the news elsewhere as much as possible."

**Tom Hougnon,
president and COO
of Reliable Property
Services**

or as close to normal as possible as soon as possible.

For example, if a plow knocks over a stop sign, the company will just go ahead and install a new one. Or if a light pole goes down, they will call an electrician to fix the problem.

If Reliable can't fix a problem right away, like replacing a tree, they will document it and handle when they're able.

Then, at the end of each season, they give each customer a damage report. Crews even take photos and videos of properties before and after the snow season.

"We try to be as upfront with the customer as we can when we

make a mistake or have damage at the property. That's pretty key to us, he says."

Reliable tries to alert customers of any damage in 30 to 45 minutes, even if it's an email in the middle of the night. The note will include what happened, what to expect on the property and what Reliable plans to do to take of the issue.

For the rest of this article on lawnandlandscape.com, check out bit.ly/propertydamage.



GOOD BEFORE GREEN

During the November #landscapechat, we tweeted about raising prices to weed out unprofitable jobs. Turns out some of our readers care more about their hearts than their pockets! That's especially good to see this time of year.



L&L'S 20TH WEBIVERSARY

Lawn & Landscape is celebrating 20 years online and this month we took a look back at how the internet is changing the way people shop for landscaping companies. To see how review sites like Angie's List and Yelp are playing a role, and to see how companies are using their own websites to stay ahead of the competition, turn to page 74.



EFI 824

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KOHLER Engines

KohlerEngines.com/824

EDITOR'S INSIGHT

What do you think? Email me at cbowen@gie.net.

Your ugly baby

I was at a conference in California last month where a contractor looked at the audience and said the best thing I'd heard all week: Nobody has an ugly baby.

The event was a peer group meeting – Next Level Network – and the contractor was Andrew Key, president at Heads Up Landscape in Albuquerque. Several times a year, the group of six companies compares notes on financials, operations and other benchmarks. The idea is to get honest and direct feedback on how their companies are doing from their peers because it's difficult for them to get an accurate view of their own operation from behind their own desk.

Choose your favorite metaphor: You can't see the forest through the trees. You can see a speck of sawdust in your brother's eye before you see a plank in your own. You can't see past the end of your own nose. As the boss, it's easy to become isolated, even if you still spend a lot of your time on a mower or in a skid-steer. In fact, I'd say it's even easier to lose perspective on what your company does well (or poorly) when you're the one actually doing it all day.

Andrew's point was that for the average landscaper, it's easy to see the good things and overlook (or make excuses for) the rough parts. To each parent, their child is the greatest and most perfect example yet of the human form. I know this is true; I have three perfect kids.

Now is the best time of year to solicit and review honest feedback from your team and your colleagues. Even if you aren't a part of a formalized peer group, you can speak with your friends or other partners to get some insight on how they see your company, and what areas they suggest you could improve.

It's true that no one has an ugly baby, but no landscaper has a perfect company, either. So take some time this month to ask for and then listen to – you have to listen to it, too – some constructive criticism. What do you do well? Because there will be things you and your crews do well. Don't forget to celebrate the positives and give credit to your team for the things they've become very good at. What don't you do well?

Find out now and get to work fixing it. This time next year, you'll have a much prettier baby. – *Chuck Bowen*



**It's even easier
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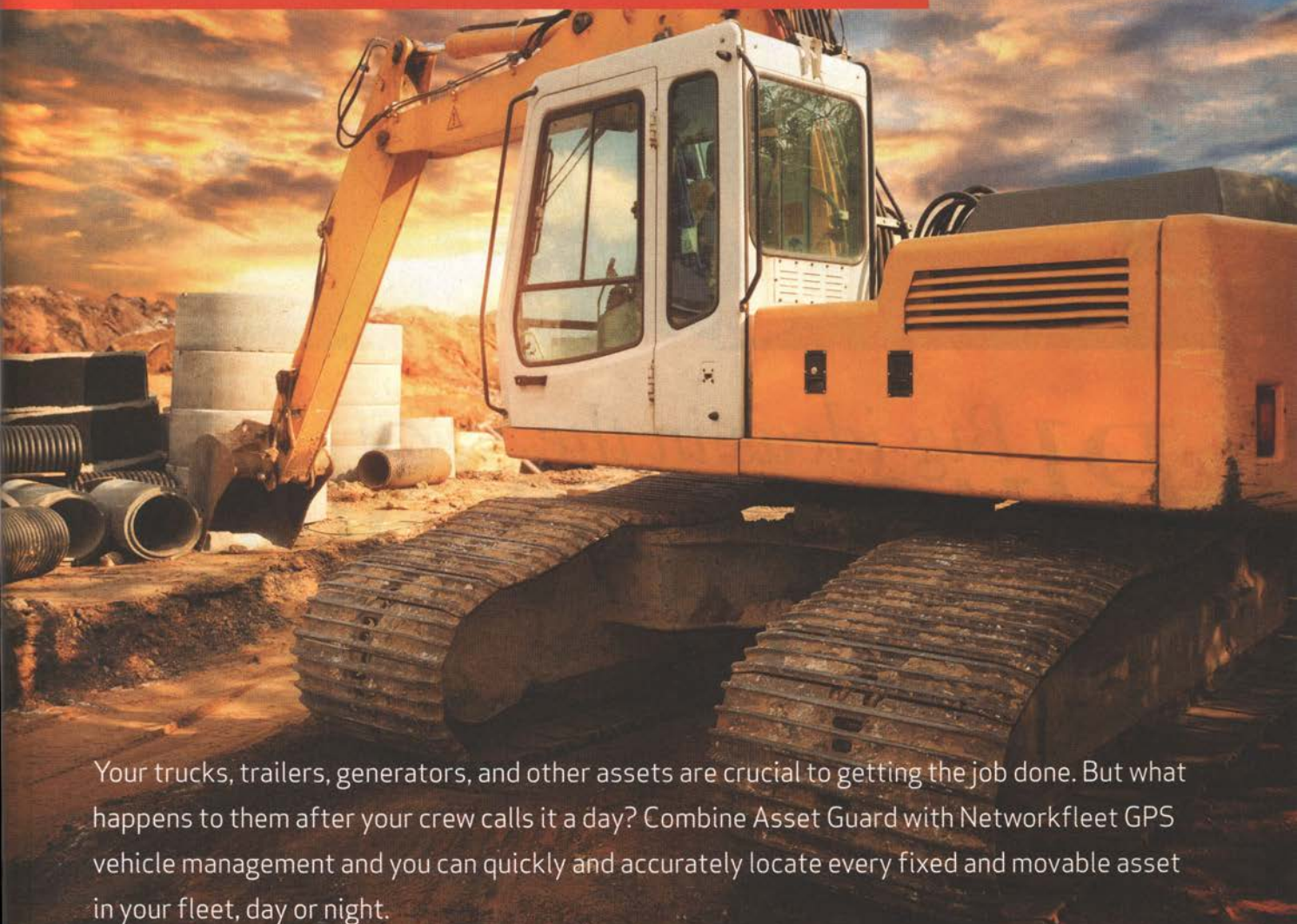
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Big ideas in the **Bluegrass State**

A number of events, highlighted by GIE+EXPO, showcased new products and provided educational opportunities for landscapers.

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky – The Lawn & Landscape team was in Louisville Oct. 20-23 to cover the industry's biggest tradeshow and conferences, and our take-aways have been positive.

The GIE+EXPO and Hardscape North America, the largest product shows in the country, both broke attendance records

this year with a 4 percent increase over last year for HNA and an 11 percent increase for GIE+EXPO.

The National Association of Landscape Professionals' conference is also growing, and the association is making new efforts to promote and expand the industry in its own right. Here is a wrap

up of our week in Louisville.

1. It was the biggest show ever, which bodes well for the industry. Any tradeshow is a bellwether for its industry, and in Louisville we had about six of them. Attendance at GIE+EXPO and Hardscape North America are both up – more than 21,000 people came this year, accord-

ing to show management – as is the amount of booth space exhibitors are buying. Despite great weather all week in Louisville, the show always felt crowded inside the hall.

That's a good indicator that the landscape and hardscape industries are healthy, and that contractors both have the money



Attendees took full advantage of the outdoor and indoor displays at the GIE+EXPO, which had record attendance this year.

and the time to attend.

2. Manufacturers are starting to bring a wide range of contractor-grade batteries and equipment to market, and electric equipment is only getting bigger. Makita was at GIE+EXPO for the first time with some powerful battery-powered handheld equipment. DeWalt returned with an expanded lineup of its own. And even Stihl – a stalwart among small engine equipment companies – had a robust lineup of pro-grade electric equipment.

3. Chatter on the show floor was positive among attendees and exhibitors. We have reams of data showing the landscape industry is growing and that contractors across the country are seeing markets return to pre-recession levels, but it's always heartening to hear that message straight from the horse's mouth on the show floor.

In short, it's a good time to be

a landscaper. What we see here at the show and what we hear in the hallways helps us get a handle on where things are headed in the next couple of years.

It's not always totally accurate, but it's a solid indicator of the tone and feeling of a few thousand of the industry's most engaged people. And right now, they're feeling good.

The dates for the 2016 show in Louisville are Oct. 19 for dealers, distributors, retailers and media, and Oct. 20-21 for everyone in the industry.

HNA, which first co-located with GIE+EXPO six years ago, has agreed to co-locate through 2018. HNA has outgrown its space and will relocate to the North Wing in 2016.

This will allow GIE+EXPO to move the Dealer Resource Pavilion onto the show floor and will provide space for GIE+EXPO and HNA exhibitors to expand.

NEW PRODUCTS

NEW, TRIED AND TRUE

It's more fun to cover the show when there's a lot of activity, and we saw plenty of new exhibitors and some old friends with new products. That's another good sign that suppliers continue to invest in the industry, and innovate what they currently have. Below is a rundown of some of the products launched at the show.

BRIGGS & STRATTON

Briggs & Stratton Commercial Power introduced its Vanguard air-cooled V-Twin Big Block EFI engine with the increased fuel efficiency of a closed-loop electronic fuel injection system. The new engine joins a growing lineup of Vanguard EFI engines, including the closed-loop 810 EFI engines for zero-turn commercial mowers. The new EFI technology is available in its 33 and 37 gross horsepower Big Block engines. It features an automotive-based closed-loop EFI system for up to 25 percent better fuel economy compared to the carbureted Big Block engines.



CATERPILLAR

For the first time, hand and foot controls will be offered on Caterpillar skid-steer, multi-terrain and compact track loader models. Single-axis joysticks were chosen in order to provide the fore/aft movement operators are used to.

In addition, the shorter joystick travel compared to traditional hand levers means operators can fully use the armrest for increased comfort and reduced fatigue. The hand and foot controls offer multiple control modes that allow operators to tailor the drive and implement response to their skill or task.



DEWALT

The DeWalt 40-volt backpack blower generates up to 450 cubic feet per minute of air volume at 140 mph and peaks at 63 decibels. It will be available with one or two of the new 40-volt 7.5 amp hour lithium ion batteries. Only one battery is required to operate the tool, but the backpack blower features two battery wells for extended runtime. The activation switch on the handle allows the user to choose which battery to pull energy from or to lock the tool off for transport and storage.



FERRIS

Ferris announced that it is breaking into a new category for 2016 with the introduction of the Soft Ride Stand-on (SRS) Z2 mower. The operator platform

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features suspension technology that is adjustable and helps lower operator fatigue. The Z2 is available with either a 52- or 61-inch iCD Cutting System, and features either a Briggs & Stratton Vanguard 810cc EFI or Kawasaki FX801V engine.



GRAVELY

Described as a modern version of the older Gravely machine, the Pro-QXT two-wheeled tractor is a compact walk-behind tractor for contractors working on smaller properties. When the Pro-QXT launches in January of 2016, two attachments will be available: a 44-inch power brush for all-season work and a 48-inch blade, available with an optional poly scraper edge.



HONDA

For 2016, Honda has launched the VersAttach Multi-Purpose System, which features two powerhead options and six different attachments. The two powerhead models are the UMC425, powered by a Honda GX25 Mini 4-Stroke engine, and the UMC435, powered by a GX35 Mini 4-Stroke engine. The six attachments include an edger, line trimmer, blower, hedge trimmer, pruner and cultivator.



KOHLER

Kohler Engines is expanding its electronic fuel injection (EFI) technology with the introduction of the Confidant EFI, Command PRO EFI ECH440 and Command PRO EFI 999cc. All three models offer the benefits of Kohler's highly regarded closed-loop EFI technology, including enhanced fuel efficiency, greater overall reliability and easier starting in a wide variety of conditions.



MAKITA

Makita is opened its tool box to the power equipment market with an expanding range of solutions for landscaping, hardscape applications, forestry and related maintenance. Included are MM4 four-stroke engine products, MM2 two-stroke chain saws, and an equipment/tool line-up powered by an 18-volt lithium-ion slide style battery. The GIE+EXPO also marks the re-integration of Makita U.S.A. and DOLMAR power equipment. Makita, which has owned Dolmar since 1991, said it will integrate the brand into its own line. The combination means Makita has an expanded line of two-stroke gas powered chain saws, including entry-level 32cc saws, 45-50cc mid-range (model EA5000PR) and larger saws for the forestry professional, as well as an expanded line of two-stroke concrete cutting saws.



For mower releases at GIE+EXPO read our mower round-ups in our 2016 January, February and March issues.

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ASK THE EXPERTS

Don't lose sight of systems

Q: Systems or processes have large buy in initially and prove themselves to make our business more effective on all fronts. The problem lies months down the road when management realizes that a business process that made everyone's life easier is no longer being performed.

What are the best methods to make sure they are embraced and stay in place?

A: Great question and a common challenge that most companies face. Systems, policies, procedures, best practices, standard operating procedures (SOP's) or whatever you wish to call them are critical to a company's success. These are especially important if there are multiple offices or yards involved with your business.

After reviewing the challenge, here it was discovered that many of these systems were installed and implemented over a short period of time by the owner of the organization and the team has had a hard time digesting them.

Below are some ideas to help get systems to stay in place.

BUILD A CULTURE OF SYSTEMS THINKERS. All key team members especially all of your leaders need to know and embrace the importance of having the right systems in place. They need to see the relationship of solid systems with solid results, which in turn affect them in positive ways as in promotions, better pay and



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job security as well as the company achieving their vision and mission. And hopefully making their job easier at least once they are in place.

GO FOR LEVERAGE. Decide on the systems that have the most leverage to success for your company or which ones will prevent bad things from happening at your organization BEFORE bad things happen: examples would include safety programs, estimating, sales, customer satisfaction, recruiting, cost tracking, HR laws and regulations, ICE or OSHA visits, etc.

IDENTIFY THE DESIRED QUANTITATIVE OUTCOMES. What measurable results will you expect when these systems are in place? As in lower Worker Compensation rates, making more gross margin, keeping your customers longer, pricing your work so you make a profit to name a few.

HAVE PEOPLE PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPING SYSTEMS. Build task forces to help design and implement the systems. Get consensus and buy in from the top down and bottom up.

HAVE A GREAT LAUNCHING AND ROLL OUT. Have a very clear path for rolling new systems out. Be very diligent on monitoring their

usage and conduct regular in-service training and certification. Remember to keep it simple and in phases and only try to launch 1 or 2 per year.

ASSIGN CHAMPIONS. You as the leader can't own every system or program. Try for people who have a passion or good knowledge of the system. Maybe even have a co-champion assigned as well. Check in regularly and assist where needed, and reward or bonus the champions once the system is in place and working.

PERFORM AUDITS/REVIEWS REGULARLY TO VERIFY. Have a check-up process to verify all is in place and working. Adjust where and if needed.

You should focus on two key systems this year – build a Safety program and a quality assurance program as your highest leverage points for your organization. Also, review and adjust your employee manual and your performance management process.

Bill Arman, The Harvest Group Trailblazer, National Association of Landscape Professionals

ASK THE EXPERTS is brought to you in partnership with NALP, the national association of landscape professionals. Questions are fielded through NALP's Trailblazers, the industry's leading company mentoring program. For more questions visit Landscapeprofessionals.org.

YOUR FEES IN 2016

L&L caught up with three industry experts to get a feel on pricing.

More than 70 percent of contractors who took our 2015 State of the Industry survey said they are very confident or somewhat confident they will increase revenue next year. With that in mind, we asked Tom Fochtman, Jim Huston and Ben Campbell about how you should approach pricing services in 2016. For more in pricing, visit bit.ly/soiprice.

Q: Is the economy improving enough where now is the time for landscape contractors to start raising prices?

Ben Campbell: The economy has seen some improvement over the last couple of years. The question about raising prices is not simple as prices are highly dependent on location and competition. For instance, areas that are seeing increased housing starts – a good indicator of economic well-being – would be primed for potential

- **BEN CAMPBELL** is an assistant professor and extension economist, University of Connecticut
- **TOM FOCHTMAN** is owner of Ceibass, a green industry consulting firm
- **JIM HUSTON** is owner of JR Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm

increases as workload increases. However, in areas with high competition, the ability to raise prices is harder. Firms looking to raise prices need to understand their specific market and clientele as this decision is firm specific.



**Ben
CAMPBELL**



**Tom
FOCHTMAN**



**Jim
HUSTON**

Jim Huston: Definitely. Pricing is a factor of the supply-demand curve. As demand goes up so does pricing. I'd blame the increase on something that clients can relate to – higher labor costs, the minimum wage increase, the lack of qualified labor.

Tom Fochtman: Yes, and they

should have done a minimum of a year ago and in many markets, two years ago. The economy will bear it. Customers are keenly aware of what the downturn did to many businesses and industries, and they certainly know what it did to the landscape industry. Some customers have new contractors because their

old one is out of business and did not make it through our recent Great Recession.

Here is an analogy I use around raising prices:

A maintenance contractor is about to submit a bid for \$1,000 month. Could he submit it for \$1,050 and get the job?

The same contractor is submitting an enhancement proposal for \$30,000. Could he submit it for \$31,500 and still get the job? A residential design/build

contractor has met with the homeowner three times and is now submitting the bid for \$100,000. If he submits it for \$105,000 will he still get the job?

In all of these instances my general response is hell yes they will get the job. Through good selling, you would get the job in all instances if you raised the price 5 percent. Everyone should raise all their prices a minimum of 5 percent yesterday.

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Q: Are there certain states/locations that will see or of an economic improvement than others?

BC: Looking at single-family home starts over the last year has seen the U.S. increase, but the rates vary by state and region.

For instance, the Northeast has seen less home starts while the Midwest, South and West have seen increases. Within the Northeast, Vermont and New York have had the only positive home start growth.

These areas are more likely seeing a bigger economic uptick and thereby be better able to handle

“Customers are keenly aware of what the downturn did to many businesses and industries, and they certainly know what it did to the landscape industry.”

— Tom Fochtman, Ceibass

a price increase. But, generalizing to a whole state, also has issues as Hartford/West-/East-Hartford have positive single family home start growth while other areas in Connecticut have seen negative growth.

So based on this, the economic growth and subsequent price increase potential is highly dependent on location. This being

said, areas outside the Northeast, especially the west and south, would be better bets for overall economic improvement.

JH: The ultra-high-end market rose first about four years ago and it is going crazy right now. The uber-rich cannot spend money fast enough.

This year commercial markets

are taking off rather strongly and the middle class residential client is spending lots of money.

TF: Sure. Colorado, and specifically Denver, is off the charts, low unemployment, 56,000 projected to move here in 2015 (according to the 2015 Colorado Business Economic Outlook) – housing is booming.

All the great lifestyle cities are doing very well. It's easier to raise prices in Denver than Detroit or maybe a Louisville, Kentucky. But, our national economy is doing quite well and most markets can handle price increases.



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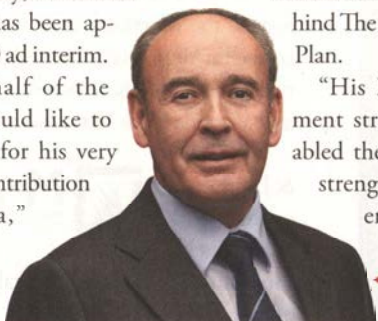
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SYNGENTA CEO RESIGNS; RAMSAY NAMED AD INTERIM

Mike Mack has stepped down as CEO and executive director of Syngenta after rejecting several buyout offers from herbicide giant Monsanto.

John Ramsay, chief financial officer, has been appointed CEO ad interim.

"On behalf of the board, I should like to thank Mike for his very significant contribution to Syngenta," said Michel Demaré,



◀ John RAMSAY

chairman of Syngenta. "Under his strong strategic and operational leadership, Syngenta developed and implemented its innovative integrated strategy and the commitments behind The Good Growth Plan.

"His R&D investment strategy has enabled the company to strengthen its leadership and the

rich pipeline in crop protection, seeds and traits will continue to produce results in the decade to come."

Mack, who had been with Syngenta for 14 years, said he believed it was time for the company to benefit from the perspectives of a new leader.

"Syngenta is a great company with outstanding prospects as the only truly integrated global player in the industry," Mack said. "While the current market conditions are challenging, I am

confident that the strength of the company's products, promising pipeline and talented people will deliver significant value in the years ahead."

Ramsay was Syngenta's group financial controller from 2000-2007.

Prior to that, he was Zeneca Agrochemicals finance head Asia Pacific (1994-1999), financial controller ICI Malaysia (1990-1993), and ICI Plant Protection Regional Controller Latin America (1987-1990).

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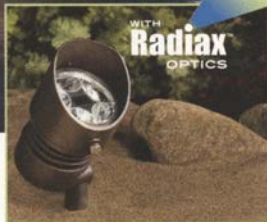
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KICHLER

FREDERICKSBURG, Virginia – Lawn & Landscape will present a half-day education program for landscapers and lawn care operators at the 2016 Mid-Atlantic Turf Expo in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in January.

The turf and landscape show is a joint effort by the Maryland and Virginia turfgrass councils. All proceeds from the show benefit turf research at the University of Maryland and Virginia Tech University.

The Lawn & Landscape conference is sponsored by Horizon Distributors and takes place the afternoon of Monday, Jan. 24. It consists of four sessions designed to help contractors of any size grow in 2016:

- **Implementing technology to improve your sales and productivity, Matt and Chris Noon, SmartLawn.** The Noon brothers will coach LCOs and other landscapers on how they can implement simple technologies to make their operations more profitable.

- **Taking advantage of the outdoor living movement, Bruce Allentuck, Allentuck Landscaping.** Allentuck will share how landscapers can enter or expand in the thriving design/build market.

- **Labor and recruiting strategies for 2016, Kory Beidler, LandCare.** Beidler is a key recruiter at LandCare, a \$205-million company with locations across the country and 4,500 employees. He'll offer specific strategies on how landscapers can find – and keep – the best employees in their markets.

- **The state of the landscape industry, Chuck Bowen, Lawn & Landscape.** Bowen is the editor at L&L magazine, and will share key research on the biggest and most important trends that are impacting the landscape and lawn care industries, and how contractors can use them to grow.

For more information, and to register, visit www.turfconference.org.



TRUGREEN DIPS INTO IRRIGATION

MEMPHIS, Tennessee – TruGreen is expanding its offerings with the launch of a new irrigation system maintenance and repair business, TruGreen Sprinkler Repair and Maintenance.

Currently available in select cities in Florida, Missouri, Nebraska, Arkansas and Tennessee, TruGreen Sprinkler Repair and Maintenance will be launching in more than a dozen markets in 2016.

“Expanding into irrigation system maintenance and repair is a natural fit for us, and brings customers an added level of convenience and efficiency,” said TruGreen Vice President Brent Armstrong.

“TruGreen Sprinkler Repair and Maintenance is not only a perfect complement to our core business, enabling us to grow and expand, it also underscores our core purpose of helping customers live life outside on beautiful, healthy lawns.”

STARK JOINS BRUCE WILSON & COMPANY

SCOTTSDALE, Arizona – Pam Stark has joined Bruce K. Wilson’s consulting team, Bruce Wilson & Company. Stark, a 40-year veteran of the green industry and 2011 Lawn & Landscape Leadership Award winner, is a professionally trained horticulturist and former senior vice president at ValleyCrest.

In her new role, Stark will oversee large projects and assignments focused on operations management, customer loyalty strategies, leadership coaching, team training and professional development.

“Our clients know that we put their interests ahead of ours and so we continually seek new and better ways to serve them,” Wilson

said. “Pam will help us create and drive new capabilities and tools which will allow our clients to improve service performance and

build their customer relationships for the long term.” To read Stark’s Leadership Award story, visit bit.ly/1lstark.



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ZINO, OTHER EXECUTIVES LEAVE BRIGHTVIEW

ROCKVILLE, Maryland – According to an internal memo obtained by Lawn & Landscape, Roger Zino will step down as vice chairman of BrightView at the end of the year.

Zino had served as CEO of ValleyCrest before it was acquired by KKR in 2014 and merged with Brickman, and was president of ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance since 2001.

"I have both the deepest gratitude and respect for all that

Roger has done for us over his 15 years. Let me simply say that Roger has contributed immeasurably to what BrightView will become, and on behalf of the Board and Management Team, we sincerely thank him for his tireless efforts toward building the business we have today," BrightView CEO Andrew Kerin wrote in the memo.

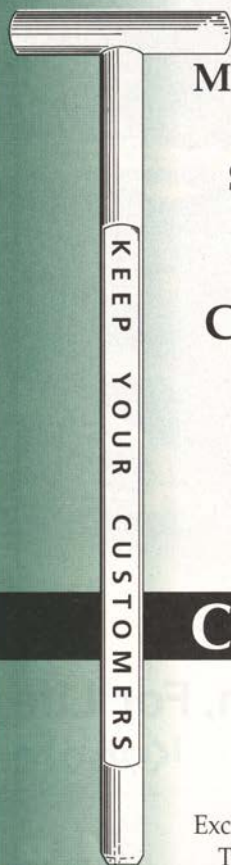
Along with Zino, several other executives announced their resignations, according to the memo,

including Andy Mandell, CFO and president of ValleyCrest Group; Gena Ashe, chief legal officer; and Jennifer Mintman, chief strategy officer and head of Brickman Facility Services.

As part of the executive changes, Joseph Tinney, a former executive vice president at Brickman, will serve as chief growth officer and president of Brickman Facility Services, with responsibility for national accounts, estimating and sports turf.

Tom Donnelly, former president of ValleyCrest Landscape Development, will serve as president of ValleyCrest Group with responsibility for the nursery and golf businesses.

The merger of Brickman and ValleyCrest was finalized in June of 2014 after both were purchased by private equity giant KKR. BrightView has approximate annual revenues of \$2 billion with more than 20,000 employees nationwide. **L&L**



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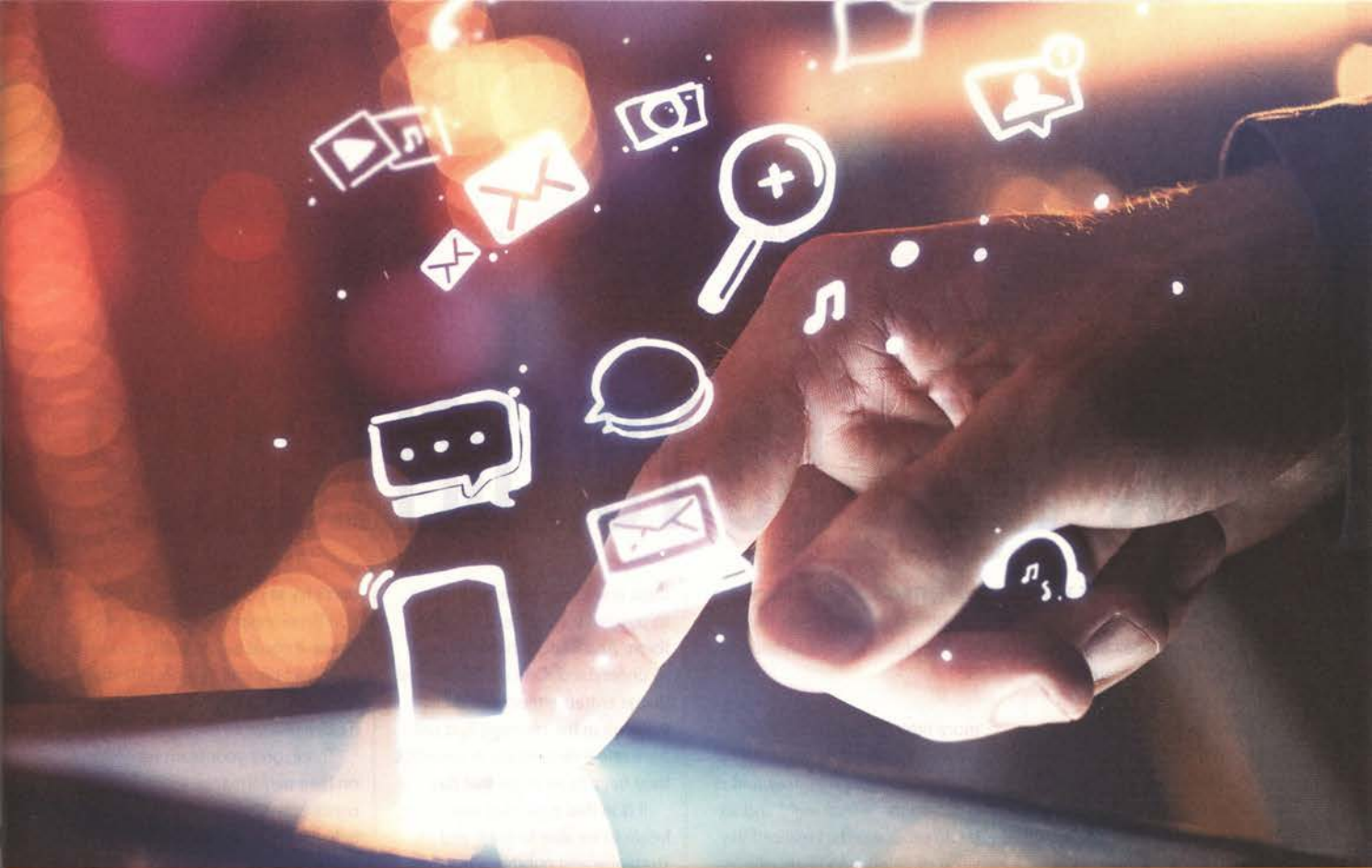
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HOW WELL DO YOU DELEGATE?

ONE OF THE HARDEST THINGS FOR AN ENTREPRENEUR to learn how to do is delegate. However, for entrepreneurs to grow their businesses, they must delegate. It's a big challenge and an issue that we all need to work on.

According to the Gallup Organization, only one in four entrepreneurs who have employees have "high levels of delegator talent." Also according to the Gallup Organization, "Founders who have and use the high delegator talent can generate better business growth and venture success than leaders who get lost in the day-to-day minutiae of managing a business." So, the obvious question I have for you is: How good are you at delegating? And how can you improve your delegating talents?

When I started Grunder Landscaping Co. more than 30 years ago, I was not very good at delegating. Part of it was ignorance and the other part was my reluctance to add payroll. I was trying to make a business work on a low budget, so paying for people to help me wasn't something I was comfortable with doing. I was just too scared to have anyone help me.

As I grew the business and got married and had children, I had to learn how to delegate to have

more time for my family. I also learned that eight people could accomplish more than four and 12 could do more than eight and so on. In other words, I realized the value of delegating financially as well as mentally.

DELEGATING IS NOT EASY.

However, it is absolutely necessary if you are going to grow your company. Don't agree? Then think about this statement that many successful entrepreneurs will tell you is true: Businesses that can run without the owner sell for far more money than businesses that rely daily on the owner to operate.

I know what you may be thinking, "Marty, I don't want to sell my business." I get it. Right now, I don't want to sell my business either. However, I'm working very, very hard to get it to the point that it runs completely without me.

I might never get to that point, but I'm trying to get there because as I get closer to having a business that runs without me, I have more time to

think and plan. I have more time to prevent fires rather than fight them. And that's what you need to understand. One of the greatest things entrepreneurs can do is wake up in the morning and not have any emergencies or priorities they have to work on that day.

It is in that zone that you begin to be able to think and strategize and put those big dreams in motion. The successful entrepreneur needs to be able to think about tomorrow while his or her team thinks about today.

HOW DO YOU DELEGATE? There's no way I can explain the delegation process in full in this column, so let me hit the highlights. One, get job descriptions for all of the people on your organizational chart and if you don't know what either of those things are, either Google it or call us. (Relax, I didn't know what they were 25 years ago either.) Job descriptions and org charts clarify expectations. They let your team members know what their roles are, and how they help the company win. Go overboard if you must to make sure your team members understand what they are supposed to do.

Two, let go. Give other folks on your team important jobs to do.

Don't try to do everything yourself. You'll never get your company to where it could be, nor will you keep your best people if you constantly hold them back. You have to give them a chance to excel.

Three, give your team feedback on their performance – good, constructive, honest feedback that helps them get better. There's a lot more to cover in delegation.

Think of yourself as a head coach in the NFL. Bill Belichick of the New England Patriots is a brilliant coach. I don't care for his personality, but I can argue he's a genius. How many touchdowns has he thrown? How many tackles has he made? How many extra points has he kicked? Sacks? He's got none. You have to be like Belichick. He can't go on the field and make a play. He can only coach them in practice, teach, instruct and show films.

Look at your role as a CEO like that. You can't go on a job site and run a machine or even touch a shovel. You can't go on a sales call. You can't drive the big truck. You can't do the plan for the new pool and hardscape your client wants. You can't answer the phones.

All you can do is to teach and coach your team on how to do that. Each year in the NFL, we are amazed at the normal player that didn't do much in college, but due to incredible coaching, he excels. Look around at your team. What could they do if you got out of the way? What could you do if you delegate? **L&L**



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THE COST OF EQUIPMENT

THE FIRST DAY I CONSULTED

with a young, somewhat arrogant, installation client, he told me that he wasn't sure if he needed my services. He'd work for his high-end customers, present them with a bill and they'd pay him whatever he charged. "I have no competition," he bragged. I replied that if I could not help him, he wouldn't have to pay me for my time that day.

Later that morning, he said he thought his sales for the previous year were \$70,000 to \$80,000 below what they should have been. He thought that he should have billed his customers about \$575,000 but he seemed to be missing \$70,000 to 80,000 in revenue.

EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLE COSTS.

You have to calculate equipment and vehicle costs in your pricing. I use 8 to 14 percent of sales as a benchmark that includes all equipment and vehicle costs (fuel, depreciation, insurances, repairs, parts, mechanics, etc.) for a typical landscape installation or maintenance company. A \$1 million company would have roughly \$100,000 in such costs. But, how do you include that cost in your pricing and pass it on to your clients?

One theory, as taught in the dual overhead recovery system estimating method, is to include all of your equipment costs in your general and administrative overhead costs and include them in your markup percentages for labor and materials. A second theory is to divide all such budgeted costs for the year by

the number of billable man-hours budgeted for the same period. It looks like the box below.

Two different bids, both of which include 1,000 man-hours in each for a three-man crew, would calculate the costs for equipment the same or \$10,000 (1,000 man-hours x \$10 EQCPH = \$10,000). Let's assume, for arguments sake, that one job requires a pickup truck, skid-steer and mini-excavator, and the \$10,000 just happens to be a correct amount.

However, if the second job only requires a pickup truck and nothing more, the \$10,000 equipment cost is far too high and should be around \$4 per man-hour. I calculate the \$4 as follows: (((Acquisition cost + lifetime maintenance cost + lifetime fuel cost) ÷ lifetime billable hours) ÷ 3 men) or (((\$45,000 + 35,000 + 40,000) ÷ 10,000) ÷ 3) = \$4.


Instead of \$10,000 for equipment costs in the bid, the second job should only have \$4,000 in estimat-

ed equipment costs. The estimated costs in this bid are \$6,000 too high. This figure gets even worse when you add general and administrative overhead and net profit to it.

WHAT'S THE BEEF? Both of these estimating systems make a false mathematical assumption that can be (and often is) fatal to contractors. The error occurs when you average an annual direct cost in your pricing, in this case equipment costs, instead of including it in a bid as it is needed. If a job requires pickup trucks, skid-steers, mini-excavators and loaders, then you should include those costs in a bid. If, on the other hand, you only need a pickup truck, you should only include the cost for such a truck in your bid. Otherwise, you will overstate your equipment costs on labor-intense jobs and be far less competitive.

THE MARKETPLACE AIN'T STUPID.

If you overprice your costs and

 If a job requires pickup trucks, skid-steers, mini-excavators and loaders, then you should include those costs in a bid.

therefore your bids, chances are you won't win many bids. But, if you underprice your costs and bids, you'll get lots of work.

Imagine if you advertised that you would landscape (planting only) any property for just \$1 per square foot of planting area. Regardless of the plant or plant size, customers would pay an average price of just \$1 per square foot. They'd get the biggest bang for their buck that they could get. In almost all cases, averaging a direct cost simply doesn't work.

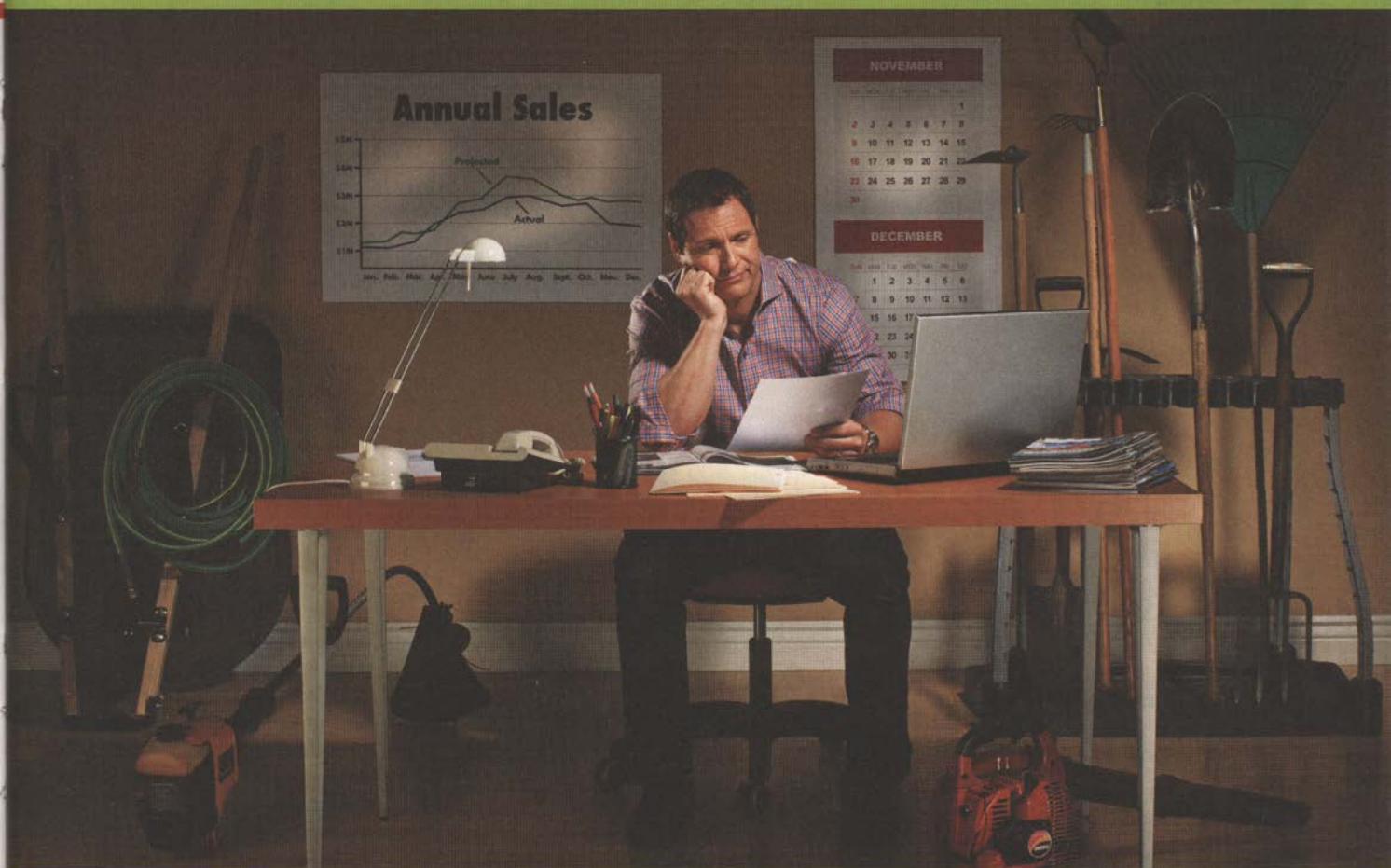
CONCLUSION. My new landscaper client had a reasonable labor rate. He also marked up his materials and subcontractor costs accurately. However, when I asked him how he charged his clients for the \$60,000 in equipment and vehicle expenses on his profit and loss statement, he just stared at me. We found the missing \$75,000. He should have marked up his equipment costs and charged his clients \$575,000 (and they would have gladly paid it) but in his ignorance, he charged them just \$500,000.

Later that day, he paid me for my time and 25 years later, this man has a business doing \$5 to \$6 million in sales annually. I think that he learned a lesson that day. Sometimes your biggest competitor is the one you see in the mirror. **L&L**

HOW TO INCLUDE EQUIPMENT AND VEHICLE COSTS IN YOUR PRICING

\$1 million (Annual company revenue)
x .14 (Annual percent of equipment and vehicle costs)
\$140,000 (Annual amount of equipment and vehicle costs)
8.0 (Annual number of fulltime field employees)
x 1,800 (Average number of paid man-hours per person per year)
(40 weeks x 45 man-hours/week)
14,400 (Total number of paid man-hours per year)
-400 (Total non-billable man-hours for holidays, vacations, etc.)
14,000 (Total number of billable man-hours per year)
\$140,000 (Equipment costs per year)
÷ 14,000 (Billable man-hours per year)
\$10 (Equipment cost per man-hour)

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BY CHLOE GOLEMBESKY

HIRE POWER is a monthly column designed to help you recruit, hire and retain the best talent for your company. We've got a rotating panel of columnists ready to give you practical, tactical advice on solving your labor problems. Email Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net with topic ideas.



CREATE A CAMPUS PRESENCE

SO YOU'VE GROWN YOUR BOOK OF BUSINESS, and have decided that it's time to start hiring the millennial generation of recent college grads. Congratulations!

But, you don't know where to start, or how to create a presence or name for yourself on campus. Not to worry, it's easier than you think. First, define your strategy. Your initial thought would probably take you down the path of attending upcoming career fairs, but let me tell you, you won't get the most bang for your buck there.

Yes, you will meet nice, well-dressed students. Yes, they will ideally come prepared looking for a job. But you will be standing there next to about another 60 companies competing for attention. What you really need is what comes even before the career fair, and that is relationships.

College recruiting these days is all about the relationships you have

with the universities, career services centers and most importantly the professors. The stronger relationships you have with the actual individuals working with students daily, the more likely you are to get that one-on-one face time with students.

What is most valuable for a small or even medium size organization searching for talent are the interac-

tions where you aren't competing with the big names like Caterpillar or BrightView for attention. It's where you are able to really shine and share why these millennials should ignore the big brands and come work for you.

Not only are you able to present how great it is to work for your organization, but you are showing support for the program as a whole. You are there supporting the students, the universities and the professors, stressing the importance of agriculture and horticulture programs. As we've seen enrollment rates into these programs decrease dramatically over the years, the more industry support we can provide, the better.

We also know from recent data that students are not attending career fairs so the more you can get on campuses, the better.

Not only are you forming personal relationships with the university staff, but you are also becoming a familiar face to the students.

Say, for example, you become involved with Brigham Young University's Horticulture Club, and you attend a club meeting and meet a freshman just beginning to explore what the horticulture industry has to offer.

If you continue to maintain your relationship with that horticulture club, it is very likely that you will see that same freshman year after year. Ideally, you'll even stay in touch with her three years down the line, when she is searching for a full-time job. And who do you think she will look at first for a job? The company that she knows nothing about or the company that has supported her club programs year after year and someone she knows like a friend. You got it, you!

You might be thinking to yourself, well, all of this sounds great, but I don't have time to go to events at every single school I hire from. This is where your strategy comes in. Rely on your strategy. Keep your relationships strong. I promise, the more you give, the more you will receive. And not just in money, but in brand recognition, recommendations and retention of top qualified individuals.

Best of luck in your recruiting and remember, it's all about relationships. **L&L**

The author was National College Recruiter for ValleyCrest Companies and Brickman Group in Calabasas, California.



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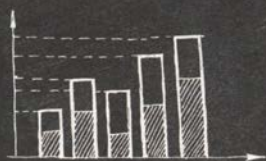
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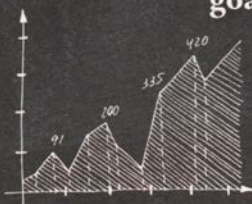
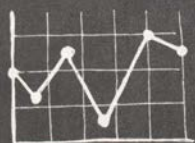


CLEAN SLATE

Owners share their goals for the New Year and beyond.

By Kristen Hampshire

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS are practically designed to be broken, which is why we set business goals. You don't have to wait until the end of the calendar year to focus on the future, but this season prompts reflection and inspires us to consider what's next. Lawn & Landscape spoke with three owners who shared their 2016 goals and plans for implementation.



One percent better

After 21 years serving in the U.S. Air Force, Ronnie Christopher retired to civilian life and immediately transitioned into ownership of a U.S. Lawns franchise near the Robin Air Force Base in Georgia. Now, two and a half years into the venture, his business is on pace to do \$250,000 in revenue in 2016, with four employees and an expanding customer base thanks to persistent, purposeful networking.

"I enjoy business, in general," says Christopher, who also serves as an ambassador for the local chamber of commerce. "When I go to meetings, I ask other business owners, 'What are you struggling with?' And I listen to them, and I think about it. I try to call them or shoot them an email with ideas that may help."

This is one of Christopher's goals for 2016: Come up with 10 ideas per week for other business owners. "I'm a believer that if you help others grow their businesses, you'll grow your own," he says, adding that his 25 percent growth target for 2016 will be realized if he can keep 10 proposals out there per week.

But Christopher isn't just looking for business growth. His goals are more holistic. "I strive to improve my life 1 percent each day," he says. "If I can achieve this goal, then every 30 days I have become 30 percent better than I was."

Christopher works on this quest of continual improvement by keeping a journal where he writes down ideas every day to hold himself accountable. "I also put these ideas up on my 'action board' in my office so I can see them daily," he says.

He dedicates about 20 minutes each day to meditation and preparation to get ready for what is ahead so he can handle stress. And, he makes exercise a daily habit so he can prevent sickness and injuries. "I make sure that I'm tak-



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U.S. LAWNS OF WARNER ROBINS

Ronnie Christopher,
owner

LOCATION:
Kathleen, Georgia

ESTABLISHED:
2013

EMPLOYEES:
4

2015 REVENUES:
\$210,000 (projected)

CUSTOMERS:
100% commercial

SERVICES:
Full-service landscape
maintenance, fertilization
and plant health, seasonal
color and installation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

PRESS PAUSE.

Christopher uses a journal to keep an ongoing list of ideas that he transfers to a board in his office. He takes quarterly breaks to assess business progress and regroup.

SET 'WHOLE' GOALS.

Christopher addresses both personal and professional growth. His personal goals focus on gratitude, physical exercise, mental aptitude and spiritual and emotional health.

NETWORK.

Professional growth depends on the strength of one's network, Christopher says. That's why he will focus on building relationships with clients and non-clients in the community through chamber and charity events.



Ronnie Christopher says he can hit his 25 percent growth target for 2016 if he can send 10 proposals out per week.

ing care of myself, because if I'm not doing that, I can't do what I'm supposed to be doing in my business," he says.

In the evening, he reflects on the previous day. "Every day, be grateful for life, the people around you and the position you are lucky to be in," he says.

Christopher will also focus more on training in 2016. While U.S. Lawns provides 70-plus safety training topics to review during 20-minute Monday morning tailgate sessions, Christopher says he can enhance those with his own experience.

"In the Air Force, we were taught on safety, so I can add more," he says, adding that he's less concerned about a time parameter on meetings than he is that everyone learns. "Making sure everyone is on the page will save me time in the long run because, if people are properly trained, they will stay safe."

Meanwhile, Christopher continues to sharpen his knowledge and skills in the industry by turning to mentors at U.S. Lawns. "I was fortunate to come from a career field where I was around many officers and learned that

66
Making sure everyone is on the page will save me time in the long run because if people are properly trained, they will stay safe."

Ronnie Christopher,
U.S. Lawns

leaders are readers," he says. "And, a key to personal and professional growth is to find people who have been there, done that."

Christopher regularly calls and emails mentors, or shoots them text messages to get quick feedback. "Making all the mistakes yourself is too expensive and takes too much time," he says.

Finally, the practice of setting goals positions you to achieve them, Christopher says. That's why he sets aside four days every 10 weeks as a "sabbatical" to reflect on business performance. "I think it's imperative that you sit down and plan time to grow yourself and the business," he says.

LAMBERT'S ►

Paul Fields, president

LOCATION:
Dallas

ESTABLISHED:
1919

EMPLOYEES:
168

2015 REVENUES:
\$18 million

CUSTOMERS:
90% residential,
10% commercial

SERVICES:
Design/build, maintenance,
tree care, plant health care,
irrigation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

RESERVE TIME FOR REFLECTION.

"The most difficult thing is finding the time to set goals, and if we can become more focused on finding that time and making that time, we'll all be much improved," Fields says.

COME TOGETHER.

Employees have different personal and professional goals – but they must work together as a company to achieve goals that will advance the organization and, in turn, their professional lives. "There's a push and pull there that becomes beneficial," Fields says.

PROMOTE ACCOUNTABILITY.

By involving team members and managers, the company pulls in ideas from all levels and inspires employees to focus on improvement. "We hold each other accountable for setting those goals and implementing them," Fields says.



Lambert's new facility will be where the team pursues its 2016 goals, which include more growth and recruiting high-quality employees.

Build your accountability

For the last century, Lambert's has moved its facility every 25 years. It wasn't planned, but the company's growth and development over the years have called for a new home every quarter century or so.

This is that year again. Paul Fields, president, says Lambert's purchased a property and is creating a facility that will include test gardens and a state-of-the-art office environment that will lift spirits. "Right at the first of the year we should be up and running over there," he says, noting that this new office allowed for space planning so teams can be grouped together. "That will help with internal communication, camaraderie and team work," he says.

And this environment will serve Lambert's well as it pursues the key 2016 goals of more growth, cultivating the quality of its customer base and recruiting high-quality employees.

All of these goals are easy to put on paper, but challenging to implement. Doing so will require buy-in from team members at all levels and accountability to carry out ideas. That's

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FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

why Lambert's has Continuous Improvement Teams (CITs) – leadership groups of individuals who are not necessarily managers. “Those teams huddle up and come up with ideas and thoughts for best practices for improving certain areas of the business we are working on or dilemmas we are facing,” Fields says.

Recruiting is one of those areas. “That has been tough the last couple of years, between immigration laws and a shrinking labor pool,” Fields says. “We are realizing that we can't just go out and hire someone. It takes consistent recruiting efforts to make that happen, and we're already focused on that.”

For now, there's a lot of brainstorming surrounding the recruiting topic. And Lambert's is currently outsourcing some HR and recruiting needs. “Right now, we are trying to figure out how we can become more focused on recruiting internally and let that be a predominant or sole responsibility of a single individual here,” he says, adding that recruiting is one of many job roles for in-house team members.

Meanwhile, Lambert's will also concentrate on client base quality. “We have been spending the last few months really focusing on what a key Lambert's account looks like – the type of client, the location, the garden

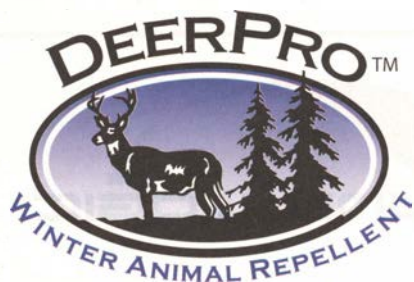
landscapes that we like to maintain,” Fields says.

Now, about 60-70 percent of Lambert's book of business mirrors this ideal image. “So, we're trying to comb that over so over the next two years we can achieve closer to 100 percent,” Fields says.

This is a brand-new initiative. For now, the company is identifying who is a perfect Lambert's client so account managers can recognize which clients are not. Then, CITs will formulate some ideas for obtaining more of those target clients. “As we do that, we'll shed accounts that don't necessarily meet our mold,” Fields says.

Personally, Fields is looking forward to more time with family and a return to more landscape architecture responsibilities in the New Year. While he continues working with a number of clients from a design perspective, he'd like to do more of that. “The last few years I've been burning the candle at both ends, it seems, working to get the business to a point where it will allow me to (step back a bit),” Fields says.

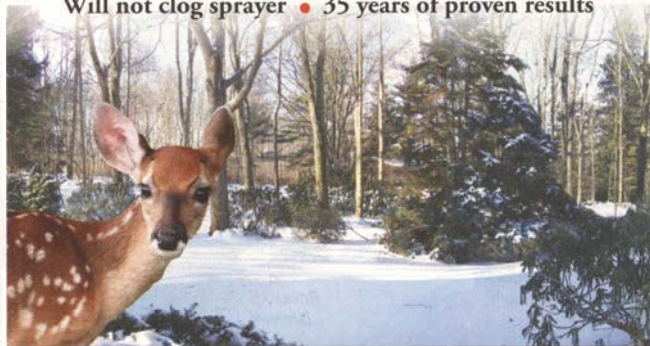
The CITs and empowering others in the organization to “own” company goals is helping make this happen. “We have to work together as a team to achieve the goals of the company,” he says.



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Launch a dream

When James Bollin decided to leave a large national lawn care firm in August 2014 to start a Bio Green location in Baltimore, he signed a one-year non-compete agreement that restricted his marketing.

After a 20-year career with the employer, working his way up to general manager and overseeing 75 employees of a branch, he had to proceed with caution with how he promoted his company.

But now, the handcuffs are off, and Bollin can get the word

out with gusto. And that's exactly what the plans to do in 2016 to hopefully triple his customer base from 100 to 300 people. If he can achieve this goal, then Bio Green will be a full-time job for him.

For now, he's working full time as a Lowe's assistant store manager while he grows his new business and builds the critical customer mass and revenues to secure his market position. He says 2016 will be a growth year because he can do more advertising.

“The goal is to hit the ground running more aggressively in February and March before the beginning of the season.”

James Bollin, owner, Bio Green of Baltimore

“I'll be on the road more, and I'll be more visible,” Bollin says. And because Bollin is accustomed to planning for and tracking business development, he will dedicate time to create a marketing plan to drive sales in winter 2016 and early spring. “I truly understand the marketing

piece,” he says. And he knows what customer numbers he must hit. With 300 customers, he can pay himself a salary and focus full-time on Bio Green. With 400 customers, he'll need a part-time employee and another truck.

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KICHLER

FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

the word about Bio Green, and creating critical customer mass. Bollin thinks the timing on starting a natural fertilization business like this will appeal to people in Montgomery County where cosmetic pesticides were recently banned starting in 2018. "Times are changing," Bollin says. "Because Bio Green is a natural fertilizer, that's a good selling point here in the Chesapeake Bay area."

**"There is always room
for lawn care and landscaping
with those jobs, and if I can
get a piece of that pie it will
help me (grow) faster."**

James Bollin, owner,
Bio Green of Baltimore

Customer education is necessary, and this can happen through social media marketing. Bollin started a Facebook page in August 2015, after his non-compete ended. "That felt like my debut in business," he says. Word-of-mouth advertising was the only way people were finding out about his operation prior to using social media and Porch.com, an online referral service.

Already, Bollin is seeing momentum and fielding more customer calls. He is also working with a direct mail firm to develop targeted advertising. "The goal is to hit the ground running more aggressively in February and March before the beginning of the season," he says.

Meanwhile, Bollin will also focus on securing minority-owned business registration for benefits like training programs, financing options and more. "That way I can be considered for bids with the massive amount of building going on here in Baltimore," he says. "There is always room for lawn care and landscaping with those jobs, and if I can get a piece of that pie it will help me (grow) faster."

Bollin also plans to focus more on the commercial market. At his previous employer, he was the operations manager of the commercial accounts. His network is there, and now he can talk to them about Bio Green.

With all of this, and despite of the challenges of starting a new business, Bollin is optimistic about 2016. "Putting more focus on business is what really makes me happy," he says. **L&L**

BIOGREEN OF BALTIMORE

James Bollin, president

LOCATION:
Baltimore

ESTABLISHED:
2015

EMPLOYEES:
1

2014 REVENUES:
Not available

CUSTOMERS:
100% residential

SERVICES:
Fertilization and lawn care
services, maintenance

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

KNOW THE NUMBERS.

Bollin understands how to track performance, and he knows the benchmarks he must achieve to work the business full time and eventually hire a part-time employee.

THINK DIFFERENTLY.

Bollin says he'll capture a growing niche of customers seeking environmentally responsible lawn care services, especially given the legislative climate in the Chesapeake Bay area of Maryland. So he left a well-paying, stable career for a business opportunity in natural fertilizer and lawn care.

DREAM BIG.

Bollin was ready to make a change in his career, and life. So he pursued an ownership license from BioGreen and started a business from scratch. "I'm talking to customers and I'm representing me – and that's a great feeling," he says.

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Leaders in Landscape Services

Story by Brooke N. Bates

BETTER TOGETHER

Photography by John Webster

HOW BOB WHEELER AND BEN HELTON **STOPPED COMPETING**

USUALLY, WHEN BOB WHEELER WANTED TO TALK WITH BEN HELTON, IT WASN'T A GOOD CONVERSATION.

As owners of competing landscape companies in Boise, Idaho, they typically only spoke when one was trying to take employees or properties from the other. Offering similar services to the same commercial market in Boise, Cutting Edge Lawn Company, owned by Wheeler, left, and Total Maintenance Solutions, owned by Helton, right, went head to head.

"We knew if we went to a bid invite, it was going to be us and Cutting Edge who were bidding," Helton says. "It almost got to be annoying. We'd compete for each other's employees and accounts. We'd see each other at the gas station like the rival team from high school."

Helton, in fact, was fresh out of high school when he started competing with Cutting Edge. He began mowing lawns as a teen to earn extra cash and then incorporated as a two-man truck and trailer operation after graduation.

He landed a high-end subdivision, where he met Tim Resler, who provided him the seed money to help launch Total Maintenance Solutions in 2007.

STARTED COLLABORATING AND BROKE THE \$10-MILLION MARK.



Wheeler and Helton observed crews on job sites, taking notes so the two could more formally standardize operations during the off-season.

"No college education, not a ton of experience – we just fumbled our way through," Helton says. "We modeled our business after Cutting Edge. They invested in their equipment. They were organized and professional, and they had the exact clientele we wanted. I hired quite a few people who were the 'old guard' of Cutting Edge and we learned a lot about their practices and emulated their processes that way."

There was a lot to learn from Cutting Edge. Wheeler had been building the business since 1995, when he took a buyout from UPS after eight years as a supervisor. Initially, he was just going to mow lawns with some former colleagues until he figured out what else to do.

But his operational training from UPS helped him develop a solid company that served the landscaping needs of Boise's commercial market. Focusing on operational efficiencies, Cutting Edge grew into a full-service landscaper with 70 employees and \$5 million in revenue.

Yet, Wheeler couldn't ignore TMS, which grew to the same size just a few years after opening. Once or twice a year, Resler called Wheeler to meet for coffee, planting the seeds for future collaboration. When Helton bought out Resler's shares to take full ownership of TMS in September 2014, Wheeler decided it was time to sit down for a real conversation.

measuring data and streamlining processes. With more than 20 years in the landscape business, he built an internal software system that helped route projects and predict costs with granular data.

Helton didn't have the experience or the processes Wheeler did, but at 28, he brought youthful energy and focused on sales growth. He realized that Wheeler ran a smoother operation, and Wheeler recognized that Helton had a growth strategy that surpassed the local market.

You don't realize how much uniforms affect morale, especially when you combine two companies that were once bitter enemies."

Ben Helton, co-owner, Cutting Edge Landscape

"He needed some help with growth and I needed some help with operations," Helton says. "It was the yin and yang effect. We thought if we could take the best of both worlds and respect each other's strengths, we'd be a force to reckon with."

Conceding that each did certain things better, they defaulted to Wheeler's operational systems. Wheeler focused on integrating routes, crews and equipment, while Helton took the lead on pricing, sales and marketing.

"As an owner, you're used to doing everything your way, but when you merge you've got to realize there's other people more competent and knowledgeable than you are," Helton says.

"I owed it to Ben to at least meet him and talk," Wheeler says. "I was really impressed with what he'd done at 28. He'd built up the company in a pretty short period of time."

As the market recovered from the recession, the competition between TMS and Cutting Edge tamed and the bad blood faded. "After you compete with someone for so long, you start to respect them," Helton says. "Then you realize your visions are aligned, and then you start seeing synergies."

After eight months of negotiations between Wheeler and Helton, they decided to collaborate instead of competing, merging to form Cutting Edge Landscape in June 2015.

BEST OF BOTH WORLDS. Wheeler and Helton were different types of leaders, which actually made the merger easier.

Wheeler, 51, came from an operational background focused on



work order

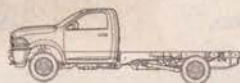
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**COMMERCIAL
TRUCK SEASON**

TWO TEAMS BECOME ONE. Employees at both companies were shocked when Wheeler and Helton announced the merger internally. When Wheeler told his team they'd be joining forces with its top competition, some of them checked the calendar to make sure it wasn't April Fool's Day.

"They thought we were probably joking with them," Wheeler says. "The first response was: 'No way.' When they found out it was true, (they had) reservations."

When it came to how the cultures would mesh, Helton and Wheeler had to approach it with an open mind.

"You've got two cultures, and neither one is right or wrong," Wheeler says. "But they are different – a lot of it could be even generational. My key people have been with me for a long time, 12 to 15 years, so we're used to doing things a certain way. Then you've got their people who do things a little bit different. That's the hardest thing."

Helton and Wheeler made a point to meet with the leadership groups from both sides – including foremen, supervisors and lead technicians – to get buy in from their key people.

"As long as those guys were on board and they could see the vi-



The two companies operated in their own uniforms for a while after the merger, but the arrival of new uniforms brought the two sides together.

sion and know how important it was to meld the two forces. They could talk to the other guys," Wheeler says. "It was just open discussion where they could ask whatever they wanted. If they were uncomfortable with something, I thought it was important for them to be able to express their concerns."

Administrative staffs and maintenance crews moved into Wheeler's facility, while construction and irrigation crews from both companies moved into the former TMS building down the street. Those crews will rejoin the rest of the company after a building project adds facilities to Wheeler's 3-acre lot.

↓
THE COMPANIES MERGED WITH **149 EMPLOYEES** ON PAYROLL AND **\$11 MILLION** IN COMBINED REVENUE. THEIR GOAL IS TO BUMP THAT UP TO **\$12-13 MILLION** IN THE FIRST YEAR, THEN ULTIMATELY TO **\$50 MILLION** BY GROWING BEYOND THE LOCAL MARKET TO SERVE THE INTERMOUNTAIN WEST REGION.

After the move, crews went right back to work. They maintained their respective accounts for several weeks before integrating, because they wanted employees to be familiar with the customer's site and customers to be familiar with their old company.

Thanks to this slow transition,

BEYOND LOCAL EXPANSION

Ben Helton serviced some large commercial clients with properties outside of Idaho in places like Salt Lake City. Without advertising beyond Boise, Helton found work in seven states through existing clients. "It's a stepping stone approach," he says. "We expanded into some new markets through the subcontractor model, then hired local account managers, and then as the business con-

tinues to grow, we'll add facilities and boots on the ground." The merger allows Helton to focus less on local operations (that's his partner, Bob Wheeler's, turf) and more on expansion outside the market, even eyeing an acquisition in Salt Lake City.

He sees huge potential for growth throughout the Intermountain West. "Look where all the big landscaping companies reside," he says. "They're all West Coast, Midwest and East Coast, and then you get down into Texas. There's a big geographic circle that's just mom-and-pop shops that

service 1,000 square miles. No one has really connected the dots across the Intermountain West in Eastern Oregon, Washington from Spokane down to Boise, down to Salt Lake, up into Montana. As the West grows, that market is growing, and we have a good foothold to capture it."

Though Wheeler and Helton are still committed to the local Boise market – where they foresee at least 10 to 12 percent annual growth – they predict that the biggest growth for their newly merged company will come from these new markets.

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the crews kept focusing on the work while Wheeler and Helton observed, taking notes so they could more formally standardize operations during the off-season. With that approach, the way crews performed work in the field didn't change much.

"The jobs, whether it's mowing, pruning or fertilization, stay pretty similar," Wheeler says, "The field guys are doing a lot of the same work. The teams have embraced each other pretty well because they're excited to see how the other side does it."

The merger provided plenty of work to keep both counterparts busy, which gave the managing partners time to evaluate their combined team.

"Everybody was so busy doing what they did that we didn't have to lay anybody off," Helton says. "In smaller companies, people have to wear more hats."

Work volume doubled, so people could wear fewer hats and focus on their strengths. We've seen an increase in productivity and quality because everyone has a specialized focus." While no one was laid-off, there were some employees who left on their own.

"We haven't had much incident in the field, other than initially, we had some fallout early on from people who just didn't want to be on board, didn't want to go through change and left," Wheeler says. "That was a good thing because those are the kind of people you don't want to go through the merge. They weren't open-minded. When that settled down, we knew this was going to work."

LOOKING FORWARD. As crucial as communication was to keep the team aligned, the biggest unifier

"The teams have embraced each other pretty well because they're excited to see how the other side does it."

**Bob Wheeler, co-owner,
Cutting Edge Landscape**

came from one simple change: uniforms. Before the new gear arrived, there was time when Cutting Edge Lawn Company uniforms and TMS uniforms visually divided the team.

"You don't realize how much uniforms affect morale, especially when you combine two companies that were once bitter enemies," Helton says. "It was blue team versus green team, but once we rolled out matching uniforms, it made an instantaneous difference. Now we're one team. If I had to do it over again, I'd do that day one."

Cutting Edge Landscape is also rolling out newly branded vehicles and market-



The merger provided plenty of work to keep both counterparts busy, which gave the managing partners time to evaluate their combined team. Because everyone was busy, no one had to be laid off.

ing efforts, including a new website. The merger is still a work in progress but the managing partners already see growth potential they didn't have as competitors. By combining Wheeler's operational savvy with Helton's sales-oriented drive, the company is poised to grow larger.

The companies merged with 149 employees on payroll and \$11 million in combined revenue. Their goal is to bump that up to \$12-\$13 million in the first year, then ultimately to \$50 million by growing beyond the local market to serve the Intermountain West region.

As the company grows, leadership will have to be mindful that changes that seem small to them may be a bigger deal to some employees.

"It's easy, as partners or owners, to see how (a decision) affects us and what it's going to do to the numbers of the business. But sometimes you forget what a small change might make to someone's perception in admin or operations," Wheeler says. "When you change something, their minds start wandering and they're wondering, 'Why? Am I being phased out?' They're always going to look at the merger as a reason to worry, so communication – letting people know why you're doing things, that their jobs are secure – that's the key to get everybody on board. Morale of the troops is really what keeps us going."

As everyone continues to work out the kinks of the merger, the managing partners anticipate that Cutting Edge will be positioned for success within a year from now.

"The initial chapter of the story is the hardest," Helton says. "We certainly have more work ahead of us, but the vision of our goal is definitely within reach." **L&L**



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PARK AND GO

Parking UTVs with product close to a job site can be less strenuous on workers moving product.



SAVE THOSE MUSCLES

UTVs can keep your employees fresh for longer periods of time to complete jobs more efficiently.

By Neil Moran

WITH MORE USES THAN A SWISS ARMY KNIFE, utility vehicles (UTVs) are gaining popularity with landscape contractors wishing to improve efficiency, reduce labor and make things safer for their employees. If you're hesitant about making a \$10,000 investment in a UTV, you may want to hear what two landscapers have to say about their UTVs.

"We're always looking for a product to bring on board to save labor and increase efficiency, and that's why we selected one of these (UTVs). So far it's working out pretty good for

us," says Barry Wolff, president of Seasonal Solutions Lawn & Landscape in Kansas City, Kansas. Wolff's crews need a vehicle that is versatile to match the variety of services it offers to

clients in what Wolff describes as an "expansive market" in the Midwestern city.

With as many as 35 employees during peak season, who service more than 200 mostly commercial accounts, his John Deere Gator is quickly becoming indispensable for a wide range of work they do, including landscape installation, hardscaping, lawn care and irrigation.

Wolff says the Gator beats moving product in wheelbarrows and finding a place to

park a truck and trailer. Like construction workers, landscape contractors are quite often working in busy thoroughfares where there is a lot of vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

UTVs allow crews to get into these spaces without having to park a pickup and trailer alongside a busy roadway or weave wheelbarrows in and out of traffic.

"It pains me to see our associates walking back and forth with wheelbarrows," Wolff says.

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He says in the spring and summer months they're working in homeowners associations, large retail centers, office complexes and a large national health care facility, sprucing up beds, fertilizing and mowing.

He says more times than not, products, including mulch beds and plants, are brought directly to the site and unloaded in the far corner of the property.

With their new UTV, which has the capacity to carry up to a dozen bags of mulch, they can more easily move the product to where it is needed, keeping the truck and trailer out of everyone's way.



UTVs allow crews to access areas where pickup trucks and trailers might get in the way of shoppers or residents of apartment complexes.

Wolff says he didn't want a UTV with a lot of bells and whistles.

"It's not a play toy for my employees or myself, but it does come in pretty handy right

now for setting up my deer stand," he says. The Gator has a 3,500-pound winch and a cargo box rated to 400 pounds and lined with polyethylene copolymer so it won't rust.

Seasonal Solutions has what Wolff calls a tailgate meeting with workers when new equipment is purchased to go over the safe use of the equipment.

He says staff are briefed on the safe use of the Gator, seat belt use, special features and maintenance needs like checking the oil.

Wolff is pretty much sold on using UTVs in the business. He doesn't have exact figures on how much is being saved using

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UTVs, which he just brought on board this past season, but he thinks it's significant.

He's ready to purchase another one for the upcoming snow removal season. The area receives, on average, about 20 inches of snow and sometimes up to 30.

The Gator, with a front blade attachment that is not as wide as a truck plow, can get into tight spaces around condos and retail centers.

They can also haul salt into areas where walkways need to be salted to melt ice.

BRAND LOYALTY. While Wolff thinks his Gator can't be beat, Ryan Kirkham, owner of U.S. Lawns of Cincinnati East in Ohio wouldn't own anything but a Gravely vehicle.

U.S. Lawns of Cincinnati East has large ongoing contracts with homeowners associations and commercial properties in the Cincinnati metro area.

His crew works five days a

“We’re always looking for a product to bring on board to save labor and increase efficiency, and that’s why we selected one of these (UTVs).”

Barry Wolff, Seasonal Solutions

week in one of the commercial properties, which Kirkham describes as a small city. The layout includes tight turns and cul de sacs, where his UTV comes in handy. “The Gravely is good for small spaces,” Kirkham says.

“We can leave the truck and trailer parked during the day and concentrate on one area.”

Kirkham bought his UTV last spring and the crew has been running it hard, working it eight hours a day.

He says it really comes in handy for the work they do, which includes maintenance around a 53-acre lake and along a creek that meanders through one of the properties. They use it to haul river rock, tools, plants

and mulch. They can use the hydraulic dump bed to unload rock and other materials on site.

“Not having to shovel the rock out of a truck bed saves a lot of time,” says Kirkham of the hydraulic dump bed they use on the Gravely.

“It has a lot of features the others didn't have. The payload is good,” which he says is an important consideration if you intend to use it to haul stone.

The Atlas also comes with a 4,500-pound winch line that is indispensable for the crew, which must get into wooded areas by creeks to pull out fallen trees and branches. The vehicle itself makes it easier to get in as close

as possible to the downed trees and limbs, and pull them out with the winch.

Like Wolff, Kirkham hasn't sat down and tried to tally the savings from using the UTV.

However, he says they've been able to pick up another contract which perhaps they wouldn't have if they didn't have the labor saving features of a UTV.

He's sold on using the UTV in the business and is also looking to buy one for snow removal.

No matter what you plan on using a UTV for, both Wolff and Kirkham have advice for shoppers. “Do the research first; don't necessarily focus on price,” Wolff says. “Focus on functionality and hauling capacity.”

“Every job has a different purpose,” Kirkham says. “Understand what it comes with. Know your dealer and dealer support.” **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan.





STREAMLINE WITH ROTORS

While rotors may look the same as they always have, improved features have simplified installation and made them more efficient than ever.

By Catherine Pomiecko

While the basic functionality of gear-driven irrigation rotors has not changed over the years, many features have evolved to improve efficiency, durability and reliability.

"Rotors are more efficient than they have ever been," says Orion Goe, product marketing manager for Toro. "Even though they may look the same on the outside, actually using the rotors, whether it be changing the nozzle or setting the arc, is becoming easier."

BETTER PROTECTION. Plastics used in irrigation systems are being specifically formulated to withstand pesticides, fertilizers and other chemical treatments used

on landscapes, says Matt Hall, product marketing Manager for Irritrol hydraulics. He says the materials used to make rotors are more durable and perform more consistently than in previous years.

Stainless steel and brass are also being used to increase the life of irrigation systems. Rain Bird's latest rotors, for example, offer stainless steel turrets and a brass reinforced stem to help protect the rotors in high traffic areas such as public parks and sports fields, says Erin Karschnik, product manager for rotors at Rain Bird.

"These features protect against vandals and provide greater resistance to impact when the turret is extended," Karschnik says.

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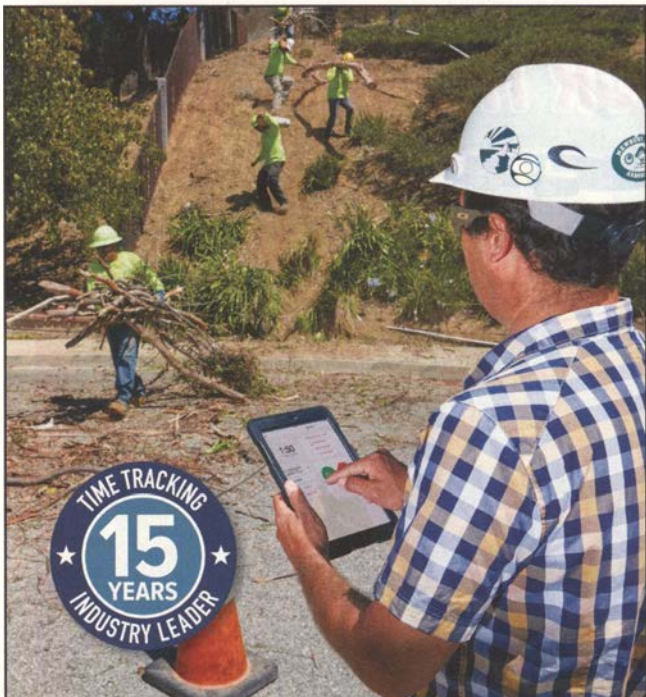


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BETTER PLANNING. In addition to knowing the intended use of the turf, specifics like water source quality and the topography of the installation site are critical factors to consider when designing the system and selecting a rotor and its feature set, Matt Hall says.

"Before you dig any holes or put any trenches in, specify a rotor and a nozzle that works with the site you have," he says. "Installing rotors at the incorrect spacing is probably the biggest issue a contractor can have, because once you put the sod down, you can't really dig it all up and redo it."

A contractor can choose the product with the most bells and whistles, but it will only be beneficial if the upfront planning was done properly, says Steve Hoveln, product manager for rotors, valves and accessories at Hunter Industries.

"There are many times when we receive calls where the rotors are spaced too far apart, the water pressure is too low and there are brown spots everywhere," Hoveln says. "Unfortunately, there's no easy fix for that. However, if the upfront planning was better, the rotors could have been spaced closer together so that selecting a smaller flow rate nozzle would increase the pressure and allow better coverage."

Having a good layout and using appropriate water pressure eliminates many common irrigation problems including misting, wind drift and water waste. Features like matched precipitation rate nozzles make achieving this much simpler, Karschnik says.

"Similar to how you install sprays, you simply space the rotors at 25, 30 or 35 feet and install a quarter-, third-, half-, or full circle- nozzle," Karschnik says.

Likewise, Intelligent Flow Technology from K-Rain makes water flow adjustments automatic, proportional and simultaneous when contractors make adjustments to the arc and radius, says Rick Hall, technical director and finished goods quality manager at K-Rain.

"When you are reducing spray distances, it is very hard to maintain matched precipitation rates when you are not also reducing your flow," Rick Hall says. "There are only so many nozzles available but infinite possibilities in landscaping. Implementing a flow control device eliminates the need for a break up screw or replacement nozzle."

Other user-friendly features in the latest rotors include a top arc indicator and tool-free arc adjustment, such as in Toro's T5 RapidSet rotor, Goe says.



RAIN BIRD



TORO

"It is the first rotor to allow arc adjustment without the need for a screwdriver or any kind of tools," he says. "You simply turn the nozzle turret by hand to the desired arc, and you're done."

MAINTENANCE FEATURES. In Rain Bird's 5000 Series Plus model, flow shut-off technology allows the contractor to work with the lateral line pressurized and the turret extended, but no water flow through the rotor, Karschnik says.

"This feature facilitates installation and maintenance such as inserting or changing nozzles, setting spray patterns or trouble-shooting lateral lines," she says. "It is also useful for controlling watering in a zone when preparing for seeding and aerating, by shutting off water flow at the rotor, not the valve."

A common culprit for clogged rotors or deteriorating wiper seals is the quality of the water moving through the system. Although rotors are designed to be tolerate debris, it is best to filter dirty water sources to ensure long rotor life.

"Wiper seal leaks are one of the largest complaints by contractors," Karschnik says. "Rain Bird's triple blade design cleans debris from the turret as it retracts and creates a seal that prevents leaks both during and after operation."

NOZZLES ARE KEY. You could have great spacing and good water pressure, but if you put the wrong nozzle in, all of that planning is shot, Goe says. "Nozzle selection is a big part of continued rotor performance over time," he says.

Contractors should train their crews to install rotor heads level and at grade. Hovel reminds contractors that nozzles are engineered to deliver the appropriate amount of water along the entire radius, but only when the nozzle retainer screw is not used as a nozzle diffuser screw.

"When the screw is used to diffuse the stream, all of the hard work put into the nozzle for efficiency goes out the window," he says.

As irrigation technology changes, contractors should be open-minded about new products, Goe says.

"Whether it's a retrofit or new installation, there may be a better tool for the job that is more efficient, easier to install, easier to adjust, and that will save time on the job site and money for the homeowner," he says. "Don't shortchange yourself by not keeping up with all of the products out there just because you've done it one way all of these years." **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Louisville, Kentucky.



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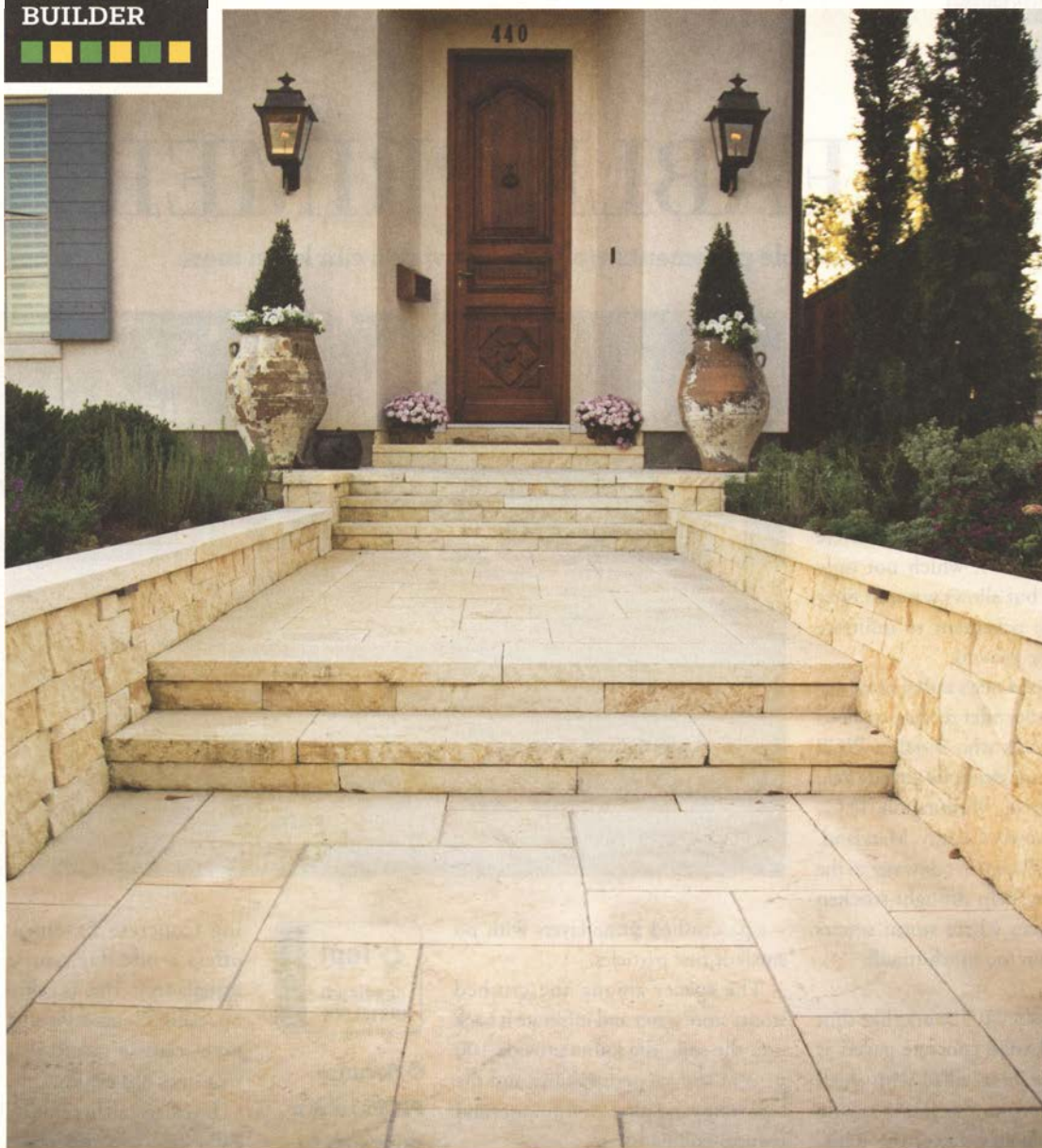
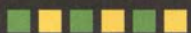


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Breaking in the Big Easy

Mullin Landscape went from post-Hurricane Katrina projects to a multi-service firm.

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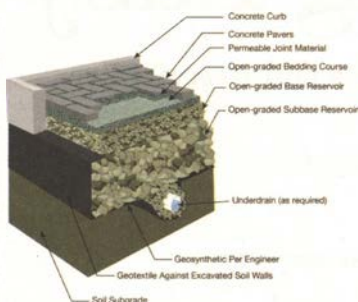
PERMEABLE PRIMER

An overview of how permeable pavements work, and how you can learn more.

Homeowners are putting their best feet forward to improve the curb appeal of their homes while helping to protect the environment. They are renovating their driveways and walkways with permeable interlocking concrete pavement (PICP), which not only looks great, but allows water to filter through the pavement to infiltrate back into the ground.

Further good news is that some cities and counties offer rebate programs to homeowners who install a PICP driveway. Some examples include Palo Alto, California, Washington, D.C., and Montgomery County, Maryland. Because PICPs return rainwater to the ground, they help drought-stricken areas or places where storm sewers overflow from too much runoff.

HOW IT WORKS. PICP works like this: A surface of solid concrete pavers is separated by joints filled with small stones that make the joints highly permeable. Water enters the joints between solid concrete pavers and flows through an “open-graded” base



A surface of solid concrete pavers is separated by joints filled with small stones to make the joints permeable.



— e.g., crushed stone layers with no small or fine particles.

The spaces among the crushed stones store water and infiltrate it back into the soil. The joints provide 100 percent surface permeability and the base stores and filters storm water and reduces pollutants.

APPLICATIONS. Permeable pavers can be used for walks, patios and driveways, as well as for parking lots, alleys and residential streets. Homeowners particularly like the wide range of colors, shapes, sizes and textures available to complement the home style. Light-colored pavers can provide a cooler surface around patios as well. PICP should be cleaned regularly and can be snowplowed. In addition, because the snow melts faster on PICP, it reduces ice and slipping hazards.

INSTALLER TRAINING. The Interlock-



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INSIDE OUT

Christy Webber Landscapes took design concepts from the interior of a residence and brought them outside.

This patio project, designed by Trish Curtis, in the Lincoln Square neighborhood in Chicago took two weeks to complete and was built in July 2014. The client had recently updated the interior of the home. The company was inspired by the modern clean lines inside and brought those ideas outside.

1. This backyard oasis is an extension of the home and showcases 3- by 3-foot bluestone flagstone with blue-chip joints that seamlessly sets the stage for backyard entertaining.

2. In order to achieve greenery all year long, the company used boxwood, rhododendron, arborvitae and pachysandra.

3. In the hopes of creating privacy in a bustling Chicago neighborhood, the crew installed a wood privacy fence, Japanese maples, a birch and a spruce tree.



BEFORE



AFTER NO. 2





3



BREAKING IN THE 'BIG EASY'

Mullin Landscape Associates went from a modest design/build outfit working on post-Hurricane Katrina projects to a multi-service firm. By Kristen Hampshire

During the summer of 2006, after Hurricane Katrina hit Chase Mullin's hometown, he began working for a small landscaping company in town.

At the same time, a friend of his mother's had returned from Harvard University with a degree in landscape architecture. "She helped rebuild the city mostly via residential landscape, so she recruited me and a couple of friends and we helped do different installations for her," Mullin says.

Following that summer, Mul-

lin began taking on side jobs, too. In February 2007, Mullin went off on his own and started Mullin Landscape Associates in Harahan, Louisiana.

"I realized that I had 12 weeks of side work built up while I was trying to work fulltime for the landscaper," he says.

GROWING HIS OWN. Being young

in the business when the economy took a monumental hit from Katrina and the rest of the country was on the cusp of the Great Recession might seem like a recipe for business failure. But not for Mullin.

"While the rest of the country was suffering, we still had hurricane money coming in to help," Mullin says of the initial economic downturn and the eight years that followed.

Earlier on in the business, when things were really bad in the rest of the country, Mullin says his outfit was small and lean.

"We didn't have multiple trucks and crews," he says. "We didn't have to lay off employees and liquidate equipment to keep the doors open."

Actually, Mullin Landscape Associates grew faster than its founder ever imagined possible.

In his first year in business, 2007, Mullin partnered with a local landscape architect who referred all of his installation business. And three years into it, Mullin was prepared to hire an operations manager, realizing that he needed more time to dedicate to sales. "I try to forecast

ahead and make sure we have the right people in the right positions to manage growth," Mullin says.

After hiring that operations manager in the third year, Mullin reeled in \$2 million in revenue. At the time, he was running two maintenance crews and two installation crews. He began to systemize operations, too. "We adopted check-out sheets for every job so we could make sure no matter what crew was there, they 'checked out' with the same quality," he says.

Checkpoints on the sheet include things like ensuring that hard surfaces are blown off after maintenance work, irrigation nozzles are intact and not spraying water on sidewalks, the mulch is patted down and looks neat.

Sales procedures are reviewed every Monday afternoon with staff. "We remind our sales people about what we want to accomplish and make sure every client is getting the same service," Mullin says.

And in the last year, Mullin Landscape Associates has implemented industry-specific software that merges customer relationship management (CRM), accounting and scheduling. "As the company grew, there were too many different moving parts under one umbrella," Mullin says. "I feel like the software glues everything together."

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM. When Mullin started out, he decided his focus would be installation.

But, clients started asking him to mow the property after the design/build project was complete. Pretty soon afterward, Mullin Landscaping was dedicating two days a week to maintenance and



While Mullin initially wanted to focus on installation when he started his business, but added maintenance after customers requested the service.

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the rest of the time was focused on landscaping, irrigation, lighting and drainage work.

Today, 25 percent of Mullin's business is maintenance, and that work is divided between commercial and residential clients.

"Maintenance is a way to give customers the best experience you can," Mullin says. "By maintaining the properties, you can make sure the landscapes grow and turn into what you intended them to be."

Of course, growing a division and a business means recruiting reliable, skilled staff that can deliver that quality. And that's not easy, Mullin says.

To help, Mullin offers his staff referral bonuses. "One of the best ways to bring in people is through referrals from our current employees, and we also advertise on social media," he says.

Craigslist advertisements sometimes work for field positions, he says. "And if we are out and about and we meet people who might be interested in a job, we tell them that we have jobs available. Anything we can do

to bring in good people is worth a shot," he says.

Because of a hiring and training process in place at Mullin Landscaping, prospective employees do not need landscaping experience. "We have a buddy system in place where they work alongside an experienced team member before they go out on their own," Mullin says.

Meanwhile, he sees opportunity to grow the firm's commercial business in the installation and maintenance divisions. "There is a lot of building now, and a lot of federal dollars still coming in for commercial construction," he says.

With eight years of growth and a solid reputation to present to prospects, Mullin says the company now is better positioned to earn commercial business.

So rather than opening a new branch and expanding the service area, Mullin's growth strategy is to get more business close to home. "We have a good reputation and we are visible," he says. "Some commercial accounts that might not have given us a second look before, now when we go after them, they know who we are." **L&L**

Integrating new software

Purchasing the software was one job. Implementing it was another task – one that Chase Mullin, president of Mullin Landscape Associates, says has been an 18-month work in progress. Today, he says, "We are all eager and excited to have the software working to its full potential."

Here is some advice Mullin offers about choosing and implementing a software system for your landscape firm.

RESEARCH THE OPTIONS. Compare software on the market and keep a priority list of what the product must accomplish at your firm as you investigate the options, Mullin says. Also, ask others who are using the products you're considering about their experiences.

TRAIN A POINT PERSON. Identify someone in your business who will serve as the software go-to. This does not have to be someone on the IT team. It should be an employee who can communicate well, is approachable and is willing to learn and teach. Mullin identified a key employee who received training from the software company.

SET IMPLEMENTATION GOALS. Set weekly meetings to review and learn key aspects of the software. Identify goals like when information will be merged, when certain departments will begin using the technology, etc. Create a timeline and share it with staff, which helps keep the implementation on track. Involve the team in the implementation process so employees embrace the new software and its capabilities.

BE PATIENT. "We are 95 percent done with the 'old habits,'" Mullin says of encouraging employees to embrace the technology and trade Excel spreadsheets for the new platform.

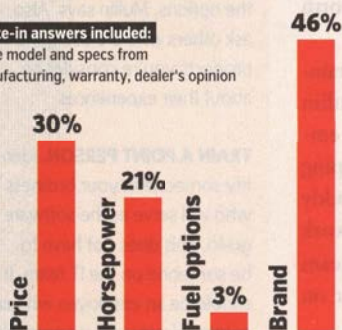
'REV'ETING RESEARCH

W E SURVEYED MORE THAN 400 READERS OF LAWN & LANDSCAPE about their views and challenges when buying, replacing and maintaining engines. Of the respondents, 89 percent were involved in the purchase of small engines for mowing equipment. Of those who responded, 66 percent generate 2014 gross revenue of less than \$500,000, while 34 percent posted more than \$500,000 in 2014 revenue. For more engine research, visit bit.ly/engineerreport in our September issue.

What's most important to you when choosing a small engine for your mower?

Write-in answers included:

Same model and specs from manufacturing, warranty, dealer's opinion



What's your preferred horsepower for your small engine?



When your mower needs a new engine, do you most often replace just the engine or do you replace the entire machine?



I replace the machine with a new engine



I replace the entire machine

When you replace an engine, do you buy a brand-new engine or a reconditioned one?



I buy a brand new engine



I buy a reconditioned engine



I do both

Do you think there is a difference between original equipment manufacturer parts and after-market options?

YES: 75%

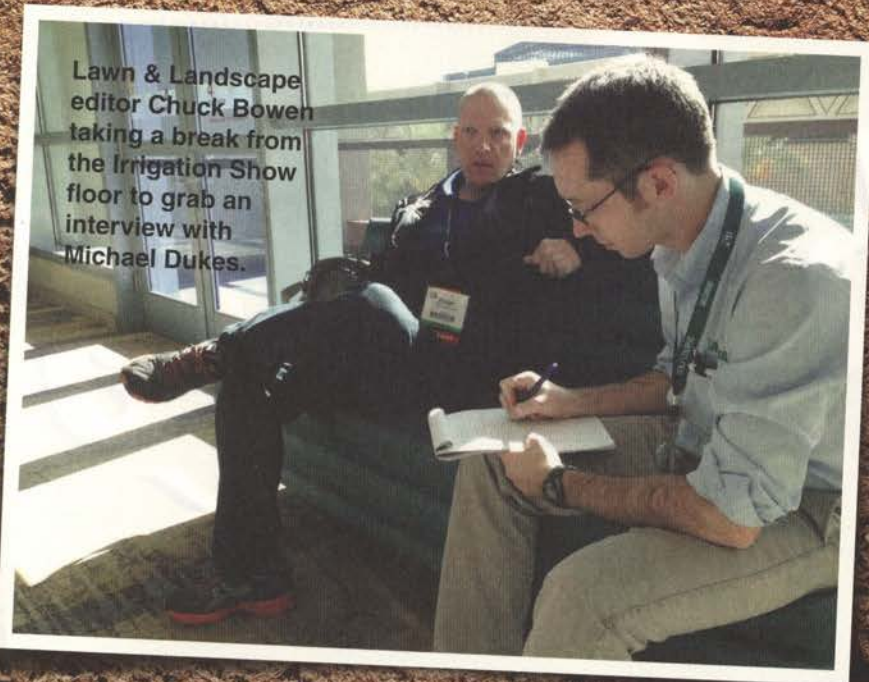
NO: 25%

WHY?: Quality: **90%** | Price: **53%** | Warranty compliance: **51%** | Easier to use: **22%** | Dealer keeps maintenance record: **13%** | More peace of mind: **33%** | Availability: **55%**

Lawn & Landscape is Connected



Lawn & Landscape digital content editor Kate Spirgen on location at Renewal and Remembrance in Arlington, Va.



Lawn & Landscape editor Chuck Bowen taking a break from the Irrigation Show floor to grab an interview with Michael Dukes.

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WHEN IT COMES

to keeping track of your crews once they leave the shop, technology makes the options almost endless. While the equipment itself may be expensive, and keeping track of the data could be seen as time consuming, the ROI may make it worth it for your company.

"A lot of folks still don't have a great idea on what GPS actually provides," says Matt Deloge, vice president of GPS Fleet Consulting.

GPS software can monitor idle time and allow you to see how many times your crews are stopping at stores or gas stations.

"One of our landscape companies didn't realize how many wasted trips his crews would take on a daily basis (to Home Depot or the gas station)," says Ryan Driscoll, marketing director with GPS Insight. "He found out he was wasting \$4,000 annually on trips his crews were taking four to five times a week to the store when they could have just bought more the first time they were there."

It can also keep your crews safe and your insurance costs down by tracking driver behaviors and alerting you to sharp braking, fast acceleration and other dangerous driving techniques.

"GPS has always been this stigma of being Big Brother and having a negative connotation," Deloge says. "(This) puts it in a more positive light."

If you're in the market for GPS and routing software, here's a rundown of some products.



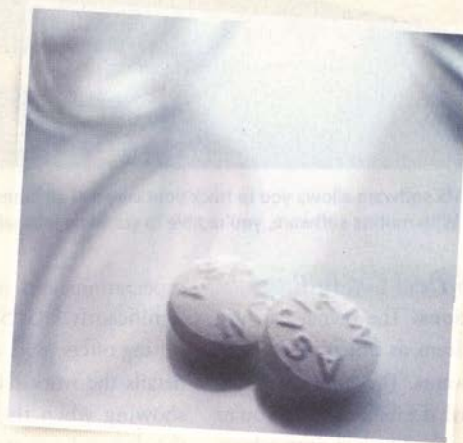
Keeping Track

Technology makes it possible to know when and where your crews are going at all times.

By Katie Tuttle

Running a large-scale business requires effort, commitment and a strong pain reliever.

Sure, a larger business means bigger profits — but it also means bigger headaches. Take my operation, for instance. On any given day, we're running 8 mowers at more than 40 locations across a 120-square-mile area, so logistics alone is challenging enough. Add staffing, scheduling and maintenance into the equation, and you're looking at enough variables to make Einstein recheck his figures. And when you've got a mower or two down for repair, it's even more complicated. That's why I started buying Grasshopper mowers a few years back. They just keep running, no matter what. And they're designed to cut maintenance just as well as they cut grass, which — believe me — my crews appreciate after a long day. Since we're running diesel mowers, they also save us thousands of dollars a year in fuel costs. And I don't know any businessman who wouldn't welcome adding a chunk of change that size to his bottom line. After all, running a business on this scale has enough headaches. At least now, my equipment isn't one of them. Talk about a pain reliever.



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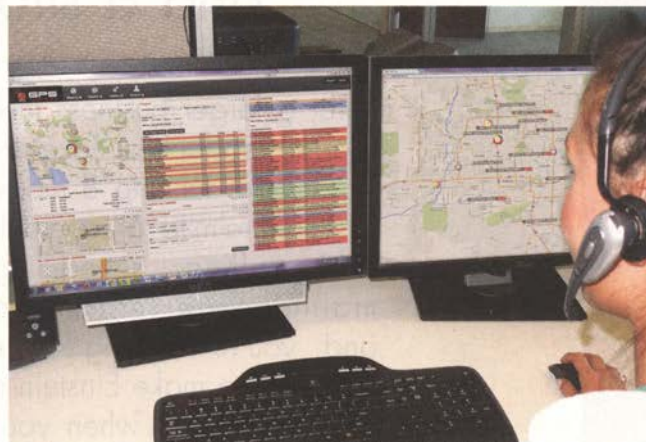
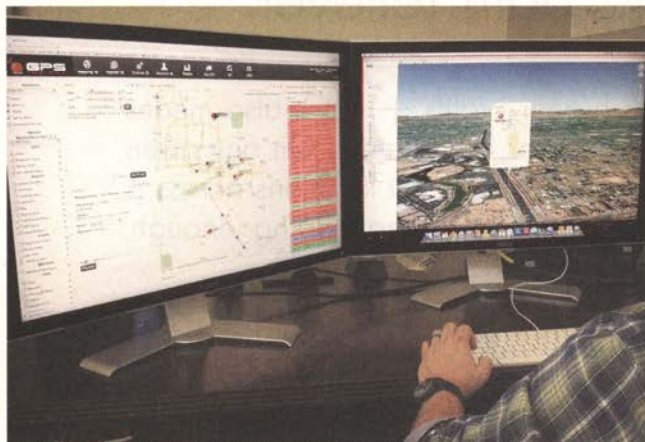


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LEFT: GPS software allows you to track your crews at all times, so you know when they're on the job site and when they're not. **RIGHT:** With routing software, you're able to schedule jobs so that your crews have the most efficient routes possible each day.

GPS Fleet Consulting

• **Options:** The owner can use the system as much or as little as he wants. The company offers seasonal flexibility where you're not required to lock into a long term contract year-round when your crews may be off in the winter. This offers the flexibility to pay as needed.

• **Online:** Gpsfleetconsulting.com

• **How it helps you:** Unlike some software and tracking programs, which are cell phone based and require users to initiate the tracking, GPS Fleet Consulting's system is a web-based user interface.

The product is hardwired into the vehicle and run entirely from the home system. It uploads all data at the rate you choose it to, whether that be every 30 seconds or every 5 minutes.

With the system's ability to monitor idle times, data will show you how long your crews leave trucks running.

"You can actually set up real-time alerts when vehicles are idling for more than a specific amount of time," Deloge says. "This system will give owners the opportunity to set goals and

expectations and reduce idling significantly." GPS Fleet Consulting offers users a report that details the work day of a crew, showing when the crew starts the day and any stops the crew takes in between jobs, whether scheduled or unscheduled.

"Even if (your crew's) off by 15 minutes each day, that adds up over the course of a week, with overtime pay," Deloge says.

Tracking crews also helps you solidify billing with clients. You may have two crews go work on a property for eight hours and the customer questions the price on the bill. With this type of tracking software, you can build a customized report for the client that shows all the data.

Without the software data, you may have still "won" the argument, but Deloge says that's not winning, because you're still arguing with a client.

"The GPS system doesn't allow you to get in an argument," he says. "It helps retain that customer as well."

"We really have a strong focus on landscaping, so we have a lot of knowledge about the industry,"

Deloge says. "We're involved with some consulting firms just so we know about the changing needs and changing issues."

Training: Offers in person and online training, but more emphasis is put on web demos, which the company finds highly effective.

GPS Insight

• **Options:** Priced per truck.

• **Online:** Gpsinsight.com

• **How it helps you:** GPS Insight offers three separate products, depending on the size of your company. The one for small businesses considers fleet size to be 1 to 25 trucks, mid-sized is 26 to a few hundred, and then the largest is for companies with thousands of trucks.

The program is automated so no one needs to sit at a desk and watch the screen all day.

"They have to deal with a lot of other things over the course of their day and monitoring trucks is something they don't have to do," says Driscoll.

The small business software is completely new this year and because it is more basic, Driscoll

says a lot of companies will scale up to use the pro products with more features.

With the standard software, driving stats are done based on the vehicle, so it's up to you to know who was driving which vehicle that day. With the pro products, you can do driver identification and monitor each person. The pro product also offers driver scorecards, which help you see exactly how your guys are doing.

"Management can really see driver behavior and rank drivers against each other," Driscoll says.

"You can see problem drivers and coach them as needed."

The pro product also allows you to send routes to a driver's Garmin GPS system so they know what customer sites to go to.

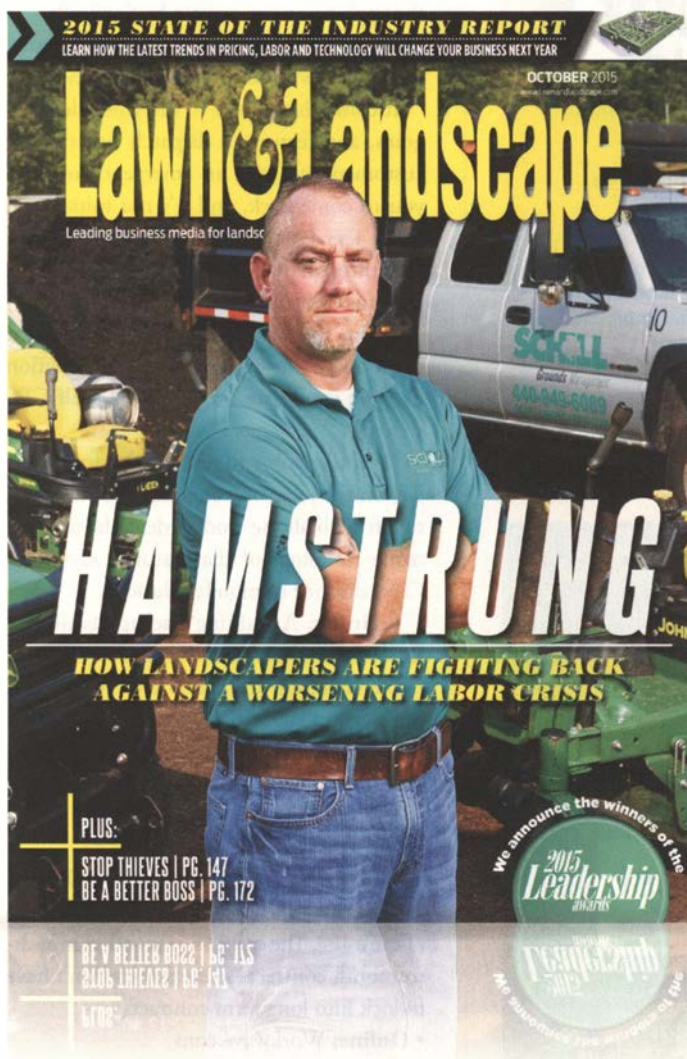
• **Training:** GPS Insight has account managers that train new customers on the product. They also offer online classes that include quizzes at the end to ensure you have a working knowledge of the software.

"It really helps make sure whoever's using the product

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understands it," says Driscoll. "You can get a certificate of training to say you're a certified user." There's also a technical support team available all the time if a customer runs into

a troubleshooting problem.

ServicePro

- **Options:** Price is based on size of the com-

pany's fleet, but packages are also priced on what modules the customer wants to include. Customers have the option to choose between unlimited support or limited support, which ever works best for their company.

- **Online:** Servicepro.com

• **How it helps you:** ServSuite is a full enterprise application that offers routing and GPS, both fully integrated into the system and offered in conjunction with the full service system. This includes managing accounts, scheduling, routing, payments, developing programs and a mobile app. After purchasing ServSuite, customers can add on the GPS or routing software.

The GPS module is just two years old, and the application was written by ServicePro, so it comes with functions and features created specifically with the green industry in mind.

It comes integrated to the scheduler program, and features a dispatch function. If customers call with an emergency or need you to come back, and it's not initially set up in the day's schedule, the software will look through that day's schedule and get that customer scheduled in for the service.

When the GPS information is reported on, it doesn't just give the basic information like you would see on an off-the-shelf GPS system.

"If you're going to run a report for yesterday on the jobs someone did, you can run a report with all the work orders, the account name ... things of that nature," says John Cole, director of mobile solutions.

• **Training:** A training package is offered for ServSuite, and ServicePro also offers an implementation and training package where they set up all the different functions and help train staff, which includes anyone in the field using the mobile app component.

WorkWave

• **Options:** Each option from WorkWave is priced based on number of vehicles and size of the route. The company also offers month-to-month contracts so customers don't have to lock into long term contracts.

- **Online:** Workwave.com

• **How it helps you:** WorkWave's newest

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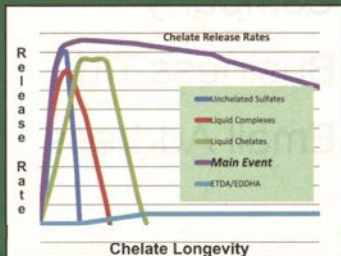
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product is completely cloud-based.

When it comes to routing your crews' days, the program breaks down what technicians are assigned to what route, as well as what time window the customer wants and whether the job requires certain tools. It can even look at things such as whether a job requires someone who speaks Spanish. It's a pick list, but you're able to define and set it up yourself with what you know your jobs will need.

"As it's looking at the best way to schedule and route these jobs, it takes all of that into account," says Chris Sullens, president and CEO of WorkWave.

In regards to tracking, WorkWave has an app program that geo stamps your crews' activity. When your crews check in at a job site, it shows you where that check in was done.

"You can check that not only did they check in and check out of a job, but did they do it at the right location?" Sullens says.

The system also tracks your vehicles and records driver behavior. If the driver does anything dangerous, it not only alerts you, but it also sets off a buzzer to let the driver know it's been recorded.

All the driver information can be placed into scorecards, which can then rank your drivers based on their score. When companies implement that, Sullens says they see a significant reduction in the number of incidents because guys don't want to be listed at the bottom.

The system comes as a device that you plug into the vehicle's 12-volt plug. If the system comes unplugged, it alerts you so you can call the driver and let them know it's been unplugged. It also can track for up to two hours after being unplugged, so you still can see what's going on.

On the software side, WorkWave's system has a user-friendly interface where you can watch how your vehicles travel throughout the day. If a new job comes in that you need one of them to do, you can press a button and the system sends it to the crew's Garmin GPS, saving the time they would take to type it in themselves.

• **Training:** WorkWave offers online training videos and tutorials, as well as a walkthrough when you first start the app on your phone.

The company also offers webinars, as

well as calling to speak with someone over the phone one-on-one. If your company is large enough, WorkWave offers onsite training. **L&L**

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Dress for SUCCESS

Company uniforms add an air of professionalism and teamwork.

By Kate Spirgen

WHEN YOUR CREW SHOWS UP at a job site, you want to make a great impression from the moment they set foot on the property to the moment they drive away. But even the most seasoned crew won't look that way in cutoff shorts and ragged T-shirts. Uniforms can help crews look like professionals, plus they're great advertising for your company.

"By definition uniform means it's the same, right?" says Lance Forsee, president at Colonial Lawn & Garden. "So we like to build teamwork and professionalism any way we can and it's just one more way to set us apart from the sea of competition out there."

The lawn care, maintenance and tree care company based in Yakima, Washington, budgets \$5,000 a year for its employees' uniforms, which range from 25 to 35 during the season.

Forsee says uniforms help promote not only the professionalism of his company, but the industry as a whole. Back when Colonial was first starting out in 1985, Forsee says there were only a couple of landscaping companies with uniforms, making his company stand out.

Over the years, the industry matured and now most companies are using some sort of dress code.



Employees at Borst Landscape & Design in Allendale, New Jersey, can choose what kinds of accessories they want, like knit hats or baseball caps.

OUTSOURCING. Mark Borst, president at Borst Landscape & Design in Allendale, New Jersey, uses a uniform company to provide shirts, pants and cleaning services for his 65 field employees. The company used to provide apparel in house, starting with shirts and sweatshirts and then adding pants, but it got to be too much work.

Now, Borst has an outside company

handle it and the employee picks up the \$6 weekly charge, with the company handling administrative fees. He estimates that the total annual cost for uniforms is \$12,000 per year. He says it has worked out well, especially since the company is no longer paying for uniforms.

"I know that the employees liked, when we went over to the uniform company, that they

“Internally, I think it gives us a sense of team. We’re all on the same team; we’re all wearing the same uniforms.”

Lance Forsee, president, Colonial Lawn & Garden

didn't have to wash their own uniforms," he says. "They looked at that as a benefit."

GreenScapes Landscape in Columbus, Ohio, also started out with shirts and then added pants to the uniform along with cleaning services. President Bill Gerhardt says too many of his guys were wearing sweatpants or jeans with holes. "I was surprised at how cheap uniforms are," he says. "It's pretty inexpensive per person and I think their wives prefer it because the guys come home with all of that dirt on their uniforms and it's going in with the family clothes."

Forsee used to use a rental company, but opted to buy and maintain uniforms at Colonial since it's cheaper and the company has more control over the process. "And we don't have a contract that we have to be concerned about," he says.

CHOOSING THE UNIFORMS. Uniforms not only need to look professional, they need to be functional, durable and comfortable so that crews can do their best work. Companies use their logos and colors, of course, but there are other factors to take into consideration like durability and breathability for the hot summer months.

All three companies take their employees' feedback into consideration. "We have the guys test the uniforms, take a look at the shirts, so we're trying to provide something that will breathe a little, something that's going to keep them cooler and then instead of a polyester type shirt we try to do some kind of a cotton shirt," Borst says. "It's something that will breathe at least."

Borst also lets employees choose what kinds of accessories they want, like knit hats or baseball caps. Foremen at GreenScapes wear dark green collared shirts while the rest of the crew wears a lighter green T-shirt. That makes it easy for everyone, including the customer, to identify who's in charge.

Colonial has used several colors over the years, starting off with green shirts and hats. The current uniforms are built around blue button-down shirts, with the company adding charcoal pants later on. "The blue was a nice, professional-looking color. It didn't



ABOVE: Colonial Lawn & Garden in Yakima, Washington, budgets \$5,000 a year for uniforms for its employees, which range from 25 to 35 during the season.

have to be green just because we're in the green industry," Forsee says.

Lawn care or spray division workers wear long sleeved shirts, while maintenance crews wear short sleeves, unless they're pruning. "But they're the same style and form of uniform so we're really consistent looking," Forsee says.

Borst also opted for blue, and although the company color is navy, the field shirts are a little lighter to keep crews cool in the sun.

EFFICIENCY WITH INCENTIVES

At GreenScapes, employees can earn 'Billy Bucks' for staying focused on the job. They can save them up and redeem them for items like gloves, hats, T-shirts and sweatshirts, with the company paying half of any uniform costs.

GreenScapes has an Out of the Gate by 8 program to get everyone on the road quickly and efficiently in the mornings. President Bill Gerhardt used to give out \$10 in Billy Bucks per week to crews that were out by 8 a.m., but switched to rewarding crews who spent 85 percent of the day on the job. "We realized if they were out of the gate but went to the doughnut store, that's not enough. We need the percent of the job," he says.

The company uses the honor system to track when crews arrive to the site and Gerhardt says it's been working well. "Some of them save their bucks up and guys getting \$10 to \$20 a week, and they do that consistently, it gives them something to focus on," he says.

Gerhardt says the program amounts to \$200 to \$300 per week for the company. Employees can also buy things like safety glasses or mulch for their homes.

GETTING EVERYONE ON BOARD. And while uniforms are great for increased visibility and marketing, there are benefits for the employees too. "Internally, I think it gives us a sense of team. We're all on the same team; we're all wearing the same uniforms," Forsee says.

Gerhardt says it also helps set the standard for employees right from the start. "You come to work clean and neat and ready to go," he says, adding that it also helps with company procedure. Employees know they have to be equipped with boots, safety glasses, uniforms and any other personal protective gear.

There are occasions when an employee will wear the wrong hat, but in general Gerhardt says there haven't been many issues.

"I always tell them, 'Look, you're on my dime and you could be on a jobsite where you're on the news or a photographer comes up to ask you a question.' We do a lot of public work and I want the GreenScapes logo on there for marketing reasons."

But if an employee does show up without the proper attire, GreenScapes will sell him or her a new hat or shirt right on the spot. **L&L**

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- Incorporating Holganix into turf, flower, tree and shrub programs restores soil's living biology and reduces the requirement of water, fertilizers and pesticides.

For more information:
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- You'll get explicit ideas from an inside, confidential tour of Complete Landsculpture, an award winning firm in Dallas, TX. No matter what size your company is, you will see that "Going Big" is the true way to find success
- Finally, you'll get a jump-start to your year and we will help you make 2016 your best yet

I first came to GROW! responding to Marty's claim his event would change my life. It has. GROW! is a great place to learn, make new friends, and think about your business. I can't think of a better way to jump-start your year than going there. You won't find the education Marty and his team give you there anywhere else. It's the best thing I have EVER done for my business and that's saying a lot. If you're doing well, you should go and if you're not doing well, you should attend. It's an incredible investment that has a HUGE payoff.

— John Richter,
Richter Landscape Company



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STREET CRED

Use websites to keep tabs on your reputation and position yourself for growth. **By Kate Spigen**

People are shopping around more than ever before making their buying decisions thanks to review sites and social media. Your reputation will precede you, so make sure you know what it is.

A recent survey of 1,046 individuals by Dimensional Research, an independent market research company specializing in technology, found that 68 percent of respondents find online reviews extremely or very valuable when looking at residential

service providers, and 86 percent will pay more for a business with higher ratings and reviews.

Ken Hyatt, founder of Village Green Lawn & Landscape in Garland, Texas, keeps close tabs on his company's online reputation and knows first-hand how important it is.

"The main area where that helps is our pricing is a bit higher than some of the other companies and when the customers are looking at our reviews, they feel like it's justified," he says.

"They understand that we're earning that extra money because we're earning the reviews that we're getting."

Dick Bare, owner of Arbor-Nomics in Norcross, Georgia, and his two sons pay close attention to the company's online reputation and even go hunting for different sites.

"Both of my sons are incredible computer geniuses – being young," he says. "They find some really unorthodox things sometimes with reviews and so


on that we can fix because half the problem is there's a lot of them out there that you may not even know about."

THE GOOD, BAD AND UGLY.

Village Green has about 800 reviews on Angie's List and includes a sample of them on its website, both good and bad. Hyatt takes advantage of negative reviews to show potential customers how he handles problems or complaints to show credibility.

"It's not unusual for me to get a call from somebody saying 'Hey, I read all of your reviews, including the bad ones, and I was impressed by the way you responded to them. You were respectful and gave your side of the story,'" Hyatt says.

"Sometimes you admitted you were wrong and sometimes you pointed out where you dis-



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agreed with the customer. If it's possible for us to fix it, then we do. If we made a mistake, we'll own up to it and sort out problems and that ties back into then being able to get a better review the next time around."

And customers are looking for reviews before they buy. From Yelp to Facebook to Angie's List, 56 percent of the Dimensional Research survey respondents said they used the web to find a service provider, with 74 percent checking Yelp.

Hyatt also includes both positive and negative reviews on his website to show how the company solves problems, and to add credibility. "I think if you handle it in a positive manner, it's good," he says. "You do need some negative reviews because when people see that you just have all 100 percent great reviews, they get suspicious of it."



Take advantage of negative reviews to show potential customers how you handle problems or complaints.

Bare has been monitoring his company's online reviews for the past five years and tries to respond to every review personally. But back when he first got started, he got reviews and leads through Home Reports, a book with contact information and customer reviews. The book is now a website but the print version really helped Arbor-Nomics take off.

"The people that called in to us, we had about a 95 percent closing rate from people that called in because they found us in that book and they really started using the book," he says.

GET AHEAD OF THE GAME. Potential clients aren't just looking for reviews before



TWO DECADES ONLINE

Twenty years ago, Lawn & Landscape magazine launched lawnandlandscape.com. In honor of our anniversary, here are 20 things you can find on our newly designed site.

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hiring a lawn and landscape company. They're also looking for a way to make sure a company is knowledgeable. Customers are doing their research before they buy and providing that information gets you ahead says Paige Worthy, client services at Landscape Leadership, an inbound marketing agency for the green industry.

"Your prospective customer already has their mind made up 70 percent of the way by the time they contact you," she says. "So it's safe to say I think that the customer is fully in control of the buying process now."

Helping potential clients solve their lawn or landscape problems and providing them with quality information puts you in front of the customer first, and Worthy says they'll likely stick with you to a sale.



A website that shows your knowledge as a landscaping expert separates you from the competition.

"It's about information and it's about trust and understanding – that's how buying happens these days," Worthy says. "Being ready with answers and information puts you ahead of the game."

Village Green provides a blog and a newsletter with localized tips and tricks for maintenance. Hyatt says it helps his company stand out against the national competitors and adds credibility. "The Texas climate is different and the Dallas area in particular," he says. "The soil is different, the climate is different than other places and by sending out educational information it helps establish our authority in this area." **L&L**

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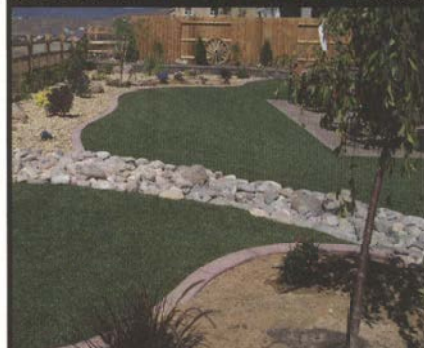
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INSURANCE

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to the EDITOR

Want to sound off on something you saw in this issue? Have an idea that you think would be worth featuring in next month's Lawn & Landscape? We want to know.

Call or email Chuck Bowen
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My father was in business and he mentored me and actually took me to some appointments, business appointments, and actually did some work at family and friends' and that's how I got interested.

I learned about landscaping. I learned about being outdoors, hard work, long hours at times, but (also) the enjoyment of improving property, improving spaces and beautifying the world. He was always very positive, always took the high road approach and always wanted to do his best. We never wanted to do it poorly. We always wanted to do it very well and be a leader in the industry and be as professional as we possibly could.

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TOP 100 RANKING

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One of the biggest keys for design/build is to get the right designer and the right architect, and then you need creative foremen that are willing to do whatever it takes to get a really good product. It's not just routine work. Sometimes it's really strange things that you have to do – different materials or different subs – in order to put the whole project together.

Just as an example, we did our first installa-

tion with artificial turf. It's basically a roof top dog park that we designed and we installed.

We're dealing with dog toys. The architect did research on dog toys, dog turf. It's a special material that's made just for the dogs, and then we did the landscaping also and put it right in the artificial turf. Then we're doing the fencing and some concrete work with some different subcontractors. So it's just a lot of management, a lot of flexibility and timing and scheduling, and putting something like that all together and getting a project manager that can handle that, and get that project built correctly and the client happy.

I had a potential client email that they wanted to see our references, and so I sent it and then they emailed back that they wanted to see how long we've had them, since what year. I put that together and it was probably half a dozen clients that we had for over 10 even sometimes 15 years. There were two clients on that list that I put on there that we had lost and we got them back in this year, and we still have them.

One of our biggest compliments this fall was every year we have to re-bid these apartment complexes that one of the account reps has been dealing with. Those separate apartments got together and said, "Hey, we still want Davids. What do we have to do to go directly with them because we don't want anybody else but them?"

That was a very nice compliment that they realized price is not better, and they went that route before where price was the deal, and they appreciated the work that we did and wanted that service to continue. We shared that and we celebrated that.

That's huge because sometimes you feel like all they care about is the money. But they do care about what we do, but they do have budgets and sometimes those budgets are tightened and it's beyond their control on what they can do and can't do. **L&L**

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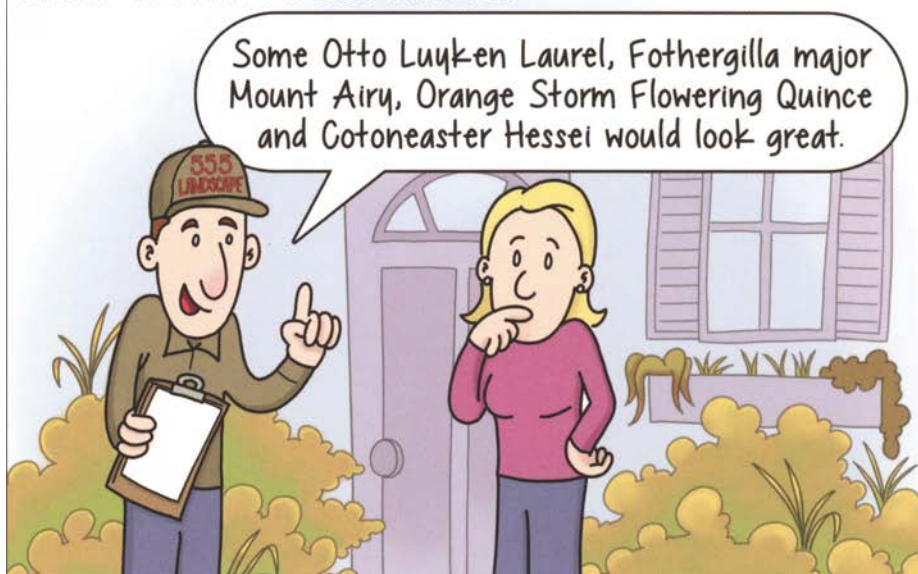
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