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VOLUME 36, NUMBER 2

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WHAT THIS DOG CAN DO FOR YOU | PG. 42

TurfMutt is one of many programs designed to promote the value and positive effects of the landscape industry. Learn how to tell your own story.

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ONLINE CONTENTS

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

And ... action!

WE CORNERED THE WINNERS OF THE LAWN & LANDSCAPE LEADERSHIP AWARDS

at our ceremony in October and asked them to say a few things on camera. Find out what was on their minds by visiting the links below.



Gary Mallory:
The Heads Up Landscaping CEO tells us what the Lawn & Landscape Leadership Award means to him.
bit.ly/llmallory



Richard Restuccia:
The water conservationist credits his family and colleagues for their support over the years.
bit.ly/llrestuccia



Michael Kravitsky IV:
Doing the right thing runs in the family, and that's illustrated at his company, Grasshopper Lawns.
bit.ly/llkravitsky



Martha Hill:
The award recipient says her colleagues inspired her to be a leader at Hinds Community College.
bit.ly/llmhill



THE ANTS GO
MARKETING

PAUL BASCOBERT,

Yodle's president of local explains how ants can serve as a reminder about what to do in the off-season.

The ant spends the summer – his “off-season” – preparing for the winter. When you run a seasonal business like landscaping, it can be tempting to think of the off-season as down time, but to remain competitive you need to have the discipline to plan for success.

Keeping the urgent from crowding out the important is critical in business. It's particularly tough in seasonal businesses that have very intense periods that can make or break the entire year. But that's also why it is incredibly important to make effective use of the down time to get your marketing and advertising set up so you are harvesting the most from the busy time.

Visit bit.ly/antsmarket for actions you can take to make sure you are top of mind and easy to find when the customers start calling.



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DURING THIS WEBINAR, "SELLING IN 2015: IT'S NOT 1985 ANYMORE,"

Digital marketing expert Chris Heiler discusses how you can update your sales process, and how consumers are now buying services. Visit bit.ly/heiler985.



Let's chat about BENCHMARKS

Looking at industry benchmarks is not only a great way to stay competitive in the industry; it's an extremely useful tool for growth. Lawn & Landscape recently shared exclusive research on everything from sales to salaries in the latest #landscapechat with Corona Tools on Twitter. If you weren't able to join us, visit bit.ly/landchat for a wrap-up of the conversation.

To participate in the conversation next time, just search #landscapechat on Twitter the first Wednesday of every month.



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EDITOR'S INSIGHT

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

Opportunity and obligation

I was in a rec center in Denver this fall, listening to a panel discussion of some very smart landscapers from Colorado. Dean Murphy, the CEO at Terracare Associates and current president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, was moderating, and he asked the audience how many of them had talked with their children about a future in the landscaping industry.

Out of about 60 people, four raised their hands. That's just sad.

The landscape industry as a whole does a pretty bad job of marketing itself to many people—prospective employees, yes, but also to current and future customers, regulators and elected officials and the broader populous at large.

Which brings us to the dog on the cover. TurfMutt is a real dog, and the brainchild of the OPEI, the trade association for equipment makers. It's a very successful public relations program that educates elementary school kids about the benefits of turfgrass and the managed landscape. Since the be-caped canine flew into the landscape industry in 2009, the program has reached 38 million students, teachers and parents all across the country. This year, OPEI has partnered with Scholastic to expand the program's reach.

So, OK. Great. But what do you care? It's been a long time since you or I fit into a first-grader-sized desk. What does TurfMutt have to do with you and your business?

What TurfMutt, and the many other programs we write about in this month's cover story, does for you is this: He promotes the work that you do. TurfMutt tells people that the work you do impacts the environment in a positive way.

That dog and many other programs illustrate that the work landscapers do every day has a positive impact.

You may already know this. I hope you do—you spend all day running a business that employs people, supports families and enhances the environment. But what I bet you don't do is tell people about it.

That's what I realized sitting in that rec center in Denver: If these contractors haven't even talked to their *own kids* about the benefits of the industry, how are their customers or elected representatives or prospective employees going to know about it? When you keep silent, you abdicate your responsibility to talk about the impact you make.

You have an opportunity—and an obligation—each day—to share that story. If you don't, who will? — *Chuck Bowen*



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#ToughLove



CENTS 2015 looks at personalities

The event's educational sessions included lessons on understanding employee behavior and insight on how to read body language.

By Katie Tuttle

COLUMBUS, Ohio – It's important to know your employees' personalities and how they can hinder and/or help your business. That was the message during Richard Arlington's session "Managing Personalities and Processes not the People" at CENTS, which took place in Columbus, Ohio in early January. The owner of Richard Arlington & Associates said there are four types of personalities that landscape contractors should know about: caloric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholy.

Caloric employees work best if they feel as if their choices play a large role. If you have an employee with this type of personality, it's important to let them make decisions, even if they're only minor ones.

Sanguine personalities are the type of people that will do any job, as long as it's fun. Making a

L&L ON THE ROAD



task into a game will make them more likely to do it willingly.

Phlegmatic employees are the people who stand around and wait to be told what to do, so always make sure you know these employees and give them tasks to complete.

Melancholy employees analyze every part of a situation before doing anything. Arlington said these are the types of people you want as landscape architects because they will break everything out into great detail before getting started.

Arlington also said there's no such thing as a bad employee.

"A bad employee is an uneducated employee," he said. "It's just someone who hasn't been trained properly."

BODY LANGUAGE. With a background in training members of the CIA and FBI on reading body language, Janine Driver gave her tips on what to look for when you are face to face with a customer or employee.

Driver, founder of The Body Language Institute and a previous law enforcement officer with the U.S. Department of Justice, said "Mind reading is the cancer of sales," explaining that body language isn't foolproof.

"Body language in and of itself is not enough to tell the whole story," she said. To demonstrate this, Driver had an audience member ask Driver if she'd ever cheated on her husband.

Driver said no, but also

shrugged. The audience member said that meant she had, but Driver said that's not always true.

"A shoulder shrug doesn't cancel out what you say, it just means you're holding something back," she said. An interrogation takes steps to get to the conclusion, so the shoulder shrug should be step one.

After her keynote, Driver did a follow-up breakout session on lie detection. She said that people never offer information before it's asked for unless they're trying to cover something up.

"If you're interviewing someone and they offer evidence before it's asked, be very wary," she said.

For example, if you were interviewing someone for a job and they voluntarily told you they hadn't been fired from their last job before you asked them. That should raise suspicion.

Another point Driver made was most job applications have a paragraph at the end that states something along the lines of "I certify that my answers are true and complete to the best of my knowledge" and offer a place for their signature.

Driver said that statement should be at the beginning of the application, because if someone's lied about a question on the paper, they'll have justified their answer to themselves before they get to the statement.

If they've already said that they'll be truthful before they fill out the application, they're more likely to be truthful.

"Prime brains by telling someone to tell the truth at the beginning," she said.

ASK THE EXPERTS

Chemical approach

Q: What do I need to know when handling hazardous chemicals?

A: Following label instructions is extremely important. We need to do a better job of following directions on product labels. After all, the product label and the associated safety data sheet (SDS) contain all of the important information on the safe use of the product in and around the work environment.

Among the most important sections of the label are directions on the safe use of the product. This includes the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) to be worn during mixing, loading and applying the product.

Reading and adhering to the label instructions is not the first step in the adoption of safe use practices, how-



ever. Actually, Step 1 is assessing the work environment to identify hazards with Step 2 being the incorporation of them into a "written" safety program.

The written safety program is so important that it ranks high on the list of most often cited violations by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

If an OSHA inspector stops by, one of his or her first requests will be to look at your written safety program.

It should contain the above-referenced hazard identification process that clearly states the impact of hazards on your employees, incorporates informa-

tion from the labels of products like any pesticides being used to control pests, lists the PPE that the employer provides to employees for protection and details the training that is being adopted to

reduce the risk of exposure to the products.

With the push by OSHA toward a globally harmonized system, the role of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), especially related to pesticides and the Worker Protection Standard (WPS), has created some concern.

Following the EPA's WPS and OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard guidelines does create a need for a higher level of awareness among employers.

But, the most important resource is the product label and the knowledge about the approved PPE to keep employees safe.

Please be aware that the information on product labels has changed over the past several years, and the newer label information and new versions of the SDS documents should be kept in an accessible location.

The product label's "signal words," including DANGER and WARNING, will be a strong indicator of the level of PPE that workers will be required to use.

For example, products with a DANGER signal word often require chemical-resistant aprons and bodysuits, while a WARNING product may require that exposed skin areas on the arms, legs, and feet be covered with long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and shoes and socks.

Product users will need to locate additional information in the safety data sheet to know how to handle contaminated clothing.

And since the work clothing may be dealt with when the worker returns home, employee training should include recom-

mendations on laundering the work clothes. Consider these four steps to simplify the chemical application process:

1. Audit or assess hazards in the work environment. Select those products that are labeled for use on the pests to be controlled, and read and understand all label instructions and requirements. This audit should help guide the following step in the process.
2. Formalize your written hazard communication program. It should be shared with employees and made available, upon request, to regulation enforcement personnel.
3. Provide training on the identified work site hazards. Be proactive on your training approach and make it a habit to provide training before workers are exposed to hazards. Keep in mind that business expansion into new operations and the use of new equipment and products can change the scope of training needed by your employees.
4. Document the training by having employees sign a sheet indicating the training topic, trainer and date of the training. Maintain a record of the training in your files for future reference and in the event of an inspection.

Sam Steel, PLANET Safety Adviser

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



For more news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com

We're giving away money

GIE Media, Lawn & Landscape's parent company, is accepting applications for the annual Richard Foster Award. Last year's winner of the \$2,500 scholarship, **Patrick Vaillancourt**, seen at right, stood out in a crowded field of more than 40 applicants thanks to his broad base of industry knowledge and the strong desire to learn more about the technical and business sides of the landscape industry.

Visit bit.ly/l scholarship to download the application. Please print off and fill out the form completely, then mail it to Chuck Bowen, Lawn & Landscape, 5811 Canal Road, Valley View, OH 44125.

To be eligible for an academic scholarship, you must be enrolled at a recognized two- or four-year college or university working toward a degree in horticulture, environmental science or other fields related to a segment of the green industry.

The deadline is April 15, 2015.



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An advertisement for RealGreen Systems. The background is a collage of images, including a smiling man's face and hands holding together several colorful puzzle pieces (blue, red, green, yellow). The text is overlaid on this background.

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LETTERS - TO THE - EDITOR

Have something to say about an issue of Lawn & Landscape magazine. Email Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net.

Keep it clean

Editor's note: We love hearing from you, but especially on popular topics in the industry. That's why we decided to run this back and forth on a story about an owner who wasn't paying himself in our September issue.

Mr. Bowen,

I very much enjoyed your editorial: Stop peeing in the pool. You addressed many of the pitfalls that plague our industry. I couldn't agree with you more. However, I was shocked to see included in your magazine the article under Operations Profile.

Why?

According to the article, "In fact, now in his sixth year of business, Lenard still hasn't paid himself one cent. Relying instead on his military retirement pay, all the profits go back into the company to promote growth." Seriously!!! Is Mr. Lenard peeing in the pool? Is his labor considered as profit on a balance sheet or is it unaccounted for in the actual costs? What bank would approve loaning a business money with a business plan that does not provide an owner a salary for six years?

If Mr. Lenard calculated pay for someone else to perform his job for those six years, would the cost be offset by the value of his business and depreciating assets? I bet not. While I applaud Mike Lenard for enjoying his hobby for six years, seems to provide quality work according to the article, I can't help but wonder how starting and running a company this way is good for our industry.

After 20-plus years in this industry, I doubt he will ever be able to get a ROI, labor included?

— Todd Cannon, president, TODDCO Grounds Maintenance

(Below is Editor Chuck Bowen's response:)

Todd-

Thanks for reading and taking the time to write in.

While I can see where you're coming from, I don't think Lenard qualifies as the same type of contractor who "pees in the pool." Those guys use unscrupulous or unsavory business practices to stay afloat, operate unsafely and don't fully understand their own costs.

I think many contractors start out in the business as part-time operators, or run a landscape business while working full-time or receiving benefits from past military or government service. Many also operate other businesses in related fields – construction, homebuilding, real estate, etc. I don't think those diversified streams of income preclude them from being stand-up and legitimate landscapers.



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I think they've realized a way to use all the resources available to them to get ahead of the competition. That doesn't make them sneaky – it makes them savvy.

– Chuck

Chuck,

I appreciate your taking the time out of your busy season to reply. I certainly don't mean for this to be a back and forth. However, I wholeheartedly disagree with you. From your "Peeing in the pool" piece:

1. "It's a race to the bottom."

If Lenard omits his salary from his expenses, how is he accurately pricing his work? How could it not be underpriced? If Lenard's pay of \$0.00 was entered into the Exmark survey in (November's Benchmarking Your Business) issue, how can the results be accurate for others to follow?

2. "You run a company ... You are a professional who creates jobs."

Lenard created jobs for others, he does quality work and that's great, certainly not illegal or unsafe. However, he has not built into his financials a way to pay someone to perform his job. That's not good business "savvy."

3. "The work you sell today needs to pay dividends for your company and the industry for the long term."

What investor would buy a company that has provided its owner a ROI of \$0 for six years. Would you buy it? His only return will be selling depreciated assets. One of my competitive advantages is buying those assets from people like Lenard.

We as an industry need to price our work accurately. I am thrilled that young people with business degrees are entering the industry.

We need that. Too many of us in this industry are, as Michael Gerber (E-myth)

says, "Technicians suffering from an entrepreneurial seizure." I remember Jim Paluch (consultant) saying years ago that after working with service industry professions including ours, but also HVAC, electricians, plumbers, etc., that he could not understand why we want to work for rich people for nothing.

While many of us love this industry, we also have bills. We have families to provide for. We look to publications such as L&L, to help guide our course.

The supplement (Benchmarking Your Business) is a great help (except for the part where Brian DuMont "did not pay himself a salary. He took a small regular paycheck..." By definition, that's a salary.

Please extend a little understanding to my rant. I do read your magazine religiously.

Best Wishes,

Todd

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Bobcat

One Tough Animal.



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



My dog Rudy is a big, sweet dog. When we got him nine years ago, the breeder said he was the runt of the litter and would never weigh more than 45 pounds. Like life when things don't go as planned or predicted, Rudy weighs 88 pounds now. He just kept growing and growing. And, he still cracks me up.

What really makes me laugh is how he responds to creatures that come into our backyard – the deer, the coyotes, the birds, the chipmunks, and with the most excitement, the squirrels. Rudy has never once thought he couldn't catch those squirrels. While I admire his determination, his distraction caused by chasing squirrels he can't catch reminds me of entrepreneurs who behave similarly.

Distraction – chasing the wrong things – saps energy. Through the years, I've wasted a lot of time chasing "squirrels" myself. Mine weren't the animal kind; mine were those count-

less distractions that are disguised as opportunities. Just as I laugh at Rudy, I have to be honest and laugh at myself, too. Both the dog and his master could spend their time more wisely.

So, what squirrels are you chasing? A "squirrel" in business is nothing more than something that seems like an opportunity but isn't. It's merely a distraction disguised as an opportunity.

What are you doing right now? Are you focused on your vision, mission and core values? Are you running decisions and behaviors through those filters? One thing I know for sure, the most successful landscapers are the ones who stay focused on four things and don't deviate:

- 1. Successful landscapers know their ideal client and everything they do is set up to serve them.** They have a dialog going with clients, constantly asking them if they are happy and requesting feedback on how to do better. You can't have multiple ideal clients; you can only have one and you need to know what



they look like and where they are, and have as much information as possible about those ideal clients. When you communicate that vision of your ideal customers, your team becomes focused on them as well.

- 2. Successful landscapers know that, to have an organization focused on the ideal client, you need to identify your ideal team member as well.** Again, in as much detail as you can possibly provide, clarify to your team what you are looking for and hire only those people. You see immediately when someone isn't a fit and you get them out of your company. Only ideal team members can serve your clients the best. Knowing your ideal team member helps you hire, lead and serve clients better.

- 3. Successful landscapers don't perform work outside their mastery.** We chase squirrels in the form of jobs that our ideal clients have that need doing, thinking we have to take care of them. We assume we'll "figure it out," however, that approach usually becomes very costly. Many a landscaper has lost a great client because they tried to build something or perform a job they had no experience to successfully complete. Tell your client NO when they ask you to do something you're not proficient at and explain to them why.

- 4. Successful landscapers stay focused on profits.** Your financial statements are your "ultimate score cards" and everything you do focuses on that. You have a culture centered on putting a winning score up on the board. Everything you do should contribute to profitability. Sure, some days are better than others and sometimes you win, sometimes you learn. However, you are always trying to make money – money that can be used to buy new equipment, incentivize your team, grow your business, and help you retire one day.

Writing about what I've learned from my dog might make you laugh; however, I believe you can learn something from every situation. Rudy needs to stop chasing squirrels and lie down and take a nap. You need to stop chasing squirrels and get focused on finding ideal clients, ideal team members, doing the work you have mastered, and making a profit. Stop chasing squirrels and capture business success! **L&L**

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



RULES ON RECRUITING

I'm certainly not a recruiting expert so I'll point you to two resources that you might find helpful. First is the book, "Who," by George Smart and Randy Street. It may be a bit over the top for small businesses, but it's a great resource to help you find talent for your company. Second is the book, "Good to Great," by Jim Collins. It's a business classic. Both of these will help you get your priorities right. As the cover of "Who" states, "Knowing what to do is not the major challenge faced by executives – finding who to do it is!" Here are some suggestions that you might find useful:

INTERNAL RECRUITING. You and your company's reputation can be two of the best recruiting tools that you have. Top-notch people and companies attract top-notch talent. I've heard it dozens of times from my clients.

Some of their best talent just walked in the front door one day looking for an opportunity. How do top-rated high school athletes decide where to go to college? It usually boils down to the reputation of the coach and/or the college. Work at being a great coach and building a great company.

Provide a financial incentive for your staff to

recruit good talent. However, don't pay for it unless the recruit works out for the long haul. Great teams don't tolerate poor performance. If you have a great team that helps you recruit new staff, you can bet that they won't recruit weak players. If a weak player does get through the screening process, the team won't tolerate him or her for very long. As the saying goes, "Birds of a feather flock together." This cuts two ways. Losers will find losers and winners will find winners.

EXTERNAL RECRUITING. Here are some resources that you might find useful for recruiting purposes:

- Websites such as Craigslist, Angie's List and Monster.com can be excellent resources for advertising your staffing needs. Remember, these sites are constantly evolving and morphing. Keep your ears open to new websites and opportunities.
- Ziprecruiter.com helps you leverage your efforts by advertising your staff needs to numerous internet resources.
- Industry trade journals: The classified ads of such publications can be very cost-effective. However, their target audience is usually national in scope. Regional publications provide a narrower readership.

- Trade associations might provide limited assistance in this area but usually they do not. You should at least research local and national trade associations. They may be of some assistance.
- Suppliers and vendors: Talk with your local suppliers and vendors. They might know about business owners who would rather be an employee than an entrepreneur and/or talented individuals looking for an opportunity.
- Trade schools and high schools can be excellent resources. Smart entrepreneurs follow the pipeline backwards to its source. They also work with and assist such schools whenever they can. Offering an internship program to students can be a good way to build rapport with the schools while attracting good talent.
- College internship programs can be an excellent source for new talent (again, follow the pipeline backwards).
- College scholarships: One of my clients funds a landscape construction scholarship at a local university. The annual funding costs only a couple thousand dollars, but it gets my client great publicity and visibility on the landscape department's radar screen.
- One of my clients successfully recruits help from Puerto Rico. In fact, virtually all of his field staff is from Puerto Rico. Because they are American citizens, there are no immigration issues.

STICK WITH THE PROCESS. A little creativity and a lot of common sense can go a long way when it comes to finding, training and keeping good people.

However, in order to attract good talent, you and your team need to have a great reputation. Create a "career-path" environment where people can have a career, not just a job.

Be sure to set measurable (quantifiable) and timeable (with due dates and deadlines) goals throughout your organization. This allows you to challenge your staff in meaningful and measurable ways. Finally, remember that recruiting is a never-ending process. **L&L**

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BY BOB COULTER

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.

Scheme for A DREAM TEAM

Great people want to earn an A and it's up to you to help them develop the right discipline to make this happen.



Throughout my career, business owners and leaders have been searching for the most critical ingredients that will help them win in their business. I have had the pleasure of being a member of the JP Horizons Team for going on 13 years and work with great people all across North America. There have been some patterns that repeat themselves.

RECRUITMENT. Many individuals have gotten locked into a belief window that there are no good people left to acquire.

They struggle with filling spots, get overwhelmed with work and continue to come up short in their performance. On the other hand, the most successful and healthiest organizations and teams continue to bring in great people. The most important lesson in recruiting revolves around having a strong culture that is winning. Great people want to be a contributor to a winning team and this is what we have to fix first.

The second key in acquiring talent is to realize that the game has changed and we have to do business differently when it comes to recruiting. The approach to placing ads in the paper, putting a sign in front of the building and crossing our fingers that people apply will not work. We have to take an all hands on deck approach just like we do when we are focused on marketing and sales for our organization.

By taking a targeted approach we identify the

talent we need and then we go to the candidates in a creative way to connect them with our organization. Through social media, schools, churches, networking and career fairs, we need to let the up-and-coming stars and the employed people who are seeking better quality of lives know we are the place to be.

At JP Horizons, we have put in place Better Results Campaigns all across North America. I believe that a campaign is crucial to change your quality of candidates. Start with putting in writing the vision you have and the desired results. Ensure you frame clear goals that we will reach with timelines that need to be hit.

You will want to make clear assignments so that we have accountability. It is really crucial to put your action steps in writing so that the people have a roadmap to follow through the process. It will be important to bring the group together to review progress and make course corrections. Remember to celebrate the small wins along the way so that we can build energy and momentum.

RETENTION. Once we have brought in great people, it is now imperative that we retain them for a long time. We have to form a win-partnership with each member of the team. One key question that I ask owners and leaders all the time is "What is a win for this direct report?"

If we can't answer this question accurately,

then we have a very large problem. Our success is lining up with them how they can reach their goals and aspirations as being a member of our team. It is also important from day one that each individual knows what we expect from them in their role and how we have culture of accountability where each individual has to demonstrate the right behaviors and deliver the agreed upon results.

A couple of key steps in the process revolve around ensuring that we communicate clearly the rules of the game that we live by in our organization. No one can be successful if they lack the right level of clarity as it relates to their position or the company standards. By walking beside our people effectively, we can show them what a win is and help them to see how they will benefit when they really excel in their position.

Each leader, manager or supervisor has the responsibility to equip their people with the tools, resources and coaching so that we set them up to win. We can't assume that anyone that we hire is going to just step in and perform. It is really crucial to provide the right training or skill development to prepare them to win.

In our role as coach we need to insure that we teach our people to hold themselves accountable. This will come from us asking great questions and holding up the mirror so that they can see their performance accurately.

As you work the process insure you are challenging your people to inspect their work product and grade their own performance. Great people want to earn an A and we need to help them to develop the right discipline to make this happen.

Our leadership consistency comes down to insuring that there are positive consequences for winning and negative consequences for losing. Your success will revolve around being timely in how you address situations and show the organization that excellence is the only option.

For each of us to be fulfilled in our work, we need to win. Winning comes as a result of our partnership with great people. Look at what you can do today to acquire and retain talented people that you can partner with so that you can help them become fulfilled and contribute directly to your fulfillment. **L&L**



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Balancing act

Arendt's Outdoor Services grows by establishing expertise, but also knowing when to back off. **By Brooke N. Bates**



Arendt's Outdoor Services started more than 20 years ago by offering basic lawn mowing. As satisfied customers kept asking for additional services, the company naturally expanded into full-service maintenance, design/build and snow management. "As time moved forward, the company grew," says account manager Dan Bantell.

"We're on these properties already, mowing the lawn, and they're always asking us to trim their shrubs. Naturally, you open up a can of worms when you start saying, 'Yeah,' because you find yourself saying, 'Yeah,'

RIGHT: Dan Bantell joined the Arendt's Outdoor Services staff specifically to grow the company's maintenance services.

to a bunch of things." The secret to Arendt's growth doesn't mean saying yes to everything – but rather, focusing selectively on what the company does best.

"It's not about saying yes to those requests. It's about saying yes to those requests that fit who we are currently and where we want to go," Bantell says. "You can't be everything to everyone, so you've got to know what you're good at. But knowing what you're good at doesn't mean you're only good at one service. We're really good at maintenance and within maintenance, there are a bunch of services."

Specifically, Ar-



Get your employees in the 'right seat.' Pg. 30

COMPANY PROFILE

end's Outdoor Services caters to commercial and high-end residential markets around Clarks Summit, Pa.

Although the company does a great deal of landscape design/build, maintenance work has been growing at a clip lately, so Arendt's is developing a niche in full-service lawn and landscape maintenance.

The ideal customer, in Bantell's eyes, relies on Arendt's all year long for weekly mowing along with other services.

By building loyal relationships with customers who fit this focus, Arendt's Outdoor Services drives sustainable growth that secures the company long-term.

After finishing a design/build project, informing customers you can maintain the property may lead to a year-long client.



PHOTO COURTESY OF ARENDT'S

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— Jan Cundiff, Weedman
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COMPANY PROFILE

ESTABLISHING CREDIBILITY. The first step to building long-term customer relationships is establishing credibility. Account representatives must be able to understand and

deliver on customer needs, which requires a combination of listening and looking. The ability to diagnose lawn care needs gives the first impression of a capable provider.

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“When you do that initial property walk-through, it’s listening to what the property manager has to say, but also keeping in mind: here’s what we offer,” Bantell says.

“Sometimes what you’re hearing from the customer – they’re only telling you what they’ve always experienced. So you’re standing there talking to them on a 15,000-square foot paver patio at an office complex, and they may not realize that needs to be maintained, so they’re not talking about it.”

That’s where you need to say, “Hey, the grout in this is really washed out; you have some moss back here,” allowing you to add that right into the service. While

“If you already have an existing relationship with someone, they naturally take your advice, suggestions and recommendations a heck of a lot easier than someone that doesn’t know you.”

– *Dan Bantell, account manager*

recommending relevant services, mentioning successful previous projects can help establish credibility.

Bantell might take the opportunity to say something like, “You have a huge drainage issue here and it reminds me of a similar job we did. It was a homerun; the client is thrilled because we completely eliminated that issue.”

The goal is not to name-drop clients or boast how much you know about landscaping. The goal is to assure customers that you have the knowledge and credentials to solve any of their landscape issues.

Building customer relationships requires enough technical experience to recognize issues and opportunities in a lawn, paired with excellent people skills. One of the biggest challenges Bantell faces on a daily basis is balancing the two, or, in his words, “learning what somebody’s expectations are and making sure that the service you pres-

ent them with makes sense.” For example, if a customer requests a “perfect-looking property” within a limited budget, Bantell is responsible for mediating their desires with realistic deliverables.

Once a balance is struck, documenting the agreed expectations is key to maintaining the relationship – especially as the company grows and more employees get involved. Arendt’s relies on software to efficiently communicate customer preferences to crews, while Bantell stays in constant contact with the production manager to make sure execution meets expectations.

CROSS-SELLING SERVICES. Although Arendt’s focus lately has been maintenance, the company isn’t neglecting design/build. Bantell, who works mainly with maintenance customers, see the two sides of the business as complementary. With that mindset, he focuses on cross-selling maintenance services to landscape installation customers, and vice versa.

“It’s easy to work on a property from a maintenance standpoint and just do nothing but maintain it,” he says. “But the reality of it is: landscapes get outdated, shrubs die, so my eyes are always open for that. My job is to get out there and say, ‘Hey, I was walking your property and I noticed this or that. By the way, your mulch is looking pretty thin. We offer that service. We’re on your property anyway. What would it take for you to accept a proposal?’”

Similarly, whenever Arendt’s completes a landscape job, the account rep makes sure customers know that the company can also maintain the landscape it just built. He or she will notify Bantell to follow up with landscape customers to recommend a maintenance program.

Existing customers are warm leads for upsells and cross-sells because they already know and trust Arendt’s Outdoor Services. By tapping into these opportunities – not as a company trying to make more money, but as a long-term partner proactively looking out for customers’ landscape needs – Arendt’s continues to grow. “If you already have an

existing relationship with someone, they naturally take your advice, suggestions and recommendations a heck of a lot easier than someone that doesn’t know you,” Bantell

says. “Being proactive from the account management point of view helps create loyalty, because it shows that you care about their property.” **L&L**

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To each his own

For a company to focus on what it does best, individual employees should be able to focus on what each one does best. At Arendt's Outdoor Services for example, estimators focus only on estimating, administrative staff focus on administrative tasks, mowing crews focus on mowing, applicators focus on fertilization, and so on. Typically, production crews specialize in certain services, although maintenance employees might cross over to assist on large installation jobs.

"You always hear you've got to have the right people on the bus, but you also have to have them in the right seat," says Dan Bantell, account manager. "If you're going to have a dedicated portion of the company that does nothing but design-build-install, you need somebody at the head who knows design."

Since Arendt's in-house landscape designer retired, the service has taken a backseat to maintenance – although several employees with CAD experience collaborate to continue offering design. Meanwhile, with the focus on maintenance, the company hired Bantell in January 2013 specifically to grow the maintenance business.

In a company the size of Arendt's, which peaks at about 30 employees

during the busy season, key employees can practically make or break certain services.

"You could have a great hardscape crew in place, and then a super loyal, committed hard worker gives his two-weeks notice," Bantell says. "That's hard to take. Do I want to go through that training process again? Or do I want to make do with what we have, slowly dissolve it and start referring that work elsewhere?"

The company "dissolved" prior services like irrigation and landscape lighting installation, which required significant specialized training. Now, as the company grows toward maintenance, having a strong team in place will determine success.

"In order to grow in a certain direction," Bantell says, "you need the right person in the right seat."

PHOTO COURTESY OF ARENDT'S

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FREIGHTLINER

Matchmaking in business



How buyouts can bring expansion, and what it takes to do the due diligence and seal a solid deal.

By Kristen Hampshire

Acquisitions are a way for businesses to expand rapidly, gain marketshare, grow a service menu and bolster the client base. But, the deal has to be a win for both parties involved, and an acquiring business needs a platform for this growth that includes capital, infrastructure and personnel. This month, Lawn & Landscape spoke with three companies about their acquisition deals to learn what brought them to the table and how they worked through the transition.

INSIDER'S VIEW: What to consider before and during the acquisition process. | Pg. 40



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KEESEN LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Dan Beekhuizen, president

LOCATION:
Englewood, Colo.

ESTABLISHED:
1972

EMPLOYEES:
260 in summer; 125 in winter

2014 REVENUES:
About \$15 million

CUSTOMERS:
100% commercial

SERVICES:
Commercial maintenance,
design/build, holiday lighting,
arbor care, irrigation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

WATCH THE TIMING.

If Beekhuizen could do this deal again, he would choose the off-season, not April and the beginning of his busy season. "It made our April very tough because all of a sudden we had new equipment and new personnel and we were rapidly trying to start the season," Beekhuizen says.

REACH OUT TO THE TEAM.

Opening up the lines of communication with employees of the other company was critical for creating a smooth transition for Keesen, Beekhuizen says.

TAKE INVENTORY.

Beekhuizen enlisted a third party to conduct an equipment valuation on the owner's machines. "We basically got what we thought we were going to get in the deal," he says.

Combine cultures

In a tough labor market, searching for reliable, trained workers seems like mission impossible. A smart acquisition can be a talent boon for business. That's what Dan Beekhuizen found when he bought out a local landscape and snow removal firm and melded it with his business, Keesen Landscape Management in Englewood, Colo.

"There is only so much organic growth you can get, and coming up with qualified workers is extremely hard," Beekhuizen says, noting that 30 solid, hard-working employees joined his team as part of the acquisition. And, he grew his business by about 20 percent.

This local firm was a fit for Beekhuizen for a number of reasons. That's why when the "seller" approached Beekhuizen about a year ago, looking for an exit plan from his \$2-million firm, Beekhuizen thought his \$12.5-million outfit would benefit financially and operationally.

"They were working on jobs right next door to the ones we were doing," Beekhuizen says, adding that the owner's family-focused culture also aligned with Keesen Landscape Management's core values. "We are proud of our culture, and we work hard to maintain that," Beekhuizen says. "The (seller) thought our company was a good cultural fit,



Beekhuizen



and knowing us in the Denver market for quite a while, he felt it would be beneficial for us to come together." Of course, sharing the same ideals doesn't mean unity without a few hiccups.

"His employees needed to fit with our structure and needed to feel comfortable working with our crews, and for a little while there was a bit of us vs. them, but after a short time we were able to bring them in and make them feel like a part of the family," Beekhuizen says.

Keesen Landscape Management staged meetings prior to the acquisition in which Beekhuizen and managers explained the health care benefits and advantages that the deal would bring to the other firm's employees. But, there were some down sides, and Beekhuizen told employees they would have to make some changes.

One of those included the purchase of uniforms. And, employees would have to learn Keesen's technology, which includes tablet use for timekeeping and more. "There was a learning curve," Beekhuizen says.

Taking the initiative to share information with the other company's employees at their work site, prior to the acquisition, paved a path for positive communication from there on out. "We had

meetings and let them ask questions," Beekhuizen says.

Employees were happy that they transitioned into Keesen with the same wage. "We went back to their anniversary dates and gave them the benefits they needed like sick and vacation days," Beekhuizen says.

Because the seller had been in business for 10 years, there were many longtime workers who had been with the company for the duration. Beekhuizen wanted this acquisition to feel like an evolution into their next stage of employment. He says: "The acquisition was not like starting for a new company – it felt like a continuation of working for the company they knew."

The deal flowed smoothly because of Beekhuizen's due diligence – both parties involved attorneys and accountants – and his understanding of exactly what he was getting with the acquisition, from employees to equipment. "The devil's in the details," he says, noting that the deal took about a year, with the companies merged by April 2014.

"Acquisitions are a good way to grow, and they can be enjoyable – they can also be frustrating," Beekhuizen says. "But this one has worked out extremely well and I'm happy that we did it."



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PACIFIC LAWN SPRINKLERS

John Dellafiora, president

LOCATION:
College Point, N.Y.

ESTABLISHED:
1980

EMPLOYEES:
50 employees (headquarters)

2014 REVENUES:
About \$15 million

CUSTOMERS:
80% residential, 20% commercial

SERVICES:
Landscape irrigation, holiday lighting, basement waterproofing, drainage

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

GET YOUR HOUSE

Your company must be solid, well capitalized and equipped with the manpower to manage an influx of new business.

NEGOTIATE PAYMENT TERMS.

Dellafiora feels the ideal term for a buyout is five years. The customer list might not be as solid as you think if clients bail after the acquisition. That's why it's a good idea for the seller to still have some skin in the game until the transition is complete.

FIRM UP A CONTRACT.

Involve attorneys on both sides of the deal. Also, include a non-compete clause for the seller. "If an owner decides he made the wrong life change and decides to come back into the business and go after your accounts ... those are issues you can run into," Dellafiora says.



No more handshakes

Pacific Lawn Sprinklers in College Point, N.Y., built its market share by acquiring other companies. "That's how we developed in different regions," says John Dellafiora, president. "We would do an acquisition of a smaller company that was existing in an area where we wanted to build a presence, and then we would rebrand it."

In other deals, Pacific Lawn Sprinklers (PLS) would fulfill an older owner's exit plan by acquiring the company's accounts and bringing the owner on as part of the PLS team.

Acquisitions began about a decade after PSL was founded. "The first ones went very well – you pretty much paid for the accounts and they were not heavy on legal contracts," Dellafiora says. But, as the company grew and times changed, the "handshake" deals pretty much disappeared. "We got more astute on the contracts for buying out other companies," he says.

All told, PLS has completed eight acquisitions, Dellafiora says. The key to completing them successfully, and growing your business rather than ending up cash-poor, is to focus on capitalization and manpower. "Capitalization is important," he says, adding that money should be set aside "just in case" to avoid negative cash flow if forecasted revenues do not arrive from the new business gained. "You don't want to drive down your company or have a cash flow issue because there were unforeseen issues."

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FORMULAS for SUCCESS

personnel to handle the sudden growth – office staff and account managers, for example. “You better make sure you have the people on board, otherwise you are not helping your customers and future customers,” Dellaflora says.

Also, during negotiations, be sure that the payment terms for the buyout are structure to protect your company. “Companies want their money right away, or within a year or two – absolutely not,” Dellaflora says. “Even if you have to pay interest, make it palatable and that interest is insurance.” He prefers five-year buyout terms.

Another negotiation point: the down payment. Sellers handing over their customer lists will want a large payment for handing over the “keys to the kingdom,” Dellaflora says. But, that can be risky depending on the value of the customers. “Nowadays in the industry, I’ve seen the value of customers go down because they aren’t as company-loyal as they used to be,” he says.

This is why vigilant due diligence – serious vetting – is a must before sealing any acquisition deal. As for PLS, the firm will not be making acquisitions in the near future. Instead, Dellaflora and team are focused on franchising the brand and expanding organically.

“We are up to more than 25 units now, and we are focused on marketing and developing franchises,” Dellaflora says. “Franchisees develop roots in their communities and that has been really positive for our brand, and that’s how we are looking to grow the company.”

Round out the service menu

When an opportunity cropped up that spelled expansion in a new arena and growth for the core business, Rudy Larsen was ready to listen. An industry colleague in his region with 50 years experience approached him about potentially buying his commercial landscape installation business. The offer appealed to Larsen because it filled a gap in services at Lawn Butler, based in Bountiful, Utah.



Larsen

“We’ve been primarily a commercial maintenance business, and I’ve known this owner through the industry and locally, and he was looking for an exit strategy,” says Larsen, president.

Larsen had never executed a deal like this before. But his fast-growing business could increase 15 to 20 percent by merging with the company, and the timing was right, he says. Plus, the seller’s business had a shining reputation in the community, which was important to Larsen. “I knew what I was getting into so I saw the value,” he says of taking the seller’s offer seriously.

Of course, just knowing an owner from the business community isn’t enough to structure a deal. Larsen engaged in a thorough vetting process, including valuations and involving attorneys and accountants from both sides.

They also talked about each other’s goals for the acquisition. The seller wanted to gradually

phase out of the business, and this would be possible if his commercial installation firm became a division under Lawn Butler, managed by Larsen and his team. "He wants to retire in the next five or six years, so we are working toward putting him in a position where he doesn't have to work if he doesn't want to," Larsen says. The seller remains in the business today, overseeing the commercial installation department during the transition into Lawn Butler's infrastructure.

Larsen's goal was to break into the landscape installation business and to acquire quality talent, loyal clients and continue a positive reputation in the region. "It takes time and discipline," Larsen says of working through an acquisition. Specifically, Lawn Butler began working on the deal in March of 2014 and closed it at the end of year.

The seaming together of the two organizations is still taking place. For now, the acquired business is set up as a branch of Lawn Butler. "They are going to be rolling into our branch," Larsen says, noting the acquisition includes two office personnel and 18 other employees. "We have sold installation jobs and we continue to operate the business as usual, and we are working to build a synergy and bring us all together."

A key to doing this successfully will be to stay open-minded, Larsen says. "We are pretty creative here and willing to adapt and learn, and adjust to different situations," he says.

Knowing the owner for some time in the industry has made the deal go smoothly, Larsen says. "We both knew what we were getting into." **L&L**

LAWN BUTLER

Rudy Larsen, president

LOCATION:
Bountiful, Utah

ESTABLISHED:
2007

EMPLOYEES:
160

2014 REVENUES:
Not disclosed

CUSTOMERS:
100% commercial
(includes HOAs)

SERVICES:
Landscape maintenance and installation, snow and ice management, fertilization, irrigation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

UNDERSTAND THE GOALS.

Larsen and the seller had open conversations about their goals for the acquisition so they understood what was important when framing the deal and during the transition process.

GIVE IT TIME.

An acquisition does not happen overnight. Larsen says the deal took 10 months, and the transition portion is really just the beginning. "You can't just mash two businesses together and call it good," he says.

ENSURE THE MATCH.

This deal was a win-win for Larsen and the seller because the acquired business fills a gap in Lawn Butler's service offering. And, the talent acquired has a lot of experience. "They have been doing (installation) for 50 years, and they're in an area of the business we wanted to be in," Larsen says.

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Insider's view

Brian Corbett, founder of CCG Advisors, a green industry mergers and acquisitions firm, presents some items to consider before and during acquisitions.

• **Duties.** Assign people to specific tasks. Most employees have a full time job and might skimp somehow if they are tasked with the entire deal. Consider hiring experts to handle legal, financial and operational diligence.

• **Equipment.** You can buy what you need so the consideration here is to make sure you are not inheriting outdated equipment that will require significant repairs and maintenance to get it up to snuff.



• **Negotiations.** Be willing to walk away. Transactions can get emotional for some owners so let cooler heads prevail.

• **People.** Make sure all human resources paperwork is up to snuff and consider asking for a non-compete or at least non-solicit as you hire their employees.

• **Price.** Get to a ballpark figure quickly. Most business owners think their baby is worth more than it is. You can waste time and create ill-will if you don't get a number up front.

• **Profit.** Are the contracts priced to where you can make money considering your overhead structure? Many smaller companies appear profitable but once your overhead is applied, contracts might not deliver the intended result.

• **Property.** Even if you are not buying the real estate, if you will operate from their location you must have environmental diligence done, at least a phase one and more if something shows up in that process.

• **Quality of work.** How does the quality of work compare to yours? If it's low quality, look at annual retention figures to see how much turnover there may be.

• **Relationships.** In a small business, the owner likely has his hands on everything and everyone. If you cash them out and they leave, so might the key people and clients. **L&L**

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TURFMUTT IS ONE OF MANY PROGRAMS **DESIGNED TO PROMOTE THE VALUE AND POSITIVE EFFECTS** OF THE LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY. HERE'S HOW TO TELL YOUR OWN STORY.

Story by **Kristen Hampshire**

Photo courtesy of **OPEI**



LUCKY is TurfMutt's mascot. Turn to pages 48 and 49 to find out what he has to do with turf and how he helps OPEI spread the word about the industry.

JEFFREY JOHNS POSTED A PLAQUE

on the wall of Coastal Greenery 15 years ago. Inscribed on it was a mission statement – empty words that held little meaning in the field. It said something like, “Provide the best landscape services possible to enhance your surroundings.” Johns can’t remember the exact words.

“It did absolutely nothing for company morale and there was no buy-in from the team – and that went on for 10 years,” says Johns, president of the company he founded in 2004. His Brunswick, Ga., firm has grown to \$3.2 million in revenue and 63 employees in that time. Meanwhile, his vision and core values have sharpened.

“We want to be recognized as a leader in landscape management throughout coastal Georgia,” Johns says. The company’s mission statement is to provide the finest in landscape management services while building and enhancing relationships one client at a time. The core values make these big ideas real in the field. Those are quality, relationships, leadership, safety and profitability.

“We are using those five core values every day to get to that end result, which is the vision statement, the destination, and that is how we talk to our crewmembers about our goal,” Johns says.

Johns and Coastal Greenery have a more precise story to tell to clients, prospects and team members. Of course, this required some soul searching and systems. “Five years ago, as my company was growing, I realized that morale was so important, so I pulled together a team of nine people in my company that I hand-selected based on their attitude and the support they gave to the company,” Johns says.

This group became the Green Team.

“I told them, ‘We as a company are growing and pushing, and we need a team to figure out who we are and where we are going,’” Johns says, noting that he hired a facilitator to lead the meeting. Johns sat in the back and kept quiet for a full day and a half.

The Green Team ultimately wrote the vision and mission for Coastal Greenery. They determined the core values necessary for reaching those goals. And, for the following three months, 24x30-inch sheets of paper filled with ideas from the session were dis-

played on the walls of the company conference room. Eventually, every employee had an opportunity to review and add his or her thoughts to what the team developed. The conclusion was a company-wide meeting to hash out the team’s feedback and how to reach the ultimate vision and mission.

“I want my team to be career-minded and involved in what we are doing and figuring out how we are going to get there,” Johns says. This team-intensive exercise built the foundation for the ongoing buy-in. Showing employees opportunity by having them help “write” the story of Coastal Greenery changed the way employees view the operation, and the way they present the company to clients and prospects.

Having a story to tell clients, the community and team members helps a business stay on track to meet its goals. A story – the vision+mission+core values package – steers employees toward the right decisions and calls for accountability.

“We are constantly having our team members think about what they are doing and how that applies to our core values,” says Rob Garpiel, president, Garpiel Landscaping, Saginaw, Mich.

At Garpiel Landscaping, the core values are quality, trustworthy, integrity, delivery and commitment. These characteristics propel a mission to, “Provide exceptional landscaping with exceptional people.”

Garpiel’s personal vision is to give others the opportunity to dream. And so the way he operates his company – by delegating to managers and supervisors so they can grow



Greenscape’s core values are communication, learning, experience, appreciation and teamwork (CLEAT). They, along with leadership principles, are on display in English and Spanish.

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careers – and the way he communicates to his people, using “we” and never acting as a boss, helps team members understand their contribution to the company.

“We engage our team and ask them during weekly meetings how they used our core values on the job,” Garpiel says of ingraining the story into the company culture. After all, a company story is only as good as the characters that play roles.

NAILING YOUR STORY. At Greenscape in Holly Springs, N.C., the company’s three “impact makers” on clients’ properties are the foundation of its vision and core values. Those are to focus on seasonal color, irrigation and lawn care. “That’s what creates the wow statement,” says Gregory Smith, business development manager.

By focusing on these three core areas of the landscape service, Smith says the company can deliver the best return on investment. Greenscape, which posted \$8 million in revenue in 2014 and employs 160 people, does not want to be seen as one more line item in a property manager’s maintenance budget. “Greenscape wants to help grow clients’ businesses,” Smith says.

“What we provide is more than just landscaping. It’s marketing,” Smith continues, emphasizing that discussions with clients center on positioning Greenscape as a business growth partner.

Why the focus on these three aspects? Smith says that crewmembers can clear out weeds or prune shrubs on short order and improve the appearance of a property. But if irrigation, lawn care and seasonal color are not tended to with attention to detail, improving a problem can take up to two weeks.

Digging deeper into how the company supports its three “values,” Smith says that dedicated specialists focused on these three service areas separate Greenscape from competitors. “We don’t have your everyday landscape management crew handling all of those aspects. There’s a detail crew that does all of our mulching and pruning, a horticultural crew for seasonal color, and we have irrigation and lawn care technicians,” Smith says.

BELOW ARE THE WORDS COASTAL GREENERY, GARPIEL LANDSCAPING AND GREENSCAPE developed as visions, missions and core values that best told their stories to their employees and their respective communities.

COASTAL GREENERY

- **Vision:** To be recognized as a leader in landscape management throughout Coastal Georgia
- **Mission:** To provide the finest in landscape management services while building and enhancing relationships one client at a time
- **Core values:** quality, relationships, leadership, safety and profitability

GARPIEL LANDSCAPING

- **Vision/mission:** To provide exceptional landscaping with exceptional people
- **Core values:** quality, trustworthy, integrity, delivery and commitment

GREENSCAPE

- **Vision:** The Green Team Way: We are passionate about serving our community through understanding their needs and providing green services for the outdoor environment in North Carolina. Our focus on building long-term relationships with clients, employees and vendors sustains the strategic growth of our business through higher retention and referrals. Guided by our principles and values, we are committed to continuous improvement by training and developing our people, resulting in greater career opportunities.
- **Mission:** Outstanding results through great service

There are many landscape management companies in North Carolina. Prospective customers may assume that all are the same. If they base their comparison on services alone, they will not see what makes Greenscape Inc. and Weed Man different. It is our job to communicate our mission through our actions so that current and potential customers truly understand how we are different and why we are the best choice. Our Green Team members are the face of Greenscape Inc. and Weed Man. Actions speak louder than words. Keep the mission in mind as you represent the company.

- **Core values:** communication, learning, experience, appreciation, teamwork (CLEAT)

The company, Smith says, has kept its story relevant through the years because the leadership principles and core values have meaning to each employee.

Specifically, its core values are communication, learning, experience, appreciation and teamwork (the acronym CLEAT). Greenscape provides business cards for employees that include the vision statement and core values. “We are constantly preaching it and appreciating people when we get a comment back from a client,” Smith says.

For example, positive actions in the field are categorized based on the core value. So when appreciation is expressed to the team member who went the extra mile, that praise is communicated by noting how that employee lived out one of the firm’s core values.

Greenscape’s delivery promise is: “On time. Done right. Landscaping services connecting people, businesses and communities through great outdoor spaces.” And rather than just telling the community what it stands for, the company participates in outreach projects to

show how it takes its values to the field. For example, Greenscape volunteers for charities like the Boys & Girls Club, helping maintain its green space. “The community sees our core values and principles, and that is how we market that,” Smith says.

GETTING BUY-IN. When a manager at Coastal Greenery sees a win in the field, he or she takes a picture or makes a note that is filed at the office. When a client gives a team member a compliment, it is logged. The feedback is organized on color-coded scorecards and categorized by core value. The office manager tracks “points” for each employee, and recognition is awarded on a monthly basis in the form of gift cards: \$50 for having the most positive marks for a given core value; and \$200 for the most feedback earned across all core values.

“At every morning safety meeting, we talk about those core values and tell the whole team what members did the day before,” Johns says, adding that the same practice

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occurs in weekly sales and production meetings, and quarterly company meetings, where a PowerPoint presentation shares scorecard highlights.

A similar reward system is in place at Garpel Landscaping. For example, one team member rolled a client's garbage cans up from the curb and placed them beside (not in front of) her garage. That displayed quality and commitment. Another crew properly set up safety cones and wore appropriate protective gear while working on a municipal job. The manager took a picture. It was a portrait of safety, a core value, and shared at the next tailgate meeting.

On the other hand, an employee at Garpel Landscaping who was flagged as having an attitude with managers was showing lack of commitment. When managers can pinpoint a problem and relate it back to a core value, they can have productive discussions with problem employees about why a certain behavior is not acceptable at the business and what expectations are required.

Garpel says one key to helping team members embrace the company story is keeping the vision, mission and core values simple. At Garpel Landscaping, people are the foundation of its story. So when hiring, Garpel advertises that the company hires for attitude and trains for skills. That's a big part of attracting people who want to play on a team and embrace the company culture, he says.

Then, when the team understands, buys into and lives the core values, the company can grow and meet other strategic goals. Garpel says, "For young companies, the owner-operators that finally put two guys in a truck and are out there mowing lawns or installing landscapes, that is the time to begin telling their people who you are, what you are here to do, and why you need their help to get to that point." **L&L**



TURFMUTT, a real rescue dog named Lucky, was turned into a superhero to battle the bad guys, who are all issues associated with landscape.

Time to get involved

THERE ARE PLENTY OF ORGANIZATIONS that can help you be an advocate for the green industry. Below are some of those groups, along with some events and initiatives they organize, and information on who to contact if you want to join.

COME ALIVE OUTSIDE. The Come Alive Outside initiative was started in 2010 to inspire landscape companies to play a more active role in reconnecting communities with the outdoors. Executive Director Andy Paluch says the green industry is perfectly positioned to advocate the benefits of the outdoors like reducing obesity and stress through staying active outside.

"What we focus on as an organization is putting together programs that bring the landscape industry in as an essential partner in creating the opportunity for people to live healthier lives outside," Paluch says.

The group is also reaching youth



through the Come Alive Outside Design Challenge. The program, which rolled out in the 2014-2015 school

year, creates the opportunity for college, high school, elementary and pre-school students to work together with landscape professionals to design and build engaging outdoor learning environments at schools and childcare facilities.

Paluch says the Design Challenge is part of Landscape Ontario and was part of PLANET's Student Career Days in the past.

- **Website:** Comealiveoutside.com
- **To get involved:** Andy Paluch, 440-525-6076, andy@comealiveoutside.com



LEFT: Employees of Greenscape, North Carolina State students and volunteers from the community complete construction on an outdoor learning environment that was designed through the Come Alive Outside Design Challenge. **RIGHT:** GreenCare for Troops benefited Sgt. Justin Wilhite and his wife, Rachael, of Holly Springs, N.C.

TURFMUTT

OPEI'S TURFMUTT: The Outdoor Power and Equipment Institute organization wanted people to realize that grass didn't need to be removed in order to keep your yard environmentally friendly from a water standpoint.

Along came TurfMutt.

"It's a program at elementary schools to kids before their minds are made up," says Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI. "TurfMutt teaches that environmental responsibility starts at home."

Since its inception, TurfMutt has reached 38 million students, teachers and families with weekly readers, online activities, contests, classroom curriculum, a television PSA and a partnership with Scholastic Education.

Kiser says the program is also valuable to landscape contractors because it is educating the next generation of home owners and environmentalists, as well as the parents of the current students.

"It values the landscape," he says. "It values the home-cape. But it's not just 'plant less Kentucky Bluegrass and water it every single day.' There are ways to work with your lawn and flowering this and flowering that to help. We believe it helps landscapers in that you're going to want a landscape tailored to your environment and your home."

• **Website:** bit.ly/turfmutt

• **To get involved:** Kristen Reamy, kreamy@opei.org, 703-549-7600

For more on these groups, and information on more events to participate in, visit Lawandlandscape.com and search "Time to get involved."



PLANET'S ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE FOUNDATION.

PLANET is taking on the green industry's labor shortage with the Academic Excellence Foundation. Originally conceived as a scholarship fund, the foundation is expanding its scope to become an advocate for the industry to the general public. AEF's new primary goal is to improve the perception of the green industry and make it a more attractive career option.

"We need to influence people before their kids select a major, before they decide their career path. They need to be aware of what great fun the green industry is and really how well you can do financially," says AEF Board President Tom Fochtman.

That's exactly what happened to Colorado State University graduate Eric Sabin. He says his AEF scholarship helped him land a well-paying job in the landscape field. And thanks to the financial assistance he re-

ceived, he was able to focus on his coursework to learn as much as he could before entering the workforce.

Donors can decide if their dollars will go toward a scholarship or into the general foundation fund to help spread the word about all the green industry has to offer. Money allocated to the general fund is used for projects like sponsorship of career fairs around the country to spread the word about the benefits of a green industry job.

• **Website:** Planetaef.org

• **To get involved:** Anna Walraven, 800-395-2522, foundation@landcarenetwork.org



PROJECT EVERGREEN'S GREENCARE FOR TROOPS/ SNOWCARE FOR TROOPS:

Launching nine years ago, GreenCare For Troops brings together landscape contractors and members of the military. SnowCare For Troops is in its fifth year.

The volunteer services are offered to families of deployed military personnel and wounded and disabled veterans.

Contractors go to the website and fill out an online form indicating what services they would like to offer, how many families they're willing to help and what their service radius is. Families sign online and make a profile indicating what services they're looking for.

When a match is found, the name and contact information for the contractor is given to the family and it is up to them to contact the contractor and get the service set up.

Executive Director Cindy Code says the program is for the families who are in a very stressful situation while their spouse/parent is deployed.

"Their green space, their landscape, is their haven, so we want to provide a green space where they can go outside and de-stress," Code says.

• **Website:** bit.ly/lfgct

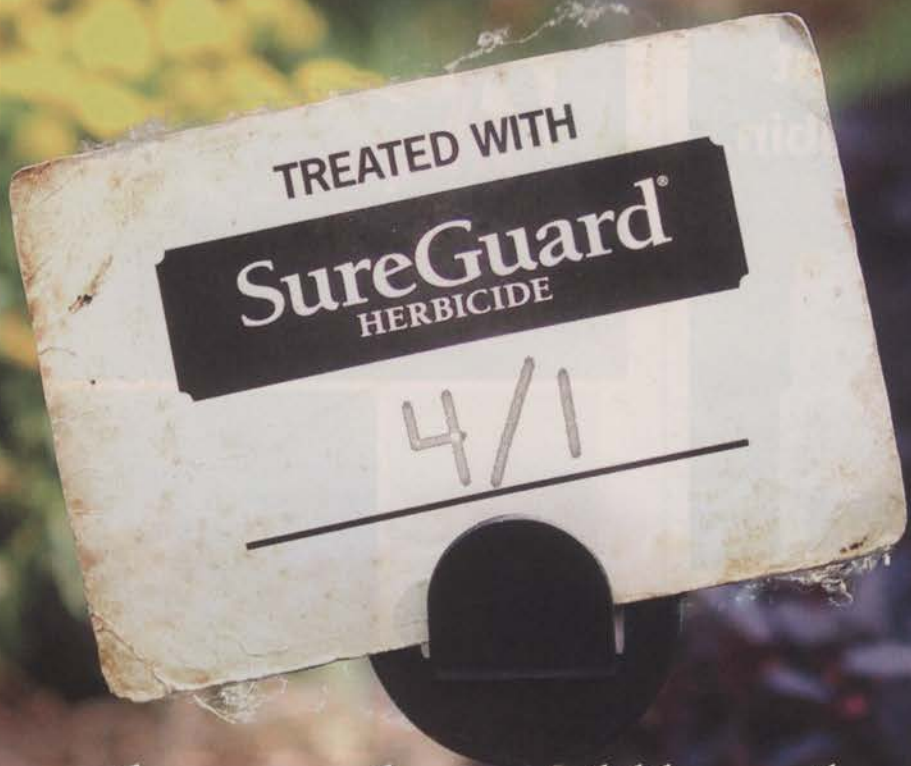
• **To get involved:** Cindy Code, 888-611-2955, cindycode@projectevergreen.org



BREAK BOTTLENECKS

Now in its 15th year of business, Masseo Landscape has seen all kinds of difficult project conditions from bad drainage to clay to bedrock ridges. On one site in their service area of Ulster County, N.Y., there can be rock, sand and clay all within 100 feet of each other says President Mark Masseo. That's where his team comes in. "We're kind of known for being the problem-

With the right equipment and materials, you can make short work of big hardscape projects. **By Kate Spirgen**



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
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A well thought out strategy, knowledge of products and the correct equipment can alleviate bottlenecks on complicated hardscape jobs.

LEAN ON THE EXPERTS

The best knowledge comes from experience, and even with years of experience under his belt, Mark Masseo, president of Masseo Landscape, doesn't hesitate to call his local product manufacturer. If he has a tough job or sees a potential pitfall, he'll find a technical or sales representative to come out to the site, noting that product specialists usually have installation backgrounds so they know the challenges of a site.

He'll do the same if he's in line with one or two other contractors in order to show his expertise to the property owner, which isn't too common among hardscapers, he says. Or, if he's working with a new product, like permeable pavers, he'll ask someone to come out and consult to make the homeowner more comfortable hiring him.

"They have to trust that I know and I'm experienced and I know the product inside and out," Masseo says. "Most likely, you're going to get the same answer from us but I'd rather you get it right from the horse's mouth and I've done that."

With all of the trade shows and education outlets available, Masseo says there's no excuse for staying in the dark about all of the products and techniques out there. "This is what people are hiring you to do," he says. "You need to be as educated, proficient and up to speed about everything in your industry to help a homeowner when they call. They are not doing their job if they don't invest the time and energy to learn about it."

solvers," he says. Many projects, whether it's a retaining wall or paver install, are on tight deadlines, so the process needs to be efficient all the way from excavation to cleanup. Often homeowners are renovating for big occasions like weddings or graduations, so hitting the finish date is a must.

"They say, 'We know you can get it done because you've done it for five other people we know,' and it's good that we're known for that," Maseo says. "Ultimately, they end up sometimes paying a premium to rush things to get it to fit because as much as we want to make your landscape nice for a graduation party, it has to last."

DEVELOP A STRATEGY. Most successful companies carefully plan their attack both before and during construction. Jim Eccleton, president of Country Club Turf in Jackson, Mich., says his company calls well ahead of time for utilities marking.

"That always seemed to be a big problem in the past to have to wait for utilities to be marked," he says. "Once utilities are marked, we go out and draw a detailed map because we may not be on the job right away and markings get removed by mowers and landscapers," he says.

Sam Walker, landscape designer/coordinator at DeClark's Landscaping in Romeo, Mich., says knowing the existing site conditions is vital when estimating the amount of excavated and base materials. "If the site is soft, recently disturbed soil, you are going to need to excavate and install a deeper base," he says.

Once you are on a site, employees should have a plan on how materials will be moved.

"A common mistake we see other companies' crews make is they will have one designated crewmember moving the material to the area of the installation while another crewmember stands in the back of the truck waiting for the other crew member's return with their empty wheelbarrow," says Timothy Trimmer, vice president of landscape at Professional Grounds in Washington, D.C.

His company keeps things moving by adding another wheelbarrow so that the crew-

member at the truck can load materials while the other worker runs across the property. That way, there are no wasted man-hours during unloading.

KNOW YOUR PRODUCTS. Often, customers will rip a page out of a magazine and ask Maseo for a replica in their own backyard.

Maseo says that actually makes his job easier since he'll know the scale, feel, colors, texture and all of the design elements. Then, he starts thinking about the right materials. "An experienced person like myself – you get very knowledgeable about your products. You're going to know when you look at a job and say 'Oh, I have the perfect product for you.'"

A customer can have a laundry list of requirements, and within about half a minute, Maseo says he can think of the two or three products that will work best.

Finding a good line of larger blocks and pavers from his supplier was a big win for him and his team. "It was a game-changer for me to see how fast we can build the same exact square footage of the wall and how quickly," he says.

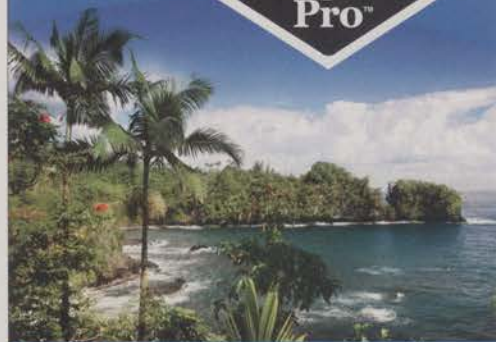
Product knowledge also helps when it comes to budgeting for paver installation jobs in the initial appointment with a client, says Philip Carlson, landscape division manager at Carrington Lawn & Landscape in Middleton, Wis.

In that initial appointment, he tries to get a sense of the desired style and makes sure that the scope of work fits the customer's budget. Then, he'll suggest paver types and combinations to establish a budget and make adjustments from there.

He has the same approach for retaining walls. "I'll select a suggested product based on functionality first, and then style," Carlson says. Clients can then ask to see alternatives. "Function of the wall is critical to its design so I'll establish if things like terracing, steps, etc., will benefit the finished product very early on in the planning phases," he says.

In Maseo's area, customers want a natural look, but they also want large retaining walls. Throw in a big conglomerate stone ridge, a lot of shale and a tight deadline, and you've

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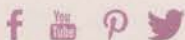
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DESIGN/BUILD



Masseo used large Rosetta stones to build this 100-foot long, 4-foot tall retaining wall to get the job done quickly.

got a difficult project. But with the right material, problems can be solved, even on difficult sites.

Masseo says he always leans toward a larger scale product, which means fewer seam joints for walls, fewer cuts and faster installation for patios.

"I can build a tall wall and a long wall relatively quickly," he says. "It has tight seams so we don't have snakes and mice and ants and environmental issues, and ... it's reinforced already. We can backfill a deeper section with drain stone and we can compact it with a larger piece of equipment. So overall, the economy of scale is great."

Although the product is more expensive than Masseo's other options, he makes up the cost in fewer man-hours. Plus, the staff has fun with larger stones.

"It's just so exciting to see the pieces coming together. It looks like a big boulder wall that was there for years," he says. "That's what's really exciting for us for how we got more efficient."

When purchasing new materials, keeping team members informed of things like installation techniques and laying patterns can prevent lost man-hours.

"You can lose precious hours if you are lacking product knowledge or improperly install a product," Walker says.

RIGHTSIZE THE EQUIPMENT. Excavation is the hardest part of the project, so Masseo Landscape purchased its second excavator last year to accommodate larger-scale projects with deeper cuts and excavation,

and to split up some of the more complex projects. The new excavator also comes with two sets of hydraulics, so there's no need to get out of the machine and change the plumb lines to put on a new attachment.

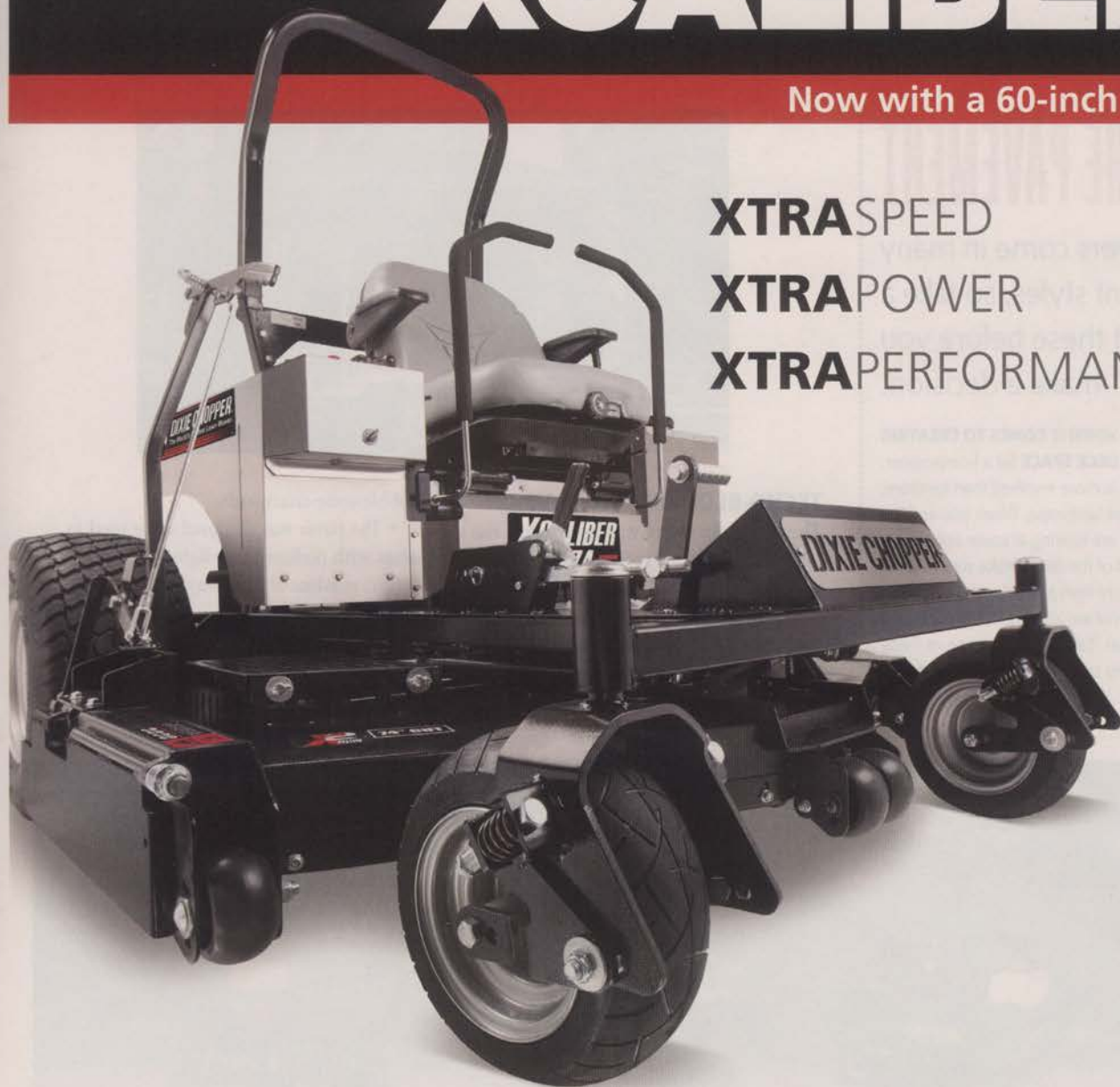
"The bigger excavator can handle more difficult terrain more safely, more easily and you can be more efficient about it," Masseo says. "But in my company, bigger is not always better. I think matching your equipment to a good majority of your calls is the best answer."

He buys the right vehicles for the jobs he has now, not the ones he thinks he might need in a few years, noting that rental equipment is always an option for larger jobs. For example, Masseo says he can use his Dingo pretty much anywhere and use it for all kinds of jobs. He has a power rake for final grading, a post hole digger, a snowblower and forks to move small palettes.

"That's a perfect example of a small piece of equipment that does a tremendous amount of work," he says. **L&L**

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cobblestone courtyards.

- The paver was designed to be used in areas with pedestrian or light vehicular traffic, residential driveways, patios and swimming pool decks.

- They are designed so that no two pieces are exactly alike.

For more information: Techo-bloc.com



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- AZEK Pavers are made from up to 95 percent recycled materials.

- Using a grid system that dramatically reduces installation time, AZEK Pavers are designed to minimize frustration and difficulty out of manually setting and aligning heavy concrete pavers.

- The pavers are available in five colors and are for commercial and residential resurfacing applications: flat roof, concrete patio, concrete walkway, deck.

For more information: Azek.com



PAVE TECH PAVE EDGE

The pitch: As a paver edge restraint system designed to match the durability of the pavers, PAVE EDGE maintains the perimeter interlock.

- It's also designed to work for sidewalks, patios and driveways.

- PAVE EDGE Industrial is recommended for commercial applications with pavers 8 cm or thicker for heavy vehicle traffic and permeable applications.

- The lip on the product keeps the bedding sand from migrating out from under the edging. It also ensures that the paver edging will not move separately from the pavement (heave) during freeze/thaw cycles.

For more information: Pavetech.com



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On the safe side

Three award-winning businesses share their best practices for keeping crews and equipment in top shape.

story by *Kate Spirgen* • illustrations by *Jeannie Phan*

Good safety practices are about much more than protective eyewear and steel-toe boots. For these three winners of PLANET's Safety Recognition Awards, it's about showing your employees that they matter, and sending them home happy and healthy. Here are their top tips.



1 **▲ WARM UP.** The whole team at Senske Services based in Kennewick, Wa., does a flex and stretch program before heading out each morning. "We stretch everything from the legs to the back to the arms and get the whole body ready to go out in the field," says Tony Fisher, safety administrator.

Chuck Miller, founder of Mirrorscapes in Lancaster, Ohio, says it can be easy to get stuck in a rut, so he does mental warm-ups by holding regular, short meetings about safe practices. "Because it can become monotonous, if you're a mower, you're riding a mower all day, you can get a little lax in your operation sometimes and so we try to remind them of that," he says.

2 **▲ DRESS FOR THE JOB.** Each morning at Arlington Lawn Care in Erie, Pa., a crew leader inspects the team to make sure they have the right gear: long pants, work boots, hats and gloves. Teams won't leave until everyone is properly outfitted, says owner Rich Arlington.

Arlington says he can't count the times he's heard about injuries resulting from improper attire. "I cannot tell you how many stories I hear of blades coming loose and cutting people's toes off. If you have a pair of leather boots, that doesn't happen," he says.

Since Arlington's service area gets a lot of wet snow, crews bring a change of clothes, extra socks and gloves, and even a spare jacket during the winter to stay warm and dry.

3 **▲ SHARPEN YOUR TOOLS.** Before starting a job, Arlington crews make sure the truck and equipment are ready to go. That means tight blades, belts and gas caps.

"I tell all my guys, make sure your tools are sharp because another one of the big accidents that happens out on the field is when you're using a dull set of pruners," Arlington says. With a dull blade, technicians are working extra hard to prune branches, which can result in cut fingers or hands.

"It's just easier if you always make sure your tools are sharp," he says.

That's why each Monday, Wednesday and Friday the in-house mechanic sharpens every single piece of equipment.



4 ▲ BE READY ON THE ROAD.

On all two-man crews at Senske Services, one or both of the technicians are professionally trained in CPR and first aid. While they already do a yearly training on both, Senske is planning to get a few employees certified in training so that they can hold trainings more frequently. "Then when we're having one or two people come on during the season, we can just go ahead and do the orientation of safety and accident prevention and get these guys or gals ready to go out into the field," Fisher says.

The company also has a policy of using a spotter

any time someone is backing up a trailer, and they always use safety cones when stopped. "That way we're not backing into things and jackknifing trucks and trailers," Fisher says. "We've had to learn that the hard way."

And before the trucks even leave, they undergo an inspection from in-house mechanics to make sure that fluid levels are correct and blinkers are working.

Once they're rolling, crews at Mirrorscapes are still thinking safety. Drivers never answer the phone on the road. "Even if it's me, they wait until they get to a stop to call me," Miller says.

5 **BUDDY UP.** Every new employee at Arlington is assigned a buddy from day one. It's someone a new employee can go to for help with their training, questions and concerns. "We have found that most new employees will not go and complain to their boss but they will complain to a mentor or partner at the

job," Arlington says. "And that buddy stays with them the whole season."

Then, once the newer employee has progressed far enough with his own training, he has the opportunity to act as a mentor to a new hire.

6 ► FIND THE SAFETY FORMULA.

Senske branches have safety committees of seven to nine people including technicians, management and mechanics. "It's not just all driven by management because safety and the culture of safety, really happens at the ground floor," Fisher says. "You have to have your technicians in a safety culture, or as a manager you can push it all you want and it's just pushing and pushing and pushing. But if you breed that culture in the organization, where safety is just kind of second nature, it just comes naturally."

That's the way to get employees to look out for each other and report problems like broken guards or improper use of safety gear before an accident happens. "It's important to let technicians know that management doesn't want to reprimand or punish anyone; they want to find ways to prevent accidents," Fisher says. "It's all about making sure the employees know that safety is really about them. Once they really see that you care about them and it's about them, that's when they really start to come on board with you."

Safety Checklist

Here's what the experts suggest keeping in your trucks:

- Pesticide spill kit
- Traffic cones
- Spare earplugs
- Spare safety glasses
- Spare work gloves
- First aid kit
- Battery packs
- Air compressors
- Flares
- LED emergency lights
- Safety vests
- Warning triangles
- Fire extinguisher
- Emergency radio



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BOB-CAT QuickCat

The pitch: The QuickCat is the first stand-on mower in the BOB-CAT lineup. The design places the platform close to the drive axles, reducing vibration and rider fatigue.

- Features an 8 mph mowing speed and 10.5 mph transport speed.
- The low placement of the 6.5-gallon fuel tank helps improve balance on uneven ground and extra ground clearance helps it safely move on and off high curbs.
- The QuickCat features an extra-strong DuraDeck mower deck, which is backed by a limited lifetime warranty.

For more information: www.bobcatturf.com



Ariens/Gravely Pro-Stance

The pitch: The Pro-Stance offers large diameter control handles and forward and reverse index bars to provide comfort and stability while operating this unit.

- Multiple models with cutting widths ranging from 36 to 61 inches.
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For more information:
www.gravely.com



John Deere 652R MOD and 652R EFI MOD

The pitch: John Deere's QuickTrak 652R MOD and 652R EFI MOD models now feature the Mulch On Demand deck, which was previously only available on the ZTrak line.

- The 652R MOD features a commercial-quality V-twin air-cooled 23.5 hp engine and a hydrostatic transmission.
- The 652R EFI MOD features a commercial-quality electronic fuel injected (EFI) V-twin air-cooled 25 hp engine.
- Both models come with a 7-gauge, 52-inch mower deck.

For more information: www.deere.com



Wright Stander ZK

The pitch: The redesigned Stander ZK now comes with the AERO CORE deck with airflow that stands grass up for a uniform cut and anti-scalp rollers for even results on varying terrain.

- Comes in two deck sizes of 52 inch and 61 inch and three engine options: 25.5, 27 and 29 hp.
- It comes with a 5-gallon debris container, as well as both side and mulch discharge, with improved mulching performance over past models.
- Wright provides a two-year limited warranty on the Stander ZK mowers, which covers parts and labor.

For more information:
www.wrightmfg.com



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WORTH *the* WORK

While consumers want low-maintenance plants, they still have appreciation for a beautiful bloom that needs attention. **By Lindsey Getz**

Annuals pack a serious punch when it comes to boosting curb appeal and adding interest. For many, the bright colors and the stunning blooms make it worth the investment in these one-season flowers. In fact, it seems that cost has become even less of a factor as we go into a new year. The latest trends seem to focus on maintenance, sustainability and beauty. We spoke to some growers and greenhouses nationwide to get their take on what's going to be popular in 2015.

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THE MAINTENANCE FACTOR. Nationwide, a big trend has been low-maintenance landscapes. Regardless of the region, growers say that hardy flowers, which tend to do well with the minimal maintenance, have been increasing in popularity.

Stacy Collins, owner and grower at Collins Cove Greenhouse, says that in her region, North Vernon, Ind., the interest in low-maintenance flowers will likely give the calibrachoa a big boost for 2015.

Besides its versatility and availability in a wide range of vibrant colors, this flower is also very low maintenance and requires no dead heading, which is seen as a big benefit.

She says this annual will be the big up-and-comer, possibly even surpassing the larger bloom petunias which have always been the most popular flower in years past.

"When I use calibrachoa in our planters with all different fillers it extends a warm welcome to my customers' landscapes," Collins says. "They are very hardy so they can take the cool nights that we have here in the early spring in Indiana."

"Ease of care and low maintenance are really important factors in flower purchases," adds Laura Hess, owner of Hickory Grove in Calicoon, N.Y., which wholesales exclusively to a local garden center.

"Drought-resistant and deer-resistant are also trends that are not going away any time soon. People seem to want a beautiful landscape but, when possible, prefer one that they don't have to work extra hard to maintain. The bottom line is that people are busy and anything that can save them time is going to be popular."

BEAUTIFUL BLOOMS. Even so, it does seem that there are still plenty of times that beauty can trump the maintenance factor.

In Chester, N.Y. Chris Ruigrok, a partner with A.D.R Bulbs, says that tulips continue to be the most popular annual

WHAT YOU'RE BUYING

We asked almost 150 growers and greenhouses about the buying habits of landscapers in 2014 and 2015. Pentunias were the favorite last year, and should be again in 2015. In fact, the top three plants in 2014 are expected to reign supreme in 2015, though impatiens are expected to hop pansys in 2015 and coleus will crack the top five this year. Respondents were surprised to see more contractors didn't buy gerberas and marigolds, and even though impatiens were popular, respondents thought they should have been more popular.

What are your top three selling annuals purchased by landscape contractors for 2014?



PETUNIA

51%



BEGONIA

44%



GERANIUM

37%



PANSY

31%



IMPATIENS

27%

What annuals weren't as popular as you'd thought they'd be with landscape contractors?



GERBERA

31%



MARIGOLD

28%



PENTA

26%



IMPATIENS

23%



COLEUS

22%

What are your top three anticipated annuals purchased by landscape contractors for 2015?



PETUNIA

54%



BEGONIA

47%



GERANIUM

40%



IMPATIENS

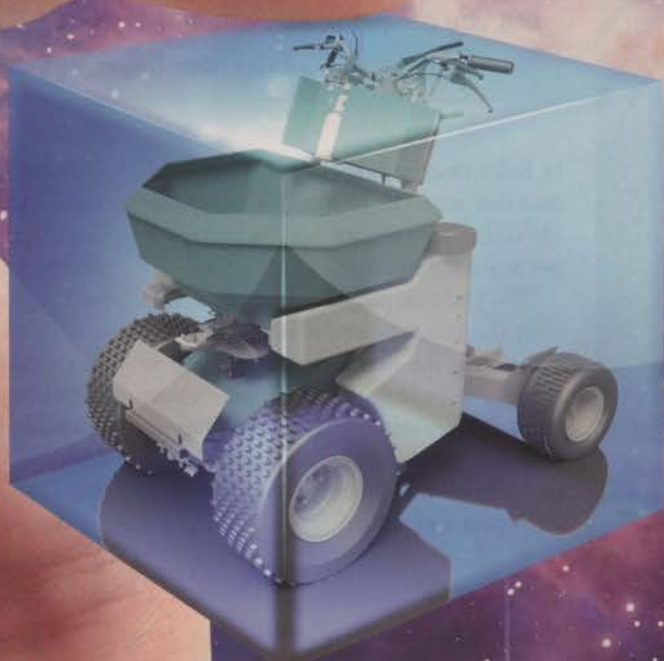
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Growers were surprised to find that gerberas, marigolds and pentas weren't as popular as they thought the flowers would be in 2014.

"People are always going to be interested in flowers that are hardy or that are low maintenance. But if you have something truly beautiful and you get passionate about that, they'll likely feel the same way."

— *Laura Hess, owner, Hickory Grove*

in bulbs despite the persistent issues with deer that might be required to have them. He says this is true not only in his region, but across the country.

"We find that people are willing to deal with the inconveniences associated with controlling the deer, such as spraying or fencing, in exchange for the vibrant colors that tulips provide," Ruigrok says. "But increasingly we are finding tulips being planted in urban areas and inner cities where deer don't pose a problem."

Ruigrok says that tulips remain the highest grossing bulb and he doesn't see that changing. "Tulips come in every color scheme imaginable and nothing pops in a landscape quite like them," Ruigrok says.

In the South, Tina Clark believes beauty is a critical factor in annual flower purchases. The manager of Carolina Garden World in Spartanburg, S.C. says that begonias are a big hit and she sees that trend carrying into 2015.

"We grow them and bring them in and

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"As we kick off a new season, don't be afraid of getting something new and trying it."

- Tina Clark, manager, Carolina Garden World

we still can't keep them in stock," Clark says.

"Between landscapers and homeowners buying direct, we find that they are incredibly popular and I don't see that changing in the new year."

Clark believes the popularity is related to their beauty. "They are so gorgeous and they keep growing and growing. While other flowers are finishing out their season, begonias stay full and beautiful. There's no doubt they're the 'it' flower around here. I am certain they're popular in many other parts of the country but because of our climate, I think they do particularly well in this region."



Tulips like 'Silver Parrot' have been popular in New York recently.

FACTORING COST. When it comes to truly beautiful flowers or just the right selection for a landscape, cost may also be less of a factor than once before.

Homeowners and commercial clients are at a point where they're willing to invest in their landscape again. According to Patti Pfeifer, program manager for the finished program at Center Greenhouse, cost is typically no longer the driving factor in annual selection.

"In Denver and the front range area we have found a big demand for impatiens and walleriana substitutes," Pfeifer says.

"We have seen strong sales for the sunpatiens, begonias and coleus. Even with the bigger price tag on these items compared to seed impatiens, landscapers are incorporating them in their designs."

Pfeifer says in her region, main pack items are also sold in big numbers and she sees that trend carrying into 2015.

"Salvias, farinacea and summer jewels, petunias, marigolds and

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zinnias are always strong sellers for commercial landscape jobs," she says. "Rudbeckia hirta varieties have also been very popular for their taller, bright back of the border use."

GETTING CREATIVE. While it's easy to get attached to certain annuals, opting for all of the same flowers or the same design each year is an easy way to get stuck in a rut.

Clark says her best advice to landscapers is to try something new. "As we kick off a new season, don't be afraid of getting something new and trying it," Clark says. "It's good to be differ-

ent. Most clients don't want their yard looking exactly like the next one. Throw in a new annual in your plant bed or try a different combination. Annuals give you the opportunity to add interest. Have a little fun with it."

"If you can get the client excited about it, it's a sell," Hess adds.

"People are always going to be interested in flowers that are hardy or that are low maintenance. But if you have something truly beautiful and you get passionate about that, they'll likely feel the same way." **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Philadelphia.



Petunias, begonias and geraniums topped the list of most popular landscape plants in 2014, according to our survey. Growers expect the same in 2015.

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CRITICAL CONTROL

The first lawn care applications of the year are designed to stop grassy weed growth before it germinates. **By Kristen Hampshire**

It's the kickoff to the lawn care season, and the first application in the annual series is a critical step in preventing stubborn grassy weeds. Pre-emergent herbicides go down as early as January in some areas of

the country, and late spring after snow melt in northern and Midwest states. Their purpose is to provide a barrier of protection against crabgrass, goosegrass, foxtail, barnyard grass and even some broadleaf weeds that crop up in the summer, such as oxalis or prostrate spurge.



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Adjuvants are designed to increase the safety and effectiveness of a lawn care treatment, and they include a wide class of products from buffering agents that are used when water pH is not ideal, to penetrants that allow a product to work through the thick gel of a plant or down into the turf canopy. Adjuvants are most often used with post-emergent herbicides that require foliar penetration for efficacy, but they are also used when spraying fungicides or insecticides, says Laurence Mudge, manager of the green solutions team at Bayer.

"Wetting agents can help post-emergent herbicides stay on leaves," Mudge says. "And, penetrators help the spray go down into the canopy to get the active ingredient down where you want it."

The most commonly used adjuvants are surfactants and methylated seed oil products. These are designed to help herbicides penetrate leaves in a post-emergent application, Mudge says.

Situations that call for adjuvants include when hot, dry weather causes weeds to dry out and develop an outer cuticle. "It's more difficult to control weeds because of the waxy surface on the weed, and that's an ideal time to use an adjuvant," says Jason Fausey, research and development specialist at NuFarm.

The main question to ask concerning adjuvants, Fausey says, is: Do you really need one?

Here are a few main classes of adjuvants and how they work:

- **Wetting agents:** Helps wettable powders mix with water
- **Spreaders:** Allows products to form a uniform coating layer
- **Stickers:** Prevents product "roll-off" and helps to stick on a plant or turf
- **Penetrants:** Helps product penetrate through the thick gel of a plant
- **Anti-foaming agents:** Reduce foam in sprays that require vigorous agitation
- **Emulsifiers:** Aid in mixing petroleum-based products with water (invert emulsifiers do the opposite)

"For lawn care operators, pre-emergents are the most critical weed control they have the whole season," says Jason Fausey, research and development specialist at NuFarm. "They really only have one opportunity to make that application, and that's prior to weeds germinating."

As with any lawn care application, timing is everything – and that's tricky business when balancing a generous roster of accounts that essentially need this pre-emergent application during the same relatively narrow window of time. Specifically, that's before weed seed germination and after soil temperatures level at 55 to 58 degrees at a 1-inch depth for four to five consecutive days.

"Timing is going to vary across the country, so the key is to monitor those soil temperatures," says Bobby Walls, product development manager for herbicides and fungicides at FMC.

Also important are application technique and product selection. "This is where the planning comes in," says Walls, suggesting that LCOs review their pre-emergent herbicide programs in fall, so they're prepared to dispatch the crews once the ground defrosts.

Still, it's not too late to seriously evaluate your pre-emergent herbicide protocol, including a review of best practices for application and understanding how tank mixing and adjuvants play into this, and other lawn

"For lawn care operators, pre-emergents are the most critical weed control they have the whole season. They really only have one opportunity to make that application, and that's prior to weeds germinating."

— Jason Fausey, research and development specialist at NuFarm.

care applications. Because, as Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist at BASF, points out, "The easiest and cheapest way to battle crabgrass is with a pre-emergent herbicide."

APPLICATION TIMING. Pre-emergent herbicides must be applied before weed seed germination occurs, and that can pose a challenge because there are varying environmental conditions even within a single lawn care route.

While application timing is based on an average soil temperature of 55 degrees (or some look to when forsythia bloom in the north, and dogwood in the south,) location gets even more specific than that.

Soil temperatures warm up faster on south-facing slopes. Bare spots in the turf also get warmer because they're directly exposed to sunlight, whereas lush turf keeps soil cooler for longer.

The strips of lawn abutting sidewalks or driveways pull in heat from pavement surfaces, which ups the soil temperature compared to the rest of the yard.

"Most LCOs take a look at the calendar, but they also need to take look at the application site," says David Loecke, herbicide product manager at PBI Gordon. "Take a look at the areas in which you need to make your application and make sure you're timing accordingly."

That means that properties on a route with south-facing lawns, for example, might get positioned first on the list for receiving a pre-emergent herbicide application. Or, one product might be used to treat properties earlier on in the route, while properties falling toward the end of the service cycle might get another

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LAWN CARE

product – perhaps one with a post-emergent mix to catch any weeds that have already started germinating.

As a rule, regions with a longer growing season will receive more than one pre-emergent herbicide application, Miller says.

For example, in the transition zone that includes his part of Virginia, first pre-emergent herbicide applications go down around Feb. 15 (depending on the weather), with a second round of product applied toward the end of March.

“With warm-season grasses further down south, you see LCOs doing up to four pre-



Pre-emergent herbicides go down as early as January in some areas of the country to protect against goosegrass.

emergent applications,” Miller says. Specifically, in Florida, LCOs might plan for three or four applications; they might do two applications in the Atlanta, Ga., area heading north toward

the transition zone.

“But one thing that we notice with some of the warm-season grass is they are more competitive to crabgrass because they’re a tropical grass just like

crabgrass,” Miller says. “Cool-season grasses start to get weak from summer stress and can’t compete with the crabgrass quite as well.”

Meanwhile, split applications can prolong control on a property and meet that every-eight-weeks visit window that many LCOs promise customers, says Laurence Mudge, manager of the green solutions team at Bayer.

“A lot of companies will apply a half rate, then maybe two months later they’ll come back and make another pre-emergent application,” he says. “There are agronomic and business reasons for doing that.” Some products

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just won't last through summer to prevent weed growth, Mudge says. "So you need to do two applications vs. one single one because if you only do one application in February, it may run out of gas by the time you get to July and August."

Mudge notes that this all depends on turf type and "the situation." Mainly, lawns that have a healthy turf stand will stand up to weeds.

"You are not putting as much pressure on your pre-emergent herbicide because your turf is providing enough competition that weeds don't germinate," he says. Mudge also points out that

fall is an important season for making pre-emergent herbicide applications for managing winter weeds, especially poa annua. (This applies to transition zone and down south.)

IMPROVING EFFICACY. Aside from timing, even application of the product is critical, Fausey says.

Sometimes, complaints from clients that weeds are sprouting in the lawn in spite of a pre-emergent application are because of missed spots during application.

"With pre-emergents, it's really important to have a perfect

barrier across the entire lawn to have perfect weed control," Fausey says. "If there are any skips or overlaps or breaks in the barrier, you'll find weeds that will germinate in those areas."

Also, these products need to be watered in within an average of seven to 10 days of application. "If you don't receive a rainfall and fail to use irrigation, the herbicide will not be released into the soil," Walls says.

On the other hand, too much rain can sabotage pre-emergent herbicide applications, says Dean Mosdell, technical manager for the western U.S. at Syngenta. "During warm, wet

springs, the active ingredients tend to break down faster in the soil," he says, noting that "crabgrass breakthroughs" can be treated upon germination with a post-emergent herbicide.

If you're planning on aerating properties in the spring, the pre-emergent application will still be effective. "Some of our research with pre-emergent herbicides shows that cultural practices like aeration will not affect the level of control," Mosdell says.

Same goes for seeding, Loeck points out. "If you are planning on seeding, there are certain pre-emergent products

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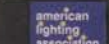
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out there you can use," he says, noting that it's critical to read the label because in a lot of instances, pre-emergent products can actually prevent the grass seed from germinating.

So many times, the success an LCO has with a lawn care product all depends on reading and following the label's recommendations.

"Some products might have a larger window of application time," Walls points out, noting that the label dictates application timing, technique and proper tank-mixing partners (if applicable). "It all comes back to the label," he says. **L&L**

MIX IT UP

Follow these tips to make tank mixing a success.

Tank mixing is an efficiency measure for lawn care companies that feel the pressure of servicing routes in limited windows of time. Mixing a fertilizer with an herbicide, for example, can give customers green-up results while controlling weeds – a one-two punch.

Specifically with herbicides, lawn care operators (LCOs) might mix a pre- and post-emergent product going into late spring to catch any weeds that have germinated in the lawn. This can happen in bare spots in turf, areas close to sidewalks and on south-facing slopes where the soil temperatures warm faster and weeds can crop up sooner than in other turf areas.

But before you tank mix any product, take a step back and ask yourself why, says Jason Fausey, research and development specialist at NuFarm. "You want to ensure that you're spending the time, money and effort on applying a product at the right time," he says, adding that mixing must be beneficial for the lawn and not just for the LCO's schedule.

Before you tank mix, here are some considerations to keep in mind.

PICK THE RIGHT PARTNER. Read the label and be sure the products you're mixing are meant to be combined. "You need to make sure your products are compatible, and some labels will

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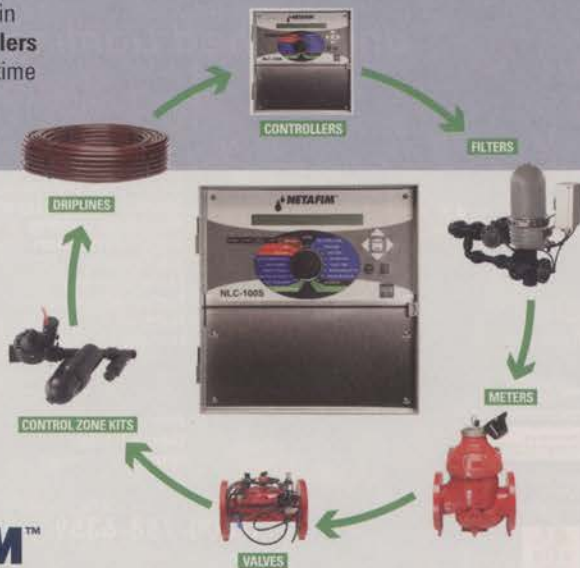
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The right tank mix can give customers greener lawns while controlling weeds.

tell you what products to mix – and what not to mix,” says Bobby Walls, product development manager for herbicides and fungicides at FMC.

DO A JAR TEST. Be sure the products you’re mixing will stay in suspension by performing a jar test before you prepare an entire tank, says Dean Mosdell, technical manager for the western U.S. at Syngenta. “Take the same ratio you’d use to apply the products then mix them together (in a jar),” he says. You want to be sure that the mixture stays uniform and no particles form at the bottom of the jar.

MIND THE MIXING ORDER. Mixing is relatively simple, but it’s not a matter of simply adding products and agitating. “You have to be careful of the mixing order when you’re adding multiple products,” says Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist for BASF. Dry products go into the mix first, followed by wettable powders, then water-dispersible granules (or dispersible granules), and next flowables or suspension concentrates. (Those products have the consistency of latex paint.) Finally, you can add emulsifiable concentrates. “You add the products that are easiest to mix toward the end,” Miller says.

GET WELL-EQUIPPED. There is a full range of tanks available on the market in a range of sizes. Some side-injection tanks allow LCOs

to customize the mix for the property, Mosdell says. “Equipment can vary widely for liquid applications, and rotary spreaders are

best for granular products,” he says, adding that swath size matters in terms of efficiency on the job. **L&L**

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NOT SO UNDERGROUND ANYMORE

Drip irrigation is growing in popularity, but there are still some misconceptions about it.

By Holly Hammersmith

With increased regulation of water usage and drought hitting some regions of the country, the use of drip irrigation is only expected to grow nationwide, system manufacturers say.

Mauricio Troche, director of landscape and turf at Netafim, says his company has been helping contractors retrofit large swaths of turf grass with drip irrigation systems on an increased basis.

A NARROWER PRICE POINT. Stuart Spaulding, customer and technical service manager for DIG, says he has read studies showing the difference in cost for installing a drip irrigation system compared to a traditional sprinkler system has narrowed.

“Obviously, you’ve got to do more digging with a sprinkler system than you do with the drip system,” Spaulding says.

There used to be a need for general education in some areas of the country where

drip irrigation isn’t as prevalent as it is other areas, like the Southwest, but that need has declined in recent years, Spaulding says.

“The product knowledge in the Southwestern states with the commercial contractors is pretty good because they’ve been using drip irrigation and low volume products for

Above: Technology advancements for drip irrigation systems have increased the popularity of the practice for contractors.



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IRRIGATION

a while now and so they kind of know the ins and outs of it," he added.

While drip irrigation can also be used in landscape beds, usually buried under a few inches of mulch, the bulk of training classes offered today by Netafim reps focus on turf installs.

"Drip irrigation is ... listed out at 90 to 95 percent efficient, meaning that the water you're putting down is being used. Most sprays and rotors are around the 60 percent, 65 percent range. So you're just using your water more efficiently, using less of it. So that's probably the number one selling feature in my opinion," Troche says.

FEW MISCONCEPTIONS REMAIN. Some contractors mistakenly believe drip irrigation systems require more maintenance than traditional sprinkler systems, but that isn't the case, Troche says.

Today, system emitters are protected and housed inside drip irrigation tubing. Tubing is placed under soil or mulch, making systems low maintenance and not easily kicked up or damaged during normal yard maintenance or use, he says. Basic maintenance includes flushing the system to remove any debris that may have entered the lines.

In the past, drip line users experienced issues with roots entering emitters and clogging them up, but those issues have been addressed, Spaulding says. At DIG, this meant educating contractors on proper scheduling so that the turf roots don't get stressed out looking for water, Spaulding adds.

"We've gotten feedback from people who seem to think that a drip system is something that just stays on 24/7. Of course, it's not. It has a longer duration than a typical sprinkler system but you still never leave it on all the time," Spaulding says.

Leaving the system on for too long does not promote healthy plants and turf.

Running the system too long can waste water through deep percolation, where water runs below the root systems of the plants. "Although it does end up in the water table, it's not being utilized by the plants," Spaulding says.



IMPROVED TECHNOLOGY AND EASE OF USE.

Emitter technology has improved and today they can filter out more soil and put out water at adjustable flow rates, depending on soil type, Troche says.

At Netafim, product refinement is a constant process. The company is currently on its 31st iteration of its emitter, with each change helping make the product more reliable and efficient, Troche says.

"I think the other misconception is having to use the top flow rates in clay soil where you're putting down too much water for what the soil can take, so therefore you start creating runoffs," he says.

At DIG, engineers are working on solar-powered timers, controllers and systems to give added sustainability benefits to an already earth-friendly system, Spaulding says.

AN EASIER SELL GOING FORWARD. While drip irrigation is still most popular in the arid climate of the Southwest, where plant root zones are only a few inches beneath grade, Troche says these systems are beneficial in any climate.

In the Northeast or Northwest, where rainfall is more prevalent, that natural rainfall is actually more helpful in reviving a lawn or landscape bed where drip irrigation was recently installed.



LEFT: Drip irrigation installation isn't limited to only turf, as is shown in this planter project. **ABOVE:** After the project is done correctly, clients will have healthy-looking plants.

"Because you're going to get some rain to back you up and be able to help cover some of that area," Troche says. "Some guys (in the Southwest) would do supplemental irrigation and spray over the top for a few weeks while the turf gets established."

Contractors that offer drip installs have a competitive advantage when many of their competitors are only offering spray heads, Troche adds.


"Runoff from sprinkler systems can carry fertilizer into places where it doesn't want to go and with drip you don't have to worry about that," he says.

Drip irrigation manufacturers know firsthand the challenge of selling their product.

"Sometimes it's hard for people to change. Sometimes you have to kind of push them, and one of the things that's pushing them is the high price of water and restrictions that are being imposed in some parts of the country," Spaulding says. Because of that, manufacturers say customer requests for drip irrigation are only expected to increase, due to constraints on natural resources.

"They're going to want to know if a contractor has the ability and the knowledge and the experience to do that," Spaulding says. "If a contractor is not up to speed on drip, I think it would be a very good business decision to look into it because it's definitely going to be growing segment going forward." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

A hand holding a silver stopwatch in front of a tree trunk. The stopwatch is the central focus, with its face clearly visible. The background is a lush green forest with sunlight filtering through the leaves.

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Spring is just around the corner, and with it comes the threat of tree diseases, something your team may be ill-prepared for. “Generally speaking, your diseases by and large are regional anomalies if you will,” says Nate Dodds, owner of Mauge Tree Injection in Arcadia, Calif.

The diseases may not necessarily be new, they’re just something you aren’t familiar with because they haven’t been as prominent in the past.

“There are a number of diseases that have been here a while that get worse when weather conditions change,” says Rob Gorden, director of urban forestry and business development with Arborjet in Woburn, Mass. “Some of these diseases are getting worse because temperatures and moisture levels are increasing in parts of the country.”

RECOGNIZE THE THREATS. Diseases tend to thrive in areas with higher moisture levels because it’s easier for their spores to travel from one leaf to the next. According to Gorden, Oak wilt is an issue all the way from Texas up to Michigan.

A fungal disease, it can be spread by insects and

KNOW THE ENEMY

With the disease forecast changing year to year, it’s important to be aware of potential problems.

By Katie Tuttle

through underground roots from an infected tree to a healthy tree.

Jim Rollins, eastern sales representative for Mauge, says fire blight hit the Midwest hard last year. “It was mostly on pear trees,” he says. “I think it has something to do with the harsh winter we had last year, so we’ll probably be dealing with it next spring.”

He also says bacterial leaf scorch hit the Midwest, mostly on oak trees ranging from New Jersey to Milwaukee.

“Diplodia tip blight seems to be getting progressively worse each year,” he says. “Root rot seems like it comes and goes. I suspect it follows a heavy rain year when you have a lot of soil moisture. We’re coming off a rather dry year so it probably won’t be a problem.”

“Many of these new pests coming into the country are actually insect vectored diseases, meaning the insects bring the disease as food,” Gorden says. “That’s going to become more and more of a problem in the U.S.”

Dodds says a variety of Fusariums, one of these insect vectored diseases, are becoming a concern

in Florida. "Out here, we've got a *Fusarium* disease being spread by a relatively new insect," he says. "The borer causes damage to the tree but the most devastating part of the infestation is that it deposits a few *Fusarium* spores within the tree and that *Fusarium* is a food source for the hatching larvae to feed on."

Not only does it provide a food source for the insects, but the fungal disease is a vascular plugging disease that will kill the tree.

Dodds says another concerning one is the polyphagous shot hole borer in California.

"It can kill up to 200 different tree species in the California area and can reproduce on 20 of those," he says. "It's spreading. It started out around L.A. and has spread up to Pasadena and San Diego." He says as of now, no one is certain how far it's going to expand.

START WITH A GOOD DEFENSE. Gorden says it's important to remember that tree care is different than lawn care, especially when it comes to diseases.

"When something is wrong with the lawn, it's really obvious really quickly," he says. "Replacing lawns is much, much less expensive than a tree that suddenly dies on you. Tree problems tend to take a longer time. I hear from our clients that they don't begin noticing calls come in from their customers until the tree is dire."

The best form of treatment is to prevent them from happening in the first place, something easier said than done. "It's hard to prevent (tree diseases) when the problems are moisture and spores," Gorden says.

He says the best way to prevent diseases is to keep the trees as healthy as possible. "Just like in humans, plants are attacked by diseases more commonly when they're under stress," he says. "It has everything to do with your body being stressed out and being more susceptible. It's that way with trees as well."

"Generally your greatest chance of preventing a disease is to maintain a tree's health in the first place," Rollins says. He suggests a pruning schedule, adequate fertilizer, insect control, making sure the tree gets sufficient moisture (without getting too much) and presenting a preventative fungicide or antibiotic program.

FIND THE RIGHT TREATMENT. So you did everything you could and a customer's tree got infected anyway. Never fear, there are treatment options available to help, although when it comes to treating the diseases, the options can vary as much as the diseases themselves.

Because of this, it's important to properly diagnose the problem and be well equipped with the knowledge

"I hear from our clients that they don't begin noticing calls come in from their customers until the tree is dire."

— Rob Gorden,
Arborjet



Oak wilt



Fire blight



Bacterial leaf scorch



Diplodia tip blight

of what effect the disease will have on the tree. "Treating for fungal diseases is probably a much more difficult part of a contractor's service because it's considerably much more difficult to diagnose and read the symptoms of a tree," Dodds says. "It requires a lot more study on the contractor's part and gaining of knowledge to know what he's got."

Dodds says your best bet is to consult with your local university extension to get up to speed on what's active in your area. The extension might also have suggestions on what products are recommended for treatment.

If a university extension isn't available in your area, go to a local grower. They'll know the predominant diseases, the symptoms and how to recognize them.

"There are a lot of good resources available to get them started," Rollins says. "I would encourage landscape contractors and others in the business to consider getting into the tree care health part because it's a service a lot of their clients can benefit from."

"For most (diseases) the infection point occurs in the fall or early spring when the trees are blossoming or coming out of dormancy," Dodds says. "The symptoms do not manifest themselves until mid- to late summer."

There are two treatment options that can help control tree diseases: trunk injection and foliar applications. When you start dealing with larger trees, particularly in an urban area, Rollins suggests using trunk injection. "It's more systemic in nature, and affects the vascular parts of the tree," he says.

He says it's a good idea to treat these before the disease can be heavily established and cause damage.

"It's not a bad idea to provide an application the second or third year after you've identified a disease," he says. "That way you've completely eradicated the disease and reduced the possibility that it comes back immediately." Treatments for tree diseases don't require specific certifications, other than what your pesticide applicator should have already.

"Generally they're going to be administered through a trunk injection application," Dodds says. "Thereby you have very little environmental exposure; they're safe chemicals to use."

However, every state has its own licensing procedure to apply pesticides in the commercial form and you must have your state licensing in order to be able to buy and sell these products to your clients.


"It may be the basic license required," Gorden says. "However, the good news is most landscape contractors who are already doing lawn care may already have the license for tree and shrub care." **L&L**



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Whether you are a man or
woman, the qualities of a
true leader are the same.

By Jennifer Lemcke

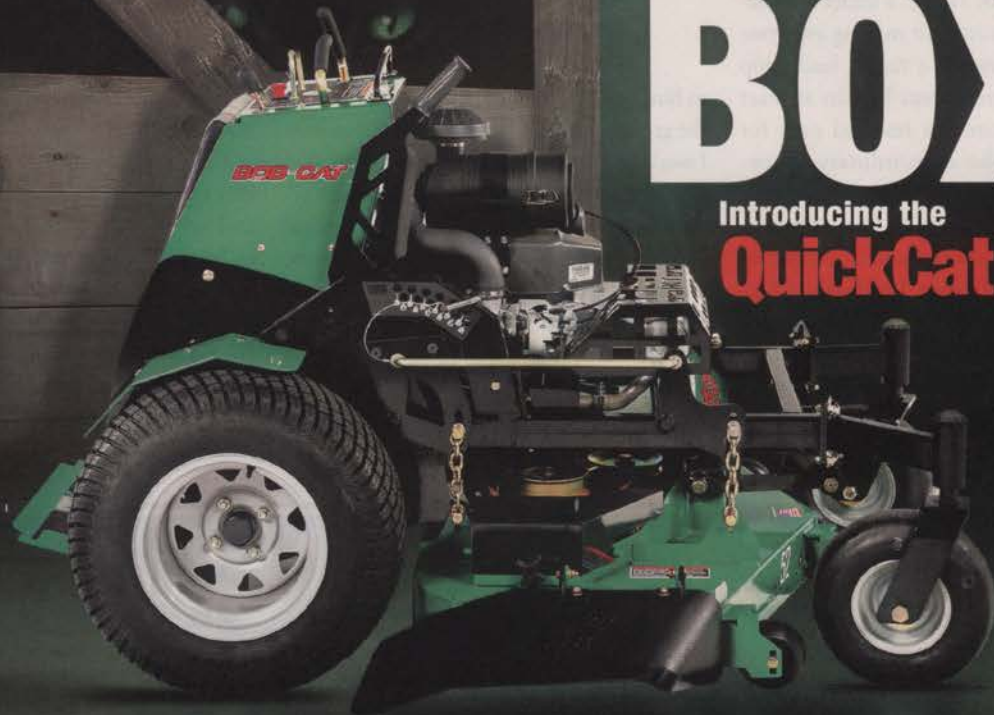


When I was first asked by Kristen Fefes, executive director of the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado, to go to Colorado and speak about leadership and women in industry, I was so unbelievably humbled. I actually thought she could give this talk. I have always viewed her as a leader in our industry. I just come into the office every day and do, so I don't really think of myself in any particular light.

That being said, I think that if anybody has a chance to sit down and reflect on what they've done and where they've come from, they should definitely jump at the opportunity. It's an incredible soul-searching experience, as all too often we don't give ourselves enough

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credit for our accomplishments. For the first time in a very long time, I looked back on my life and thought, "Wow, I really did accomplish something!" It was almost therapeutic. Not only did I love giving the presentation, I loved working on and preparing for it as well.

A LEADER DEFINED. To me, a leader is someone who is committed to making everyone around them better. To many, leadership



Lemcke

may seem like an abstract concept reserved only for the extraordinary. However, during his popular TED Talk, Drew Dudley, speaker and founder of Nuance Leadership Development Services, stated, "We've all changed someone's life – usually without even realizing it." To me, that's what leadership is – improving lives. Every person has a choice when they get out of bed in the morning. They can choose to have a good day and make everyone around them better, or they can choose to have a bad day.

Who I am (in this order) Like many people, I take on so many roles in my day-to-day life:

I'm a mother. It amazes me how much my children, Jessica, Justin and Joshua, inspire me every day. While growing up, I used to look up to my parents (still do), thinking that they were guiding me, coaching me, shaping me. I felt they had the secret recipe for raising children. Now, as a parent, I realize that there is no secret recipe; you just help guide and hope you are doing a good job. This made me aware that even as parents, we are still evolving as people. My kids help me in that process. I guess I am still growing up and learning.

My kids have probably taught me the most about managing people. Management and leadership are very much like raising kids – three individuals going through life with the exact same parents, yet all require very different levels of parenting. Each one of them continues to inspire me to be better.

I'm a wife. I have a very understanding husband. He's a terrific father and I owe a lot

I felt they had the secret recipe for raising children. Now, as a parent, I realize that there is no secret recipe. You just help guide and hope you are doing a good job.



to him. Having a spouse that is supportive is the greatest gift you can get in life. Chris and I work very hard together at Weed Man, but we always take time to have fun, leaving it all at the office. We both enjoy being parents and love being active with our kids' sports and social activities.

I'm a daughter ... and an employee. Although I'm a daughter first, I'm always aware that I also have a job to do. It certainly adds a complexity to the role because my father is

CEO of Weed Man, but I wouldn't change it for the world.

I'm a chief operating officer. I truly feel that my role here is to serve our franchisees and my staff. I have been extremely lucky to have incredible people around me. My favorite part is being a coach. That's a conundrum that many small businesses face. Many landscapers, for example, love being on the front lines with members of their staff. However, if you want to grow beyond that



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\$1-million or \$2-million mark, you have to learn to let go and be a coach to your employees.

I'm a friend. I really count on my circle of friends to help guide me through being a mother, wife, daughter, employee and boss. Friends have been and will always be a crucial part of my network.

I'm myself. All of the above is me. I think it's very normal for women to put themselves last.

The way I laid out who I am is very deliberate and ties into the compass theme I selected for my presentation. Although this list reflects my life now and how it should be 100 percent of the time, my priorities shifted

I think every person has a choice when they get out of bed in the morning. They can choose to have a good day and make everyone around them better, or they can choose to have a bad day.



around frequently over the years. Sometimes my kids were fourth. I tried to keep them first, but it didn't always happen that way. That's why the compass is important – it helps keep me grounded. There are times when

you are going to have to readjust because you've lost your way or you've put your career before your family.

Women and leadership. Over the course of my career, I have done quite a bit of research

on leadership and people who take charge. I found the "Traits of a True Leader" list from a Harvard Business Review study to ring especially true:

- Empathy
- Vulnerability
- Humility
- Inclusiveness
- Generosity
- Balance
- Patience

Generally speaking, I think that women are more prone to these types of traits. Throughout my life, I've gone through phases during which I'm better at one quality than another, but this is constantly changing and evolving.

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According to the study conducted over the course of 10 years, women make up more than half of the current workforce. In an analysis of 16 competencies, women outperformed men in 10 out of 16 categories.

Then why is it that as you move up the organization, only 3 percent of women are CEOs and only 14 percent are senior executives? There is obviously a disparity at play.

Several factors impact the leadership gap:

- I don't want the role – child bearing age, guilt factor (I should be with my sick child,) family balance
- I can't succeed in the role

– no mentorship, “Others haven't done it; how can I do it?”

- I can't have the role – no formal systems in place that promote gender parity

This gave me a chance to reflect on my own personal experiences as a female in a leadership role. Both Weed Man and my father have always treated everyone fairly and equally. He has always been a huge advocate of promoting the right person for the job, regardless of background. I love that I help grow a company that allows everyone an equal opportunity.

How do we improve the leadership gap?

- Initiate formal mentoring programs. This is a great opportunity for organizations to set up networking and mentoring programs for women.

- Create development opportunities in the workplace. Be deliberate about it.

- Recruit internally.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN.

For this presentation, I was asked to brainstorm opportunities that I believe exist for women in our industry. It is my firm belief that every position within the green industry is available to a woman. However, I don't think women should be given high-level jobs simply because they're female.

I think every position should be earned by the best person for the job. Women may have to work a little harder than men to achieve leadership roles, but it makes us better in the long run. You need to work hard and be smart, surround yourself with great people and believe in yourself.

I can honestly say that waking up every single day is a pleasure. I'm not sure if it is maturity or rather cycles in life, but I am comfortable with who I am, and I am surrounded by incredible people that make me love what I do. **L&L**

The author is chief operating officer of Turf Holdings/Weed Man USA.

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Easier than it seems

You might have plenty of the necessary building blocks for completing SN 9001 certification as a snow and ice management company and not even know it.

By Holly Hammersmith

THE WORD CERTIFICATION CAN BE A DIRTY ONE to some companies. The thought of taking months to earn a stamp of approval is a turnoff to owners who have businesses to run.

But a certification can set you apart from your competition and be used as a great marketing tool. In the snow industry, contractors can earn SN 9001 certification through the Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA).

“It’s something that’s really exciting for the industry, says Neal Glatt, account executive for Attleboro Falls, Mass.-based Case Snow Management.

Glatt’s company began the certification process in advance of the 2013-2014 season.

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“We work with a lot of customers who have achieved ISO certification for themselves and their industries. Having the ISO certification really communicates to them how organized, how detail-oriented, how processed we are.”

— Neal Glatt, account executive, Case Snow Management

“It lends some legitimacy to an industry that’s been forgotten for a long time. We’re excited about more companies joining us in this process to help us really change snow and ice into something that’s viewed as a legitimate industry like landscape is,” he says.

WHAT CERTIFICATION MEANS. ISO 9001 is a well-known industry standard for quality management created by the International Organization for Standardization and has been used in the manufacturing sector for years. SN 9001 certification is exclusive to snow and ice management contractors and works in conjunction with ISO 9001.

The certification process starts with a pre-assessment of the business. Then management must configure to address any concerns brought up during that pre-assessment. This may include the creation of or refinement of internal documents such as training materials, check lists for safety meetings, job descriptions and more, says Matt Boelman, co-owner and vice president of Des Moines, Iowa-based Perficut.

Perficut, a landscape management and snow and ice management company with revenue of \$15.5 million in 2014, earned its certification in July. They employ 70 full-time employees, but have as many as 160 during peak times.

“When SN 9001 certification became available, the highest level of industry standard certification, it just made sense for us to seek that out. It added some real value to our company, not only from an educational standpoint, but from an operational standpoint,” Boelman says.

Boelman also serves as co-chair of the ASCA educational committee.

“We feel as a company, we need to be involved to the highest levels of education and standards held within the industry. So, it was a no-brainer for us to pursue it,” he says.

After all of the documents were in place, Perficut underwent the three-day audit and passed. If a company passes the audit they earn certification but must continue to adhere to SN 9001 standards and pass an annual audit to maintain their credentials.

HOW CONTRACTORS GET THERE. For many contractors, the process was straightforward, although labor intensive. Following the pre-assessment, Boelman says he decided to hire a compliance manager who would spearhead the documentation requirements. That individual is now a permanent part of the Perficut staff. Once certified, contractors must take part in an annual audit to ensure the company continues to follow SN 9001 standards.

Passing the initial audit is not only a big sigh of relief, but it adds credibility to a contractor’s business.

“It’s put us on just a complete higher level of procedures here in our office because we’ve got to follow these in order to pass our audit [again in the future,]” Boelman says. “I would call maybe the first part of getting certified as the easy test and keeping your certification and following up to the guidelines that are set forth, that we set forth as a company now is the hard part. We’re asking everyone within the company to follow a set of procedures and then there is proof and documentation that these procedures are followed.”

Glatt says the initial certification process at his company took about nine months. More than 450 people work at Case Snow during the peak season. Last year revenue was at \$10 million.

“The whole thing started with defining where our processes were and how things were handled in the business,” he says. “We found that we were doing a lot of the things already, but we didn’t have documentation of them and so documentation was a really big part of what we did.”

As someone in a management role, Boelman says many of the processes required for SN 9001 were already in his head - it was just a matter of extracting that information and documenting it.

“It’s been absolutely wonderful. It’s for companies who really want to be at that next level. When I say at that next level, it’s peace of mind of knowing that your business is running the way you’re telling the public it’s running,” he says.



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THE POWER OF THIRD-PARTY VERIFICATION.

An advantage with SN 9001 certification is that its sister certification, ISO 9001, is already well known and respected among other industries – including some clients, Glatt says.

“It certainly gives us more credibility in the marketplace,” he says. “We work with a lot of customers who have achieved ISO certification for themselves and their industries. Having the ISO certification really communicates to them how organized, how detail-oriented, how processed we are.”

For his industrial clients in particular, certification has been integral to business, as these clients already often have ISO certification themselves and understand the value of that third-party verification, says Chad Oberson, president of Oberson’s Snow and Ice Management, a Fairfield, Ohio-based company that just earned SN 9001 certification in December. About 30 in-house employees (plus additional contractors) work at Oberson’s during the winter, and revenue in 2014 was \$7 million.

Oberson, too, devoted a single person to help with the bulk of the documentation. In his case, it was an individual in an administrative role that had helped an electrical company through certification in a prior role.

“I’m one of the smaller companies that has done it. I think in the long run, it’s going to help our company have much better operations, have much better paper trails, liability risks will be lowered and I think it will be used as a marketing tool,” Oberson says. “It’s definitely for a certain size operation. You don’t need to do this if you’re doing just a handful of accounts.”

Consultants can also be hired to assist with the process, Glatt says.

TIPS FOR MANAGING THE PROCESS. Oberson is quick to point out that owner and management buy-in is paramount – from understanding the process, supporting it and financing it – in making sure certification is reached.

“You have to have that admin person that



We asked **ASCA executive director Kevin Gilbride** to debunk some of the misconceptions about the SN 9001 certification process.

Myth: ISO 9001/SN 9001 are for the manufacturing industry.

Fact: While very popular for manufacturing companies, ISO 9001 is a quality management system for business, both manufacturing and service-related businesses.

Myth: The certification is tremendously expensive.

Fact: You may have to adjust some practices to comply with ISO 9001, but a drastic cost investment is fictitious. The cost for the audit is based on number of full time employees, so the cost is relative to your size. The costs are averaging \$1,200 per audit day plus travel. First year audits for large snow and ice management companies are averaging two and a half days. Audit times are less in subsequent years.

Myth: Preparing for the ISO/SN 9001 audit is time-consuming.

Fact: A well-run snow and ice management company is already on the way to being ready for its audit. I have seen companies commit to the process and be ready in as few as four weeks.

Myth: We have to change everything we do to comply.

Fact: No you don’t. You need to document and measure what you do. You may have to tweak how you measure your success or add a process for correcting mistakes.

you can say, focus on this, this is what you need to focus on to get this implemented, not the owner,” he says.

Many of the certification requirements are not difficult to accomplish, but take time and diligence on the part of management, Glatt says.

“Understand the commitment, because it is continuous. It’s not something that you go out and earn one time and then move on,” he says. “It’s something that you really live, and you need to be prepared for that commitment before you enter it.”

Oberson was surprised by how smooth the

process was, once started. “I think everybody thinks there’s like this whole new plan you’ve got to do,” he says. “The biggest thing is, we already do all this stuff in a roundabout way, we just might have to tweak it a little bit, or put it in writing.”

In the end, the diligence needed to see certification through is worth it.

“Once you’re through the grind, you look back and say, ‘I’m not sure how we did this, how we operated without this.’” Boelman says. **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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TIPS FROM THE TOP

Interviewed by **CHUCK BOWEN**



Greg Shannon

// GENERAL MANAGER

I worked with my brother-in-law, who had a small landscape company, summers and after school and holidays. I'm a little bit of a workaholic so I just enjoy being out, cutting grass and mulching. I went to Virginia Tech where I got a degree in landscape architecture.

It's not just reckless spending. Everyone got a little wiser, both from the consumer and the landscape business side of things. You can't get away with the stupid stuff you used to be able to get away with. It's been good for us because a lot of the fly-by-night guys are kind of tossed to the wayside.

Our offices are not far from downtown, about 9 miles outside of the city limits. Ninety-five percent of our business is a high net worth individual: CEOs of companies, attorneys, modern business leaders. That other 5 percent would be institutional work. We do work with the

Smithsonian, the National Mall, the museums. We do work at the National Zoo.

I've been in the lion and tiger exhibit, an arm's reach away from a lion. Yeah, it is pretty neat. We get to see some pretty cool stuff kind of behind the scenes, which is fun.

Residential doesn't seem to bring in too many big players, which is really kind of surprising to me. It's a tough business. It's very customer centric; it's very service-oriented, but the margins are so much better than commercial.

And it's such a relationship-driven business, not price-driven, so you can really build a strong relationship with somebody. And if price does become an issue you can have a conversation about it, not necessarily just lose the job because you're not the lowest bid.

I try to spend 70 percent of my time working on bigger picture stuff that's not necessarily tied to day-to-day operations, and more strategic, more growth-oriented.

One of our biggest threats all the time is finding great people and then retaining great people.

I spend a lot of time recruiting to ensure that we have a pipeline of folks. In this market, we could easily outsell our ability to produce work just because we can't find enough good, qualified people.

Our number one driver of new employees is referrals. And so really having a good, healthy work environment where people are excited to be a part of the company helps. We have a referral program where they get paid basically a bonus – a referral bonus based on the level of employee that you bring in. That's really where we have the most success.

We do a lot of college recruiting. There's nothing better than a good internship program where you're getting students through the door, having a good experience, and they go back and sell your company for you.

Focus on building a great culture, and then ensuring that people that you have are great fits to that culture that you want. When you don't have the right people that fit your culture, you're going to stagnate. But if you can get those aligned: great fit, great culture with great people, growth is explosive.

Everybody on the top management team needs to be constantly improving personally. When I started here we were a \$4 million company and now we're a \$17 million company. Our goal is in two years to be over \$20 million. And to lead that I've got to make sure that I'm really pushing myself – from reading books to attending seminars to building kind of a support network of good people. **L&L**

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Company: Wheat's Landscape **Location:** Vienna, Va. **Top 100 Ranking:** 88 **2014 Revenue:** \$17 million



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