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HE SCORES

IN THE MIDDLE OF A PUNISHING DROUGHT, Chris Angelo is making millions tearing out turf and changing the way people think about their landscape.

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PG. 25

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PG. 30



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BREAKING INTO THE BIG EASY

MULLIN LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATES began as a modest design/build outfit working on projects as New Orleans slowly recovered from Hurricane Katrina. Today, the full-service firm has the reputation and resources to make an even bigger impact.

When other parts of the country were slogging through the recession and clients who typically spent dollars on landscape enhancements were gripping their wallets, Mullin Landscape Associates was a small upstart in post-Katrina New Orleans – small enough, nimble enough and connected enough to become part of



The Big Easy's rehabilitation. **Chase Mullin**, left, who grew up working summers for a family friend's homebuilding business, was looking to carve a niche for himself and grow a career of some kind. "I didn't want to be a home builder," he says. "I didn't want to be a subcontractor."

Visit bit.ly/llmullin to read the rest of the story.

When ya gotta go...

We have a lot of weird conversations around the L&L office, but sometimes these talks actually turn into stories. In this case, we wanted to know where your crews go to the bathroom. Yes, it's a silly topic, but one we've heard a few different responses to over the years. So, we want to know from you. Email Managing Editor **Brian Horn** at bhorn@gie.net, and if we get some good responses, we'll publish them anonymously.



Keeping qualified employees on staff is a key factor to success, especially during the busiest time of the year.

Summer labor lessons

WHEN IT COMES TO MANAGING crews during the summer season, making sure jobs are staffed by quality employees is priority No. 1.

The last thing a landscaping contractor wants to deal with during the height of the summer is an employee who doesn't show up for work or who quits in the middle of a job. What's a business owner to do when a labor issue arises in the midst of the industry's busiest season? At bit.ly/summerlabor, the leaders of two landscaping companies share their secrets for bridging labor gaps as well as finding the right employees and keeping them around all summer long.

For tips on how to keep your crews safe while working in the extreme heat, turn to page 8.



PROTECT YOURSELF

When an employee leaves your company, they could be taking some of your business with them. Jason Cupp, former business owner and now growth consultant, discusses some of the ways to keep your clients.

bit.ly/protectcupp



BLAST FROM THE PAST

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CHEVROLET 

EDITOR'S INSIGHT

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

America's drought

The drought in California isn't unique to our friends in the Golden State, or even the Southwest. The drought that's punishing so much of the country is America's drought. And I don't mean that the historic drop in precipitation our friends on the left coast are experiencing will make its way east.

What I mean is that the impact of this drought – the shift in attitudes toward turf, how we think about water in the landscape and the technology and applications that landscapers are using to deal with it – is being felt and going to be felt for years to come across the entire country.

This spring, California Governor Jerry Brown mandated that the state decrease its water consumption by 25 percent by June. KB Homes, one of the largest homebuilders in the country, has phased out most turf in its California front yards, opting instead for xeriscapes. In Texas, local builders broke ground on the country's first subdivision that runs all of its irrigation on graywater.

All of this can be boggling for someone

like me who lives in Ohio. We have plenty of water. Our problem is our inability to manage it adequately during the rainy season, and where to put all that snow during the winter. And while the weather in the West might not make it all the way to your headquarters, the trend is coming from California. This drought is going to make a lasting change on the entire landscape industry – and it's mostly positive.

Something that's missing in a lot of the coverage about how much water it takes to produce a single almond or a bottle of beer is the opportunity that this drought and watering restrictions present for the green industry. I don't just mean the incentive programs that will pay you upward of \$3 a square foot to rip out healthy turf. The water crisis has people across the country realizing they need to change the way their homes are landscaped. That means that California and the West are about to undergo the largest landscape renovation in the history of the state.

I've said for years that water management



services are the place to be for anyone working in the green industry. Help your customers manage an increasingly scarce and increasingly expensive resource, and you'll make yourself increasingly valuable. Because even as the West dries up, people's interests and desires don't change. They still want their homes to be landscaped, still want to entertain and enjoy the outside space at their home. What that looks like will have to change – it is changing as we speak – but the best person to help make that change is you. – *Chuck Bowen*

Lawn & Landscape

Leading business media for landscape contractors.

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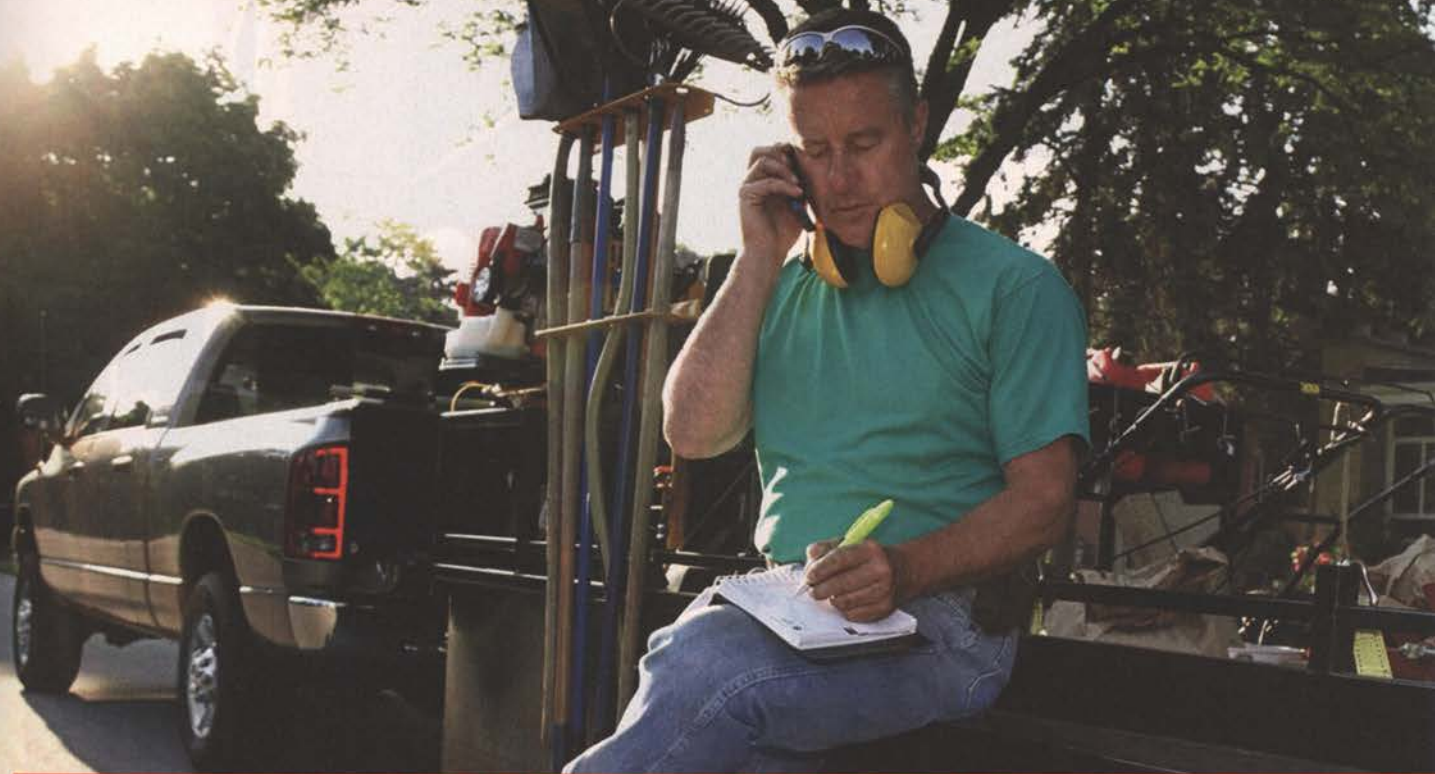
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BEAT THE HEAT

As summer temperatures rise, landscape contractors try these tricks for maintaining employee productivity and safety. **By Julie Collins**

When summer heat sets in, many landscape companies fall back on one tried-and-true strategy: getting an early start.

For JubileeScape, a commercial and residential landscape management company in Mobile, Ala., that means getting to the first job of the day as soon as there is enough light to see by — although employees don't start on residential projects before 6 a.m., says Robin Luce, president and owner.

Dixie Landscape, a landscape

maintenance company that serves homeowners associations and commercial properties in the area surrounding Dade, Fla., also schedules early start times so crews can wrap up the workday sooner on days with particularly high temperatures. And in Troy, Ohio, where Ever-Green Turf and Landscape is located, work starts an hour to an hour and a half earlier when temperatures are forecasted to reach 90 to 95 degrees, says General Manager Kirk Persinger.

But starting the workday early is only one strategy landscape

businesses use when the mercury rises. Here are some other key considerations that come into play when the heat settles in for the summer.

TRAIN CREWS TO STAY SAFE.

During yearly training, employees of Ever-Green Turf and Landscape learn about the signs of heat exhaustion and dehydration so they know what to look for once summer temperatures arrive. Crew chiefs in particular are on alert for signs of trouble.

"When it's warm out, I'm in constant contact with my guys,"

Persinger says. "Crew chiefs may get tired of hearing from me, but I check in every couple of hours to make sure everything is OK."

At JubileeScape, supervisors and foremen keep an eye out for employees who look overheated or disoriented. "When we have heat waves, we'll talk about how we can take care of the guys. It's about communication," Luce says. He adds that JubileeScape employees have never dealt with a heat stroke or other serious health problems resulting from heat exposure.

"We have had people get

overheated, though," Luce says. "We'll send them to the doctor in a moment if they need it. Otherwise, we encourage them to drink plenty of fluids and rest."

KNOW WHEN TO TAKE BREAKS.

Encouraging rest and fluids are common strategies for helping landscaping crews deal with the heat, but employees need to take responsibility as well. "We let the guys and girls manage their bodies themselves. They know their bodies more than we do. If they need two or three breaks before lunch, that's what they do. I don't set any schedules," Persinger says. "When the heat gets like this out there, whenever you need a break or need water, you do what you need to do."

Jeff Reamer, president of Dixie Landscape, says his company stresses common sense with employees when it comes to extreme heat, as does Luce.

"One size doesn't fit all. We have reasonable expectations. If someone gets hot, they sit down, take a break, get something to drink. If someone is abusing breaks, that's a management issue we deal with."

How frequently employees need breaks also depends on the nature of work they're doing, Luce adds. For instance, he says employees walking around with backpack sprayers or digging in the dirt for extended periods have to be more cautious than those riding on a lawn mower.

KEEP CREWS COOL. Although the responsibility for staying safe falls in large part on employees' shoulders, many companies also



OPPOSITE PAGE: Ever-Green Turf and Landscape starts work an hour to an hour and a half early when temperatures are expected to reach 90 degrees, and shuts down if they reach 95 at noon.

ABOVE: JubileeScape supervisors and foremen keep an eye out for overheated or disoriented employees.

take steps to assist crews in the field. For instance, Dixie Landscape makes sure every vehicle has a working air conditioner when temperatures rise.

Luce says his company stocks plenty of water on every truck, which is a priority for Ever-Green Turf and Landscape, too. "We make sure we have 5-gallon coolers in the back of the truck and refill them with ice cold water at lunchtime so crews don't have to go out of their way to get something cold to drink," Persinger says.

ADJUST TO HIGHER TEMPS. In Florida, "nature seems to bring the heat on slowly, and we acclimate to it," Reamer says. "Basically, we follow the flow of nature, so by the time the peak of it comes we're in shape for it."

Most employees do get accustomed to working in high temperatures, Luce adds. "I do have sympathy for those guys, but the heat is a fact of life."

However, some people handle the heat better than others. "If guys just can't take the heat, they don't work out," he admits.

Persinger offers an example to further illustrate this fact. "Last year, we had an employee whose body reacted very badly to the heat once it got about 86 or 87 degrees. He'd come in early and work and take vacation or personal time if temperatures got high," Persinger says.

Eventually, however, the employee decided to take a different job.

CALL IT A DAY. What's considered "too hot" varies from region to region and also depends on what type of job landscape crews are tackling.

Yet most companies do have an informal sense of when "hot" becomes "too hot." When those "too hot" temperatures hit, management may make the decision to call it a day early.

"We don't want these guys

working in the heat when it becomes a safety issue and a productivity issue," Luce says.

If it gets too hot, he says they're better off saying, "Let's go home and get an early start tomorrow."

Although the goal is to be as productive as possible, at some points, Luce admits his company just has to say, "We've done all we can get done today."

For Ever-Green Turf and Landscape, if temperatures get up to 95 or 96 degrees at noon, the company shuts down for the day.

"It's too hot for employees and the yards. We don't want to damage plants or turf," Persinger says. In fact, in 2013, Persinger says the whole company shut down for a couple of days due to heat index readings up to 115 degrees.

"That doesn't happen very often," Persinger says. But when extreme heat occurs, it's smart to get employees out of the sun.

The author is a freelance writer based in Lincoln, Ill.

For more news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com

Fair compensation

Q: I'm looking for an office manager for our company, because I'm overwhelmed with the office duties.

I have one reference from a friend for a person who worked at a pesticide company for 5 years and helped see the company grow from \$1.5-\$3 million. He ran the office/employees and helped to sell too.

He is asking for \$50,000-\$60,000 in salary along with a 5 percent cut from the profit. I'm not comfortable with that. What are some creative ways to pay for someone like this?



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS

A: First, determine what this job entails. Assemble a job description, performance metrics, performance evaluation, pay range, etc. Then, build some good screening and interviewing questions. Finally, make a list of everything you want them to be doing and how their success will be measured.

Be careful with candidates that have too high of compensation expectations or have been accus-

tomized to making more than 20 percent of what you can afford.

If they are truly a good fit and a fair deal can be made for both parties, then continue to the next step: determining what's a win-win scenario for both of you.

If there is a possible agreement to be made, be flexible, but don't offer something that is hard to retract, like profit sharing right from the very start of employment.

In this scenario, after we had our conference call, it seemed that this person was a good fit but the compensation was too rich for what the company could afford. We worked on determining what you could reasonably afford

as the base salary and then offered some additional earning potential with a percentage on sales for recurring and extra work. It's way too early to be considering a profit share.

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

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ACO USA GrassGrid

The pitch: GrassGrid, a modular plastic grid structure, is capable of supporting vehicles and allowing rainwater to be absorbed where it falls.

- The plastic grid covers only 10 percent of the ground at its surface. The other 90 percent of space is designed to be filled with soil and seeded with grass, or filled and covered by gravel.
- GrassGrid is rated to withstand 28 tons per square foot.

For more information: acousa.com



Arborjet Arbor-OTC

The pitch: Arbor-OTC delivers an antibiotic punch via trunk injection into the tree's xylem.

- It is a water-soluble, injectable, systemic antibiotic for the annual suppression of bacterial diseases in trees and palms.
- Arbor-OTC is not yet registered for use in all states. Contact your local extension or the Department of Agriculture to verify that Arbor-OTC is available for use in your area.
- The new container comes in two sizes: a 1-ounce jar and a 5-ounce container to treat 50 trees or palms at 10 inches DBH.

For more information: Arborjet.com



Atlantic Excavator Attachments Black Splitter S2X 800

The pitch: The Black Splitter S2X 800 is a hydraulic wood-splitting attachment that enables an operator to handle and split large timber without leaving the cab of a construction machine.

- It features a 245-millimeter rotating threaded chromium-steel cone with a replaceable tip.

For more information: blacksplitternj.com



Atlas Copco XAS 90

The pitch: Atlas Copco's XAS 90 air compressor is an option for pneumatic-tool applications demanding as much as 88 cubic feet per minute of air power.

- The HardHat canopy is made of weather-resistant polyethylene that protects the compressor's 24-horsepower Kubota diesel engine from dust and debris.
- A two-stage air intake filter with a service indicator prevents dirt from flowing into the engine and the compressor.
- The engine meets Tier 4 Final emission standards without requiring any exhaust aftertreatment components or filters.

For more information: atlascopco.us



BioSafe Systems TerraCytePRO

The pitch: TerraCytePRO Algaecide/Fungicide is a product designed to completely eradicate and prevent moss, algae, fungi, and their spores.

- It's a wetttable powder formulated with an activated peroxygen chemistry that releases oxygen as it biodegrades.
- It is designed to be mixed into a liquid for spray applications and can be applied curatively or preventatively on all types of plants and grasses.

For more information: www.biosafesystems.com



Buyers Products XD Series

The pitch: The XD Series boxes are two-door barn style boxes constructed of 1/8-inch thick aluminum with an extruded aluminum front frame.

- The extrusion is designed with a rain gutter to help channel water away from the interior of the box.
- The automotive bulb seal gasket seals provide weather resistance, and you can lock everything up with a diecast three-point latch system.

For more information: buyersproducts.com

L&L INSIDER

For more news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com



Calculated Industries Wheel Master Pro 12

The pitch: The Wheel Master Pro 12 is lightweight and folds to half size for convenient transport and storage.

- It measures up to 9,999 feet, 11 inches.

The counter can be reset from the grip handle or the counter unit.

- It folds to half size (from 38 to 19 inches) and has a built-in carrying handle.

For more information: Calculated.com



Cool Planet CoolTerra

The pitch: CoolTerra is an organic, multi-functional soil amendment for enhancing plant and soil vitality.

- CoolTerra acts like a sponge to retain water and nutrients at a plant's root zone, reducing water and fertilizer use.

- It also decontaminates toxins and enhances oxygen transport into the soil.

For more information: Coolterra.com



Coxreels T Series

The pitch: The stainless steel T Series now features a total of nine models.

- The spring driven hose reels are made of electro-polished stainless steel with stainless steel fluid paths.
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For more information: Coxreels.com

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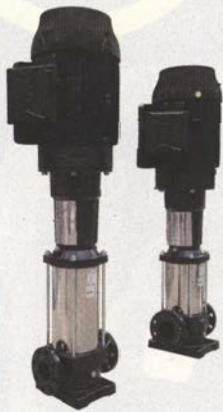


ECHO PB-580

The pitch: The ECHO PB-580 features a 58.2 cc professional grade two-stroke engine that helps deliver air volume of 510 CFM and air speed of 215 MPH.

- The new backpack blower weighs as little as 22.6 pounds in tube throttle configuration, 22.9 pounds in hip throttle configuration.
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For more information: Echo-usa.com



Franklin Electric VR Series

The pitch: Franklin Electric VR Series vertical, stainless steel multi-stage booster pumps are now available in 3, 5, 9, 15, 20, 30, 45, 65 and 95 m3/h options.

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For more information: franklinwater.com

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Inside the student's mind

WE RECENTLY POLLED 180 COLLEGE STUDENTS in a green industry major to get their thoughts about a future in the green industry and what they've learned in school about landscaping. What we found is that money is not the most important factor in turning a job offer down, and they don't expect to break the bank immediately. For more results from the survey, find the June issue of L&L at lawnandlandscape.com.

HOW MUCH DO YOU EXPECT TO MAKE IN YOUR FIRST YEAR?



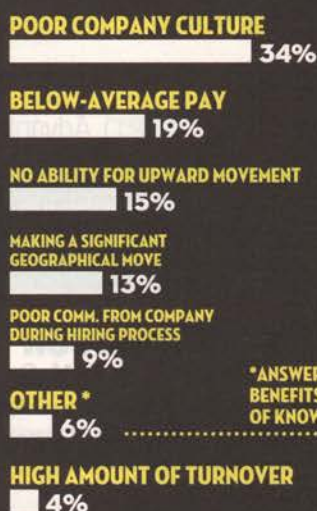
HOW MANY HOURS DO YOU EXPECT TO WORK A WEEK AT PEAK SEASON?



DO YOU THINK IT WILL BE EASY TO FIND A JOB IN YOUR MAJOR WHEN YOU GRADUATE?



WHAT IS A DEAL-BREAKER IN JOINING A COMPANY RIGHT NOW?



*ANSWERS INCLUDED BENEFITS PACKAGE, LACK OF KNOWLEDGE OF COMPANY



SOURCE: LAWN & LANDSCAPE RESEARCH

TruGreen LandCare changes name

IJAMSVILLE, Md. – TruGreen LandCare announced a name change and a refreshed brand. The company will now operate as LandCare.

The brand was developed with input from branch teams, who participated in an intensive discovery process aimed at uncovering the core values that drive success across the company.

In a series of branch visits, new CEO Mike Bogan met with several hundred team members across all 50 branches, who collectively articulated a set of core values that are at the heart of the new brand.

“It was important to me to understand what drives our team members and what makes them want to come to work every day,” Bogan says.

“The result is a brand that honestly reflects the spirit of the company and one that I know everyone on our team can stand behind.”

LandCare
Your land. Our care.

LandCare was spun off from ServiceMaster in 2011, and immediately focused on building infrastructure to support a stand-alone business.

With nearly 30 years in the landscape industry, including 23 with Brickman, Bogan took the helm in November 2014 after Vidu Kulkarni stepped down.

The new brand includes the tag line, Your Land. Our Care.

“Though our team has always been focused on quality and service, having a set of shared values will provide a touchstone to help us strengthen our culture, and continue making the right choices in the best interest of our people and our customers,” Bogan says.

TruGreen LandCare ranked 7th on Lawn & Landscape’s 2015 Top 100 list with revenue of \$205 million.

Aurora Capital Group, a Los Angeles-

based private equity firm bought the company from ServiceMaster for \$38 million – a

fraction of the \$250 million ServiceMaster paid for it in 1999.



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Industry groups sue DOL and DHS

MIAMI, Fla. – Two industry associations are fighting back against a recent ruling altering H-2B procedures.

The National Hispanic Landscape Alliance has joined Bayou Lawn and Landscape Services, the National Association of Landscape Professionals, Superior Forestry and the Small and Seasonal Business Legal Center in filing a lawsuit seeking to make the recently enacted H-2B rules illegal.

The suit against the U.S. Department of Labor and the Department of Homeland Security in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Florida would eliminate regulations filed April 28.

The new ruling has many new procedures, including:

- All jobs must be at least 35 hours per week, rather than 30.
 - Job offers must remain open to U.S. workers until 21 days before the employer's start date of need.
 - Employment duration was decreased from 10 to 9 months.
 - Employers must guarantee a certain number of work days to employees.
 - Private wage surveys may not be used to determine hourly rates.
 - Former employees with U.S. citizenship must be contacted with job opportunities.
- "It's frankly very disheartening as we visit our members

across the country and meet so many of them really poised for growth, ready to make investments, ready to bring people on board," said Ralph Egües, executive director of the NHLA.

"They work hard to implement best practices and, but for the ability to staff their crews, they're ready for big things," he says.

"We've got this administration working against the needs of a lot of people in the country but very acutely affecting Hispanics in the landscape industry, so we've got to do what we can."

Many contractors – as well as other industries like hospitality and food production – rely on the program for employees they say they can't find domestically.

In fiscal year 2014, 93,649 H-2B positions were certified by the government. Landscapers employed 34,845 seasonal workers during that time, the most out of any industry.

The next-closest industry, forest and conservation workers, employed just 9,602, according to data from the Department of Labor.

The lawsuit is based on the fact that they are contrary to the requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act and the DOL and DHS did not give the public a chance to comment on them.

The lawsuit also claims that there was no emergency, therefore there was no basis for making the rules immediately effective. – *Kate Spirgen*

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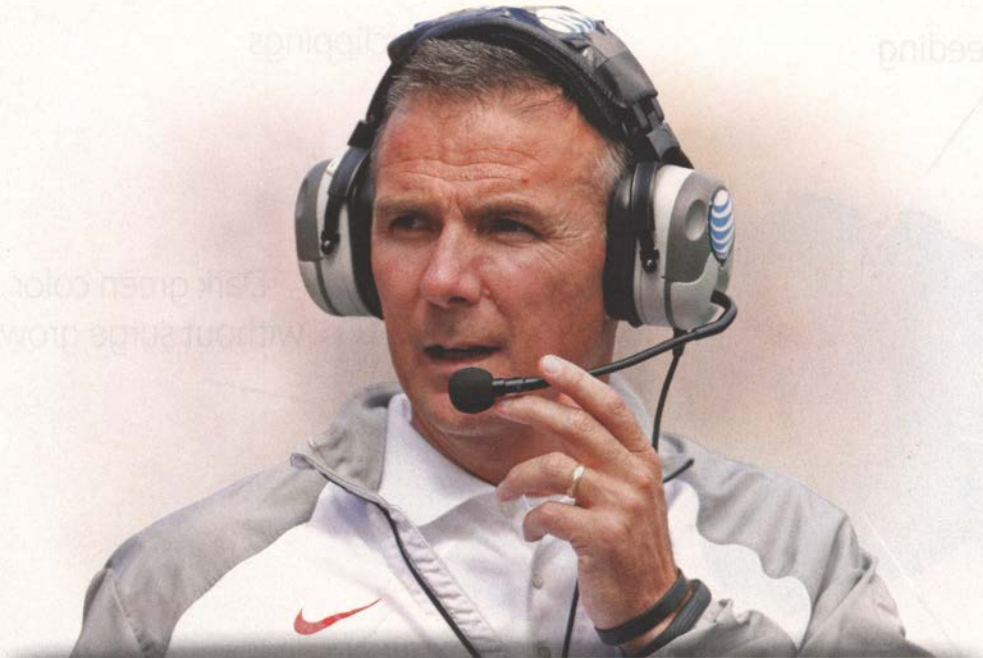
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TEACHING VS. PRESENTING

MY BANKER RECENTLY SENT ME A STORY ABOUT URBAN MEYER, the football coach at The Ohio State University, the 2014 NCAA football champions. It can't be argued that Meyer is one heck of a coach. The story focused on Meyer's debate on whether his sister, vice provost for Undergraduate Affairs at the University of Cincinnati, was a presenter or a teacher.

Meyer spoke of the importance of being a teacher instead of a presenter. He said a teacher makes sure that their students truly understand the information and take action with it. A presenter just dumps information and doesn't pay any attention to whether it's understood or not. Teachers make a difference and change people's lives. Presenters are often forgettable as they aren't engaged enough to make that big of an impact.

Talk to any successful owner of a landscaping company and they will all tell you that training and education are important parts of their success. You will only realize your team's utmost potential by training, educating and equipping your team so they can effectively handle all sorts of tasks without your involvement. Growing a landscaping company happens when you teach your team to follow procedures and systems. Presenters don't move this agenda forward; only teachers do.

A presenter is someone who just reads from a piece of paper or just demonstrates, without having a feel for if the audience or the student is actually grasping the concepts. He shares his presentation and walk away, failing to engage the audience by asking questions and to get those present excited about the knowledge or information.

A teacher is someone who has lesson plans and strides to the front of the class to actively share a lesson with her class. She doesn't turn her back on the class. Instead she

pauses as she teaches to make sure her students are following along, grasping the concepts. Great teachers make learning fun and focus in on details when needed and seem to make difficult subjects palatable.

Let's talk about how you might be a teacher rather than a presenter in front of your team. Let's say you are talking to your team about how to weed eat properly. I know what some of you are thinking – that's silly, everyone knows how to weed eat. Wrong! Smart landscapers train and educate their teams on how to

weed eat. Think about how much weedeating you do. Think about how much time can be lost by not doing it efficiently. Think about all the windows you could break if you don't do it correctly. Think about how many edges won't look right if your team doesn't do it correctly.

A teacher would have an outline that detailed everything she wanted to get across and have the highlights of that outline on a handout for everyone. A teacher would systematically go through the outline, stopping along the way to ask questions.

Ask the group to share what they have learned so far. A teacher would demonstrate, ask others with experience to demonstrate and then when done, ask the class to demonstrate what they learned to make sure everyone now knows how to weed eat properly.

A teacher would go over even the simplest of all details and not be afraid to point out the obvious because she realizes details matter. A teacher would hand out a quiz and grade them. A teacher would frequently check on her students days, weeks and months later to make sure they are weedeating correctly and praise those who are in front of the whole team.

Think about the teachers in your life that you liked the most, think about the ones who helped you improve. Work to be that kind of teacher. Don't be a presenter who just gets up in front of everyone, dumps a bunch of information and leaves. Be a patient, detail-oriented teacher who gets his students involved and excited about learning. Your team will appreciate your efforts and your profits will improve as a result of some properly equipped teammates. **L&L**

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BEFORE WE CONDUCT OUR MID-YEAR REVIEW, let me tell you what I've seen around the country these last six months. I've been in the offices of more than 50 green industry contractors in 30-plus states preparing budgets, checking pricing, setting goals, etc. Virtually every contractor told me their leads and sales have significantly increased over the trend of the past five years. Their biggest problem? The same as your biggest problem – labor! There just isn't enough skilled labor available to do the work that's on the books.

THE MID-YEAR REVIEW. Here are the things I do for my clients when I visit at mid-year and what you should be looking for and at.

1. Profit and loss (P&L) statement:

You should review your P&L both on a cash and an accrual basis. The cash report will tell you how you are doing cash-wise. However, it books cash only when you either receive it or pay it. It does not reflect accounts receivable balances or bills that you haven't paid (accounts payable). The accrual report is much more useful for telling you if you are profitable because it books payables and receivables upon receipt of a bill or upon submission of an invoice to a client. You should review three things:

- **a. Sales and revenues:** Check to see if your income is on target for each division. If not, investigate to determine why you're falling short. Find out if it's a sales or a production problem.
- **b. Bottom line net profit or loss:** More than likely, you are running at a net loss at this time of year. For those who had a huge snow season, it may look very

profitable. But your bottom line looks nice and fat because of the weather and not because of your brilliant business acumen.

- **c. Gross profit margin:** Next, add your net profit margin (NPM) to your general and administrative (G&A) overhead expenses. This will give you your gross profit margin (GPM). Do not include expenses for field vehicles and equipment in G&A overhead. That's a direct cost. Your GPM is an important calculation as it will tell you when you have reached your break-even point (BEP). When you have accumulated enough GPM on your P&L, you

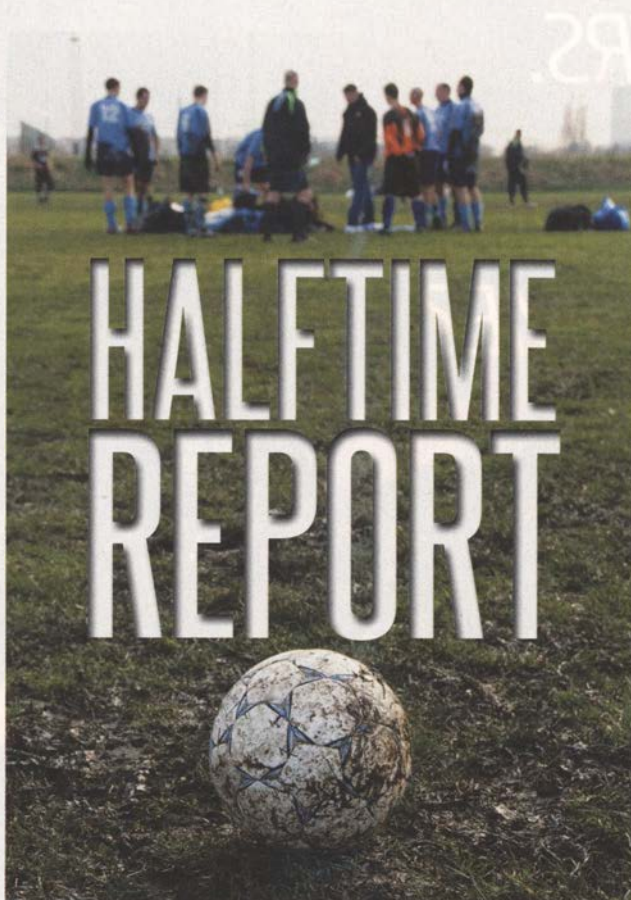
have reached your BEP.

- **2. Job cost reports:** Next, you should review your job cost reports for all of your jobs. You should primarily look to see if the actual man-hours used match the man-hours budgeted. Actually, you and your managers should have been doing this all along. These reports will tell you if individual install projects and/or maintenance accounts are on budget. It's the report card for your field team and managers.
- **3. Team weaknesses:** Once you review these reports, you should have a pretty good idea how your field crews, managers and

sales staff are performing. If you are off target, make adjustments as needed.

LOOKING FORWARD. We've been looking in the rearview mirror, but now it is time to look ahead.

- **1. Bid board report:** This will tell you what's in the pipeline. Do you have enough work in the pipeline to reach your budgeted sales goal for the year? If not, change your strategy, if possible, so that you can reach your goals.
- **2. BEP:** Identify and project when you should reach your BEP for the year. Once your accumulated GPM equals your general and administrative overhead costs for the year, you've hit it. This should occur in September plus or minus one month.
- **3. 2016 preliminary budget:** Once the previous items are reviewed, you should put together a preliminary budget for the upcoming year. I like my clients to briefly think about the upcoming year and put it in the back of their minds. Putting together the 2016 budget helps put the current year in perspective. It's also nice to know that going into the fall and early winter you've already started the planning process for the upcoming year.
- **4. Plan to finish strong:** Once you've conducted your mid-year review, plan for you and your staff to take some time off in August. Then come back refreshed with a clear plan of action to finish the year as strong as possible. End-of-year work is your most important work because it determines your year-end profitability. **L&L**



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BY AMY SNYDER

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@gje.net with topic ideas.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Ken (father) and Hunter (son) Thompson; brothers, Jose and Edgar Zavala; cousins, Adrian Karver and Logan Eschbach



But in addition, the existing employee possesses a knowledge of the industry and the company that they may have already shared with their family member, which can help streamline the orientation process. In effect, that new family member may begin with a head start in the organization because of that shared knowledge, and it improves the odds that their career will be more successful sooner and last longer.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT. Our company has a value (related to people) that includes the concept that when we hire, we strive to hire for life. We've found that when we employ multiple members of the same family, the company's responsibility increases significantly, as we are entrusted with the care of a family and not just an individual. Conversely, the commitment from the employee(s) to the organization's long-term success also rises. Additionally, there may be added incentive for the newer employee to live up to a family performance standard. They may also have had a unique opportunity to see first-hand, what a long-term commitment looks like between employer and employee if their family member has been with the organization for many years. When both employer and employee are thinking long term, it ties the two together in a common bond.

TEAMWORK. When working with people whom you know and enjoy, communication and cooperation often improve. Camaraderie – whether developed over time by working together or built through family relationships – certainly adds spirit, enthusiasm and fun in a workplace, and in the long run, will likely increase productivity.

It's a big compliment when someone thinks enough of a business to refer a potential customer. Referring a family member to work with a company is equally flattering. Cultivating family relationships on your team can provide a real advantage, drawing together like-minded individuals, working together toward a common goal. **L&L**

THE FAMILY ADVANTAGE

WHEN COMPANIES THINK OF HIRING EMPLOYEES to grow their business, the focus is often external. Where can we post this position so that it attracts the best applicants? What would happen, however, if we flipped this paradigm and looked within our own families to fill an open position?

This is something that we have been doing at Ruppert for many years, even though it wasn't something we set out to do. It evolved on its own and has led to multiple generations of relatives working together, which we concluded was more of an advantage than a disadvantage.

While we don't formally measure this, an informal survey indicated that we have approximately 18 percent of our workforce that are related, from fathers and sons and husbands and wives to brothers-in-law and cousins.

Can it be challenging? Yes. But when practiced fairly and with some parameters, we have found that hiring family members can be a good decision, and here's why.

ATTRACTING LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE. Family members often share the same work ethic, which can help ensure that the fit will be a good one.

HOW TO HIRE FAMILY

When hiring a family member, there are some best practices that can help minimize potential problems and maximize success.

➡ **Avoid having family members directly manage one another.** This can minimize the appearance of favoritism within the organization or disagreements within families.

➡ **Maintain a level of professionalism.** Keep family discussions and disagreements at home and business discussions at work.

➡ **Keep it equal.** Family members should be held to the same standards as it relates to promotions, pay scale, benefits, training and opportunity for advancement.

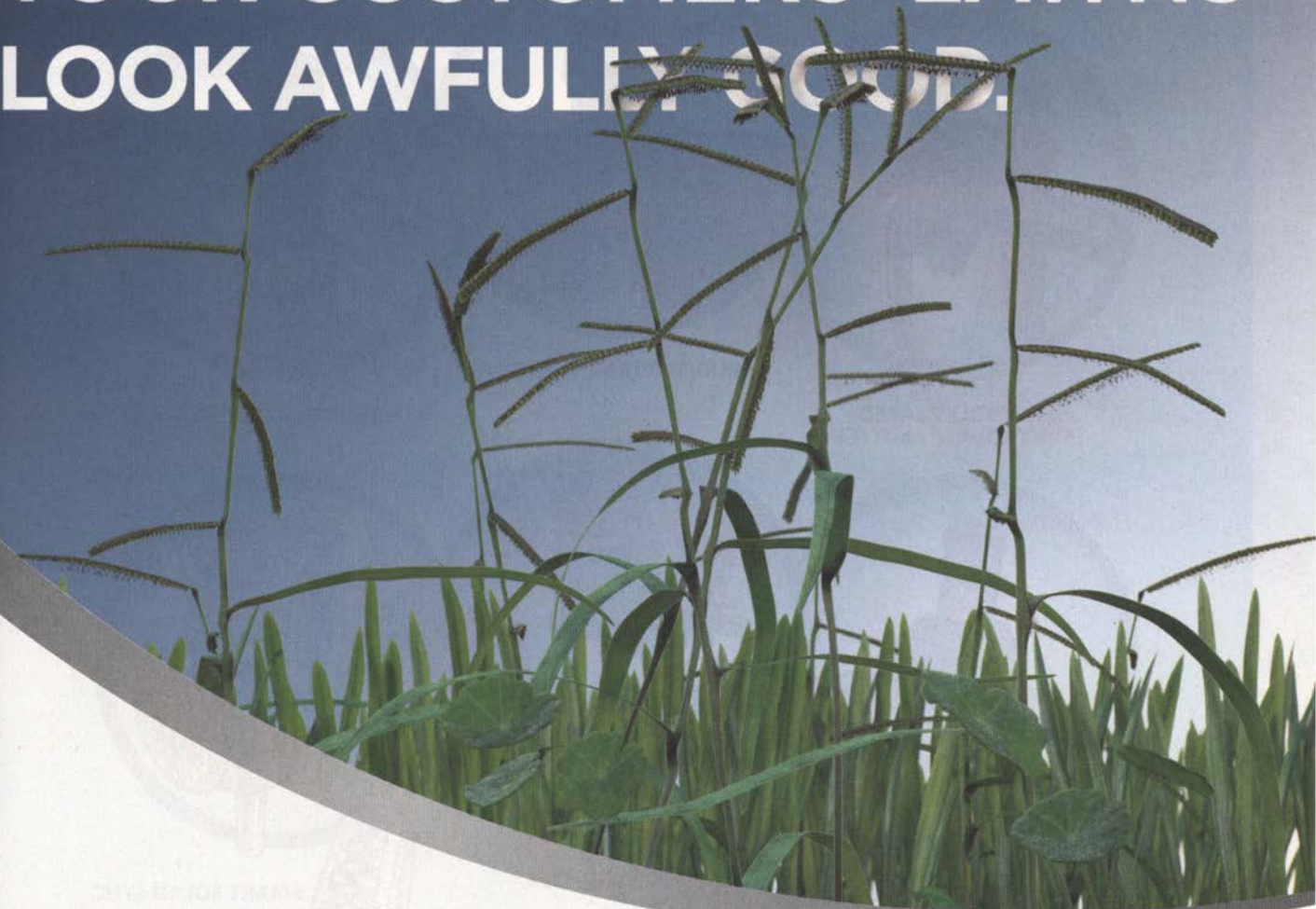
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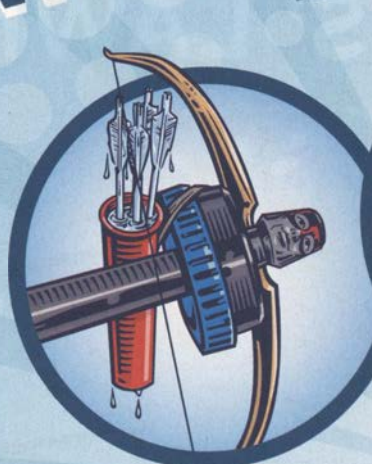
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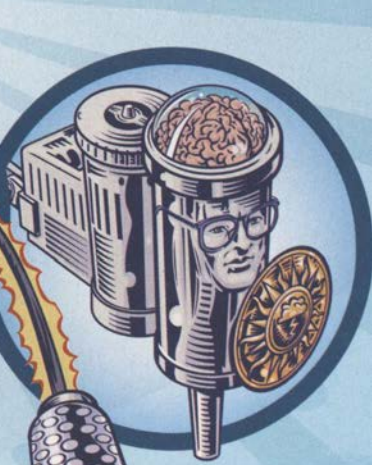
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COMING INTO BLOOM

Micah and Lauren Bloom's business collaboration is a design/build firm with a concrete construction base and a sweet spot for creating just-right spaces.

By Kristen Hampshire

A family concrete business with deep construction roots in Denver merges with a designer/gardener with architectural sensibilities. Invention melds with craftsmanship. Ideas become concrete.

It's a happy marriage at Bloom Concrete and Landscape in Lakewood, Colo., where Micah and Lauren Bloom provide boutique landscape design and construction services to clients who value the art.

"We have made a niche for ourselves in the historical Denver neighborhoods with smaller properties where every square foot counts," Lauren says.

Micah adds, "Those historic areas may have a smaller yard, but it's about making the very best use of every spot on that property." That work has garnered industry award recognition. In 2012, Lauren was named an Outlook Emerging Leader by the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado.

Bloom's small-scale approach applies to its personnel,



COMPANY PROFILE

too. The firm has just one crew, “and we really like to operate that way,” Lauren says. The company prefers those intimate spaces that fall into its design sweet spot. Bigger isn’t always better. And Bloom incorporates concrete into its designs by seriously considering how this element impacts plants and other landscape features.

With an eye on sustainability and structural integrity, Bloom wins over clients who want a dedicated firm that can take a landscape from concept to finish. “Our clients really want a company that will be there fulltime and not jump between projects,” Lauren says.

A SOLID FOUNDATION. Bloom Concrete and Landscape came together in 2009, when many landscape and construction companies were falling apart. But the Denver market was much more stable than other areas of the country, Micah says. Thanks to his and Lauren’s experience and contacts in the area, launching a business during the recession was feasible.

That’s not to say hard times didn’t touch Bloom. “We were impacted by it,” Micah says. “That is why we wanted to find a niche. And we had reliable clients that liked our work, and our quality of work, who kept coming back to us.”

Before Bloom, Lauren had a company she started out of college in 2001, Yve’s Garden Landscapes, where she designed annual beds and pot displays. In 2000, Micah started Colorado Concrete Specialist, a family venture that involved his father, uncles and cousins. Concrete runs in the family since Micah’s



Bloom likes to operate with just one crew, preferring intimate spaces. The company incorporates concrete into its designs by carefully looking at how it will affect plants and other landscape elements



grandfather, Oscar, started pouring concrete in Denver in 1954.

“He did concrete three days a week in Denver. They had a farm in Fort Morgan where he would farm three days a week and do church on Sunday,” Micah says.

Micah’s father eventually joined his grandfather’s construction crew, along with his two uncles. People in the area know the Bloom name. “I have clients who said, ‘Well, your uncle built my house,’ or, ‘Your

granddad poured my driveway.’ A lot of the old-timers I run into see the name on my truck and remember working with my dad or uncle in the 1980s.”

Bloom was gaining its first clients during a time when many

residents were cutting back services rather than investing in projects, that family name and Lauren's existing client base made all the difference. The start-up had deep roots, and that mattered. "In the rough times, those clients (who know you) are who you rely on," he says.

Bloom Concrete and Landscape has grown from a \$300,000 firm in 2009 to about \$600,000 last year.

The size of its projects has also increased, Lauren says, though she says the firm is perfectly poised to manage those that are about \$50,000 and less. It goes back to their desire to design and build right-sized spaces for clients.

"We like to travel and we are



Bloom has a solid base in historical Denver neighborhoods with smaller properties where the company has to make every square foot count.

always taking pictures and getting ideas," Lauren says. "We really enjoy the design aspect of the business, and we are always learning more about how spaces can be used."

THE POWER OF ONE. There was a time in 2010 when Bloom expanded its core crew and ran with two. "We really didn't like that," Micah says. "We felt like the quality of the projects we

were on wasn't to the standards that we wanted and expected."

Micah is the project manager on jobs. He's there in the field, working alongside the crew and ensuring that the design is properly executed. Lauren is the landscape designer. They have an employee who helps with office matters and in the summer, the "core" expands to about five people who do everything from pouring concrete to planting to installing irrigation systems.

"They are skilled in everything turf-related, and it's really important to us that we keep people like that, and that we keep training them, too," Lauren says. "Often we'll do projects that involve a

(continued on page 29)

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TALKING UP THE **INDUSTRY**

How to grow veggies in a drought year. Recover your garden from hail damage. Keep the pests away from your garden. And, why not add chickens?

These topics and more fill the airwaves on Colorado's Channel 9 News, where Lauren Bloom, co-owner of Bloom Concrete and Landscape, addresses landscape concerns and educates the public with helpful how-tos that include an important call-to-action: Consider a pro.

The monthly garden segments are fun to produce, Lauren says. "And, it has been good in promoting our industry association," she



Lauren Bloom does monthly garden spots on Denver's Channel 9 News. She says the segments don't necessarily generate calls for service, but it does look good to potential clients and helps promote the industry.

adds of the company's involvement in the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado.

Bloom doesn't necessarily receive customer calls for service because of the television spots. "But it qualifies us to potential clients," Lauren says.

Meanwhile, Lauren and Micah Bloom provide education to industry peers and students by teaching classes at industry events, and participating in career days at local high schools and colleges.

"We help people understand, this is one way you could go with your career with design," she says. "We are trying to encourage growth in the industry – and not just growth, but quality growth."

PHOTO COURTESY OF LAUREN AND MICAH BLOOM

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(continued from page 27) new skill we haven't tried, so we will give them the tools they need to expand their knowledge to do it correctly and up to industry standards or above."

Operating with a single, skilled crew suits Bloom's business philosophy to be present for clients. During the 2010 season when they decided to expand, the drive time between projects and hustling compromised quality. "We were losing track of our time, spending too much time going between job sites and trying to sell too much," Micah says.

Tasks on a job were slipping through the cracks. "Micah was going back and forth between

projects and it felt like he was just correcting errors and cleaning up more problems than if he had been on the site full-time," Lauren says.

Paring the team back to a single crew was the best decision for Bloom. Though, this structure means there is a limit to how much work the firm can accept – at least in the construction aspect of the business. There have been times when backlog is six months. Lauren is quick to add that the company always squeezes in smaller projects for regular clients.

"That backlog has triggered us to make an adjustment to what we do," Lauren says, noting how the business has grown its design

services. "We can turn around designs in three to four weeks." That includes a couple of client meetings and a detailed property walk-through.

At that point, Bloom connects the client with one of a few select contractors in the area to execute the design. Bloom stays connected as a consultant during the process. "We don't have to say no to these new clients who are calling us from referrals because our backlog is too long," Lauren says.

"We can still offer the design services, which in a lot of cases, is what companies are lacking: a well thought out design that is spelled out so that with a good contractor, the project will be

what the client wants." Meanwhile, the Blooms find that their clients want the whole design at once, but prefer to have construction completed in phases. That way, the company can stay small in crew size, and still say 'yes' to clients.

The Blooms see the design and consulting side of their business continuing to expand. That's their hope. They want to maintain some construction while deepening the design business.

"We are really excited about doing more design work and consulting – being a general contractor sort of company that can look over each project and make sure clients are getting what they are paying for," Micah says. **L&L**

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Gow Litzenburger's fleet of trucks is famous around the small resort town of Harbor Springs, Mich.

FLEET FEATS

Three different fleet management strategies prove there's more than one way to deal with wheels. By Kristen Hampshire

THEY'RE MORE THAN YOUR WHEELS.

Your company trucks are billboards, branding tools, staging areas for your work – and of course, the means of transporting necessary equipment to service accounts. So, it's no wonder that fleet expenses are a sizeable portion of most landscape contractors' budgets. And the cost can fluctuate depending on breakdowns and maintenance.

Do you lease or buy? When is the time to move on from a truck that's a legacy member of the fleet? How do you maximize your investment in vehicles without dumping too much cash into a truck that is ready for retirement?

These are questions that Lawn & Landscape asked three contractors this month. Here's what they had to say.



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LITZENBURGER LANDSCAPE

Gow Litzenburger, president

LOCATION:
Harbor Springs, Mich.

ESTABLISHED:
1985

EMPLOYEES:
55 during peak season

2014 REVENUES:
Not disclosed

CUSTOMERS:
99% residential, 1%
commercial

SERVICES:
Landscape maintenance
(not mowing), installation,
tree services, irrigation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

WATCH THE MILES.

Age doesn't matter as much as mileage, and that's a good thing for Litzenburger's classic fleet, with vehicles ranging from 1934 to 2002. "After 100,000 miles, anything can happen. Then it doesn't become economical to maintain the truck," he says, though he does break this rule because of the age of his trucks.

GO CUSTOM.

Litzenburger Landscape's trucks are characters. They're a big part of the company brand. Each receives a professional lettering job and a name.

TAKE TASK INTO ACCOUNT.

The classic trucks work for Litzenburger because the vehicles don't pull trailers, and the company does not mow lawns. The beds carry plants and installation tools, and they act as a "stage" while crews are on jobs. "If we were pulling heavy loads that would be a whole different ball game," he says.

A classic impression

The yard at Litzenburger Landscape is a classic truck collector's paradise, rivaling any car show with 36 insured and plated vehicles restored and maintained by owner Gow Litzenburger and a few mechanics.

Buck Rogers. Weiner Dog. Snuffaluffagus. Every classic truck has a name, a story. Tree-Ceratops is a tree mover. Pinocchio has a long hood. They're characters, not just trucks, and the vehicles are famous around the small resort town of Harbor Springs, Mich., where the company has been based since Litzenburger started it after graduating college.

"I've had an interest in trucks first and foremost since a very young age," Litzenburger says of the "service vehicles" that stand out among the competition in town. "I'm a hobbyist, and the trucks are really a labor of love. You have to be a mechanically-minded person to restore and maintain them."

They're not exactly practical vehicles for a landscape maintenance business. "If we were sensible, we would not have any of these trucks because they are constantly requiring extensive maintenance, everything from motors to transmissions, so you really have two businesses: your primary (landscape) business and a truck repair business," he says.

Of course, Litzenburger wouldn't do it any other way, even though customers, at first, couldn't believe he was using his pristine, historical vehicles for work. He recalls taking his first restored classic truck, a 1939 Chevrolet he painted with GM's



The trucks in Gow Litzenburger's fleet have names, including "Yosemite," above. Most of the trucks were named by employees.

authentic Brewster Green, to a weekend job. This was while in college, when he was working for a landscape architect but still managing mowing side gigs.

"The truck was such a novelty. People thought it was neat," he says. "They would see my old truck with a wheelbarrow in it."

The novelty evolved into a brand when Litzenburger restored another truck, and then another, and grew his business while scouting out vehicles to restore in winter when the company is closed. "I'm always at farms and nurseries, and you see trucks sitting out back. It's the classic story where a guy had the truck in his barn," he says.

One truck in Litzenburger's fleet spent its life on a golf course next to Litzenburg's childhood friend's home. When they were young, they'd watch the truck and remark about how cool the 1952 Chevrolet was. "Lo and behold, years later I end up buying it," he says. The truck is now named The Penguin.

Finding and restoring the trucks is one thing; servicing them and keeping them on the

road is another. The benefit of working in a small town is that crews put very few miles on their trucks during the day. The average distance to a job is less than 5 miles. "The trucks are basically used as a staging area — they're out and back in real short trips," Litzenburger says.

Locating parts to fix trucks can definitely be a challenge but like finding the vehicles, Litzenburger enjoys the hunt. Plus, the fact that most trucks in the fleet are GM makes parts acquisition a little bit easier. But one thing's for sure: You can't send the classic trucks to a repair garage. Fixing them takes special knowledge, and it's been a lifetime of learning for Litzenburger, who restored that first 1939 truck during his high school vocational car mechanic classes.

The classic vehicles may not be the most practical trucks on the road, but their character has become a company trademark. "I just love doing it," he says of restoring the trucks. "I've had an interest in trucks since I was a little boy, and I never outgrew it."

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BEARY LANDSCAPING

Paul Irish, vice pres. of operations

LOCATION:

Lockport, Ill.

ESTABLISHED:

1985

EMPLOYEES:

About 200

2014 REVENUES:

Not disclosed

CUSTOMERS:

65% residential, 45% commercial

SERVICES:

Design, installation,
maintenance, snow removal

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

HIRE TALENTED MECHANICS.

Four on-site mechanics ease the service and repair burden at Beary Landscaping. "The biggest part is making sure you have qualified, really good mechanics," Irish says. Indeed.com is one source for seeking out specialists, he says.

BUY NEW INSTEAD.

Do you have the resources in house to service used trucks and repair vehicles when they fail? Companies that are not ready to add a mechanic position should consider this when acquiring vehicles, Irish says. "If you can't afford to have a mechanic on staff, consider newer equipment because it will have less breakdowns," he says.

KEEP TRUCKS CONSISTENT.

"The most important thing we do for fleet management is having the same type of equipment and trucks," Irish says. "All of our guys are familiar with how to operate it, and we can keep parts in stock."

Tracking truck performance

Every three months, Beary Landscaping uses Microsoft Excel to take inventory of its fleet of vehicles and makes decisions about whether a truck is ready to retire or if the company can get another year or more out of it. "We have a database where we track what repairs each vehicle receives, so we always know if tires need to be replaced or the oil needs to be changed," says Paul Irish, vice president of operations, who oversees four fulltime mechanics that work at Beary.

Sticking to the maintenance schedule is probably the greatest challenge of fleet management, Irish says. "You're so busy during the season that keeping service up to date can be difficult," he says. Keeping a few extra trucks on the lot to use when a vehicle is down prevents downtime. Still, service must be carefully monitored, and everyone is responsible for communicating trucks' maintenance needs.

"We train our crews in the field so if they have an issue with a vehicle, they let a supervisor know," Irish says. Crews also complete pre- and post-inspection checklists prior to and after returning from routes. This keeps service top of mind.

At Beary Landscaping, the fleet is a combination of leased and purchased vehicles. The company leases the trucks that crews and salespeople drive. It purchases larger dump trucks used, such as International and Mac trucks that will have up to a 10-year life in the business. "It's cheaper for us to find used larger vehicles than buy new or lease. We can buy a truck that is 5 years old," Irish says.

On the other hand, crew trucks – Ford F-350s and F-450s – are leased and turned over every five to six years. Crews generally put 6,000 to 8,000 miles per year on a truck, though there's no mileage cap in lease agreements, Irish says. "By leasing, we guarantee that we rotate out those trucks on a regular schedule," Irish says.

A revolving door of vehicles reduces repair

FORMULAS for SUCCESS

and parts expenses, and frees up Beary Landscaping's mechanics to focus on service and the company's robust fleet of mowers, skid-steer loaders and other equipment, from hand-held to heavy-duty.

As for snow business, Beary's trucks have the same "set-up" — same dump bodies, plows and parts. "That way we don't need 15 different things. It's all the same stuff," Irish says, adding that truck breakdowns during a snow event can be especially problematic.

"Service needs to be done immediately because we must have equipment on the ground 24/7," he says, adding that spare trucks are helpful, and maintaining a regular service schedule is crucial so that none of the vehicles are compromised when storms hit.

The tracking tools like inspection checklists, the vehicle inventory and ongoing evaluation of the fleet are key, Irish says, "There is a lot of coordination that takes place."

A consultative approach

Taking advantage of two inherited, used trucks seemed like a good idea at the time. "But the reliability really hurt us," says Jim Molinaro, president of GLS Landscaping and Maintenance in Oak Ridge, N.C. "We had a job that was more than an hour away, and when you have a truck break down with six guys, that will cost you a considerable amount of money."

events. Other entities that rent commercial trucks, such as road crews, turn in vehicles because they can't continue working. That means more available rentals for GLS, which has an agreement with Enterprise Commercial that includes a volume discount.

"We're renting 20 to 30 trucks at a clip and we are big enough locally that we can work out some standard agreement where we rent

“

"You try to find the best truck and maximize the use on it, then talk to your professionals who can help you make decisions about when to buy."

— Jim Molinaro, GLS Landscaping

For GLS, buying new trucks is a smarter decision, Molinaro says. "We have the factory warranties and we know what we are getting into," he says.

GLS keeps seven to nine trucks in its fleet, and the company supplements by renting pick-up trucks to manage major snow

for a set minimum amount of time and lock in a rate," he says.

The commercial vehicles are essentially an extra fleet that GLS can depend on when business spikes during a snow event in winter. The rental cost gets passed down to clients. "We are upfront about it — and it's a cost of doing

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GLS LANDSCAPING AND MAINTENANCE

Jim Molinaro, president

LOCATION:
Oak Ridge, N.C.

ESTABLISHED:
2011

EMPLOYEES:
15 to 30

2014 REVENUES:
\$1.5 to \$3 million range

CUSTOMERS:
70% commercial,
30% residential

SERVICES:
Landscape maintenance,
snow and ice management,
pressure washing, painting,
parking lot maintenance,
landscape design
and installation, lighting,
hardscape

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

PARTNER WITH A DEALER.

Building loyalty with a dealership is important because you may learn about incentives and other deals that can save your budget. And usually, purchasing trucks at the end of a model year is a wise strategy, Molinaro says.

SUIT UP FOR YOUR SERVICES.

Be sure to explain what your work demands are and how crews will use the truck when discussing vehicle options with a dealer.

TALK TO THE CPA.

Include your accountant in vehicle buying decisions and discuss when a truck is too much of a financial burden because of repairs. "Use the professionals you surround yourself in your business to help make these decisions," Molinaro says.

business," he says. Otherwise, GLS purchases its service vehicles. "We are not the size of business yet where leasing makes sense," Molinaro says of the ability to secure a deal based on leasing volume.

GLS keeps its fleet consistent, opting for Fords across the board. Molinaro says the interiors stand up well to employee wear.

As for budgeting for the purchase, which can be upward of \$40,000 and more if you're adding extra equipment like snow kits, Molinaro says he works closely with his accountant when making purchase decisions.

Also, he relies on the salesperson at a dealership he trusts to let him know when he can take advantage of incentive programs.

The fleet is a significant expense in the overall budget, but a landscape company's productivity depends on a well-serviced, capable fleet of vehicles that can carry the crew and equipment from job to job.

Once a truck is fully depreciated, Molinaro decides whether there's enough life left in the vehicle to keep it on the fleet for another year, or more. "It might make sense to keep a truck because it has multiple purposes and it has a lot of life left in it," he says.

But after learning a hard lesson about keeping a truck for too long – and then paying excessive repair bills and suffering costly breakdowns – he's careful about keeping a truck for too long, where it becomes a financial and productivity liability.


"You try to find the best truck and maximize the use on it, then talk to your professionals who can help you make decisions about when to buy," Molinaro says. **L&L**

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and aeration, water features, low voltage landscape lighting, LED lamps, PVC pipe, fittings, valves, polyethylene
Soil Amendments, Water Efficient Sprinkler
pipe, polyethylene gas pipe, chemical feed pumps, filtration systems, interlocking and permeable pavers
and Nozzles, Smart Controllers, Rain Sensors
garden and retaining wall blocks, polymeric joint sand, geotextile fabric, edge restraints, tools, outdoor
Central Control/Water Management System
living kits, safety products, ET controllers, soil-moisture sensors, rain sensors, drip irrigation
Two-Wire Irrigation Controllers, Permeable Pavers
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When it doesn't rain, HE SCORES

In the middle of a punishing drought,
Chris Angelo is making millions tearing out turf
and changing the way people think about their landscapes.

story by Chuck Bowen | photograph by Ed Carreón

In the midst of one of the worst droughts in California's – and the country's – history, the landscaping industry is taking some punches. Swaths of lush turfgrass are seen by many as excessive and wasteful. The state has mandated a 25 percent reduction in water use across the board, and many cities are paying residents to tear out their lawns.

Chris Angelo, CEO at Stay Green, is in the middle of the fight. His Los Angeles-based commercial maintenance operation, and its 265 employees, depend on those acres of lush turfgrass for its \$17.8 million in annual revenue.

And as water restrictions grow ever tighter and water districts start paying even more for businesses to tear out their turf, what's the future for the landscape industry? Turns out for smart landscapers like Angelo, it's pretty good.

LEFT: For 2015, Chris Angelo has hired 22 people to staff his turf conversion division at Stay Green. He has already booked \$800,000 in business, and by the end of the year, he expects to clear \$2 million.



Thanks in large part to those rebates from water districts, the team at Stay Green has completed 7 acres of turf conversions this year. Crews kill clients' turfgrass and replace it with low-water-use plants, mulch and river rock pathways. They also convert overhead irrigation systems to sub-surface drip. Angelo estimates this new work will add \$2 million in revenue.

"In the short term, it certainly has supplemented and enhanced our economy. For contractors in the landscape area, there is an uptick in revenue that we haven't seen in a long, long time," Angelo says. "This is the first year since 2005, 2006 where we're doing more order taking than protecting our turf and aggressively hunting new opportunities."

Angelo isn't the first landscaper to get wise to business opportunities that exists in water rebates. A couple of contractors have gained national media attention for their approach of removing a customer's front yard and replacing it with gravel and a few 5-gallon plants in exchange for the rebate cash. But that's not what Stay Green is after.

"What we have seen is when there's ever any opportunity ... there seem to be people who take advantage of the system. Some companies are branding themselves and marketing well, but not leaving a very desirable end product, which is not good for the California landscape long term," Angelo says. "We have a major education process that has



An average job, according to Stay Green's Operations Manager Dee Sanders, involves about 50,000 square feet of turf removal, mulch for the area and drought-tolerant plant installation.

to take place. It's not just terminating turf. We have increased our efforts to educate clients as to what this looks like."

What it looks like is a real, verdant and beautiful landscape that also happens to use less water. We spoke with Angelo and his turf renovation team to learn more about the business of this new opportunity, as well as the impact it has on the design and operation of his company. Here's how Stay Green does it.

HOW IT STARTED. Stay Green got into the turf conversion business at the request of its clients. In 2013, Miller-Coors and Boeing wanted to get in front of water conservation efforts in Southern California, and asked Angelo's

team to help them replace a few acres of turf with mulch, shrubs and river rock pathways.

Around the same time, Stay Green was working to help its main clientele – large HOAs – save money. Two of the largest budget items for those properties were landscaping services and water bills, so the company set to work reducing the amount of water it applied by using smart controllers, then evapotranspiration calculations. "Then it came down to, 'Wow, what if this turf wasn't there?'" Angelo says. Stay Green could reduce the costs for both landscape maintenance and water consumption for its clients, and position itself as more of a partner than just a service provider, while at the same time not

cutting its own revenue.

"I think we're not taking ourselves out of the equation. The industry in Southern California is evolving to a different scope of service and a different level of support," Angelo says. "We have not seen a major change in our pricing structure after we take over these projects. ... Many of these we're just trading tasks on the job." For example, a reduction in mowing due to a reduction in turf means an increase in herbicide applications and shrub pruning.

For a few years, Angelo and his team had been preaching the value of water management and the return on investment a renovation project can bring, especially to a large-scale com-

"You can have water savings and greens and flower stuff. It's not just going to be a cactus and an agave and a rock." – Fern Wildflower, landscape designer, Stay Green

mercial property or HOA. But despite the ROI, as well as increased watering restrictions and the sharp decline in landscape health as a result of such a punishing drought, sales were slow.

“Up to 2015, we had struggled with selling our ROI,” Angelo says. “Up until January, it was a much harder sell for us. The clients just didn’t get it. And the water is so inexpensive in Southern California.”

Angelo saw a big spike in interest in turf renovation jobs after California Governor Jerry Brown mandated in March a statewide reduction in water use of 25 percent and the conversion of 50 million square feet of turf to drought-tolerant landscapes, and water districts started increasing the amount of money they would pay property owners to tear out turfgrass.

Stay Green sent out press releases and contacted clients to remind them that the company could help them manage water during the drought, and the phone started ringing. The work ramped up through February and March of this year and continued strong through April and May.

“Now we’re extremely backlogged in designs,” Angelo says. “We just started one project that will take us 32 days with 15 landscapers, that’s also using heavy equipment. If we didn’t mechanize it, we’d have closer to 30 bodies on this project.”

That job – 80,000 square feet of turf removed and another 20,000 square feet in planters – should bring



Stay Green has completed 7 acres of turf conversions – killing turfgrass and replacing it with materials like low-water-use plants and river rock pathways.

in \$420,000 in revenue. Of that, \$160,000, or about 40 percent, will be subsidized through rebates from the Metropolitan Water District. In all, turf conversions have to date brought in \$800,000 in revenue to Stay Green, and Angelo predicts that figure will grow to \$2 million by the end of 2015.

“We are backlogged with turf conversions through

September and we’re still running around and booking things now,” he says. “This is money that is subsidized through the rebates program, and if the rebate programs weren’t there, (customers) wouldn’t do it.”

OPERATIONS SIDE. Dee Sanders, operations manager of the enhancement and design/build department, is responsible day-to-day for Stay Green’s turf conversion work. He manages a team of two designers, three estimators, two production managers and six crews of 35 employees.

“With all the work we’ve got approved, that’s nowhere near enough to keep up,” Sanders says of the employee count.

The goal of this new segment is to be as efficient and simple as possible, and work within the scope of a customer’s rebate amount. Sanders and his team do a site visit, estimate the value of the rebate and bring a proposal to the customer that hews to that amount.

An average job, Sanders says, is about 50,000 square feet of turf removed, the area mulched and drought-tolerant plants installed. With current crews, it would

STAFFING UP

When it comes to turf renovation, the biggest challenge for Chris Angelo – like so many landscapers – is labor. New home construction and renovation of existing buildings are pulling laborers out of the landscape labor pool, and he’s struggled to find crew members to execute the backlog designs his team’s sold.

He’s found moderate success with recruitment bonuses. He’ll pay \$100 if a current employee brings in a candidate that gets hired, and has added four crew members this way.

Stay Green started this year with 13 employees in its \$6 million design/build division, and has since hired 22 more. These specialty crews do enhancements and other renovation work, as well as the turf conversions. “They’re smart with equipment – not pick-and-shovel guys,” Angelo says.

Here’s how Stay Green approaches a typical turf renovation, according to Operations Manager Dee Sanders:

A typical conversion involves one crew of three to five men in a Ford F-450 dump truck with a Ditch Witch mini skid-steer or Caterpillar skid-steer (depending on job size).

The turf is sprayed out with a herbicide 7 to 10 days prior to starting the job (one spray tech with rig). The dead turf is then scalp mowed and the spoils disposed. The crew cuts the edges along the hardscape, and then lays out and installs the plant material.

Then, the drip irrigation is installed and the entire job is mulched.

All of the crew members are cross-trained to do irrigation, landscape and demolition work, and earn \$15-\$22 an hour, compared to a maintenance crew member, who earns \$10-\$14 an hour, Angelo says. The design/build work is more physically and mentally demanding, and so he often has to hire new crewmembers as opposed to moving them over from another division.

“We don’t have a list of guys saying, ‘Promote me to the enhancement crew,’” he says.

RECENT CHANGES

The turf rebate programs have been a success in California. In May, the Metropolitan Water District received \$350 million in funding to pay for another 175 million square feet of turf conversions. But because the program has been so successful – and all the rebate money has already been allocated – the district imposed limits to the rebates.

Prior to the change, there was no limit on the size or amount of money someone could get for removing turf. Now, the district has capped the amount. For a residential job, the limit is 3,000 square feet and \$6,000. For a commercial site, the limit is \$1 per square foot, with an annual cap of \$25,000.

The changes to the subsidies change Stay Green's business model slightly – some of Angelo's clients have reduced the scope of their renovations. But he says just as many are moving ahead with the projects regardless of the rebate amount.

"What they've really done is change the rebate program to say, 'We all need to have some equity stake in this game – have skin in the game to make it fair.' I think they balanced out the rebate program to really stop being taken advantage of," he says.

The drought in California and the West has changed the way many homeowners and property managers view landscapes, and has especially changed how they view the role of turf. But it hasn't changed the value they place on the landscape, and it certainly hasn't killed the industry. On the contrary, Angelo says, turf renovation work has bolstered Stay Green and many of its competitors.

"Some of our best competitors, when I'm talking to them and they're busy and backlogged, and I know we are too, it drives up prices," he says. "We're able to charge more."

And after two years of installing these new types of landscapes, Angelo says, he and his team have found a way to show customers they can have a beautiful, verdant landscape that also uses less water.

"We've developed some really nice, good-looking landscapes without turf."



Stay Green designers like to use colorful, drought tolerant plants like *Dianella cassa blue* for turf conversion projects.

take about four weeks. Sanders says turf renovation work is profitable as long as the crews stay within the scope of the bid. If a client wants a more involved design – decomposed gravel pathways, more elaborate plantings or tree work, for example – the cost of the job will quickly exceed the rebate for the turf removal.

"There are no change orders in this. The price is the price, because it's dollar

for dollar. You've got to have your plan together, and if you're not meeting your number, you're eating your number. So you really have to manage your job. If something changes that you didn't count on being there, it is what it is. You bid it and that's the rebate and your customer basically isn't going to pay more."

About 10 percent of Stay Green's clients spend more than their rebate, but the

vast majority are dollar-for-dollar jobs. Clients are also keen to know how long it will take before their water savings equal the amount they've spent.

"We figured out if we could get (return on investment) to three years, it makes it easier to swallow for the customer. From there, if we could get it dollar for dollar, that's an even easier sale," Sanders says. "That's where we really found our sweet spot. That's where we could close these deals. That's when it really started happening."

DESIGN SIDE. Fern Wildflower is one of Stay Green's lead landscape designers for turf conversions. (Yes, that's her real name. "I got my first job out of college strictly from my name," she says.)

She and Stay Green's other designers pride themselves on being able to change an older, turf-heavy landscape into one that uses less water but still is aesthetically pleasing and verdant. Less water and less turf doesn't mean more rocks and more cacti.

"I call them turf conversions. They're not always xeriscapes, because a lot of times you use plants that look lush. They don't always look like a desert," says Wildflower, who's from Missouri originally. "I'm from the area where it's green everywhere. But there's a lot of plants that

"If you're not meeting your number, you're eating your number. So you really have to manage your job." – Dee Sanders, operations manager, Stay Green



aren't green, or they're big and bushy, or they have flowers. ... You can have water savings and greens and flower stuff. It's not just going to be a cactus and an agave and a rock."

Some of Wildflower's favorite plants to use include purple heart, *Caryopteris* 'Sunshine Blue' or 'Worcester Gold,' *Dianella caerulea* 'Cassa Blue,' *salvias* and *Muhlenbergia capillaris* 'Regal Mist.' They are drought tolerant, but also add color and variation to the landscape, which, in the end, is her ultimate goal.

Wildflower sees these turf renovation projects as an opportunity to be creative, and less turf doesn't mean fewer options



Plants like 'Regal Mist' let Stay Green designers create a landscape that offers good color contrast and movement while using less water.

or a limited landscape.

"A landscape that is good offers color contrast, movement, different shapes. Without the turf, you can have even more of an interest. Your outdoor space to me is a place to relax or give interest, right? In general that's why you're spending money on landscaping," she says.

"(Turf renovation is) an opportunity to take it to the next level to see what you can create with all these different colors and shapes to give you even a better looking landscape. ... It gives you more of a chance to be creative because you have so much more space. It necessitates more creativity." L&L

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WEED MANAGEMENT FOR PONDS

“Most every body of water wants to be land, it wants to be swamp or marsh,” says George McCloud,

CEO of McCloud Aquatics in Elburn, Ill. In other words, there is a constant threat of weeds invading a pond. Weed management in a pond begins with proper maintenance of the body of water in question.

“Recent advances in data collection, chemical and non-chemical treatments, equipment and education have given us more tools to manage bodies of water,” McCloud says.

Beyond proper maintenance of a pond, consider these steps for weed control:

1. IDENTIFY THE WEED SPECIES.

This is important in choosing the right herbicide or algacide.

2. TAKE OXYGEN READINGS prior to any application to determine if levels of oxygen are high enough to prevent adverse effects to wildlife and plants from the chemical application. Applications should be postponed if the oxygen level is 5.8 ppm or lower.

3. CHOOSE THE PROPER HERBICIDE/ALGAECIDE based on the mandates of the label, including extent of vegetation, weed species controlled, current or proposed water usage, oxygen levels present, and other environmental conditions.

4. KEEP THE BODY OF WATER in question free of organic matter. Lawn clippings and other organic matter that inadvertently enters ponds are frequently overlooked by both lawn specialists and homeowners, says Cathy McCloud. The simple act of mowing too close to a pond and allowing clippings to get into a pond encourages algae growth.

Test the waters

You need to do your homework to properly maintain ponds. By Neil Moran

If you think pond maintenance involves throwing some products into the water and collecting your payment, Phil McCloud has a word of advice.

“You’ve got to take care of the pond like it’s a living organism,” says McCloud, CEO of McCloud Aquatics in Elburn, Ill. “Some think you can throw a few pellets in, squirt some juice and everything is cool. Well, it’s not.”

McCloud Aquatics services 1,500 bodies of water for 750 clients in 13 counties in northern Illinois. Customers include homeowner’s associations, golf courses and municipalities. The ponds are 1 to 5 acres in



The lake management specialist at McCloud Aquatics in Elburn, Ill., wears a face shield while treating a pond for algae using copper sulfate, which can cause eye damage.

size and house water features like fish and native plants.

In February of 2014, McCloud, 65, sold off his share of a pond construction busi-

ness that included pond installations to his brother and went into business full-time offering strictly pond maintenance services.



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He and his wife, Cathy, are knee deep in the business and loving it. Pond owners are increasingly interested in keeping their ponds clean and functional, not just ornamental, which drives business for McCloud Aquatics. Last year, the company generated 20 percent gross profit margin, and McCloud is projecting to average a 50 percent growth rate each year for the next five years.

The company hired three college interns this year, will hire six next year and nine the following year, and McCloud says that will be done with the intention of hiring them as opportunities arise. "Our mission is to educate our clients," McCloud says.



Keeping ponds free of weeds and other contaminants is somewhat simpler for backyard ponds than larger ponds measured in acres.

"They're getting more interested in water and how to save it. People are protective of their little ponds. A lot of people care about the water."

That education depends on a staff of 13 crewmembers, all of whom have been with the company for at least 10 years, and who have degrees in marine biology, fisheries biology and environmental science.

Their expertise is vital to manage not just water, but a thriving ecosystem that includes fish and shoreline plants. McCloud keeps his staff on board year-round, but only works on ponds for six months. During the other months they do rou-

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tine maintenance of equipment and training.

ON SITE. When starting a new job, an applicator begins by taking the pond's vitals to determine pH, temperature, oxygen, presence of bacteria and depth of the pond, the latter which is done with a boat and GPS technology.

From there, they can formulate a plan that could include adding aerators and diffusers to maintain appropriate oxygen levels. McCloud Aquatics uses boats to add a specially blended biological treatment that incorporates bacteria, enzymes, vitamins, minerals and amino acids.

BJ Linger, owner of BJL

“People are protective of their little ponds. A lot of people care about the water.”

– Phil McCloud, McCloud Aquatics

Aquascapes in Colts Neck, N.J., has increasingly turned to pond maintenance to drive his business in Monmouth County and the surrounding area. Linger, who has been in the pond construction business for about 14 years says he shied away from pond maintenance the first decade, but is now moving in that direction.

“I can keep more guys busy

maintaining ponds than building ponds,” he says, adding that maintaining a pond for a client can also lead to renovation work and upgrades.

Keeping ponds clean and free of weeds and other contaminants is a somewhat simpler for backyard ponds than ponds measured in acreage. Linger says it's harder for weed seeds to

germinate in smaller ponds that often have moving water from waterfalls or fountains.

Ponds with lots of sludge and organic matter are usually completely drained, which can be done with the same pump that is used to create a waterfall in a water feature. A wet/dry vacuum and 5-gallon bucket is the equipment of choice to remove the sludge from the bottom of the pond. Linger then uses a power washer to clean the rocks and other components. While he's at it, he'll inspect and clean the skimmer and filters. **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich.

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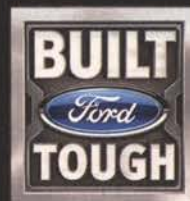
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Extreme choices

Choose the right plant for the right place whether you have too much water or not enough. By Leslie F. Halleck

AUTUMN SAGE

SALVIA GREGGII is one of the most reliable and easy-to-grow drought-tolerant perennials. There are many varieties of the species available and bloom colors range from pure white to pink, to coral, to deep red. As plants become semi-woody, they are often used as small shrubs in warm climates. Plants can grow approximately 3 feet tall and spread to 5 feet wide. Autumn sage begins blooming in early spring and continues until a hard frost. There are also many *S. greggii* hybrids with *S. microphylla* and other species, which are referred to as "*Salvia greggii* types." Plant in a sunny location with well-draining soil. **Hardiness zone varies by varieties and typically ranges from Zone 5-10.**



SEDUM

AS A GROUP, SEDUMS can be relied upon to be sturdy performers in hot and dry landscapes. These hardy succulents are available in assorted sizes, shapes and foliage colors. 'Blue Spruce' is a variety particularly good for use as a low-maintenance groundcover along sidewalks, driveways, retaining walls and containers. This variety offers up a unique silvery-blue foliage color. Plants require a full sun location with well-draining soil. Once established, plants require little supplemental water and are highly tolerant of reflected heat. **There are sedum varieties available for just about every hardiness zone.**

 DROUGHT-TOLERANT  WET-FEET PLANT



MEXICAN FEATHER GRASS DT

NASSELLA TENUISSIMA, commonly referred to as Mexican feather grass, is a species of grass native in the U.S. only to West Texas and New Mexico. Unlike many other ornamental grasses, this species is compact in size, growing to only 30 inches tall in bloom, in clumps 1 to 2 feet wide. Foliage is threadlike and adds a soft texture to the landscape. The spring and summer inflorescence have a feathery appearance. Plants require a sunny location and well-draining soil, and do not tolerate any excess soil moisture. **They are also excellent in containers and cold hardy to USDA Zone 6.**



ROSEMARY DT

KNOWN AS ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR culinary herbs, rosemary also performs as a lush, evergreen landscape shrub or cascading trailer. Plants are drought-hardy once established and very tolerant of intense reflected heat. Can be used in very low-maintenance plantings without supplemental irrigation. Plants bloom sporadically throughout the growing season, but timing

will depend on climate. There are many varieties of rosemary available; some grow upright to 6 feet tall, while prostrate varieties will trail over retaining walls and containers. **Some varieties are cold hardy to USDA Zone 6, while others are more suited to Zone 8 or higher. Provide a sunny location with well-draining soil.**



BEARDED IRIS DT

THIS STUNNINGLY BEAUTIFUL "BULB" also happens to be one of the most reliable drought-tolerant garden plants. The large rhizomes produced by bearded iris plants allow them to not only survive, but thrive under extended periods of drought. Once established, bearded iris do not require supplemental water. However, a bit of supplemental water now and then will result in more flowers. Bearded iris are available in a seemingly unending array of colors, shapes and sizes. There are iris varieties suited for any climate in the U.S. Some perform better in southern soils, while others are more tolerant to cold northern temperatures. Rhizomes should be planted shallowly in loose, well-draining soil in a sunny location. **They are hardy to Zones 3-10 in drier parts of the country, 3-8 in wetter parts.**



USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map

▶ **THE USDA HARDINESS ZONE MAP** is the standard by which landscapers can determine which plants will thrive in different locations across the country. The map is based on the average annual minimum winter temperature, divided into 10-degree F zones. Download one at bit.ly/LLusdamap.



GOOSENECK LOOSESTRIFE WF

AS WITH MANY PLANTS well-suited to a rain garden, Goose-neck Loosestrife, *Lysimachia clethroides*, can be an aggressive spreader depending on your location. However, if you have room to spare, they make quite an impressive display. Their long racemes of small white flowers curve as they mature, creating a gooseneck-like appearance. Plants establish easily in a rain garden and perform best in moist to wet soils. They don't tolerate extreme heat or soils that stay dry for extended periods. In cooler climates plants perform well in full sun locations, while they'll prefer some afternoon shade in southern regions. Each plant creates a clump about 3 feet wide and can be used in mass plantings or mixed borders. **Cold hardiness ranges from USDA Zones 3-8.**



YELLOW FLAG WF

UNLIKE BEARDED IRIS, *IRIS PSEUDACORUS* is a water-lover. Yellow flag is used to clean waterways as it absorbs heavy metals. Plants can spread aggressively, creating dense clumps of foliage. However, when planted in rain gardens that periodically dry out, their spread will be slowed. Plants produce bright yellow blooms in spring or summer atop sword-like foliage. Plants can tolerate very acidic

soils but are also adapted to soil with a high pH. While plants bloom heavier in sunny locations, they will also bloom in shadier locations. **Yellow flag can be grown in a variety of conditions throughout USDA Zones 3-9.**



MAIDEN GRASS WF

SOME PLANTS HAVE THE ABILITY to perform double duty in the landscape by tolerating both drought and wet

conditions. Maiden grass, a species in the genus *Miscanthus*, have that ability. This makes them perfect for use in rain gardens that may experience big swings from very wet to very dry and back again. There are many varieties available that offer up different foliage types, colors and plant sizes. Some varieties of maiden grass, such as 'Cosmopolitan' can grow up to 10 feet tall while dwarf varieties such as 'Adagio' top out at 3 feet tall. There's a maiden grass for almost any type or size of landscape space. Plants perform best in a sunny location, but can tolerate some shade. **Maiden grasses are typically cold hardy to USDA Zone 4 and are grown through Zone 9.**

ADD LANDSCAPE LIGHTING TO YOUR BUSINESS – AND ADD TO YOUR BOTTOM LINE.

When Jim Lewis started mowing lawns and trimming hedges nearly 20 years ago, he had no idea he would become one of Oregon's premier landscape lighting contractors. Today, Lewis Landscaping Services, Inc. offers clients a full spectrum of landscape design and build services, including hardscaping, greenscaping, irrigation and lighting. In particular, Jim's company is known for creating dynamic outdoor living spaces: taking outdated patios and re-imaging them into gathering spots with kitchens, grill stations, fireplaces and more. With each job, lighting is a big part of the initial design – and a profitable end result. Here's how Jim grew his business while becoming a pro in landscape lighting:

Three Reasons To Add Landscape Lighting To Your Business:

- 1. Higher profit margins.** The landscape lighting category provides greater profit opportunities than hardscaping and greenscaping products.
- 2. Happier customers.** Jim says that with his landscape lighting jobs, the only callbacks he tends to get are for more work.
- 3. Untapped opportunity.** "When you get good at landscape lighting, all of your work stands apart," notes Jim.

Photograph everything. Great, high definition photography of his work is the number one secret to Jim's success – yet he admits that getting these images was a struggle at first. "It's a Catch-22 when you're starting out: people want to see examples of your work, but you can't get those photos until you do the jobs." Jim overcame this by lighting his own yard and photographing the results. He also invested in a good quality camera and went to online forums and training classes to learn how to capture

landscape lighting effectively. "I'm not a photographer, and I don't claim to be, but this is such a critical part of my business. I invested the time in learning all I could."

Get the right product. "When I find a company I like, I'm loyal to it – it takes a lot to get me to switch," Jim says. A few years ago, Jim began using Kichler Design Pro LED landscape lighting products based on several factors that were important to him, including installation ease, warranty and the overall profit margin he gets. "I loved their 15-year warranty and the fact that we could swap product at the distributor's counter if we needed a replacement." Because of the variety of high-quality products Kichler offers, Jim is able to light outdoor living spaces for maximum use and enjoyment. Consumers get more value out of their investment and Jim makes more off of every job, since landscape lighting provides a higher profit margin than the other products he installs.

Make it easier on yourself (and your crews). Another big reason Jim chose Kichler Design Pro LED product was the way it simplified installation, since his crew didn't have to calculate voltage drop. "With the halogen product we were using, my crews used the hub system to run lines, which can be tricky to calculate. If you don't get it right, you'll have some lights that are brighter than others." With Kichler's daisy-chain installation, Jim was able to eliminate the frustration – and time – that came with these calculations. "This was a huge challenge Kichler helped us overcome."

Train, train – then train some more. Jim has taken dozens of landscape lighting classes over the years, and one in particular that stood apart was a full-day, hands-on training session Kichler offered. "That session was more in-depth than anything I had ever done, and really focused on how to design

things properly. It included photography information, as well, which was important to me." Training isn't a one and done deal for Jim either. "Technologies can change or a manufacturer can come up with a better solution. You've got to go to training year after year so you know you've got the latest information."

Top Tips For Getting Started with Landscape Lighting:

- 1. Make sure you choose the right landscape lighting manufacturer** – one who offers quality product and outstanding support.
- 2. Learn as much as you can;** take as many training classes as you can.
- 3. Market to the right people:** homeowners who can afford high-end landscape lighting.
- 4. Learn how to take great photographs** of your work.

Don't be afraid of the "lighting only" contractors. Jim's stiffest competition typically comes from contractors that only do lighting. Jim uses his varied experience to prove he's up to the job. He not only shows clients his portfolio, but he also emphasizes that because of his hardscaping and greenscaping skills, he can retrofit existing patios and put them back together like new. "You have to be prepared to prove that you know landscape lighting just as good as the other guys," Jim says "We're not just dabbling in landscape lighting design; it's something we've invested time in to become true experts."

To learn more about Jim's business, visit lewislandscape.com. To learn more about Kichler Design Pro LED fixtures, including how to register for a hands-on training seminar, visit kichler.com/landscape.

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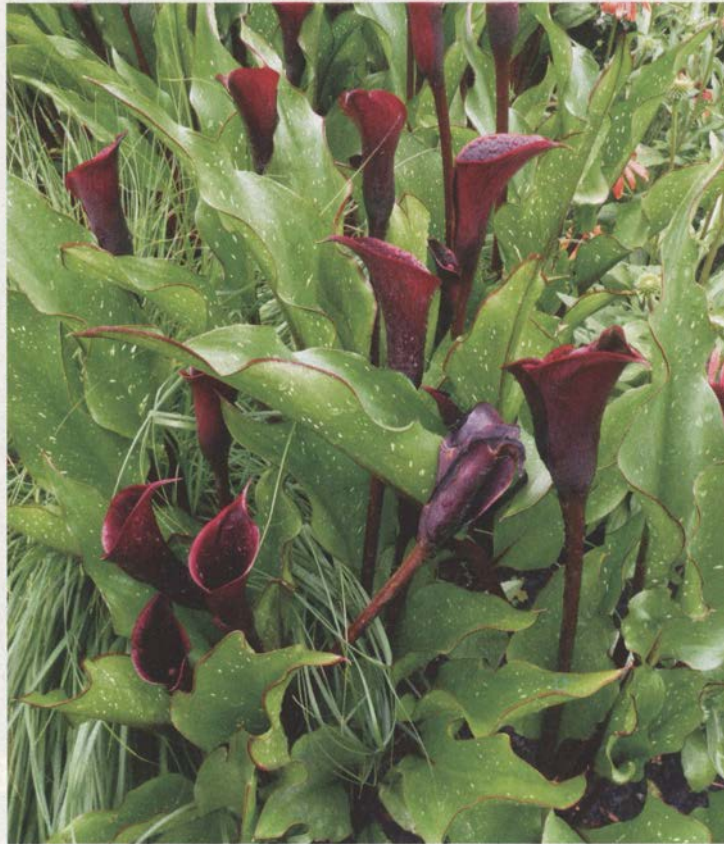
DON'T FORGET ABOUT TURF

While many homeowners are looking to replace lawn areas with drought-tolerant plants or rain gardens, lawns still offer important benefits to the urban dweller and ecosystem. For areas that need to support regular foot traffic and playtime for kids and pets, turfgrass is still a good solution. Lawns can be made more sustainable if the right variety is selected and a proper maintenance regimen is established.

According to Jack Karlin, program director for the Turfgrass Water Conservation Alliance, water-efficient turfgrasses use 30 percent less water than conventional varieties and provide a whole suite of ecological benefits. Dense fibrous root systems nearly double water infiltration rates while high plant density is excellent at securing and protecting topsoil. Turf also sequesters carbon into the soil and produces oxygen at a tremendous rate.

Turf also lowers the ambient temperature of an urban area, helping to mitigate the urban heat island effect, Karlin says.

"Beyond ecological services, turf has been correlated to increased mental and physical wellbeing, especially in children, and provides an affordable, attractive groundcover that enhances any landscape," he says.



CALLA LILY **WF**

WHILE NOT TRUE LILIES, *Zantedeschia* spp., are very elegant flowers for the spring and summer garden. Plants grow from tubers that are best planted bare-root in the fall. Container specimens can be planted any time in the growing season. Once mature, each tuber will produce a plant that offers up 10-30 flowers. The classic white calla lily is *Zantedeschia aethiopica*, but there are other species and cultivars in a variety of colors. Callas grow best in consistently moist soils with a sun to part shade exposure. Afternoon shade is recommended in very hot climates. **Calla lilies are best suited to warmer climates and are marginally cold hardy to USDA Zone 7.**

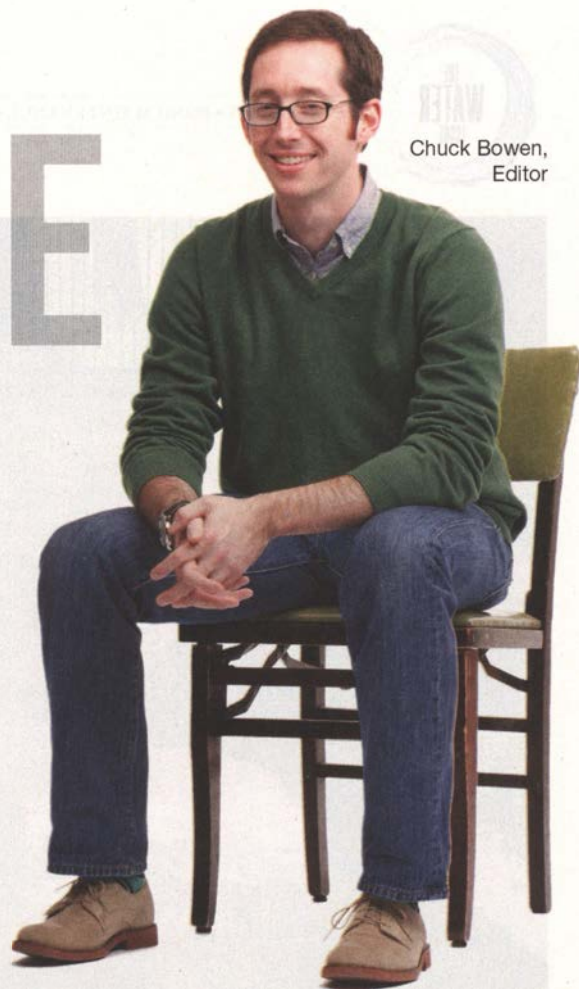


SPIDERWORT **WF**

SPIDERWORT WILL BRIGHTEN UP shady spots in rain gardens and along streams and ponds. If there is soggy soil, this plant is bound to thrive. *Tradescantia* spp. grow in spreading clumps that can spread and seed quickly given the right environment. Choose sterile hybrids for smaller areas or if spreading is a concern. Plants grow to about 2 feet in height. The unique flowers appear in intense shades of purple, violet, pink and even white. Individual blooms last only a day, but are continually replaced by new flowers from spring through summer. **Spiderworts are cold hardy to USDA Zone 4 and grown through Zone 9.**

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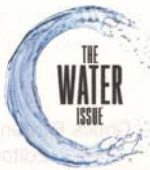


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Where to drain all that rain

If you work in an area that has too much water, then don't let it go to waste.

By Hilary Daninhirsch

While the drought continued in California, just a couple of states to the east, areas of Texas were drenched, leading to serious flooding. And although the West is dry, certain areas of the country get a steady dose of rain on a regular basis.

This provides great opportunities for contractors who want to help customers be more eco-friendly, and save some money. Here are four systems that use rain where water is needed,

instead of it coming from your hose or faucet.

PERMEABLE PAVERS. Permeable pavers are an alternative to concrete and asphalt. Typical pavement materials are impervious to fluid, resulting in runoff, but permeable pavers permit rainfall to percolate through, or permeate, voids or cracks in the pavement surface to the underlying soil.

Camille Stauber, landscape architect and president of Sustainable Places in Skokie, Ill., says that a lot of landscape design



Plant materials along the edges of permeable pavers play an important part in absorbing stormwater. There is a wide range of permeable paver choices for every budget and for every situation.

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practices have resulted in very compacted soil, which shed water and prevent rain from entering the underground water system. She says, especially in larger areas, it is important to use a paving system that has a neutral stone base with a sand topping that is well-compacted and constructed.

"It's a little more expensive, but in the long run, it is a much better system. You can do plantings along the side so that water underneath the paved system gets absorbed quickly," she says.

Stauber says not to use limestone, as the chemical reaction from lime and water makes the soil harder and less porous.

"I would always use permeable pavers whenever you can, and I always provide different kinds of plant materials in low elevation areas," says Stauber, stressing that you should use native plants when possible and plants that will tolerate wet conditions.

Stauber says permeable pavers wear really well and are a very good and durable choice. "Unlike asphalt or concrete that will crack and give, if they sag or heave, you take them out one by one, fix it, and put them back again," she says.

She adds there exists a wide range of choices in this product for every budget and for every situation.

POROUS MATERIAL. Porous Pave is a brand of pavers made primarily from recycled tires, which allows water to drain through the entire surface. The material can be used in areas such as driveways and parking lots. The product is used in at least 35 states now and in both private and commercial properties.

Tim Allen, owner of T&K Outdoors, in Bemidji, Minn., says the product doesn't plug up like a lot of permeable surfaces or crack like concrete.

Plus, he says, it can get into tight areas, is easily workable and is easy to maintain with glue. Another bonus is that he is now able to blend up the basic

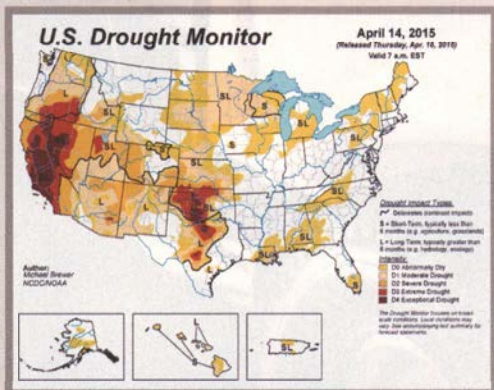
solid colors, which has led to more sales to correlate with the numerous color options.

"You can put it in a planting bed, around tree rings instead of big metal grates, and the water runs right through it," Allen says.

He says he would not install them in a clay-based area, as clay needs to be sealed. He says that they also can be used on very steep slopes.

"It doesn't slough off, as it is rubber, and it doesn't get slippery," Allen says. "In winter, this is a huge asset because it doesn't hold the moisture. Water goes through it. Customers don't have to worry about slip and fall incidents."

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RAINWATER HARVESTING. Rainwater harvesting involves collecting or catching rainwater where it falls to store for future uses, such as irrigation.

The rainwater can be collected from rooftops or other above-ground hard surfaces. It then goes through a pre-filter and is piped into the containment system.

“In the past this has meant a rooftop petroleum tank that could be considered an eyesore,” says Chad Turpin, co-founder and co-owner of EcoDrainage Solutions, a drainage system installation company in Coatesville, Pa.

“Recent improvements in



Porous Pavement is a brand of pavers made primarily from recycled tires, which allows water to drain through the entire surface. The material can be used in areas such as driveways and parking lots. The product is used in at least 35 states now on both private and commercial properties.

rainwater harvesting allow us to capture the excess water from gutters and downspouts, send it through a pre-filter and store it in an underground cistern. Then distribution can range from a simple pump to an entire fully automated drip irrigation system and treatment.”

Once it has been captured and pre-filtered, Turpin, who also co-owns Turpin Landscaping, says the water can be used in a number of ways, such as irrigating landscaping and vegetable gardens, sustaining a water feature, providing water to wildlife and livestock and even assisting in fire protection. And those are just the bigger uses. “Consider

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things like washing your car, power washing your home, etc.," he says. "The list goes on and on."

Depending on size, though, a system can be costly to set up. Turpin says a profes-

sionally installed system starts at about \$6,000. Harvesting rainwater is an option under most normal circumstances, but for those with well water as their only source, it can be especially useful as a supplement to the



Rainwater can be collected from rooftops or other above-ground hard surfaces. It then goes through a pre-filter and is piped into the containment system.

well, particularly if the well is unreliable, Turbin says.

RAIN GARDENS/BIOSWALES. Rain gardens and bioswales are similar landscaping concepts. Both are used to capture and filter storm water by being positioned near a runoff source.

"A rain garden is a bed that has soil amended and allows plants to survive in both wet and dry conditions," says Matt Ciminelli, owner of Ciminelli's Landscape Services in Lothian, Md.

A rain garden will collect contaminants that run off of asphalt and from the roof. It should only be able to hold water temporarily while it absorbs during storms and then it filters through the amendments of the soil layers.

Bioswales are essentially ditches with plants that channel surface water to slowly intercept water pollutants. They are primarily used when there are significant slopes or hills, and are less common than a typical rain garden.

Ciminelli says he doesn't think of rain gardens as an expense but rather as a necessary cost or an investment. "If we keep polluting our water and environment, and not treating our property, there is a cost down the road," he says. The expense lies in the cubic footage of the soil and plant bed, and the number of specifications for materials will drive the price



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up further. Rain gardens and bioswales can be planted anywhere you'd have storm water runoff that needs to be controlled, though Ciminelli says they are more prevalent on the East Coast than on the West Coast.

Some commercial properties in the mid-Atlantic region require them, such as parking lots.

Also, those who plant rain gardens can often obtain tax credits and refunds from



A rain garden will collect contaminants that run off of asphalt and from the roof. It should only be able to hold water temporarily while it absorbs during storms, and then it filters through the amendments of the soil layers.

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municipalities, as they are storm water management tools.

In general, Ciminelli says he'd use them in any circumstance where there is the ability to capture storm water. "We would not use a rain garden or bioswale in an area that would prevent proper construction method and regular maintenance," he says, which would include any severe slope or subsoil that could not be excavated properly.

"You should only use native plants which would benefit insects, birds and wildlife, and reestablish those plants that were removed when construction was done," he says. "You are recreating a habitat, so you should put natives in."

The downsides are few, though Ciminelli cautions that many people do not understand how to maintain them, or they are sometimes not installed properly or are "overly planted" with weeds. Owners should pick up trash regularly, keep out invasive plants and promote the plants that were planted there. Another option is putting a maintenance clause in the contract.

"That's the number one thing for me: Are they going to do the maintenance?" Ciminelli says. "Don't take that lightly; you want to make sure it is still functioning 20 years from now." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Pittsburgh.

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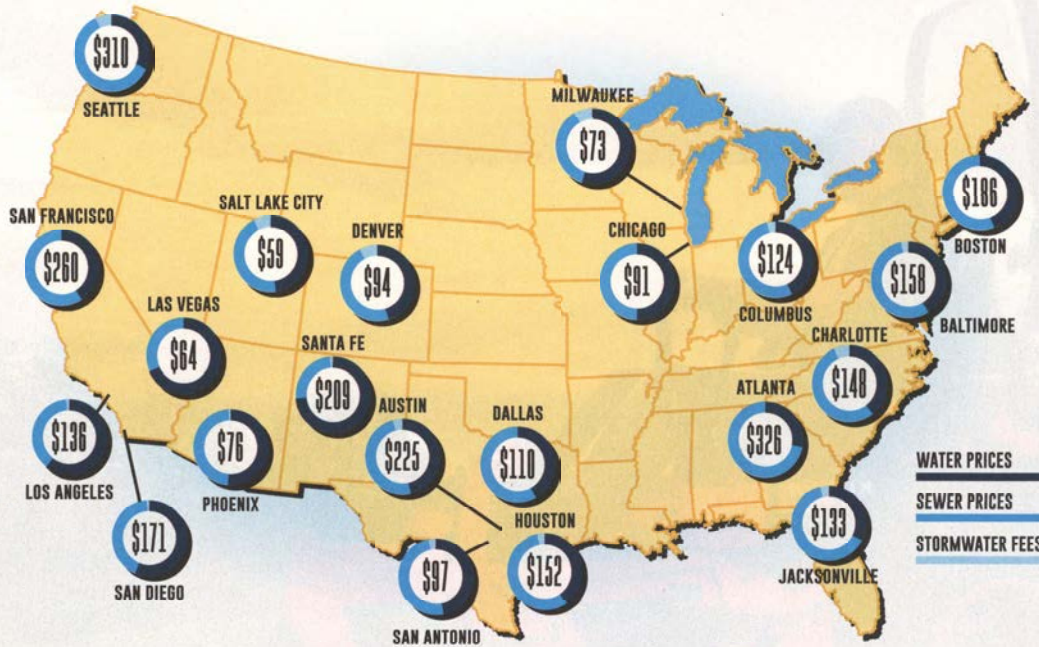
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WHAT YOU PAY FOR WATER

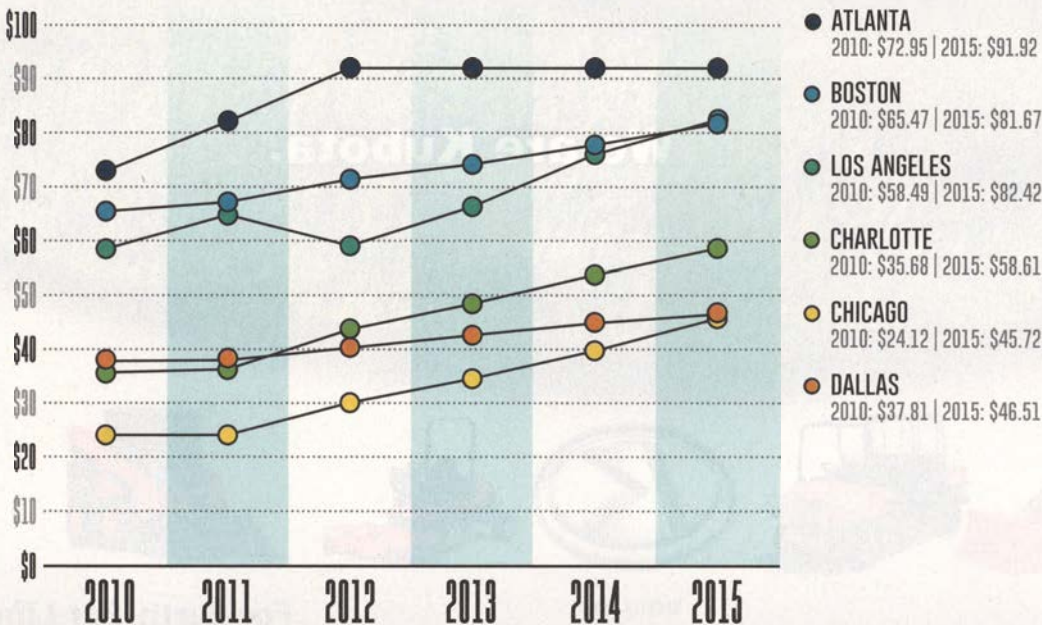
Combined water, sewer and stormwater prices for households in 21 major cities



NOTES: Rates current as of April 1, 2015. Monthly bill calculated for a family of four using 100 gallons per person per day.

SOURCE: Circle of Blue research, based on utility water rates

AVERAGE MONTHLY BILL FOR FAMILY OF FOUR USING 100 GALLONS/PERSON/DAY



If you look at a map of the country, you'd be hard pressed to find much logic to the price of water. It costs just as much for 100 gallons of water in Boston as it does in Los Angeles (about \$82), and less than half as much in Las Vegas (\$44) as in Seattle (\$99).

The price for 100 gallons of water – what the EPA says is the average an American uses each day – varies dramatically throughout the country, according to a recent study of water, sewer and stormwater rates from Circle of Blue, a Michigan-based non-profit that reports on freshwater.

"Prices are going up pretty much everywhere," says Brett Walton, a reporter with Circle of Blue. And what's driving those prices isn't geography, but infrastructure. "The price of water isn't tied all that closely to scarcity. Prices are what it costs to treat and deliver."

Many cities are coupling price increases with efforts to find or make more water.

San Antonio plans to pipe in water from farms 142 miles away. A private company is building a \$1-billion desalination plant in San Diego that it says will produce 50 million gallons of fresh water a day. In 2014, two small towns in West Texas started pumping treated wastewater directly to municipal taps.

However cities are finding new water, one fact remains: Prices are only going one way. "They're not going to go back down," Walton says. "That's for sure." **L&L**

– Chuck Bowen

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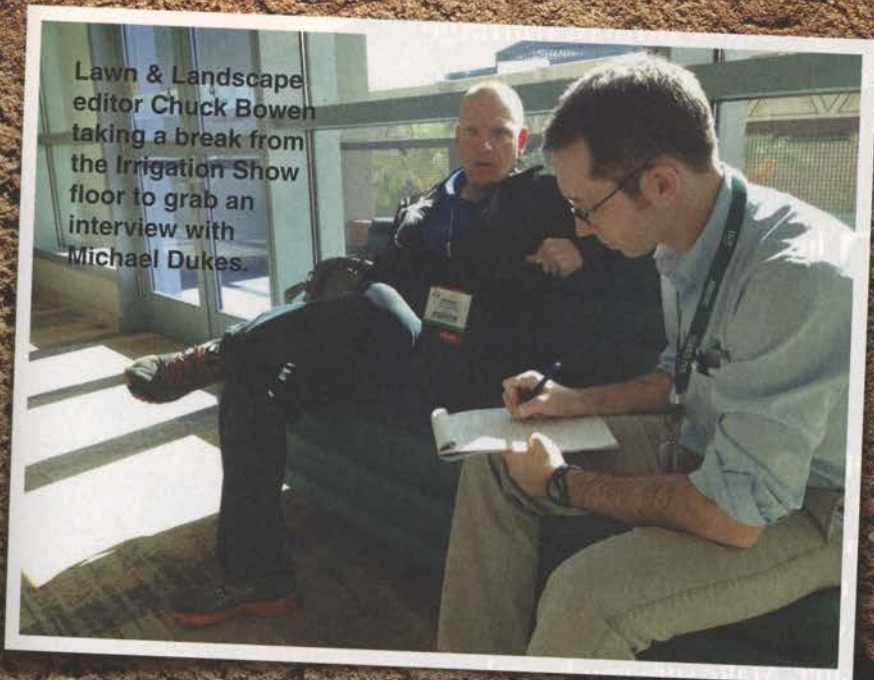
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Lawn & Landscape digital content editor Kate Spirgen on location at Renewal and Remembrance in Arlington, Va.



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

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LEAD YOUR CUSTOMERS TO WATER

You already know how to manage water. Here's how to tell your prospects why they should care.

By Richard Restuccia

The contractors doing the best job in water management today are contractors who are successful in explaining *why* customers should save water instead of spending time telling customers *how* to save water.

If a customer or prospect does not understand the importance of saving water, they simply will not care about how you will save them water. Make sure you have the following marketing tools in your tool kit and you are well on your way to explaining the why, not the how.

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A SIMPLE LEAVE-BEHIND. Saving water will save money, and if you are installing tools to more effectively manage water, you should have more time to focus on other key areas of their landscape, therefore saving the customer labor costs or time. Your leave-behind should convey this message.

The key concept you need to make answers the question: Why save water? Saving water saves money and improves the look of your landscape.

You need to show them, preferably with a picture, what a water-efficient landscape looks like. A simple call to action – “call me for more information on how to

When presenting water management concepts to our customers, it is important to remember that they are asking one question: So what?

save water, save money and improve your landscape” – provides an opportunity to further explain why your customer should want to save water. Be sure to include your contact information and website.



Richard RESTUCCIA

WATER USE ANALYSIS. This analysis should include a minimum three-year history of water use on your customer’s property. Most water agencies accept a letter from your customer giving you authorization to access their water bills. Do this first – do not ask your customer to get the information for you. Water agencies will be happy to tell you exactly what they require in the letter so

you get the proper authorization the first time.

The next step is calculating the proper amount of water the customer should have used based on their landscape and historical evapotranspiration. If it is a current customer you should have the square footage information and breakdown of percentages of groundcover, shrubs and turf. If it is a new customer, you may have to measure or use Google Earth or Bing maps for square footage information. These web services aren’t always perfect, but don’t let perfection get in the way of progress. A solid estimate can accurately forecast water savings.

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footage and plant material estimates, you will need ET data for the property. There are a number of websites providing ET data for cities or whole ZIP codes. You will also need to estimate or calculate the efficiency of the irrigation system. If this is for a current customer you should have a good idea of this already. With a new customer you should gain permission to turn the system on and take some measurements.

Once you have gathered all this information, you will be able to put together your water use analysis and have something that looks like the **table above**.

This is a simple example of a water use analysis, and you

ESTIMATED IRRIGATED LANDSCAPE SIZE	5 ACRES
AVERAGE COST OF WATER	\$4.23 PER UNIT
AVERAGE 12-MONTH WATER USE	\$150,000
PROJECTED 12-MONTH WATER USE	\$112,500 (25% WATER SAVINGS)
12-MONTH PROJECTED SAVINGS	\$37,500

have the opportunity to make it more specific based on the data available and time you spend on the analysis.

I would also include a monthly bar chart of projected water use compared to historical water use and a discussion of water price trends.

ROI CALCULATION. Instead of

selling water management as the “right” thing to do to protect the environment and ensure the long term aesthetic of your landscape, the industry decided to sell the dollar savings.

As a result, customers won't invest in water savings unless they see a return on their investment in less than two years. I've worked with some customers who won't make an investment in saving water unless the ROI is less than a year. I have met with several who accept three years, but almost none who will agree to make changes if the ROI is more than four years.

The exception to this has been customers in California who, due to the drought, are now willing to spend money to be sustainable,

► FOR A MAP AND ANALYSIS OF WATER PRICES ACROSS THE COUNTRY, TURN TO PAGE 68.

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PROPERTY	ANNUAL SAVINGS	% SAVINGS	MICRO IRRIGATION AND INSTALLATION AND MATERIAL	PAYBACK EST. IN YEARS
WHITE HORSE HOA	\$40,125	25%	\$127,195.77	3.17

*SAVINGS CALCULATIONS ARE FOR WATER COSTS ONLY AND DO NOT INCLUDE ANY OTHER AVOIDED COSTS

not because it is going to pay off for them in a short period of time. Your calculation should include historic water costs, the projected dollar savings from the recommended changes and the amount of time the changes will take to “pay off.” Above is a simple example of an ROI calculation.

CASE STUDIES. When presenting water management concepts to our customers, it is important to remember that they are asking one question: So what?

Keep this in mind and you will never find yourself straying into the world of distribution uniformity, Water Use Classification of Landscape Species or crop coefficients when trying to make a sale. That “so what” often leads to questions like, Why should I save water? How much money will I save? Will I have a better-looking landscape?

Once the so-what question is answered, the next thing they say is: “Prove it.”

The committees, decision makers and HOA boards typically hear similar promises from all companies. “We do the best work, we care about our work more, we will do a great job for you, and here is our price ... is it low enough?”

Promises are made to decision makers who have been lied to before. We don’t provide them with the proof they need to select a higher price and we get mad when they go with the lowest price. Often it is our fault for not providing enough proof for them to select a higher price.

Water management case studies are the proof you and your customers need. Every

water management job you start should begin with a case study in mind. Water management provides objective measurement, allowing you to document the results of the changes you made to an irrigation system. Take pictures of the property before you start your work. You already should have water use information from your water analysis so you can compare water use to previous years.

Keep your case study simple. I prefer a three-part case study. Part one states the challenges the customer is having. For example: White Horse HOA is a 20-year-old association with steep slopes surrounding homes and many of the slopes were planted with turf.

Part two provides the information for the solution. For example: We removed 60 percent of the turf and replaced it with a more water-wise landscape including drip irrigation. For the remaining turf areas we installed smart controllers that adjust water schedules daily based on actual water requirements.

Part three provides the results: The first year we cut water use by more than 50 percent for a total of \$63,000 annually in water cost. This project paid for itself in the first eight months.

A simple challenge-solution-result formula provides the answer to the prove-it question your customer is asking. It provides a solution to their specific problem in an easy-to-understand manner. It provides the justification the customer needs to say yes to a higher price.

If you don’t have a job with water management history, you can create a case study when you start a job. The formula is very similar, but instead of results you include expected results.

For example: Based on our water use analysis, White Horse HOA will save 50 percent on water the first year, which equals \$63,000 in annual water costs savings. Then supply a reference name and number for the prospect

► TO DOWNLOAD A TEMPLATE TO CREATE YOUR OWN SALES PROPOSALS, FIND THIS STORY AT LAWNANDLANDSCAPE.COM BY SEARCHING “LEAD YOUR CUSTOMERS TO WATER.”



to call to see how the savings are progressing at another job. It is not as effective as actual results, but much more effective than just a blanket promise to save water. You need a case study for all the customer segments you work with. Don't forget to share these case studies on your website and social media.

PROPOSAL. Once you have your water analysis, ROI calculation and case studies assembled, writing the proposal will be easy. A clean cover page with a picture of the property helps convey that this proposal was designed specifically for the customer and is not just a generic template.

A proposal is your opportunity to show the customer how you are solving their problem, so mention that right away: "A Water Management Solution for White Horse HOA." I am providing a solution, not a proposal.

The next page should be your summary. Start by thanking the customer for the opportunity to provide the proposal. Tell them what you are going to do without going into too much detail: We are converting spray irrigation to drip irrigation, which has proven to be a much more efficient way to apply water. We are also recommending smart controllers, which have been shown to save 20-25 percent of water on similar properties.

The next paragraph should explain that what your client is about to see is the scope of your services, and the final paragraph covers why they should invest in their irrigation system: saving water, saving money and improving the look of their landscape is critical for the investment they have in their property.

The next page is where you go into the specifics of recommended products, the time it will take to do the project and the cost. This is where you insert your ROI calculation. Use this page to present any type of financing program you have to offer. The next page should be what every customer wants – the case study provides justification to pay a higher price and peace of mind because the contractor has the necessary experience to deliver on his promises. **L&L**

The author is vice president, landscape solutions at Jain Irrigation. He is also the former director of water management solutions at ValleyCrest Landscape Co.

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Retrofitting spray systems with more efficient rotator-type sprinklers is the easiest way to see an immediate reduction in water use. And every system, no matter where it's located, should have a smart controller to water landscapes based on local weather conditions to maximize savings. Other solutions include converting small areas from overhead sprays to drip irrigation and adding pressure regulation to any system for optimal product performance.

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Can you imagine how much water your clients would save if you could send an irrigation expert to the jobsite every single day? He could measure the site's sun exposure and temperature, monitor current and historical weather patterns, take into account the turf or ornamental plant materials in each zone and make irrigation schedule adjustments on the spot. Sending a staffer to every customer site every day isn't practical. But, it is possible through the use of the Climate Logic wireless weather sensing system from Irritrol.

Climate Logic is a wireless transmitting weather sensor that combines a rain sensor with an automatic shut off for precipitation events, a solar sensor and a temperature sensor with historical data

to more accurately schedule site-specific irrigation cycles. The Climate Logic system includes an outdoor wireless transmitting weather sensor, a receiver module and an SD card with 40 years' worth of historical weather information based on longitude and latitude. Climate Logic is compatible with most Irritrol controllers and meets the criteria for the EPA WaterSense label.

"This gets down to almost a microclimate of a particular landscape, looking at current and historical data for a pinpoint on the North American map," says Alexis Bookman, marketing communication manager for Irritrol, based in Riverside, Calif.

Because the data used to make decisions about how much water to apply and when to apply are deter-

mined by information for a particular site, Climate Logic "makes adjustments to prevent over-watering that is in and of itself a key factor to address drought issues," Bookman says.

The system is easy to install. It has a built-in radio which means it's wireless. There are no wires to run through a jobsite, requiring much less labor for installation.

Online tutorials in both English and Spanish on the Irritrol YouTube channel offer step-by-step instructions for installation and management of the system.

An optional handheld remote control adds to the system's ease of use. The remote utilizes the same receiver module as the Climate Logic wireless transmitting sensor. One remote can oper-

ate multiple sensors. "Sitting in your truck, you can do maintenance and whatever is necessary," Bookman says.

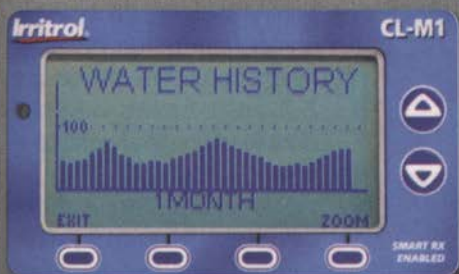
The Climate Logic wireless water sensing system may be installed to monitor and schedule irrigation for single family or multi-family residential landscapes, commercial properties or HOAs.

"Even as experts, we tend to apply more water than the landscape calls for most of the time. The Climate Logic system takes the decision out of human hands and leaves it to the weather and historical data. You end up with an irrigation expert at your location and it will save you water in the long run," Bookman says. "When you leave it to the smart irrigation system, it's a benefit to the environment and to the landscape."

To learn more, visit the Irritrol Climate Logic YouTube channel at: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL571A45A727F42101>
Or visit the Irritrol website at: http://irritrol.com/sensors_climatologic.aspx.

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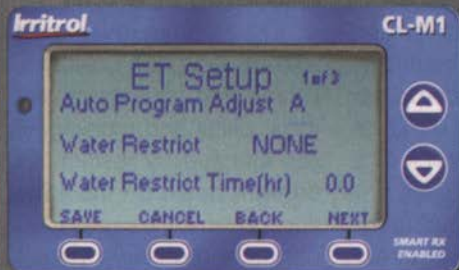
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EAGLE PLUS CONTROL SYSTEM SAVING WATER AND YOUR WEEKEND



It's a Sunday afternoon and Anthony Lardieri's phone rings. It's the coach of a youth group calling to say that the irrigation system is running on the field at Fontana High School and he's got a game scheduled.

Just a few years ago, Lardieri, as operations supervisor for Fontana Unified School District in Southern California, would have had to track down a crewmember who lives nearby and pay him a minimum two hours of overtime to go in and manually shut off the irrigation system.

Or even worse, if he couldn't find a staffer to do the work, he'd have to drive the 30 miles from his home to the field and do it himself.

But since the school district began switching over its older central control systems to the new Rain Master Eagle Plus central control system equipped with i-Central internet-based control, that scenario has become less frequent of an occurrence. Now, even before he hangs up the phone with the coach, Lardieri can boot up his laptop or smart phone and shut off the system without having to leave his house.

As the Eagle Plus is a weather-based system that



Anthony Lardieri, above, uses Rain Master's Eagle Plus control system to remotely manage the irrigation systems at Fontana Unified School District in Southern California.

senses precipitation, it has the ability to automatically initiate a "rain shutdown" in case of unexpected showers. This feature, alone, Lardieri says, has dramatically changed the way the district manages its irrigation at all 47 school and administrative building sites.

"When I first started at the district in 1990, when it would rain, our irrigation guys would spend the whole day driving around the dis-

trict going to each controller, shutting them off manually. Now I can go to a computer and shut them all off all at one time with the click of a mouse button," he says.

But more than just labor costs are saved. A recent comparison between two schools in the Fontana Unified School District tells the real story.

The comparison looked at an elementary school with an older manual sys-

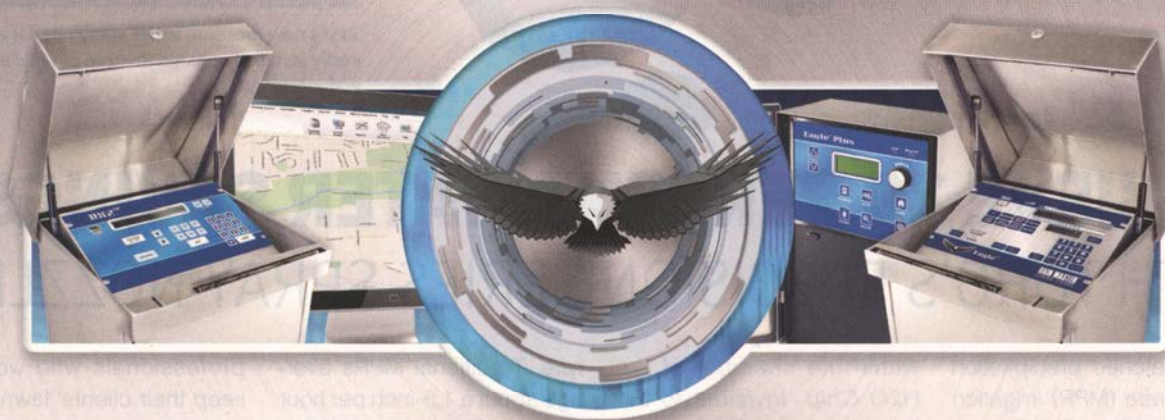
tem and a middle school with the Eagle Plus central control system with ZipET, a component of the i-Central internet software that sends ZIP code-based weather data to the central controller every 24 hours.

The elementary school using the manual system without weather sensors used 9.9 acre-feet (3.25 million gallons) of water to irrigate less than one acre (.94 acres) of greenspace in the calendar year 2014. Elsewhere in the district, a middle school using the Eagle Plus central control with i-Central and ZipET used just 2.6 acre-feet (326,000 gallons) of water to irrigate 9.9 acres of greenspace. That's right, the site with 10 times more greenspace used 1.2 million gallons less water.

"Especially down here with the drought in California, I think that for school districts, cities and municipalities affected by restrictions brought down by the state and governor, it's really important to conserve water," Lardieri says. "Everybody has to do their part. This is a very good tool that shows tax payers that we are doing things to try to save as much water as possible and use it, as wisely as we can."

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Toro's new precision series spray nozzles are an easily installed upgrade that can provide major water savings.

ACHIEVE 30 PERCENT WATER SAVINGS WITH TORO'S PRECISION SERIES SPRAY NOZZLES

Matched precipitation rate (MPR) irrigation spray nozzles have been the industry standard for pop-up irrigation for more than two decades. Yet, a new advance in nozzle technology from The Toro Company, the Precision Series Spray Nozzles – a new spray head compatible with nearly every MPR system installed in the U.S. today – could help landscape contractors achieve a 30 percent water savings for their clients over traditional MPR nozzles.

"You can just swap the nozzles out, and not change the run times, and realize about a 30 percent water savings," says Burnett (B.J.) Jones, senior marketing manager for Toro ResCom Irrigation.

The secret to the high-efficiency Precision Series Spray Nozzles with patented H2O Chip technology lies

within the chamber of the H2O Chip. Invisible to the naked eye, and only seen with strobe light illumination, water in the spray head oscillates at over 200 cycles per second. Water droplets of consistent size and velocity exit the nozzle as high-frequency oscillating streams that create a spray pattern offering better coverage, defined edges, reduced runoff and lower flow rates. The consistently sized droplets also reduce misting.

"What we're able to do is create a much more evenly distributed area of water as compared to the MPR nozzles of old," Jones says.

More even distribution, or higher distribution uniformity, results in superior coverage while using less water.

Jones says the new Precision Series Spray Nozzles target a 1-inch per hour flow

rate. Traditional MPRs average about a 1.5-inch per hour flow rate to achieve the same coverage, hence the 30 percent reduction in water use.

For systems that operate at higher pressures, Toro developed pressure compensating versions of the Precision Series Spray Nozzles to minimize misting up to inlet pressures of more than 40 PSI.

For even more efficient irrigation, Precision Series Spray Nozzles may be integrated into systems operated by the Evolution Controller with Smart Connect to "automatically manage and adjust" irrigation schedules. The system offers two sensor options: weather-based or ET/soil sensor.

Based in Riverside, Calif., Jones says he and his colleagues at Toro are acutely aware of the irrigation restrictions placed on landscape

professionals who work to keep their clients' lawns and ornamentals healthy and green, while saving water at the same time.

For professionals, Jones says, "Your customers are looking for solutions. You as the contractor can bring these forward as a solution" to manage drought conditions.

"Many people are being faced with the decision of what to do to become compliant with water restrictions being imposed. What they don't realize is there are other options to avoid ripping your turf out. Simply by doing retrofits to existing irrigation systems, they do have other options to reduce their water usage," Jones says. "The Precision Series is one of those products to help them save significant amounts of water with their existing irrigation system."

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The ultimate drought buster product, Hydretain is currently being used throughout the state of California where Governor Jerry Brown has ordered a mandatory 25% reduction in water use.

To help achieve this mandate, the city of Rocklin has added Hydretain to their 2015 Drought Mitigation Plan. They have applied the product to the turf in city parks and reduced watering by 50%.

Not only are they doing their part to conserve, but the difference is stark when compared to nearby properties who have also reduced watering by half without application of the product.

The use in California and other western states provides an example of Hydretain's ability to perform under extreme conditions; however,



Treated with Hydretain, Twin Oaks Community Park in Rocklin, CA is much greener than the adjacent untreated Elementary School grounds. Both properties have reduced water use by 50%.

the product's benefits are not limited to dry climates. While drought is characterized by prolonged periods without adequate rainfall, drought stress can happen every day.

According to Agronomist, Jim Spindler, "drought stress occurs when moisture loss from the plant exceeds the roots' ability to absorb water and the plant's water content is reduced enough to interfere with standard plant processes.

"Under normal conditions, plants can experience drought stress regularly in between periods of rainfall or scheduled irrigation." By maximizing water use in the root zone, Hydretain protects against everyday drought

stresses. In addition to the product, Ecologel offers a program to help landscape contractors capitalize on the opportunity to turn landscape water management challenges into profitable service option.

The Hydretain Advantage Program provides members with product training, technical support, and free marketing materials (including materials for private label brands, LESCO Moisture Manager and BioPro's H3O Plus).

Program members also have the option to be included in an online professional applicator directory.

For many applicators, Hydretain has had an immediate impact on their bottom line:

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After several years of use by golf course superintendents and sports turf managers, Hydretain has a proven track record, and is becoming increasingly popular amongst landscape professionals.

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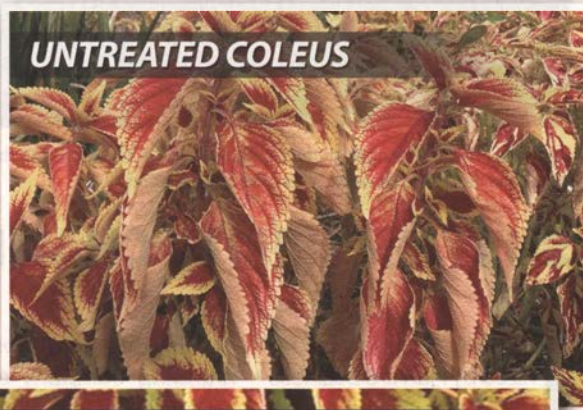
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Acquisitions of Chapin, the founding company of drip tape; NaanDan, the emitter leader, and Thomas Machines, the manufacturing equipment leader, along with PureSense a field monitoring software, helping growers save money and manage limited resources responsibly. These all help make Jain the nexus of irrigation technology. Today Jain holds the most irrigation device patents and is committed to the largest research and development effort in irrigation to ensure water consumption is delivering the best return. We offer a full line of products to the landscape irrigation market and invite you to try some of our innovative products. This is all to fulfill the Jain mission statement,

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Plantscapers in Irvine, Calif., gives designers and architects the tools they need to incorporate green space indoors.

Outside in

Interiorscaping is taking plant design and installation to a whole new frontier.

By Kate Spirgen

Part design, part horticulture and all customer service, interiorscaping is taking off as the idea of incorporating natural elements into interior design gains popularity. Architects and interior designers are starting to include some green in their designs, and interiorscape companies are diversifying, branching into furniture, art and more.

In Irvine, Calif., Julie Farrow has been installing indoor plants for more than 30 years, working with designers and architects to raise awareness of the benefits of adding plantings. And now designers are putting green space in their plans.

"We're being specified where we weren't before," says the president and founder of Plantscapers. "We give them the tools to actually put in living walls in their CAD designs and we speak to them a lot. It's a really hot topic right now. People are actually starting to listen."

For Plantscapers, working with the designers is crucial

to a great product. Not only does the endorsement of the architect help sell the client on planters or green walls, but knowing the design helps Farrow's team complement the office environment.

"There's nothing worse than having a design that's very traditional and then you go in there and you disregard it and put in chrome pots," Farrow says. "You really have to be respectful of what they're doing."

At Hoffman Design Group in Folcroft, Pa., the team does it all, from furniture to artwork to outdoor planters and window boxes to weddings and holidays displays for nearly 400 clients in an 85-mile radius of Philadelphia. The company has been doing so well that it moved to a larger, 50,000-square foot facility in June.

The goal is to create a happy and healthy environment to improve people's well-being. "A company that is going to succeed now in this day and age needs to

Stay on your toes

Trends move much faster inside than they do outside, says Julie Farrow, founder and president of Plantscapers in Irvine, Calif. Customers want more than just the standard pots and planters, so interiorscapers need to keep up to date with the latest design trends to keep their customers happy.

Plantscapers is always expanding its design horizons, using cutting-edge elements like preserved grasses, replica equisetum, character plants, unique pottery and contemporary lines of squares. Cool tones and steel elements like gunmetal pottery are big in California right now, so Farrow incorporates them into her work.

"We're really paying attention to what the architect and design movement is right now and if we can keep on that and complement that, I think we're going to do really exciting things," she says.

Bryan Hoffman, founder and owner of Hoffman Design Group in Folcroft, Pa., keeps his customers intrigued by surprising them with elements like pop-up gardens and found object planters. From parking lot gardens to temporary displays, the company is always trying to keep clients guessing.

"We're looking at these ways that we can incorporate changes into the accounts and surprises because the whole idea of surprising people and capturing people's attention is a big trend right now," Hoffman says.

Inspiring creativity and interrupting routines in surprising ways is Hoffman's goal, and he says that's what sets his company apart. Hoffman gets his inspiration from some of the latest movements in street art like seed bombing where someone will throw a handful of seeds into an open lot and see what grows.

Hoffman Design Group is always trying to find new ways to display plants beyond the green wall and green roof, looking at ways to combine art and hor-



Indoor design trends change much faster than outdoor landscaping trends, meaning interiorscapers need to stay up to date on the latest styles.

ticulture in ways no one has seen before. Capitalizing on the popularity of biophilia (the idea that there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems), Hoffman and his group create a natural office environment.

"Why would people want to use us if we didn't have the newest, latest innovations to share with them?" he asks. "They could just go to Home Depot and buy some pots and plants and do it themselves."

be more focused on plants and their effects on the office as well as how they relate to the interior design of the office," says Bryan Hoffman, founder and owner of Hoffman Design Group. "Plants by themselves – anyone can do that. You really need to be able to figure out a way to provide a whole environment for the people in the office."

STRICTLY BUSINESS. Plantscapers and Hoffman Design Group both service mostly corporate clients like hotels, retail centers, offices and other public spaces, with Hoffman's clientele 100 percent commercial, and Farrow's 80 percent commercial and 20 percent high-end residential.

Both companies employ 18 fulltime workers, and Hoffman also has 30 to 40 seasonal employees. While Plantscapers is all interior, Hoffman's landscape services make up about 45 percent of the company's total revenue. That includes interiorscapes and outdoor planters. The rest comes from displays and design.

Plantscapers' goal for net gross profit is 55 percent with a 2014 revenue of \$2 million.

Each department at Hoffman

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Design Group has its own goals with an overall ideal of 15 percent profit margin.

Last year, the interiorscape department had a goal of 45 percent net profit and exceeded it by 2 percent.

"Interior landscapes has a lot of reoccurring revenue so it's easier to predict what revenue is going to be coming in every month and as long as the routes are managed efficiently and there's not a lot of turnover, things can move along nicely according to plan without too many surprises,"



Pop-up gardens and unique displays keep Hoffman Design Group's clients guessing what's coming next.

"You really need to be able to figure out a way to provide a whole environment for the people in the office."

Bryan Hoffman, founder and owner of Hoffman Design Group

Hoffman says.

Both Hoffman and Farrow got into the industry for their love of plants, but stress that it's a business, not a hobby. Since interior landscaping is a luxury service, she stresses that it's important to be a perfectionist and a professional at all times. And if you don't know

how to do something, find someone who does.

"Hire people to do the things that you don't do," Farrow says. "So if you're not good at accounting; if you're not good at business, then hire people who can help you with those things because you can't be great at everything." **L&L**

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ATTENTION DESIGN/BUILD CONTRACTORS!

Lawn & Landscape is looking for the best design/build companies in the industry to submit the best work they've done in the 7 different categories below. All we need are a few photos along with some information on why you are submitting this project for the particular section. Once we've gathered all the entries, the L&L team will select which ones will be featured in Lawn & Landscape magazine. The winner from each section will receive a \$25 gift card to Lowe's.

THE CATEGORIES ARE:

- 1. Front door/entryway
2. Patio (no pool)
3. Pool
4. Driveway
5. Outdoor kitchen
6. Rain garden
7. Xeriscape

HOW TO ENTER:

Send two to three high resolution photos (7X5 or bigger at 300 DPI) and 300-400 words describing your project with details like: Why you chose to submit it, challenges on the project and how you overcame them, how long the project took, etc.



XERISCAPE



DRIVEWAY

Advertiser	Website	Page #
Adkad Tech	adkad.com	77
Altoz	Altoz.com	2
AMSOIL	amsoil.com	47
Aqua-Aid	aquaaid.com	33
Ariens/Gravely	gravely.com	99
ASIC	ASIC.org	62
Atlantic Water Gardens	atlanticwatergardens.com	10
Bayer	BackedbyBayer.com	23, 75*
Cascade Lighting	cascadelighting.com	63
Case Construction Equipment	CaseCE.com	21
Chevrolet	chevrolet.com	5
CLC Labs	syntheticturftesting.com	96
Corona Clipper	coronatoolsusa.com	45
Ewing Irrigation	ewingi.com	37
Exmark	exmark.com	61
Ford	ford.com	50-51
Gempler's	gemplers.com	48
GIE+Expo	GIE-EXPO.com	71
GopherX	GopherX.com	96

Advertiser	Website	Page #
Ground Logic	groundlogic.com	77
Hunter	hunterindustries.com	24
Jacks Small Engines	JacksSmallEngines.com	90
John Deere Construction	JohnDeere.com/Eskid	19
Kawasaki	kawpower.com	38
Kichler Lighting	landscapelighting.com	56-57
Kubota Tractor Corp.	kubota.com	67
Lebanon Turf Products	LebanonTurf.com	16, 17
Little Giant	lg-outdoor.com	35
Outdoor Living	lg-outdoor.com	35
MistAway	mistaway.com	28
Neely Coble	neelycoble.com	59*
Otterbine	otterbine.com	91
Pathway Biologicals	PathwayBioLogic.com	74
PBI/Gordon Corp.	pbigordon.com	31*, 69*
Pennington	pennington.com	15
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Sakata	SakataOrnamentals.com	36
SipcamAdvan	sipcamadvan.com	65
Southern Nursery Association	sna.org	97
SUPERthrive / Vitamin Institute	superthrive.com	34
Turfco	turfco.com	52
US Lawns	uslawnsfranchise.com	49

Advertiser	Website	Page #
Verizon Network Fleet	networkfleet.com	7
Wacker Neuson	wackerneuson.com	27, 29
Weisburger Insurance	programbrokerage.com	72
Drought Busters		
Ecologel	hydretain.com	86-87
Hunter	hunterindustries.com	78-79
Irritrol	irritrol.com	80-81
Jain Irrigation, Inc.	jainsusa.com	88
Rain Master	rainmaster.com	82-83
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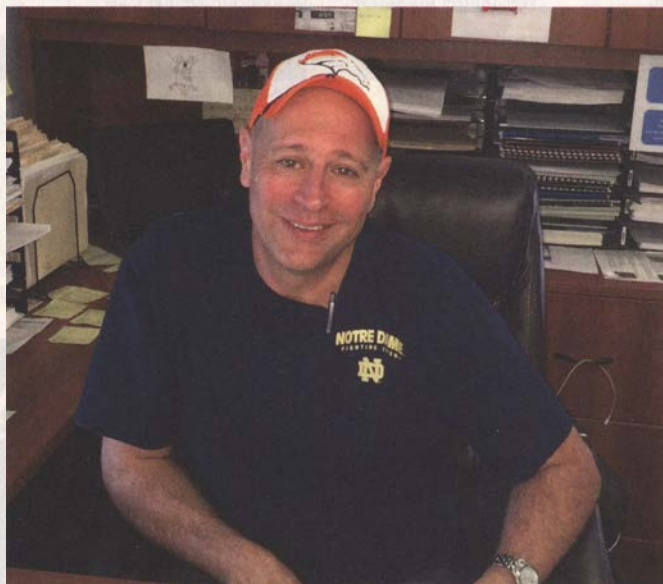


TIPS FROM THE TOP

Interviewed by **CHUCK BOWEN**

Sponsored by

TORO



MARK TOMKO

// PRESIDENT, METCO LANDSCAPE

going to implement any of this shit. You need to come work here yourself." Because, you know, I'm a marketing and customer service person. I come up with the great ideas and I can tell people once to do it, but I'm not so good at implementing.

His name is Greg Ritscher. He came over here for six years and got us organized. And we went from – 2001 our revenue was \$3 million. By the time he was done with us in '06 our revenue was \$33 million.

It was a hell of a lot. We had some serious growth. Then the housing market crashed – '07, '08 and '09 were just horrendous years. We went down to \$15 million.

When the market did crash, even though we weren't necessarily very profitable, we didn't have too much debt. So for a couple of years – '07, '08 and '09 – we paid off all our debt and managed things there very closely. We came out of that crash very strong, and in 2010 we started growing again.

So second time around, we did a lot better because in the early growth of 2000 to 2006, we were just developing systems. Mostly just corporate structure-type stuff because prior to Greg coming, the guys didn't even have time cards. We just kept their time on a pad of paper in the office. We'd call them every day and there would be their name and then we'd just write the hours down.

We put in safety procedures, we put in purchasing procedures, any kind of operational procedure he helped us develop. We evaluated talent. We'd have people come over, "Hey, you want a job?" You know, "You like Mountain Dew? I like Mountain Dew. Come on, let's go to work." That's true.

We were just like cowboys. He just modernized us. So he brought in key people: a CFO, a CPA group. We got hooked up with some banks, so that things started to become more real. **L&L**

I got into landscaping because I didn't have a job. I was a stock broker back in the mid-eighties and the stock market blew up. So I got out of the stock broker business and couldn't get a job, so I said, "OK, I'm going to start mowing lawns."

I don't know anything about landscaping – still don't. Mostly I'm a customer service guy.

So we just started mowing some lawns and then trying to find work. So that's '87. Probably all the way until about '98 we were this little goofy mowing company that didn't do anything right. I mean, we were horrible.

In '98, somebody asked me to do some install work. Of course I told him, "Yeah,

LOCATION

Aurora, Colo.

TOP 100 RANKING

31(t)

2014 REVENUE

\$40 million

that's easy. We could do that." So we just started doing install work and we learned kind of the hard way. And then about 1999, a home-builder asked us to help him. That's when things started to take off pretty good.

We just started chugging along for many, many years. We really didn't start to become a real company until after 9/11.

A guy sent me a brochure. It said, "Hey, would you like a business consultant to come in and help you?" So he came over and started to organize us.

I was on a trip in Hawaii. I called him from my balcony and I said, "Hey, dude, I'm not



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WHAT THEY HEAR

Some blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, and, blah, blah would look great.



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