LANDSCAPERS WEIGH IN COMPACT EQUIPMENT:
ON DRUG TESTING BIGGER'S NOT ALWAYS BEST



TOP 100
ISSUE

HINDSIGHT IS 20/20

What these leaders would do over

NO-SHOWS TO SHOW-OFFS

TruGreen is (finally) turning around

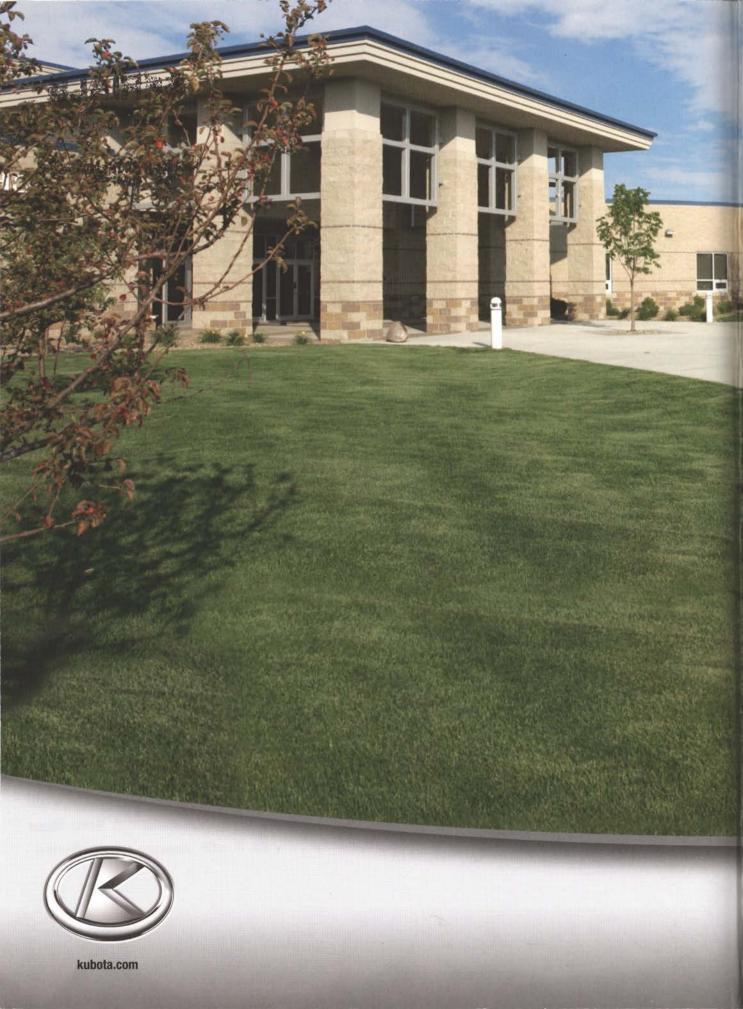
NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Fresh faces on the list for 2015

BUILDING BRIGHTVIEW

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We are perfectionists.

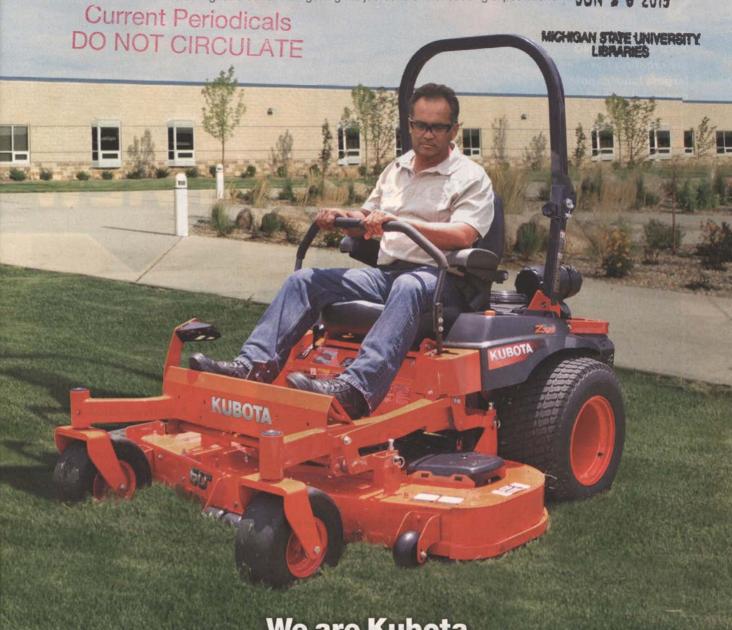
Every job is a personal challenge to do more in less time.

After all, every hour counts.

SERIALS

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JUN 2 6 2015



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ANDREW KERIN AND ROGER ZINO

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No-shows to show-offs

After a miserable few years, David Alexander talks with Lawn & Landscape about what he and his team had to do to improve the operations and company morale at TruGreen.

TOP 100



A conversation with the Top 100

Leaders from the Top 100 discuss the biggest challenges facing their companies, and how they're solving them. Turns out, their solutions work for landscapers of any size.





In hindsight

We asked some Top 100 company leaders about decisions they'd like to do over, and some choices they made that they wouldn't change.

Also Inside:

Our Top 100 Commemorative Poster



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FIND NEW ROADS



COMMITTED TO QUALITY GENERATIONS OF OWNERS at Toms Creek Nursery & Landscaping have stayed true to their family roots.

ustaining a business through good times and bad is part of the lifecycle of a generationsold operation, and at Toms Creek Nursery & Landscaping in Farmer, N.C., a tradition of staying the course has resulted in a rich, evolving legacy.

Ovie Henson started Toms Creek during the Great Depression, and current owner Brandon Vaughn, her greatgrandson, has learned how to run a lean, quality-focused business because he's "a product of the recession." Like many design/build outfits in this region, strip malls and ongoing development in the 1990s reeled in what seemed as endless business. Visit bit.lv/tomsquality to read the full story.



Vaughn talks about what the team has learned from operating for almost 100 years. bit.ly/tomscentury

> Find out why Toms Creek charges for its design work. bit.ly/tomsmoney



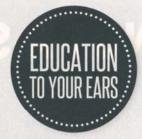
Safety Sheets

t can be a real challenge to get new employees up to speed while you're gearing up for the busiest time of the year," says Ellen Bauske, program coordinator for the UGA Center for Urban Agriculture. Language barriers can present a further complication.

To help with this challenge, the center developed Safety Checklists for New Landscape Employees, which can be downloaded by visiting bit.ly/safteylist.



E WANT TO SHOWCASE THE BEST DESIGN/BUILD JOBS IN THE INDUSTRY, and we need your help. We are collecting entries for a feature that will run in the magazine for the rest of the year. All we need you to do is send photos (preferably before and after photos) and a couple of paragraphs describing the job to Managing Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net. We are specifically looking for driveways, xeriscapes, rain gardens and pools. If you are selected as the winner we will send you a \$25 Lowe's gift card and you will be featured in a future issue of Lawn & Landscape. The deadline is June 15.



WE HOSTED TWO WEBINARS sponsored by Koch Turf & Ornamental to help LCOs operate their businesses better. You will have to register to receive access to the webinars, but when you do, you'll be able to hear the following:

How to find and keep lawn care labor

Your products are only as good as the people who apply them. Brad Johnson, CEO at Lawn America, offers his advice and practical tips on how to keep the best technicians at your company to ensure profitability and high rates of customer retention.

bit.ly/Icomarketing

Lawn care marketing mastery

The way consumers make their purchasing decisions today has changed compared to how they decided 10 years ago. Chris Heiler explains how lawn care operators can improve their marketing programs and keep up with the changes, bit.ly/lcomarketing



If you are looking for an event in the industry, whether for fun or education, we have a calendar of events at bit.ly/lawnevents just waiting for you. Email Ileditors@ gie.net to have an event listed.



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The standard bearers

ndrew Kerin and Roger Zino have the unprecented challenge of leading the creation of the largest landscape company in the history of the industry.

It wasn't a difficult decision to put their story on the cover - the biggest news in the landscape industry in the last two years has been the purchase of Brickman and ValleyCrest by private equity company KKR, and the subsequent efforts to combine them.

The Brickman and Sperber families were arguably the founding families of the industry. What they started in the 30s and 40s grew into the modern landscape industry that we all know and love today.

And when I was talking with Andrew Kerin and Roger Zino at the Brickmancum-BrightView headquarters in a swanky office park in suburban Maryland, I realized something. Despite the fact that these guys don't look like your typical landscapers, they are now the standard bearers for the landscape industry.

How they decide to operate - pricing, safety, design style, employee training, recruitment, wages, etc. - will trickle down through other commercial maintenance firms, property managers and customers. Because, like it or not, like Valley Crest and Brickman before, BrightView is the landscape industry to many people. They have the most trucks, the most employees, the most high-profile jobs.

What BrightView and other Top 100 companies do defines what the green industry looks like to the outside world.

And that's why the Top 100 matters to every landscaper out there - from the large, regional companies that actually go toe-to-toe with the BrightViews and the TruGreens of the world, to the independent entrepreneurs running mom-and-pop operations who make up the bulk of the industry.

This issue is not meant to be a bragging contest about who has the biggest company. While that's interesting, it's not particularly useful. It's about helping you understand who these guys are and how they're going to shape the next 50 or 100 years of the industry.

I asked Zino and Kerin about combining two of the industry's most storied and influential companies into one, and how they approached that idea. Zino told me this: "The way that you honor pioneers who created



decades of opportunity is to be a pioneer and create the next five and six and 10 decades of opportunity. So that's what BrightView is about. We honor the Brickmans and the Sperbers and their pioneering by being pioneers - taking this industry to the next level and providing opportunities for thousands of people like both those families did."

The mega-merger of these two companies makes for splashy headlines, but the rub lies in how Kerin and Zino lead the industry, like their forebears did. So far, they seem up for the challenge. - Chuck Bowen

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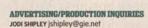
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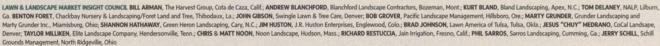


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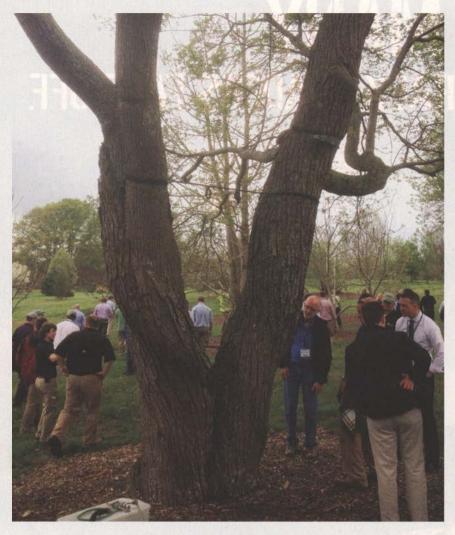
ONE VS NAMY COMPACT TRACK LOADERS FACE OFF.



Do you want to see how compact track loaders perform in head-to-head competitions or watch side-by-side comparisons relating to performance, serviceability and durability? Before you buy your next loader, watch our video comparisons of compact track loaders. Not only do the videos show you which loader is best, they explain the small details that increase your performance and reduce your downtime. You can watch all the videos at BobcatAdvantage.com/CTLFaceOff5 or scan the code and find out who comes out on top.









Lawn & Landscape visited the company's research laboratories to get the latest on tree care. By Kate Spirgen

CHARLOTTE, N.C. – Bartlett Tree Experts, ranked fifth on L&L's 2015 Top 100 list, had its best year ever revenue-wise last year and expects this year to be even better.

We took a tour of the company's laboratories to find out what employees are researching right now.

Visit, bit.ly/treebart for more photos from the visit.







Clockwise from left: Can you tell which brace is in the right place? "We have this just to show you the different tree support systems," said Tom Smiley, arboriculture researcher.

At the urban sidewalk plots, researchers can see how different types of sidewalk structures affect the root structures of urban trees.

This is what happens to a container tree whose root ball was not broken up before planting.

Researchers pollarded this sycamore tree to treat for bacterial leaf scorch. "It never becomes systemic because we believe we're pruning it out," said Bruce Fraedrich, vice president of research. "That's the only way you can grow those here. They all get bacterial leaf scorch."



Student Career Days features a career fair on Friday, giving students the chance to meet with representatives from companies in the industry and interview for potential job opportunities.

Talent in the Tar Heel state

Green industry students descended on North Carolina for the annual Student Career Days.

By Katie Tuttle

RALEIGH, N.C. - A future in the green industry was at the top of every student's list at the annual Student Career Days event organized by NALP, the National Association of Landscape Professionals (formerly PLANET.)

This year's event featured 757 students from 65 different schools across the country competing in 28 green industryrelated events.

The event kicked off on March 12 at the N.C. State Fairgrounds where students attended workshops on the events they would be competing in.

Jeremy Thorne of ThorneCare

Landscape Solutions was presented with the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award.

Students were given a chance to design a T-shirt for the event, and Alysha N. Lawless of Virginia Tech won for her design.

The NALP Academic Excellence Foundation also awarded 77 scholarships to students, valued at a total of \$93,700.

Kelsey Hatesohl, a student from Kansas State University, said she was hoping to better herself as a member of the industry.

"I'm looking forward to going to the workshops and learning about the programs I thought I knew about, and then getting to actually learn more about them," she said.

Along with the competitions, one of the highlights of Student Career Days was the career fair that took place on Friday.

Companies had representatives at booths for students to talk with and interviews took

FINAL RESULTS

The top school, BYU-Idaho, won \$5,000 from Platinum Sponsor STIHL.

- 1. Brigham Young University Idaho
- 2. Michigan State University
- 3. Cal Poly Pomona
- 4. Colorado State University
- 5. Brigham Young University Provo
- 6. University of Georgia
- 7. Alamance Community College
- 8. Kansas State University
- 9. Cuyahoga Community College
- 10. Mississippi State University

place throughout the day. Erin White and Jessica Smith of The Fockele Garden Co., said they came to the career fair because their company isn't very well known and they want to look for qualified workers.

"I think there's definitely a push to find more educated employees," Smith said. "I knew one of the best ways to find someone was to go someplace with a lot of students."

L&L ON THE ROAD



"As a company, we're looking for the next best thing," White said. "We want to become a destination company and advertise to the next generation of landscape professionals."

While a lot of students were focused on preparing for the competitions, some were focused on the networking involved with the career fair.

"I'm trying to get some internships to prepare for what it will be like after I graduate," said Karen Schneck, a student at Kansas State University. "I really want to find a company that I can stay in after I graduate and then make a career out of it."

"This is an incredible networking opportunity just meeting industry professionals," said Kevin Boylan, a student from Penn State University.

"It's always nice to compete and stuff, but definitely the networking and getting out and meeting some important people in the industry is great, and meeting some of the other students too."

The event was sponsored by: platinum sponsor STIHL; gold sponsor John Deere; silver sponsors Caterpillar, Gravely, Husqvarna and New Holland; and bronze sponsors Anchor, Belgard Hardscapes, Brickman, ValleyCrest and Toro.

L&L got an up-close look at a handful of new loaders and a new facility, which will produce six products. By Katie Tuttle

ATHENS, Ga. – Caterpillar's new products feature a Tier 4 Final solution and were designed with five customer values in mind: fuel efficiency, productivity, technology, comfort and safety.

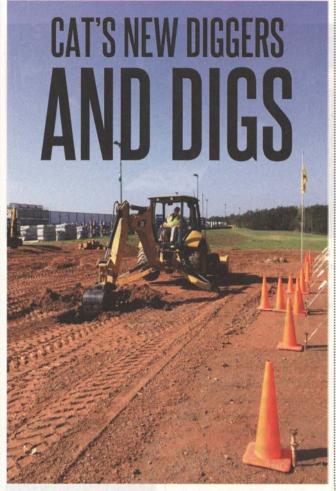
The products were introduced at a media event held in April at the company's new facility in Athens, Ga.

In the loader market, Caterpillar has four new small-chassis models: two compact track loaders (the 239D and 249D) and two skid-steer loaders (the 226D and 232D). All are Tier 4 Final and maintenance-free. The smaller loaders have redesigned chassis and lift arms.

"We're excited about these models because of all that D Series value that we introduced in 2013 that we're able to extend down to these smaller machines," said Jeff Brown, product specialist.

Caterpillar has improved visibility on the D Series machines with low profile lift arms that allow for more visibility both above and below the arms on the sides of the machine. The loaders feature an optional advanced display, available with a rear-view camera, which offers more visibility behind the machine as well.

The D Series loaders feature creep control and continuous flow, which allow operators



One of the products unveiled at the event was Caterpillar's 415F2 backhoe loader, which is part of the new F2 Series, an update of the F series.

to slow the track speed of the equipment while maintaining high RPMs on attachment tools.

"This allows the operator to be very precise and productive in grading and other applications," Brown said.

A new, optional track tread pattern on the 239 and 249 track loaders is a 15-inch track with a wide bar tread. This different pattern delivers better flotation, lower ground disturbance and better snow traction.

"(It's) ultimately delivering a better finished product for the customer," Brown said. "Especially for that landscape contractor that's working on a house pad or finished grading a housing development. We're really excited about what this track can do on a small CTL."

Caterpillar has three new track type tractors: the D3K2, D4K2 and D5K2, which are all Tier 4 Final. These new K2 models feature slope-assist, part of the Cat accugrade ready attachment, which allows controllers to automatically maintain a pre-established blade angle for a consistent grade.

Along with the new slope-

assist, automatic traction-control and slope-indicate, the models also retain the hydrostatic drive, stable blade, power pitch systems and eco mode found on previous models.

Caterpillar has released four F2 Series backhoe loaders that are Tier 4 Final: the 416F2, 420F2, 430F2 and the 415F2. The F2 series is an update from Caterpillar's previous F series.

A new model to the range, the 415F2, is an entry-level machine featuring a 68 HP Cat engine.

NEW LOCATION. Along with the new products, Caterpillar also unveiled a new production facility. In 2011, the company made the decision to relocate its Sagami, Japan facility to Athens, Ga., the result of a large market shift from the Asia Pacific region to North America.

Todd Henry, operations manager for Caterpillar, explained that the site selection process included seven criteria: location to Eastern export/import ports, location in relation to highway and rail transportation, availability and qualification of workforce, workforce training capability, 250-acre site with infrastructure to support, location of a potential supply base and a good relationship with state and local government.

The new facility will produce nine of the Caterpillar's building construction products: six mini hydraulic excavators and three small track-type tractors.

Currently, 1,100 people are employed at the Athens facility, with 1,400 expected as the site matures over the next few years. Most of the employees will be new to Caterpillar.



For more news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com

Turf Masters makes largest acquisition

ROSWELL, Ga. – Turf Masters, a lawn and pest control company based in Georgia, acquired Dorsey Services, a lawn care, tree and shrub, and pest service company, earlier this month.

The transaction is the largest investment made by Turf Masters and it expands the company's quality services throughout central Georgia.

With this acquisition, as well as expansion markets completed in 2013 and 2014, the lawn care business now has nine companyowned operations in four southern states: Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Tennessee. Turf Masters employs 60 people and posts more than \$5 million in revenue.

After looking at several companies, Turf

Masters decided to acquire Dorsey Services, which employs 23 people and posted revenue of \$2.1 million in 2014, because of its established customer base, its proven ability to retain customers and its growth potential, the company said in a statement. Dorsey Services was founded by Larry Dorsey in 1985.

"What Larry founded in central Georgia was built on the same philosophy and commitment to quality that I used in starting Turf Masters in the North Atlanta suburbs," said Andrew Kadrich, Turf Masters owner.

"The company's employee culture, from service technicians to administrative support, understands that the customer always comes first."

Turf Masters plans to continue the Dorsey

name. Employees, trucks and will operate as Dorsey Services in their current local offices. Turf Masters will retain all existing Dorsey employees. Dorsey's decision to sell to Turf Masters was based on Kadrich's reputation of treating employees well, Dorsey said.

"Andy is committed to all the employees who have made his company strong," he said. "Along with his reputation as the best sales and marketing guy in the industry, Andy's commitment to the Dorsey employees was the most significant factor in my decision to sell to him."

"Our focus will continue to be on customer satisfaction and retention by holding all of our locations to our high standards," Kadrich says.





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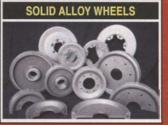
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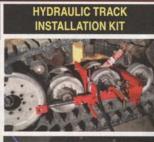
DRIVE CARRIER PARTS Greaseable Bearing Carrier 25% Thicker Steel Plates and Sprocket Base Inner/Outer Sleeve Tubes CAT 247/257/267/277/287

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string trimmer with an excessive amount of manly power. You don't have to need 80 volts to need 80 volts.



ASK THE EXPERTS

For more news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com

Sales benchmarks

Q: I am a designer and I want to improve my company's closing ratios and sales. In doing so, I am trying to set new benchmarks per month to ensure we end the year either meeting or, hopefully, exceeding them.

The benchmarks we have come up with are sales target by month and closing ratio by month. Would you provide me with any information to help us set these benchmarks?

A: In our design/build process, most of our sales/closings happen upfront with the initial meeting process. During this initial talk/call, we describe our process and what they can expect with an initial meeting.

For example, we describe about how long an onsite meeting can take, what we hope to accomplish by the end of that meeting, our design process, and the fees associated with that process. We also mention we will discuss a budget for the customer.

Our initial meeting is a definite process and by the end of this meeting, they will know what the design fees will be and there will be a discussion of budgets to set the parameters.

I say all this because we understand that once we have signed up a client for our design services, that client is ours to lose. We need to set a revenue goal for design first before we look to our installation sales.

Once they are our client, we look at our closing ratio



based on the client signing up for construction work and not necessarily on the total dollars we have proposed.

Most of our clients accomplish their projects in multiple phases because they understand what is financially required.

With that said, we know we need to close 50-60 percent of our initial meetings and convert them to designs. We also know that over a period of time, we need to convert 70-80 percent of these clients to work.

We set our sales goals, knowing that we have a lead time and that we need to be prospecting double to triple our budget in the next 2-3 months.

For example, if our budget for May is \$300,000, we know we need to have a minimum of \$600,000 that we are working on right now. We primarily focus on in-house revenue as opposed to subcontract work (e.g., pools, carpentry, etc.). Subcontractor revenue can greatly create a false echo.

Pete Wilkerson, Scapes, Trailblazer, National Association of Landscape Professionals

ASK THE EXPERTS is brought to you in partnership with NALP, the National Association of Landscape Professionals.

Questions are fielded through NALP's Trailblazers, the industry's leading company mentoring program. For more questions visit www.landscapeprofessionals.org.



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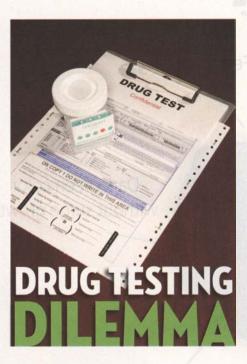


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WE RECENTLY POLLED OUR READERS ABOUT THEIR STANCE ON DRUG

respondents showed the majority did not drug test, one reason in particular why contractors don't test was a bit shocking (we didn't even give it as a multiple choice answer): They don't want to turn away employees who can do the work, but who also use drugs. Others only test truck drivers or after accidents. We'll continue to monitor how the changes in state drug laws will affect how you hire.

- Let us know how you feel about drug testing by emailing Editor Chuck Bowen, at cbowen@gie.net. We may print your letter in a future issue.
- ▶ For more on contractors' perspectives on drug testing, turn to page 34.

WHAT SERVICES DO YOU PROVIDE? CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY.

MAINTENANCE: 79%

LAWN CARE (CHEMICAL, FERTILIZER APPLICATIONS, ETC.): 65%

DESIGN/BUILD: 57%

IRRIGATION: 45%

TREE CARE: 34%

SNOW REMOVAL: 33%

DO YOU DRUG TEST PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYEES?

YES: 38%

NO: 62%

WHY DON'T YOU DRUG TEST?

TOO EXPENSIVE: 17%

TOO DIFFICULT TO FACILITATE: 24%

TOO MUCH PAPERWORK: 6%

OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY): 53%

As noted at left, one of the most popular written-in answers was:

- Trouble finding employees and drug testing would only make it more difficult.
- Others were:
- What folks do on their own time is their business. I expect them to be sober and not suffering any
 ill-effects from off-work activities when they come to work and while they are at work.
- What they do on their own time is none of my business, but they are told in person and given a written statement that if they get hurt and drugs are in their body they are not covered under workers' comp.
- Good idea, it's something I would do if I suspected it. I trust my guys currently.
- · Does not tell us if employees use since most expect this test and make sure they can pass.

DO YOU HAVE A DRUG USE POLICY FOR CURRENT EMPLOYEES?

YES: 71%

NO: 29%

HAVE YOU EVER DRUG TESTED IN THE PAST AND STOPPED?

YES: 13%

NO: 87%

IF YOU DID TEST, WHY DID YOU STOP?

TOO EXPENSIVE: 23%

TOO DIFFICULT TO FACILITATE: 26%

TOO MUCH PAPERWORK: 5%

OTHER: 46%

Reasons included:

- Not worth the trouble. (Stopped) using for pre-hire testing and random testing always confirmed what we already suspected.
- Ran out of employees who weren't positive and hard to find people that don't do drugs that want to cut grass.
- · Pee for enjoyment not for employment.

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LET RESULTS DO THE MARKETING

ne of the questions my team at Marty Grunder! gets asked the most is, "What is your best way to market your landscaping company?" The answer is really easy. The best way to market your landscaping company is to do great, high-quality work. Yep, it's that simple. Trouble is, many of us don't understand that.

Quality is the magical differentiator in all businesses. It's even better than service. Don't believe me? Okay, let me ask you this question: What pizza do you buy to have delivered to your house for dinner? The one that tastes like flaming hot cardboard that is delivered in 19 minutes? Or the one that you salivate over when you are hungry and think of them because it's so delicious, even though it takes 45 minutes to an hour to be delivered? If you say the 19-minute one, I think you have a problem! Your customers will do more business with you if you offer quality. Now the trick is to offer top-quality, awesome service and a fair price. I said fair, not cheap.

If your quality isn't great, then you need to make it great. It's a maturation process for us landscapers. The work Grunder Landscaping did in 1984 was not very good. We pruned boxwoods in a way that makes me cringe now when I see work like that. We did paver patios that drained back towards the patio door and had horrible cuts that

only a 3-year-old could do worse. Fast forward 30 years, and I'll put the quality of the work we do up against any contractor in the country.

1. We want to get better. Drive is what differentiates winners from losers in all businesses. You have to want to get better. Matt Esch is a client of mine based in the thumb of Michigan. His firm, Esch Landscaping, does awesome work. I have learned a lot from him just by looking at his jobsites and the photos of his work at EschLandscaping.com. Matt is very driven. He attends seminars; he visits with other companies; he is passionate about improving. A 15-minute conversation with him shows you he wants to get better. Do you want to get better? If you can honestly answer "no" to that question, you need to take a trip and visit another successful landscaper in another area of the country and see what's possible for your business. Matt wakes up every day trying to get better. He stays motivated by being networked with other landscapers that are more successful than he is. He has a target he is chasing and this works.

2. We have a dialog with our clients. If you don't have a dialog with your clients, you are missing a great opportunity to get better. I feel that the most successful landscaping companies are market-focused. What this means is that what

the market wants is what shapes their decisions. They know what their clients want and need and make decisions based on that. Frank Mariani and his team at Mariani Landscape in Chicago listen to their customers better than any landscaping company I have ever encountered. I could go on for days talking about the things they do to listen to their clients. Let me boil it down to something Frank told a group of my clients that I had in to tour his operation. He said, "We ask our clients when interviewing them about their backyard projects: 'What would make you pull that door handle and go out in your backyard for four hours?" I absolutely love that question. I have shared it with my sales team at GLC and we are going to get some great insight from that and make a lot of money from that question as well.

3. Work at quality 24/7. Having the drive to get better and talking to your clients are the first two steps; the last step is to spend time on your quality. You can be motivated to get better; you can talk to your clients; however, if you don't get your whole team to take action on quality, then you're never going to realize your utmost potential.

Talking about it and learning and listening is great, but execution is the way to find permanent improvement. I have a friend who is constantly trying to find new and better ways to run his business. He goes to seminars and he reads more books than anyone I know. He writes wonderful columns on business success and is perceived as a "go-to" person in his industry. Trouble is, he really doesn't make much money and quite frankly doesn't have a company that is going to succeed beyond him as he doesn't have anyone else on his team, and this is because he never executes.

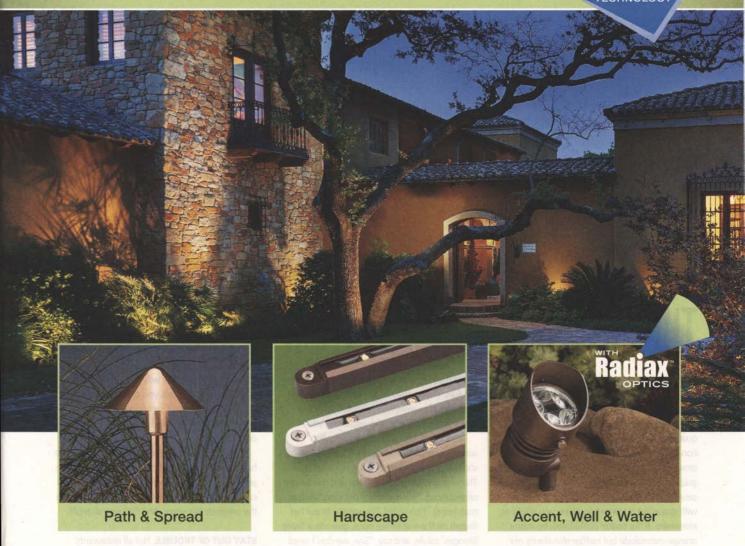
He never gets the work done. At a certain point, we have to take action; that's when true learning takes place. You can't go through life as a business owner in the ready, aim, aim, aim, aim, aim mentality. It has to be ready, aim, fire. Take action. Do the work. You don't get better at golf by just reading about it and watching it. You get better at golf by playing it.

Quality is the great differentiator. Use the three steps above to initiate your quest to get better. Oh, and read Lawn & Landscape magazine cover to cover. Seriously, this publication is full of ideas that will help you improve your quality. L&L

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THE POWER OF PRESENTATION

he jelly basket. I travel a lot and I've learned how to spot a good breakfast restaurant by applying these two benchmarks to the jelly basket at the table. The first deals with quantity, while the second addresses presentation. If the jelly basket has lots of brand-name strawberry jam (preferably Smucker's) and some grape jam, you're probably going to get good service and a good meal. If the basket is filled with grape but no strawberry jam, you might go elsewhere. If the basket is filled with no-name orange marmalade but neither strawberry nor grape jam, you definitely should go elsewhere.

Second, but of less importance, is the presentation of the jelly basket. If it's in disarray, that's strike one. If it's missing altogether and the waitress has to go find it, that's strike two. If, when she returns with it, it's filled with orange marmalade, you got it – strike three.

NO STOOGE HERE. I met an irrigation contractor from the East Coast at a seminar I conducted. He wanted me to benchmark his company. However, his wife thought my services were a waste of time and she didn't hide her feelings the morning of my one-day visit with them and their company. I told them not to tell me how

much they were charging for their products and services. During the remainder of the morning, the three of us reviewed financials and prepared a thorough budget for the upcoming year.

After lunch, I calculated their irrigation service technician's rate and told them they should be charging at least \$75 per man-hour. The wife grinned, looked at me and mockingly pronounced, "We're already charging \$85 (per man-hour)." I could tell she wanted to put her thumb on the end of her nose, give me a Three Stooges' salute, and say, "See, we don't need your services after all."

I knew this was a good rate to charge. It handily beat my national minimum service technician benchmark rate of \$60 per man-hour. I also knew I really wanted to humbly say to the wife, "Gee, don't I look foolish." But I held my tongue and asked, "Tell me. How do you present your rate to your clients?"

The husband volunteered that they charged the \$85 to show up for a service call and the technician would spend up to one hour on the client's property. Time after that was billed out at the same rate on a pro-rated basis.

As I had previously thought, their service technicians were working a nine-hour payroll day

but were only charging for seven or eight of the nine man-hours. Each day they should have been billing $$765 (9 \times $85)$ but were missing one to two man-hours of billing per day.

I recommended they keep the \$85 show-up rate but only give the client up to thirty minutes for it. After the thirty minutes, they should bill the technician's time in fifteen minute increments, or parts thereof, at a rate of \$21.25 per fifteen minute increment (\$85 \div 4). The husband said that would be fine and the clients would willingly pay it. I then added that this would give them at least one more billable man-hour per day per technician at \$85 per man-hour.

I then said, "That's an extra \$85 per day for 22 days per month or an additional \$1,870 per technician per month.

"That's \$1,870 multiplied by seven months per year or an additional \$13,090 per technician per year.

"That's \$13,090 multiplied by your 11 technicians or an additional \$143,990 of revenue per year."

I wanted to give the wife the Three-Stooges' salute and say, "I guess you don't need my services." Fortunately, my good angel and professionalism prevailed, and I let the arithmetic do the talking.

It amazes me how many irrigation contractors have good service rates but have no clue how to present their rates to their clients. It had cost this contractor hundreds of thousands of dollars over the previous five years. And that was all profit.

STAY OUT OF TROUBLE. Not all restaurants serve good breakfasts. The trick is to find the good ones and eliminate the bad ones. Studying the right little things like a jelly basket can help you in your quest.

Not all irrigation service companies make money. This company was making money, but it could have made a lot more. Many irrigation service companies get themselves into serious jams because they don't study the right little things. You not only need to have a good rate, but you also need to know how to present it to your customers.

You have to study the right benchmarks because, as we all now know, not all jams are created equal. 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@gie.net with topic ideas.

ONE GOOD DEED

inding the right employees can be a challenge for any employer. Today, employees are looking for more than just health insurance, a good salary and a 401(k) program. So what is that something extra that might attract a prospective employee to your organization or keep them there for the long haul? Well the answer may lie in something most companies are already doing: giving back to the community.

The concept of social responsibility certainly isn't new. Most organizations have figured out that giving to community causes is a good way to develop a positive reputation, reinforce relationships with customers and community members, and create vibrant and healthy business environments. But what does it have to do with attracting and keeping employees? One of the biggest factors affecting employee happiness is knowing that they work for a company that shares their values.

A company with a philanthropic culture provides the type of shared value system that keeps employees productive, enthusiastic and loyal. Here are a few ways giving can have a positive effect on your recruiting and retention efforts.

BUILDS COMPANY PRIDE. Donating money to a cause can have a positive effect. But involving employees in an event or a cause that enables them to work side-by-side with other team members, managers and even those who are the recipients of the help, provides a unique opportunity for team building. It can help remind team members how their special skills and elbow grease, as well as the collective help of the team, can have a direct benefit for others who are in need. When employees make the connection that the effort they put toward keeping customers happy, hitting budgets and making profits are tied to the dollars that a company is able to give back to the community, it can help generate a real feeling of purpose in their day-to-day efforts.

Whether those projects involve cleaning up a park, renovating a school playground or serving at a soup kitchen, it allows employees to experience firsthand the feeling of goodwill that comes



Five hundred of Ruppert Landscape's employees provided nearly \$180,000 worth of landscape renovations to Baltimore's Carroll Park last fall.

with giving back and creates pride in what they have been able to achieve through their organization. In turn, an organization should operate as a good steward of the charitable funds, recognizing that the giving is made possible through the hard work of the company's employees and therefore should largely be directed by the employees.

KEEPS THE MILLENNIALS ENGAGED. Millennials or Generation Y, who are now in the 15-35 age group, think very differently about where they want to work and what keeps them happy once there. Engaging this age group requires employers to be tuned into what motivates them, and those motivators are very different than the Baby Boomer generation who are more influenced by salary and benefits. In a recent CareerBuilder survey, class of 2014 graduates expressed an interest in wanting jobs with companies that "made a difference in the world" and provided employees with opportunities to meaningfully contribute to society.

Nearly three out of four of those surveyed were also willing to accept a lower salary at a company that provided those opportunities. So by keeping this younger set of employees at the forefront of your company's giving initiatives, having them recommend causes near and dear

to their hearts and encouraging them to get the company involved, you up the chances that they will feel fulfilled and will commit for the long haul.

CREATES SOCIAL MEDIA BUZZ. Ralph Waldo Emerson said "Doing well is the result of doing good." Whether you interpret "doing well" to mean profit or reputation, the idea that a company will prosper based on the good deeds it does certainly resonates.

When employees respect their employer, they are more likely to share their optimism with others. In this day and age, a lot of that sharing is done on social media. A picture posted on Facebook or a review given on Indeed can go a long way toward generating positive interest in an organization.

When employees are given an opportunity to work and make an impact in their communities, the result can be increased morale, greater job satisfaction and a shared pride in the company's role in the community. By capitalizing on the good your company is likely already involved with, it is possible to not only keep existing employees motivated, but also attract new team members who value community giving. L&L

The author is director of public relations at Ruppert Landscape.



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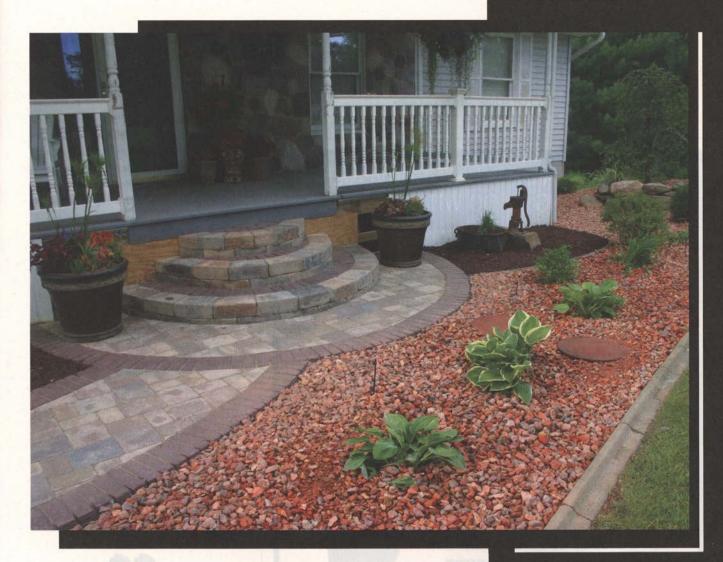
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GROWTH

im Eccleton grew up on the golf course. Naturally, he started working for a country club, where he became grounds superintendent and worked for more than a dozen years.

> Members were so impressed with the property, they often asked him for advice about turf issues at their homes and businesses. "I finally determined I should start a business in 1987, and Country Club Turf

seemed like a good name since I was a country club superintendent," Eccleton says. At first, he offered basic lawn care and sprinkler services, which opened the door to other services.

Over several years and a handful of acquisitions, Eccleton added equipment and skills to meet customers' needs and Country Club Turf Cos., eventually become a full-service, year-round company.

ABOVE: Country Club Turf Cos., started as basic lawn care and sprinkler service company, but gradually added many services, including design/build.

How Country Club Turf Cos. transitioned to a 12-month property management company through acquisitions.

By Brooke N. Bates

IRRIGATION IMPROVEMENT. Eccleton saw his first acquisition opportunity in 2000, when a business in the area went up for sale.

The company, Silver Rain Irrigation, had been larger than Country Club Turf at one time, but the business was struggling. Still, it possessed the equipment Eccleton needed to improve his irrigation services, adding installation and repair capabilities. Plus, the price was right.

He purchased Silver Rain Irrigation, increasing his sprinkler business. By combining the company's inventory with his attentive approach to customer service, growth was inevitable.

"The business was not doing well, so when I purchased it, I instantly gained a large percentage of their customers because they were not being serviced properly," Eccleton says.

Then, the owner of nearby Lakewood Irrigation suddenly died, leaving no transition strategy behind.

The regional Rain Bird representative asked Eccleton to help the man's widow handle service calls for a while. Eccleton relieved her altogether.

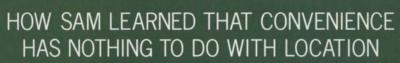
"After getting all of the work orders caught up, I purchased the company for the cost of equipment and inventory," he says. "That

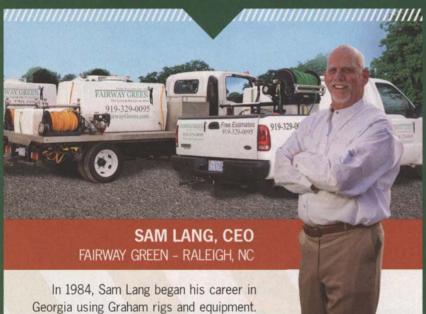




WHEN I WAS IN THE GOLF
BUSINESS, changing cup holes
was one of the most tedious
tasks. When one guy gets
good at it, that poor guy has
to do the same thing every
single day. Cross-training is
important for morale because
it takes out the monotony. You
enjoy your job more if you're
not stuck to one routine.

 - Jim Eccleton, owner of Country Club Turf, based in Jackson, Mich.





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added about 20 percent more customers to my database."

Leveraging the strengths of two irrigation acquisitions, Country Club Turf was better suited to serve customers.

BUILDING 12-MONTH SERVICES. Meanwhile, Eccleton noticed a growing trend among larger clients as they requested year-round property management. Country Club Turf offered some services, but relied on subcontractors to supplement certain jobs, such as mowing.

So, in 2012, Eccleton acquired Sunshine Landscaping. Although several of Sunshine's services overlapped with Country Club Turf's, it had something Eccleton didn't: 12-month property management contracts.

"When I purchased Sunshine, they had some lucrative contracts already established," Eccelton says.

"By leveraging their equipment and manpower, we became a true 12-month property management company without subcontracting any labor. That was my goal – to do everything in-house and have more quality control, more billing control, and deal directly with supervisors on site to meet needs in a timely fashion."

Customers have been hugely appreciative of the change. Instead of different trucks showing up for each service, they get the consistency of dealing with one person and the convenience of 12 equal monthly invoices.

SMOOTH BRAND TRANSITION. Though acquisitions aren't always easy, Eccleton prefers this growth strategy over bootstrapping. Country Club Turf grew at double digits during the acquisition period, and still maintains about 7 percent annual growth, with \$1.5 million in revenue.

"If you start from scratch and have to buy equipment, hire all new employees and advertise, it's hard to get a footprint out of the gate," he says. "I can acquire a company for the cost of equipment – that's huge if it already comes with a couple of employees and some customers - even better if it comes with a good reputation."

The Sunshine purchase was valued at

about 50 percent equipment and 50 percent goodwill. The existing reputation and relationships looked lucrative, but tapping into those required a smooth transition into the Country Club Turf brand.

Eccleton's first step after acquisition is liquidating any duplicate equipment. To initiate acquired customers to the new parent brand, most trucks and trailers are all lettered with the Country Club Turf logo



(except for a couple from Sunshine that survived liquidation). Eccleton doesn't advertise the names of acquired companies, although the sign outside of the company's headquarters in Jackson, Mich., lists them – at least for now.

The names drop off as acquisitions slowly integrate into the Country Club Turf brand.

"When I acquire a company, I keep the name for a year or two, and then blend it into the parent company," he says. "I don't want to confuse my customers with two names, but I want them to know that we are still Sunshine.

After a year or two, customers start getting invoices that

WHAT RVS HAVE TO DO WITH TURF

n 2010, after renting for 10 years, Jim Eccleton bought a foreclosed property to house his growing lawn care business. Country Club Turf moved into its new headquarters, which had been home to Larry's RV Center since the 60s.

"The previous owner told me I would have to hire a full-time employee at both gates to tell people as they drove in that there was no longer an RV business there," Eccleton says. "He was correct. I reopened Larry's RV and it now grosses more than all of my lawn care companies combined."

Although "the businesses don't really go together," he has noticed that "the synergies abound." For example, employees are cross-trained early on to help RV customers get propane gas for their campers from the company tank.

Cross-training between companies helps Eccleton make the best use of each employee. For example,



if Larry's RV needs campers moved to the secure lot across town, or if mechanics need help installing an awning, it doesn't make sense to pull salesmen or store clerks into the shop. Instead, crews from the turf business may lend a hand in between service calls.

"If somebody calls for service, I can react quickly because so many of my employees are cross-trained."



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say Country Club Turf, not Sunshine. We transition them slowly into the brand, until they get all the correspondence from Country Club Turf."

To avoid confusion during the transition,

each company maintains separate phone lines. "We can tell by the display on the phone which company customers are calling," he says.

"If they call a number associated with

Country Club Turf, you would see CCT on the display, so you know how to answer the phone." One employee may answer calls for any company, because operations are streamlined under one roof.

This allows Eccleton to integrate phone systems, administrative support and other resources, while reducing costs.

CROSS-TRAINED TO MULTI-TASK. Cross-training is crucial at Country Club Turf, where employees often hop between services and even companies.

New employees, who typically come through word-of-mouth, start in one divi-



Most trucks and trailers are all lettered with the Country Club Turf logo (except for a couple from a prior acquisition that survived liquidation).

sion. If Eccleton likes what he sees, he starts to pair them up with various crews to learn as many skills as possible.

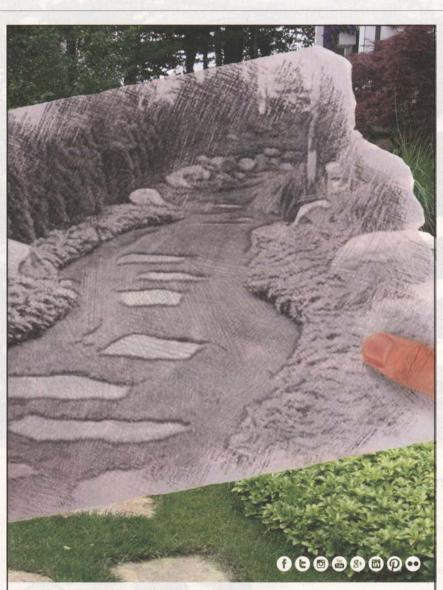
"As long as you've got one person who knows what's going on, the second person should always be a trainee," Eccleton says.

"You would never send two people who were good at one thing; that's a waste of manpower. If you send one person who's specialized and another person who can help, he can learn as he works."

Eccleton learned that cross-training doesn't just make his staff members more productive, it often makes them happier.

"When I was in the golf business, changing cup holes was one of the most tedious tasks," he says.

"When one guy gets good at it, that poor guy has to do the same thing every single day. Cross-training is important for morale because it takes out the monotony. You enjoy your job more if you're not stuck to one routine." L&L



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This is only a test

While drug testing can be used as a marketing tool and a way to weed out bad workers, it can also limit the employee pool.

By Kristen Hampshire

ho are you really hiring? And, could this person potentially sacrifice the safety of a crew because of irresponsible lifestyle choices? These are questions that employers consider when putting a drug testing program in place. There are two camps: companies that wonder, "What organization can afford not to test?" and businesses that believe life happens; people make bad choices. If someone is on a clean track, give him a chance to work and be a productive contributor. What employees do on their own time is their own business.

Some insurance providers want to know if your company requires pre-employment, post-accident or random drug testing. Elana Daley, co-owner of Daley Landscape in Ojai, Calif., says clients might not directly ask the question, but they want assurance that workers on their properties are living responsibly.

This month, Lawn & Landscape spoke with three firms about their drug testing policies and how the choice to test, or not, affects hiring, retention and the overall business environment.

A clean reputation

he high-profile and celebrity clients. Daley Landscape serve in the Los Angeles and Santa Barbara market trust the company to safely enter their properties and perform quality work. And homeowners don't invite just anyone onto their grounds.

"When you work on someone's property you are essentially coming into the home, and because clients entrust us to go into their homes at any time – whether for maintenance, renovation or fixing a leaky sprinkler – we want them to know that the work will get done, that our people are clean," Daley says.

Daley Landscape began drug testing about four years ago, when Daley noticed that insurers were asking the question: Do you have a safety program? Do you perform pre-employment screening, and if so do you require a drug test? Do you conduct background checks?

So, the company decided to ramp up its application process and institute these preemployment screening tests, including checking employees' driving records and criminal records, and testing for drugs.

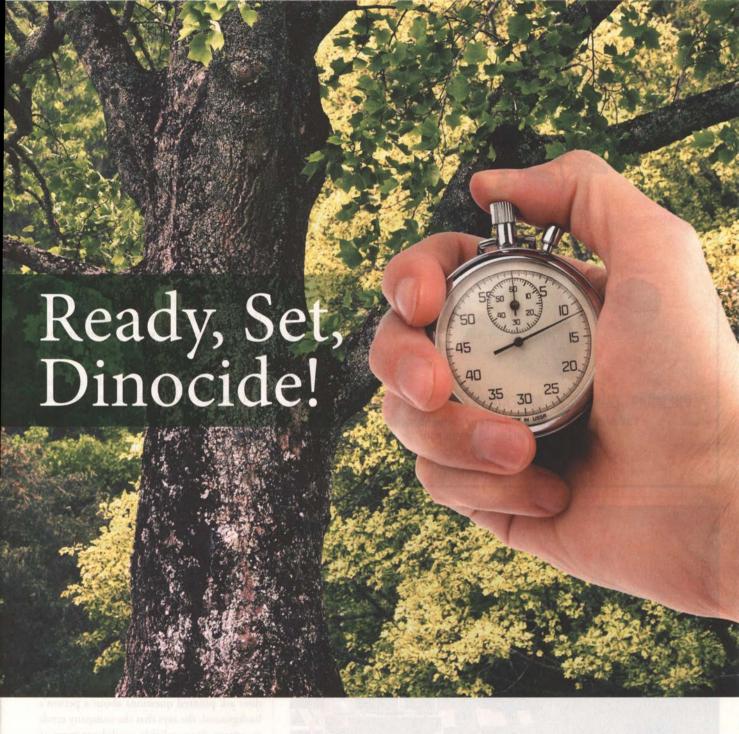
Daley began by reviewing the application for employment and adding a couple of key questions: Have you been convicted of a misdemeanor or a felony? If yes, provide a date of conviction, state and county, and describe the circumstances.

The application asks: Has your employment with anyone ever been involuntarily terminated? If so, please explain.

After offering a prospect a job, Daley Landscape asks the potential hire to go immediately to get a drug test through its third-party provider, HireRight.

Employment is contingent on getting the drug test, and the complete screening

 For Lawn & Landscape's survey results on landscapers' views on drug testing, turn to pg. 18.



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FORMULAS for SUCCESS

package costs the company about \$150 per candidate. "This process has made a difference with hiring, and it has shown us that we can't always trust our own experience about a person," Daley says.

For example, the company hired one candidate who admitted to a drug conviction on his application. He explained that he had cleaned up his life. He passed the pre-employment drug test, so Daley hired him.

However, because of the drug conviction, Daley's insurance company would not allow this employee to drive a company vehicle. "We knew we had a guy we could hire, but we could not let him drive a vehicle, which posed a problem," Daley says.

But Daley decided to give him a chance and hire him anyway. "He came to work for us for a week and he showed his true colors, and then we cut him loose," she says. "There was a red flag there, and you learn."

Daley has had job applicants refuse the drug test, though this does not happen often because they know that it's part of the onboarding process. "I have had guys who have great references but they won't go in and test," she says.

"We offered them a job. We said we'd love for you to come work for us, you interviewed successfully, now if you can demonstrate by a drug test and background screening, we will be assured that what you are telling us is, in fact, what you are living."

This frustrates Daley because the reality is, sometimes the background screening does not match what the prospect reveals on an application. But, because the application does ask pointed questions about a person's background, she says that the company tends to attract clean, reliable candidates most of the time.

"If something shows up on their background check that they do not reveal on the application, we can immediately terminate the (hiring) process because they falsified the application," Daley says.

Daley doesn't directly advertise to clients that employees are drug-tested, but she does promote that the people who will work on their properties are of high integrity. "I let them know we hire people who want to work and who are interested in leading a clean life," she says.



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DALEY LANDSCAPE

(FROM PG. 36)

Elana Daley, co-owner

LOCATION:

Ojai, Calif.

ESTABLISHED: 1992

EMPLOYEES:

2014 REVENUES:

\$750,000

CUSTOMERS:

99% residential, 1% commercial

SERVICES:

Design/build and maintenance

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

REVIEW THE APPLICATION.

Be sure your application for employment is compliant with the law. You can ask questions about a candidate's background, but you must ask those questions in a manner that is legal. "We had to change our application a few years back, and the one we use now is simple, in compliance with state law and it works for us," Daley says.

GO BEYOND A RESUME.

Resumes provide helpful information, but every candidate must fill out the company job application. Otherwise, Daley might not collect the information she needs to move forward with a hire. "That sentence about previous misdemeanors or convictions has to be filled out," she says.

FIND A REPUTABLE PARTNER.

Select a third-party vendor to manage the background screening and drug testing.
As part of the hiring process, every candidate is screened through a national company before they are officially made an employee, Daley says.

Create a safety culture

of the drug testing program at Total Lawn Care (TLC) based in Weslaco, Texas, because the what-ifs associated with not screening are just too risky, if you ask president, Gary Bower.

"We have four guys in a truck. What if one of them is high on cocaine? Everyone is at risk," Bower says.

In fact, the company has experienced some accidents where drug use was involved, though



Gary BOWER

not necessarily the cause of the incidents. And these situations occurred after Bower instituted pre-employment drug screening in 2003 – part of a mission to provide an "excellent working environment." "The No. 1 way we do that is through safety, and that is

why we implemented drug testing," he says.

TLC requires individuals who are offered a job to take a pre-employment drug test. The company also requires post-accident drug testing, and random drug testing several times a year. "We have terminated employees based on them not doing the post-accident drug-test," Bower says, referring to two scenarios.

In one case, an employee drove a zero-turn mower over a curb and fell off the machine. His arm landed on the muffler and he was severely burned. "We took him to the hospital right away, where we said, 'We have to do a drug test,' and he refused," Bower says. "He said, 'No. I'm high on coke. I'm not going to do it."

In effect, the employee terminated himself. The other situation involved a key employee who hit a building's canopy with a truck. "I said, 'No problem, let's deal with the accident, get the drug test and we're all good,'" Bower says. "He refused to go (get the test)."

Other managers wondered if Bower would let the guy off and give him a break since he was on the foreman level. "Losing that employee was huge," Bower says, but he could not allow him



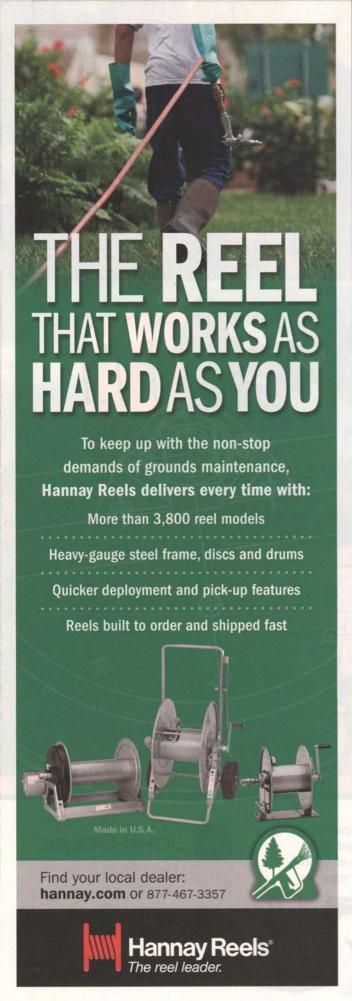
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TOTAL LAWN CARE

Gary Bower, president

LOCATION:

Weslaco, Texas (branches in San Antonio and Laredo)

ESTABLISHED: 2000

EMPLOYEES:

2014 REVENUES: \$2.4 million

CUSTOMERS:

95% commercial, 5% residential

SERVICES:

Maintenance, design and installation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

GAIN BUY-IN.

TLC formed a safety committee
that focuses on accidents in
general – not drug testing
specifically. This sets the tone
for a culture focused on acting
responsibly, Bower says. And,
involving employees sends a
message that the desire to play it
safe is a whole-company effort.

STICK TO THE POLICY.

Even if a key employee refuses a post-accident drug test, the policy still applies. The drug testing policy applies to all employees at all levels of the company.

MAKE IT A SYSTEM.

Pre-employment, post-accident and random drug testing are just part of the system at TLC. "We have a development program and one of the modules talks about the expectation of the drug policy and why we do it," Bower says. "Employees have to read it and test on it – so they have to explain back to us that they understand. It's all about communication."

to continue employment. He held fast to the company policy. "Drug testing is not about catching an employee," Bower says. "It's about investing in your company. Our people are our greatest asset, so it's sad to lose someone.

"It's not about saying drugs are wrong. I was a kid once. It's about the safety of others," Bower adds.

Random drug testing at TLC happens every quarter, when three to five employees' social security numbers are drawn by the third party that administers the drug tests. Bower has had his name pulled, too. TLC will loosen up on its random drug testing during periods when all employees have been in place for some time and there's consistency. "But the last couple of years we have had an influx of employment," Bower says. The random drug testing reaffirms TLC's commitment to being a safe, drug-free workplace.

But, random testing has a down side. "It can be demotivating and some field employees feel like they are not trusted," Bower says. Others might say that they were chosen for the test because the company wants to get rid of them. "There are types who are defensive, maybe not being the great performers they feel like they are being targeted, but that has nothing to do with it."

Bower says communication is how the company helps employees understand that drug testing is part of the system at TLC. It's just like any other process in place.

Overall, drug testing has been a positive experience for TLC because it gives employees and Bower peace of mind that the people operating trucks and equipment are safe and reliable. "It's about protecting my people," he says. "When they are on a zero-turn mower, they have control."





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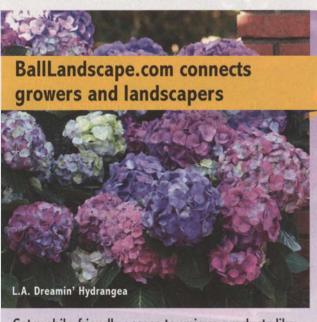
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ELITE LANDSCAPES

Brian Scott, president LOCATION: Spotswood, N.J.

> ESTABLISHED: 2009

> > EMPLOYEES:

2014 REVENUES: \$100,000

CUSTOMERS: 75% residential, 25% commercial

SERVICES: Landscape maintenance and installation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

SET EXPECTATIONS.

Scott is most focused on whether a candidate can perform the job, meet the company's standards and show up to work on time. "My time is money; their time is money and if their time is being wasted then they are wasting my money," he says.

GET EXPLANATIONS.

One worker told Scott he had a drug issue in the past but had just completed a recovery program. "I offered him work to keep him on a schedule," he says. "When you have those issues, half of (staying clean) is your schedule and half of it is mental."

BE A REFERENCE.

Scott wants to open up an opportunity for candidates with drug records to improve. "If you can give someone a second chance, then maybe someone else will give them a third chance and they can be on their way to making something out of life," he says.

Operate on trust

alculated risk and second chances – these principles explain why Brian Scott will hire an employee without performing a drug test, and why he will also consider a worker who has been in trouble with the law before. Scott is careful about who he hires to work at his small business, because it's



Brian SCOTT

a close-knit crew working in a small community where everyone knows your name. But he is also aware that some people just

need a break to improve their lives. He is willing to give those individuals a chance if their performance on the job aligns with his company's high standards.

"There are a lot of people who have had issues in the past who need job security – they need something regular, they need to wake up and do something," says Scott, president of Elite Landscapes in Spotswood, N.J.

Scott's theory is, if you show up and do the work as expected – and if your after-hours activities do not interfere with job performance – then your time is your business. He's had this discussion with workers before. "I said, 'It doesn't matter to me what you do at home, but when you are at work you have to work and no questions asked."

Scott calls himself a relaxed business owner, though he's

(continued on page 104)

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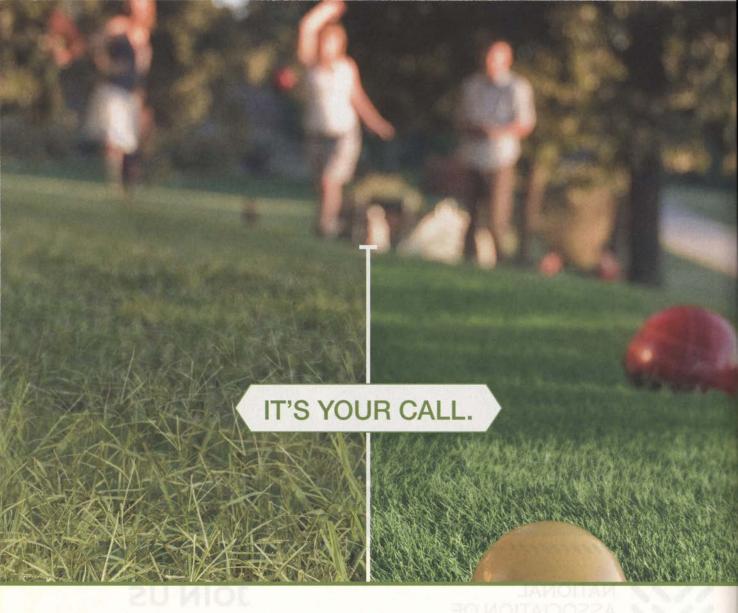
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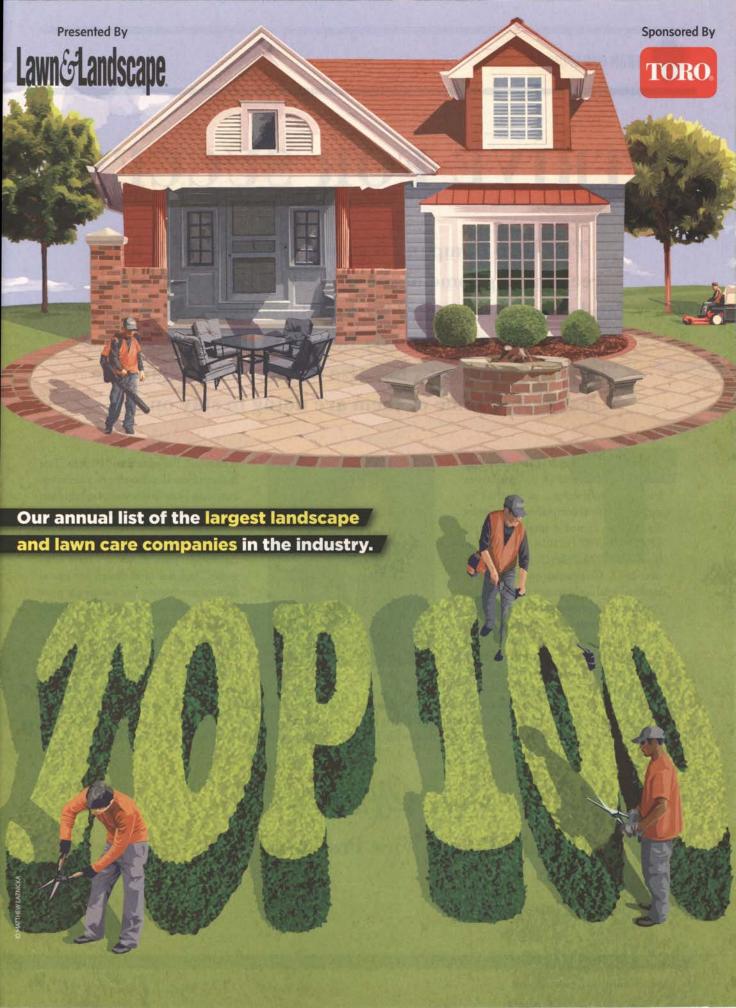
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STRIVE FOR SUCCESS

The Toro Company is proud to sponsor this list recognizing some of the industry's most successful landscape contractors. We look forward to the Top 100 issue every year, not only because it recognizes these growing businesses, but also because it's a chance to learn what some of them are doing to stay on top.

This year's Lawn & Landscape Top 100 is based on 2014 revenue from landscape profit centers, as reported by each of the listed companies. Companies on this list earned a total revenue of \$8,026,808,707 in 2014, which is an increase of \$776,283,627, or 11 percent, over 2013. Companies on the list also reported total employment (seasonal plus year-round employees) of 86,255.

The list is comprised of companies from 31 states and three firms in Canada. From the oldest company on the list – Davey Tree Expert Co., in Kent, Ohio, founded in 1880, to the youngest company, Bright-

View, founded in 2014 – these landscape professionals all share the same challenge: staying productive and profitable. Doing that day after day requires innovative thinking, and that's what Toro



is all about. For more than 100 years, Toro has been focused on listening to, and serving, customers by finding new ways to help them increase productivity and profits.

We never stop working on new innovations that can make a difference on the bottom lines of our customers' businesses. And our local dealers are just as focused on helping our customers grow their business with the right equipment, service and support.

As you look at this list, we hope you'll be encouraged and energized by the possibilities. Just as these companies are growing and raising their revenues, you can achieve

your goals – and Toro is ready to serve you with the equipment you need to get there.

We hope you have a very safe and profitable year!

David Allring | Vice Presi

David Alkire | Vice President, RLC Businesses

2015



COMMEMORATIVE
POSTER

LOCATING THE TOP 100



NUMBERS DON'T LIE

FLORIDA: 8

ARIZONA: 7 TEXAS: 7 MARYLAND: 7

VIRGINIA: 5

COLORADO: 3

GEORGIA: 3

MASSACHUSETTS: 3

PENNSYLVANIA: 3 WISCONSIN: 3

OHIO: 3

CANADA: 3 **NEW JERSEY: 2 NEW YORK: 2**

CONNECTICUT: 1

ALABAMA: 1

DELAWARE: 1

INDIANA: 1

Top 100 companies are located. BrightView is

Here's a look at where the main offices of headquartered in Maryland and California.

LOUISIANA: 1

KANSAS: 1

IOWA: 1

NORTH CAROLINA: 1 SOUTH CAROLINA: 1 TENNESSEE: 1 OREGON: 1

WASHINGTON: 1

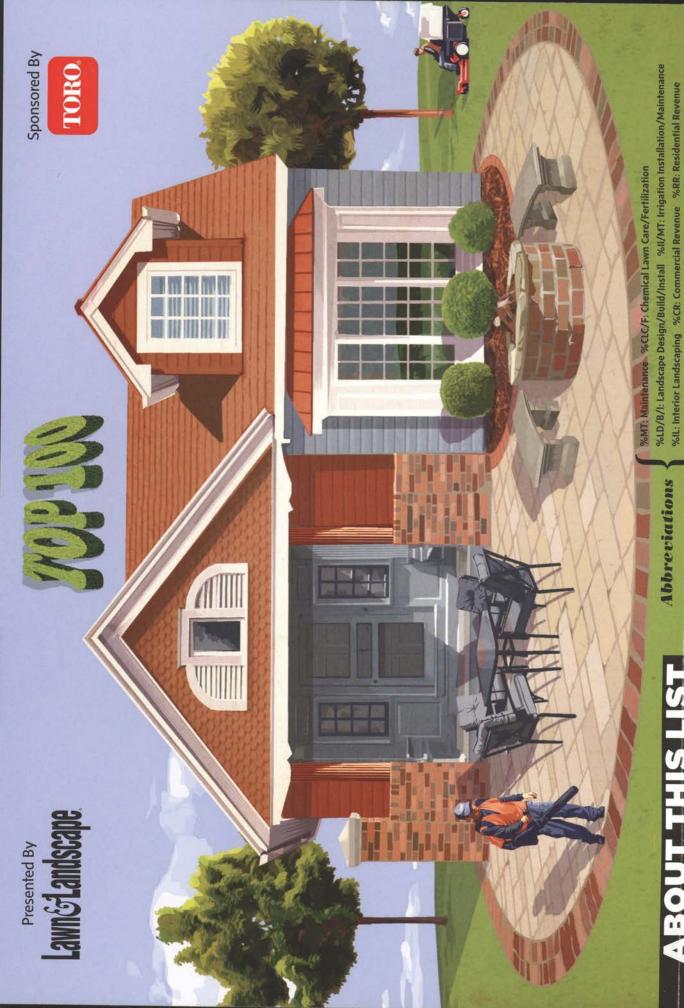
- BASED ON DATA COMPILED BY LAWN & LANDSCAPE

NEW MEXICO: 1

MINNESOTA: 1

MICHIGAN: 1

MAINE: 1



Companies on the L&L Top 100 earned total revenue in 2014 of \$8,026,808,707. That's \$776,283,627 more than in 2013 – an increase of 11% percent.

 Companies on the list reported total employment (seasonal plus year-round employees) of 86,255.

The oldest company on the list is Davey
Tree Expert Co., Kent, Ohio, founded in 1880.

 The youngest company is BrightView, founded in 2014.
 Rotolo Consulfants, Slidell, La., reported

the largest revenue growth with a 90 percent increase in sales from 2013.

The list is comprised of 97 companies in 31 states and three firms in Canada.

with 14. Illinois has n and Florida has eight.

Yellowstone Landscape Group reports combined revenue of BIO Landscape and

Maintenance and Austin Outdoor.

California has the most Top 100 companies

 Davey Tree Experts does not separate utility or Davey Resource Group revenue.
 Groundskeepers & GT Landscapes are reporting combined revenue.

Massey Services revenue does not include termite or general pest control revenue.

termite or general pest control revenue.

ABM Landscape & Turf Service, formerly
One Source Landscape and Golf, revenue

does not include the general facilities maintenance revenue of its parent company.

Merchants Landscape Services gets 100

percent revenue from municipalities.

ValleyCrest, which is the parent company of U.S. Lawns, reports revenue that includes royalties paid and fees from the sale of U.S. Lawns franchise licenses, but not general revenue from the subsidiary's operations.

* Indicates an estimated revenue figure * Indicates a company new to the list This list was compiled by L&L staff. Email Editor Chuck Bowen at chowen@gie.net with comments.

				The second secon										
2015 RANK	COMPANY	2014 RANK	2014 REVENUE	HEADQUARTERS	EMPLOYEES	% CHANGE FROM 2013	% CHANGE EXP. FOR 2015	% MT	%CLC/F	%LD/B/I	%II/MT	™ %	%CR	%RR
=	The Brickman Group/ValleyCrest Landscape Companies	+	\$2,000,000,000	Rockville, Md./ Calabasas, Calif.	22,200	NA	NA	NA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	NA
c.	TruGreen Cos.	8	\$936,000,000	Memphis, Tenn.	8,500	N/A	N/A	1%	85%	%0	%0	%0	18%	82%
3	The Davey Tree Expert Company	4	\$789,000,000	Kent, Ohio	8,657	10.5%	2%	N/A	NA	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
4	Scotts LawnService	9	\$323,000,000	Marysville, Ohio	N/A	2.1%	4%	%0	%68	%0	%0	%0	%86	2%
10	Bartlett Tree Experts	80	\$210,000,000	Stamford, Conn.	1,535	%9.9	8%	%0	%0	%0	%0	%0	25%	92%
9	TruGreen LandCare	7	\$205,000,000	ljamsville, Md.	4,500	8%	3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	%0
2	U.S. Lawns	6	\$163,000,000	Orlando, Fla.	2,050	11.6%	10%	%02	3%	14%	4%	%0	100%	%0
8	Weed Man	10	\$143,219,156	Mississaugua, Ontario	3,500	%2	10%	%0	100%	%0	%0	%0	2%	95%
6	Ferrandino & Son	14	\$120,000,000	Farmingdale, N.Y.	350	929%	35%	25%	%0	%0	%0	%0	100%	%0
10	Gothic Landscape	11	\$114,000,000	Valencia, Calif.	1,200	13%	%6	27%	%0	73%	%0	%0	100%	%0
11	Ruppert Landscape	16	\$110,000,000	Laytonsville, Md.	1,050	33%	4%	54%	%0	40%	%0	%0	100%	%0
13	Ambius	12	\$103,000,000	Reading, Pa.	830	.4%	.2%	%0	%0	3%	%0	%26	100%	%0
13	Lawn Doctor	13	\$101,764,260	Holmdel, N.J.	N/A	4.95%	4%	%0	%06	%0	%0	%0	9%9	95%
14	Merit Service Solutions	17	\$101,446,000	Pennsylvania	N/A	22.5%	N/A	27%	3%	2%	3%	%0	N/A	N/A
15	Yellowstone Landscape Group	15	\$95,688,000	Bunnell, Fla.	1,500	14%	N/A	20%	15%	10%	15%	%0	100%	%0
91	SavATree	18	\$85,000,000	Bedford Hills, N.Y.	685	13%	%6	%0	17%	%0	1%	%0	20%	%08
11	Mainscape	19	\$75,300,000	Fishers, Ind.	1,100	26.6%	2%	61%	2%	%6	2%	%0	100%	%0
18	Massey Services	20	\$64,120,320	Orlando, Fla.	1,650	8%	12%	%0	31%	1%	4%	%0	12%	88%
61	Clintar Landscape Management	22	\$61,200,000*	Markahm, Ontario	009	10%	8%	35%	2%	2%	2%	%0	100%	%0
20	Marina Landscape	21	\$61,000,000	Anaheim, Calif.	069	2%	2%	30%	%0	2%	%89	%0	100%	%0
12	The Groundskeeper/ Greater Texas Landscapes	24	\$56,000,000	Tucson, Ariz.	1,000	22%	%2	%09	3%	25%	7%	%0	%96	2%
22	NaturaLawn of America	23	\$50,513,514	Frederick, Md.	461	9.8%	2%	%0	%66	%0	%0	%0	2%	95%
23 (1)	Acres Group	25	\$49,000,000	Wauconda, III.	860	13.4%	8%	38%	2%	25%	1%	%0	%96	2%
23 (t)	Lucas Tree Expert	28	\$49,000,000	Portland, Maine	N/A	16%	2%	%0	2%	%0	%0	%0	%96	%9
25	Denison Landscaping	26	\$47,500,000	Fort Washington. Md.	485	12%	2%	2%	%0	86%	2%	%0	A/N	N/A

Lawn Care 27		\$45,471,000		Plainfield, III.	517	8.7%	10%	%0	%26	%0	%0	%0	%9	94%
The Greenery 31 \$43,000,000 Hill	\$43,000,000		Ī	ton Head Island, S.C.	0//	11%	8%	75%	2%	15%	4%	%0	85%	14%
ABM Landscape & Turf Services 30 \$42,000,000 Tampa, Fla.	\$42,000,000		Tampa	, Fla.	009	%9	9%9	%02	%2	10%	2%	%0	%06	%0
Garden Design Farmers Beach Texas	\$40,600,000		Farmers Be Texas	each,	55	35%	15%	3%	%0	%26	%0	%0	40%	%09
Christy Webber Landscapes 33 \$40,400,000	\$40,400,000		Chicago		920	30%	10%	30%	%0	92%	%0	%0	65%	35%
31 (t) Jensen Corp. 29 \$40,000,000 San Jose, Calif	\$40,000,000		San Jose, C	alif.	324	N/A	N/A	40%	%0	%0	%09	%0	92%	25%
31 (1) Metco Landscape 42 \$40,000,000 Aurora, Colo	\$40,000,000	-57	Aurora, Co	10.	200	47%	%0	10%	%0	40%	40%	%0	%66	1%
Mariani Landscape 32 \$38,500,000 Lake Bluff, III	\$38,500,000		Lake Bluf	=	482	12%	%6	21%	%0	40%	%0	%0	13%	87%
Rotolo Consultants 67 \$38,000,000 Slidell, La.	\$38,000,000		Slidell, La	1.	400	%06	%96	30%	%0	%02	%0	%0	100%	%0
NN	\$36,690,526		Carrollton, Te	sxas	N/A	19%	12%	2%	%0	62%	36%	%0	73%	27%
Girard Environmental Services 51 \$36,000,000 Sanford, Fla	\$36,000,000	-	Sanford, Fla	ä	415	46.1%	14%	61%	2%	24%	8%	%0	100%	%0
Dixie Landscape Co. 40 \$34,515,000 Medley, Fla.	\$34,515,000		Medley, Fla		305	20%	10%	10%	%0	%02	20%	%0	100%	%0
Terracare Associates 39 \$33,878,780 Littleton, Colo	\$33,878,780		Littleton, Colc		643	32%	43%	95%	5%	16%	%0	%0	100%	%0
Cagwin & Dorward 35 \$33,700,000 Novato, Calif	\$33,700,000		Novato, Calif.		400	8%	40%	%09	%0	50%	10%	%0	75%	25%
Mission Landscape Cos. 36 \$32,930,180 Wilmette, III.	\$32,930,180		Wilmette, III.		290	2%	10%	%08	%0	12%	%0	%0	100%	%0
Sebert Landscaping 34 \$31,200,000 Bartlett, III.	\$31,200,000		Bartlett, III.		350	%0	10%	%09	%0	25%	%0	%0	%96	2%
42 (c) The Grounds Guys 76 \$30,300,000 Waco, Texas	\$30,300,000	2	Waco, Texas		N/A	72%	26%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Reliable Property Services 43 \$30,300,000 St. Paul, Minn	\$30,300,000		St. Paul, Minr	- 24	385	11%	2%	20%	2%	10%	2%	%0	%96	%0
Gothic Grounds Management 41 \$29,414,450 Valencia, Calif	\$29,414,450		Valencia, Calif.	750	440	3.2%	12%	78%	3%	3%	8%	%0	%06	10%
CleanScapes 62 \$28,588,275 Austin, Texas	\$28,588,275		Austin, Texas		370	31.58%	20%	31%	2%	%09	4%	%0	100%	%0
Southern Botanical 52 \$28,546,414 Dallas	\$28,546,414		Dallas		270	19%	9%9	12%	4%	62%	16%	3%	42%	28%
Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping 45 \$28,500,000 San Antonio	\$28,500,000		San Antonio		425	11%	-9%	44%	%0	38%	18%	%0	75%	10%
Chapel Valley Landscape Company 48 \$28,200,000 Woodbine, Md	\$28,200,000		Woodbine, M	Ġ.	350	12%	20%	%02	%0	30%	%0	%0	75%	25%
Landscape Concepts Management 53 \$28,100,000 Grayslake, III	\$28,100,000	20	Grayslake, II	_	370	18.5%	3%	32%	%0	19%	2%	10%	N/A	N/A
McFall and Berry 47 \$28,083,000 Annandale, Va. Landscape Management	\$28,083,000		Annandale, \	a,	290	10%	9%9	28%	%9	21%	1%	%0	100%	%0
AAA Landscape 50 \$28,022,345 Phoenix	\$28,022,345		Phoenix		440	10%	10%	48%	5%	44%	5%	%0	100%	%0
52 (1) Shearon Design 54 \$28,000,000 Plymouth Meeting.	\$28,000,000	1000	Plymouth Mee Pa.	ting,	350	N/A	N/A	30%	10%	30%	10%	2%	%02	30%
52 (1) Greenscape 38 \$28,000,000 Middleboro, Mass	\$28,000,000		Middleboro, 1	Mass.	275	.25%	15%	45%	%0	38%	%0	%0	%06	10%
	\$27,650,000		W. Bridgewal Mass.	ter,	200	11%	10%	30%	2%	%0	2%	%0	%69	41%
Bemus Landscape 44 \$27,060,000 San Clemente, Calif	\$27,060,000 San	San	San Clemente, (Salif.	425	2%	10%	%02	%0	10%	10%	%0	%66	1%
Chalet Nursery, Landscape 93 \$27,000,000 Wilmette, III.	\$27,000,000		Wilmette, III.		350	%2	2%	40%	10%	40%	%0	%0	%0	100%
Rvan Lawn & Tree 46 \$26,700,000 Overland Park, Ka	\$26,700,000		Overland Park, K	an.	240	5%	10%	%0	92%	%0	13%	%0	2%	95%
cape & Maintenance N/R \$25,660,000	\$25,660,000		Chandler, Ariz	Ni.	426	22%	25%	%02	%0	15%	2%	%0	100%	%0
Gachina Landscape Management 59 \$25,119,347 Menlo Park, Calif	\$25,119,347		Menlo Park,	Calif.	310	13.7%	10%	64%	%0	26%	10%	%0	%02	%0
Environmental Management 58 \$25,000,000 Plain City, Ohio	\$25,000,000		Plain City	Ohio	295	18%	10%	33%	3%	44%	2%	%0	%86	2%
James River Grounds Management 60 \$24,760,000 Glen Allen, Va.	\$24,760,000		Glen Aller	η, Va.	395	14%	2%	73%	%0	17%	4%	%0	100%	%0
The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin 74 \$24,456,500 Middleton, Wis	\$24,456,500		Middleton,	Wis.	328	-2%	2%	18%	%0	40%	4%	%0	80%	20%
DD Morrilli 9 Company Morbury Ma		\$24 DOT 077 Mochanic Ma	Manhama Ma		151	210%	10%	12%	10%	81%	%6	%U	3%	07%

000	RP Warzim & Company	99	\$24,000,000 \$24,000,000	Voncouriet Moch	101	0/17	/60	2000	7007	9/10	04.7	020	3%9	2007
-	Seriske Lawri & Iree Care	9	924,000,000	NGIII IGWICH, WASH.	200	0/0	0/0	0/07	10/0	0/7	0/0	0,0	20.70	0,0%
65	NutriLawn	22	\$23,500,000	Toronto	NA	4%	2%	%0	85%	%0	10%	%0	10%	%06
99	Scott Byron and Co.	22	\$23,257,000	Lake Bluff, III.	230	4%	2%	32%	%9	29%	%0	%0	10%	%06
29	Russell Landscape Group	53	\$22,600,000	Dacula, Ga.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
89	Teufel Landscape	61	\$22,500,000*	Hillsboro, Ore.	278	N/A	N/A	30%	%0	25%	15%	%0	%86	2%
69	Gibbs Landscape Co.	83	\$22,100,000	Smyrna, Ga.	290	11%	9%9	%69	%6	15%	%2	%0	92.5	43%
92	Naturescape	72	\$21,124,242	Muskego, Wis.	220	13.6%	10%	10%	%08	%0	%0	%0	2%	%96
11	Swingle Lawn, Tree, and Landscape Care	64	\$21,046,399	Denver	275	10.27%	7.74%	%0	33%	%2	2%	%0	33%	%19
272	Merchants Landscape Services	78	\$21,000,000	Santa Ana, Calif.	420	20%	15%	%86	%0	%0	2%	%0	%0	%0
23	McHale Landscape	65	\$20,600,000	Upper Mariboro, Md.	195	%0	10%	20%	%0	80%	%0	%0	%0	100%
1/2	High Tech Landscapes	82	\$20,569,904	Branchburg, N.J.	353	18%	10%	28%	2%	11%	11%	%0	%09	30%
12	Landscape Workshop	77	\$20,493,602	Bessemer, Ala,	350	13%	10%	75%	2%	16%	4%	%0	%88	8%
91	DLC Resources	70	\$20,100,000	Phoenix	310	%0	%0	%22	%0	15%	%0	%0	100%	%0
11	Yard-Nique	84	\$19,675,000	Morrisville, N.C.	325	18.5%	25%	48%	%0	47%	2%	%0	%96	4%
78	Angler Environmental	73	\$19,567,001	Warrenton, Va.	155	5.8%	10%	%0	%0	75%	25%	%0	25%	15%
62	Berghoff Design Group	69	\$19,500,000	Scottsdale, Ariz.	280	17%	2%	20%	%0	20%	%0	%0	20%	80%
80	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	71	\$19,460,000	Germantown, Wis.	300	4%	%9	41%	5%	33%	3%	4%	75%	20%
88	Wheat's Landscape	88	\$19,154,845	Vienna, Va.	180	18%	2%	36%	%6	44%	%9	%0	5%	%86
82	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	79	\$18,925,000	Albuquerque, N.M.	330	8%	%9	35%	2%	24%	%9	1%	%02	15%
83	Lambert Landscape Company	66	\$18,875,000	Dallas	180	28%	2%	36%	2%	52%	2%	%0	8%	93%
84	Clarence Davids & Co.	80	\$18,500,000	Matteson, III.	250	%9	3%	40%	%9	40%	5%	%0	%56	2%
200	Benchmark Landscape	81	\$18,258,000	Poway, Calif.	238	%2	2%	%09	%0	20%	%0	%0	100%	%0
98	HighGrove Partners	26	\$17,900,000	Austell, Ga.	190	21%	2%	78%	%0	20%	%0	%0	100%	%0
87	Stay Green	85	\$17,853,162	Santa Clarita, Calif.	265	10.7%	18%	28%	1%	18%	2%	%0	%66	1%
88	* New Way Landscape & Tree Services	N/R	\$17,533,000	San Diego	235	43%	2%	93%	%0	32%	2%	%0	25%	15%
88	Meadow Farms	83	\$17,300,000	Chantilly, Va.	540	3%	2%	%2	3%	%06	%0	%0	2%	%96
(1) 06	ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design	89	\$17,000,000	Venice, Fla.	250	9.1%	12%	64%	2%	23%	2%	%0	%08	20%
(I) 06	* Beary Landscaping Inc.	N/R	\$17,000,000	Lockport, III.	230	20%	10%	30%	3%	30%	5%	%0	%02	30%
83	Sposato Landscape Co.	94	\$16,571,711	Milton, Del.	328	11%	13%	21%	12%	13%	12%	%0	%08	20%
93	* Great Oaks Landscape Associates	N/R	\$16,400,000	Novi, Mi.	140	15%	6.7%	25%	2%	20%	%0	%0	N/A	N/A
94	Integrated Landscape Management	90	\$16,244,515	Tempe, Ariz.	274	4.3%	2%	62%	3%	17%	%9	%0	%02	30%
95	Greenscapes	92	\$16,100,000	Naples, Fla.	270	9%9	12%	72%	2%	15%	3%	%0	100%	%0
96	Munie Greencare Professionals	92	\$16,081,282	Caseyville, III.	225	8%	%0	65%	4%	23%	1%	%0	%96	4%
16	Frank and Grossman Landscape Contractors	99	\$16,040,000	San Francisco	185	-19%	9%9	25%	%0	%69	2%	%0	%6	91%
98 (1)	* SiteWorks	N/R	\$16,000,000	Chandler, Ariz.	155	%0	2%	20%	%0	%02	2%	%0	100%	%0
98 (1)	* Pacific Outdoor Living	N/R	\$16,000,000	Sun Valley, Calif.	100	32%	12.5%	%0	%0	100%	%0	%0	%0	100%
100	* Perficut Companies Inc.	N/B	\$15,800,000	Des Moines	170	26%	8%	22%	10%	25%	8%	%0	85%	15%
	Company of the last of the las													





NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK

Of the companies listed in this year's Top 100 list, eight are new to the list. To get to know some of these companies better, we asked them what makes their company unique, what their biggest challenge of 2015 is and one thing people might not know about them.

NEW WAY LANDSCAPE & TREE SERVICE

IT'S A CLICHÉ, BUT WE CARE about our

employees. We have an opendoor policy. People aren't a number in a large firm. They have tremendous input authority. (My daughter/coowner) Kath and Lare pretty hands off and all regional and account managers run their divisions like their own company.

(OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE

IS TO) figure ways to reduce overhead to make decent profits, as we are in the landscape construction arena now - figuring the correct pricing strategy to win large installation work. Also to keep inspiring the managers to run their divisions to be the most safe, efficient and productive.

I NEVER WENT TO COLLEGE

- just took a few classes and learned all on the job through hard work, long hours for many, many years. (I) came to San Diego in fall of 1976 on an Enduro dirt bike with \$800 in my pocket.

- RANDY NEWHARD, CEO

SITEWORKS

SINCE ITS VERY **BEGINNING**, SiteWorks

has an established presence as a compatible and user-friendly landscape contractor that develops mutually beneficial relationships with those we selectively work with.

THE DIMINISHING

AVAILABILITY of skilled and qualified landscape field personnel that can meet the required individual identity and work eligibility as validated by E-Verify is today's biggest challenge for SiteWorks.

IN THE FALL OF 2004,

SiteWorks was founded in the kitchen of a small two-bedroom apartment at a complex located in the East Valley of the Phoenix metropolitan area. We had business cards printed up that showed our address as "Suite 2020" instead of "Apt. 2020," whereas we wanted to create the image that we were located in an office park instead of an apartment complex.

- CHRIS MALHAM, PRESIDENT

PACIFIC OUTDOOR LIVING

THE MOST UNIQUE THING about our

company is that we do everything in-house, from the design all the way through installation. There is no need for our customers to get multiple bids from multiple contractors for each aspect of their project. We are able to give them a onestop-shop experience through the entire project.

OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE

is expanding our service area to be able to cover all of southern California and eventually all of California. Finding the right guys to install and supervise projects can be quite a task.

WE ARE FAMILY OWNED

and operated. The company was started in 1999 by Terry Morrill and his two sons, Trent and Chad, and to this day they still run the day-to-day operations of the company.

- ANTHONY BARRAGAN, MARKETING MANAGER

PERFICUT



WHAT MAKES OUR COMPANY UNIQUE

is our continued commitment to our mission. This includes working very hard in honoring our partnerships with our clients as well as recognizing and rewarding our employees.

OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE

is making sure the processes and procedures are in place to continue to grow into the future. Staffing is one area we are really focusing on now - from how we recruit, hire, train, retain and offer long term careers in the green industry.

LIKE MANY great companies, we continue to be very passionate about our business and telling the Perficut story of who we are and what we do differently than everyone else. This isn't to say that we do one particular service better than the competition, but how we go about serving our clients' needs.

- KORY BALLARD, PRESIDENT

WHO SAID IT?

Find out which Top 100 executives said the following quotes by turning to the page listed next to it.



DAVID DuBOIS



FRANK MARIANI



JIM McCUTCHEON



DAVID ALEXANDER



ANDREW KERIN

WE BELIEVE we should be at the highest quality and that should create advocacy for the craft, for the trade and for being part of that either as an employee or a team member or as a client.

Pg. 57

WHEN I WAS a kid, you couldn't wait to be outside. Kids today can't wait to get on the Internet or play a video game. So, the point is that we want to connect with our customers. We want them to get to know their neighbors, want them to live outside with their families.

Pg. 64

I REMEMBER years and years ago I would hear horror stories about people taking kid interns and basically throwing them on a lawnmower and leaving them there, or putting them in the field and they're watering or pulling weeds. Pg. 67

I KNOW everybody around the country, and I've done it myself, thinks they can do residential and commercial. I will debate it with anybody. all day long, that I've never seen anybody in this country do both of those very, very well. I've seen people that do one very well and the other one pretty well, but never seen anybody that does both very well. Pg. 68

WHEN TWO COMPANIES are not enough alike, chances are it's not going to work and for us it ended up taking a very long road to bring it around. Pg. 72



IN FEBRUARY,

I sat down with Andrew Kerin and Roger Zino. The two men headed up Brickman and ValleyCrest, respectively, before both companies were bought by private equity firm KKR. Now, they are leading the creation of BrightView, the largest landscape company in history. In an exclusive interview with L&L, they talked about how they're integrating two already-huge companies, how they see their place in the industry and what it means to carry on the legacy of two of the landscape industry's founding families. — *Chuck Bowen*

ABOVE: Andrew Kerin, left, and Roger Zino are faced with the challenge of creating the largest landscaping company in history.

CHUCK BOWEN: How did you guys first get into a room and start talking?

ANDREW KERIN: Fortunately, Roger and I had met some time before then and when KKR got involved and obviously MSD Capital on the ValleyCrest side, we had an opportunity to visit and Roger and I first talked to see how we feel about that.

Now we are together providing more comprehensive service, providing more opportunity for our people which is clearly a top priority. Being more local. If you think about it, we have so much density, we're so much more local in many markets. **CB:** Can you give me an example of one of those markets where you've been able to really strengthen those local ties? Because I think the legacy companies never had that we're-the-local-guy reputation.

AK: One great example is the community work that we're doing in Dallas, as well as the work we're doing for our clients. Maintenance service is now adding tree services. Where there was development work going on, now they add maintenance.

And I think, importantly, just the sharing of resources that we have across horticulture, irrigation, maintenance, develop-



⇒ AS YOU FLIP THROUGH OUR TOP 100 COVERAGE, keep an eye out for the noteworthy news stories since May 2014.

JUNE 2014

THE DAVEY TREE EXPERT

company was named the largest employee-owned service firm company in the U.S., according to data from the National Center for Employee Ownership (NCEO).

0000000

AUGUST 2014

FERRANDINO & SON, based in Farmingdale, N.Y., hired Tom Panek as vice president of operations. Panek is responsible for the day-to-day operations across all of Ferrandino & Son's programs.

0000000

AUGUST 2014

THE DWYER GROUP, parent company of The Grounds Guys, was acquired for the second time by The Riverside Co., a private equity fund.

0000000

AUGUST 2014

ABM rebrands its landscape and turf management business – formerly OneSource Landscape & Golf – to ABM Landscape and Turf Services.

0000000

SEPTEMBER 2014

Dan Carrothers, who was marketing manager at BASF, created **WEED MAN** Houston, and purchased 22 territories, the largest Weed Man franchise to date. ment. We are the local company in Dallas and we're all stronger for it. Our people are stronger for it; our clients have better service because of it.

CB: So, as you guys have brought the two companies together, what's surprised you the most?

ROGER ZINO: When you get people in the room, how excited they got about being in the room with each other. I mean, you have a bunch of landscape people coming together, right? And just sort of unprecedented in terms of people saying, "Hey, how do you do this?" And, "Here's how we do this," and, "Let's compare notes."

This sort of shared vision of how do we get and do things better and the opportunity to have so much experience, different in a lot of ways but similar in so many ways too. It was really cool to see.

AK: What's been surprising – I think what's important to understand and you asked about the process is, we as a senior team spent a lot of time together during the effort. So we got to know one another.

CB: Tell me what that was like. Tell me what you guys did.

AK: Two senior teams getting together. We got together multiple times to begin to explore how we might work together, to understand who each other was. We understood and we came together on what we were all in-

vesting in and what that future would look like and what we were to aspire to.

That brought us to Bright-View later on. As soon as we closed, we began getting input. The first day we got over 6,000 inputs from our team members out in the field about what they thought about certain things. During the branding process, during the priority-setting process, we had thousands of interviews with clients, with our team members, and so we've been very proactive about getting perspective.

CB: So when you guys were talking about spending time

together as an executive team, were you playing golf, going to dinner – what are you doing?

AK: We're not playing golf.

RZ: We're not playing golf. As leadership goes and sets a tone, that's how the organizations believe in the possible. So we have to come together to form relationships, form friendships, get to know one another.

CB: Sure, because if you two don't get along it's not gonna work.

AK: That's correct and we happen to, but the whole senior team (does). And I think what's



The way that you honor pioneers who created decades of and their pioneering by being pioneers ... and providing



important is we now have one operating structure where we operate as one company even though today we go to market with the ValleyCrest brand and the Brickman brand until we transition to BrightView.

RZ: It was nothing fancy at the end of the day. We get together and talk about some set of topics about how we do X or how we do Y, and some social time. It was very important not only that we did the same things but we saw the world the same way, we cared about the same things.

And in the end, we keep it pretty simple. We love the industry; we love developing our people and we like serving our customers, and found a lot of alignment on that.

And then you get into specific topics and say, "OK, what really matters?" Well, having our people work safely matters not just to us but the whole industry, right? So let's talk about how we continue to be leaders in the area of safety and how we can continue to do that for the whole industry.

CB: I'd imagine you guys are going to be on the acquisition hunt soon if you're not already.

AK: I think that what we're focused on is doing great work, doing a consistently high quality everywhere, every day, all the time. What we're focused on is engaging in a professionalism, and raising the professionalism and the opportunities for our teams, right. And what we're focused on is helping build the brand awareness of not just BrightView but the value that landscaping brings to clients.

Our job is to raise the level of the field, it's not just about M&A. We will be inquisitive where we think it makes sense. But importantly our goal is to raise the standard in the industry, and have the breadth and scale to do that so that it actually moves the industry.

RZ: In simple terms, we think we do our job right, we make the pie bigger.

CB: I don't want to put words in your mouth, but it sounds like you view BrightView as the standard bearer for the industry – a very strong advocate for the landscaping industry.

AK: I think we love the landscape industry and we love the opportunities that it provides people who want to take care of landscapes. And we love what it means for those clients and importantly, those customers.

We believe we should be at the highest quality and that should create advocacy for the craft, for the trade and for being part of that either as an employee or a team member or as a client. So in that way, yes, our charge is to do that.

READ MORE ONLINE

To read this interview in its entirety, visit **LAWNANDLANDSCAPE.COM** and search "Building BrightView."

CB: In Brickman and Valley-Crest, you've got the two families who arguably started the landscape industry. What's your take on that legacy, and how that impacts BrightView?

AK: When you think about the legacy, it's important. It very much lives on in the people of both companies. So we've got 20,000-plus people with a large number of years of experience in both companies that grew up and have the legacy in there, in their being, and part of carrying forward is the spirit of that moving forward. And it's the spirit of both families believing, doing great work, taking care of your people, growing the business, and they love the landscape business. And that spirit very much is alive and well in the companies, and it lives in people that lived it for many years.

RZ: The way that you honor pioneers who created decades of opportunity is to be a pioneer and create the next five and six and 10 decades of opportunity. So that's what BrightView is about. We honor the Brickmans and the Sperbers and their pioneering by being pioneers — taking this industry to the next level and providing opportunities for thousands of people like both those families did.

opportunity is to be a pioneer. ... We honor the Brickmans and the Sperbers opportunities for thousands of people like both those families did." - Roger Zino

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NO-SHOWS TO SHOW-OFFS

After a miserable few years, David Alexander talks with Lawn & Landscape about what he and his team had to do to improve the operations and company morale at TruGreen.

By Brian Horn

When David Alexander accepted the position of CEO at TruGreen, he had first-hand knowledge on why the company was struggling.

"I fired (TruGreen) a few months before I was offered the job," Alexander says, adding that he rehired them the weekend after he was hired. "I cancelled my service because they weren't doing what they said – because they weren't showing up when they said."

So, it wasn't a surprise that Alexander intially balked when he was approached about the CEO job. But after discovering his values aligned with TruGreen's parent company, ServiceMaster, he changed his mind and joined the struggling company.

Those no-shows were a good indicator of why TruGreen had an 8 percent revenue decline in 2013 revenue, lost 400,000 customers in two years and went through three presidents in three years. The company was also spun off from publicly traded ServiceMaster and is now owned by the private equity firm Clayton, Dubilier & Rice, who also owns a majority share of ServiceMaster.

But that split from Service-Master gave Alexander and his team at TruGreen the flexibility to get back on the right path. Alexander says 2014 was "probably the best year in a long time" for the company in many areas and revenue has increased by \$40 million.

"We probably measure, I don't know, 25 or 30 different metrics, all of which we exceeded in 2014, so it was our first

















HAUSBECK MARTIN HURTO

DAVIDOFSKY

MINKS

FEDORCHAK RAJANIEMI















COHEN

FLYNN

TURNAROUND TEAM

ALEXANDER'S DIRECT REPORTS

BILL HAUSBECK, North Division vice president since 2002, joined company in 1984

DAVID MARTIN, chief financial officer, transferred from ServiceMaster in January 2014

KIRK HURTO, VP of Technical Services since 1981

ERIC DAVIDOFSKY, South Divison vice president, transferred from Terminix in 2013

ERIC MINKS, West Division vice president since 2005, joined company in 1975

JEFF FEDORCHAK, VP of Corporate Affairs (a new position created by Alexander), transferred from ServiceMaster in 2013

KARI RAJANIEMI, executive vice president and chief marketing officer, hired from SenecaOne in 2013

KATE OLIVER, vice president of Customer Service since 1990 KEN DEWITT, chief information officer, hired from United Rentals in 2013

KEVIN MANN, general counsel and chief legal officer, transferred from ServiceMaster in 2013

MARTIN CLICK, vice president of Process Improvement, hired from UPS in 2013

MARK ALLEN, vice president of Residential Sales, transferred from ServiceMaster in 2013

ROY COHEN, chief human resources officer, transferred from ServiceMaster January 2014

SHAWN FLYNN, promoted to vice president of Commercial Sales in 2013, joined TruGreen in 2002 and was most recently Atlanta region manager

hen Alexander accepted the job, he changed 10 of his 14 direct reports. Even though TruGreen was the fourth company where he has served as CEO or president, he never had to make that many changes with direct reports. Some were brought over from ServiceMaster, while others were promoted from within.

"I wanted a management team that really believed in where we could take the company," Alexander says. "We had some great folks, but we had some folks who were either not good fits for the roles they were in, or they were somewhat beat down in terms of feeling like they'd been through a bunch. They were tired. And I wanted people who were very high-energy and enthusiastic and believed where we could take the company. Today, we have a team that is very excited about where we can take the company."

At left is a list of Alexander's direct reports.

year as a standalone company, and we literally cannot be more pleased with the kind of year we had," he says. "We added 44,000 or 45,000 customers. So, it was a pretty phenomenal year for us." One major hang-up was the routing software TruGreen shared with other ServiceMaster companies including Merry Maids and Terminix - companies that performed services indoors and didn't have to change plans when it rained.

"We're using the same software dramatically customized for us, and then we have some internal software we've developed that is also very valuable for our business," he says.

But the software wasn't the only reason for TruGreen's struggles, and those problems were weighing a lot of employees down. Alexander had to do the basics and make sure employees were showing up on time and servicing customers' lawns the right way, but he also had to boost morale and shape a culture that would make staff proud of their employer.

As the largest lawn care company in the United States, the masses judge lawn care companies by how TruGreen does business, leaving Alexander with a lot of influence on how the industry is viewed in the public's eye. In this exclusive conversation with L&L, Alexander talks about his first months on the job, why he describes the Tru-Green acquisition mode as historic, what he sees in TruGreen's future and much more.

Lawn & Landscape: You came into what sounds like, from the outside, a mess. What was the atmosphere like and what were

some things you did to repair it? David Alexander: That was kind of a fairly accurate description. It kind of was a mess. I came in December of 2012, started a week or so before Christmas, and one of the first things that I tried to do was get out in the branches and listen to our folks. In the two years I've been with the company, I've been to 88 of our branches (as of Feb. 2015), and what I try to do in a branch visit is listen to our frontline people, our service managers, our specialists, our general managers, our sales managers.

I try to learn what they think is going on, and what I heard in my first few months here was that we didn't give them the tools that they needed to do their jobs. That they were very, very frustrated with routing, with scheduling, with planning. Not that our folks in planning and scheduling and routing weren't strong, but their tools were so misapplied and so inappropriate for what they were trying to accomplish that, in effect, we handcuffed them in terms of being able to do their jobs.

L&L: These branch visits, which you still do, are unannounced. Why do you choose to do them that way?

DA: I don't want people spending a lot of

"I FIRED (TRUGREEN)

a few months before I was offered the job. I cancelled my service because they weren't doing what they said. Because they weren't showing up when they said."

time making a branch pretty and working all night and doing those kind of things. I never announce I'm coming, I just show up, and I talk to whoever's there. So, sometimes that's the techs, depending on the time of day it may be the specialists. Other times it may be the service managers, the sales manager, the general manager, it may be customer service people, it may be the office manager.

But, I try to talk to whoever's there and try to learn as much as I can about how they think the company's doing. So, even at Family Dollar (Alexander was president of Family Dollar from 1995-2005) when I visited 600 stores a year, they were all unannounced. I've never done announced visits, and the reason I haven't is, very early in my career we'd hear the CEO was coming, and we'd work all

night to make the store perfect and he wouldn't show up half the time. So, instead of being a positive, it became a negative. I don't want to see what's not real, and I don't want them working lots of hours to make it just right for me. I'm there to listen, so for that reason I don't tell them I'm coming.

L&L: When you first started doing these visits, I have to imagine people were a little worried about losing their jobs. How do you get them to be honest with you?

DA: It was fairly easy, actually because they were so frustrated that they were ready to be honest with somebody. It was surprising though how honest they were. I had one guy I talked to early on who'd been with us for almost 40 years, and I said, "I appreciate all your service to the company. It's so

great, almost 40 years." And he looked at me and said, "The key word is 'almost.' I don't think I'll make it 40 years."

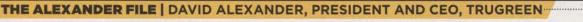
I said, "Why would you say that?" He said, "I'm so frustrated with the systems, the fact that nothing works, and the fact that I can't serve my customers today like I always have that I don't think I'll make it another six months."

We had a lot of folks with a lot of tenure and a lot of loyalty both to the company and their customers, who felt extremely frustrated that they couldn't deliver the service that they wanted to deliver.

L&L: Did you have to do any layoffs when you first got there? **DA:** No, we have not done any layoffs at all.

L&L: What was the most shocking thing you saw when you did these visits?

DA: I think it was the consistency of concern that I heard everywhere I went. If you're the CEO, some people will tell you, "Oh, he's the CEO I need to tell him something nice, something good, something positive." Folks were pretty straightforward that this ain't working, so probably the tone and the tenor of the comments and the consistency of the comments that we needed



Educational Professional

(2005 -2007) Chairman and CEO, PCA International

(1985-1993) Senior Vice President of Distribution, Best Products

(2009 -2012) President and CEO, Citi Trends

(1976-1980) East Tennessee State University, BBA, Business

(1995-2005) President and COO, Family Dollar

(1993-1995) Senior Vice President, CSK Auto

(2008) Consultant, Apax Partners



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COMMERCIAL VEHICLES







OCTOBER 2014

Terracare acquired VMC
LANDSCAPE. The purchase of VMC
added more than 160 employees to
Terracare's rolls and another state
to its territory. It previously
had operations in Colorado,
California and Utah.

0000000

NOVEMBER 2014

MICHAEL BOGAN appointed CEO of TruGreen Landcare. Bogan succeeded Vidu Kulkarni, who remained on the company's board.

0000000

DECEMBER 2014

BRICKMAN and **VALLEYCREST** announce BrightView as the name of combined companies.

0000000

JANUARY 2015

CIVC PARTNERS, L.P.,

a Chicago-based middle market private equity firm, acquired Yellowstone Landscape Group in partnership with management.

ACQUISITIONS

THE DAVEY TREE EXPERT CO.,

made the following acquisitions:
Nature First, Santa Cruz, Calif.;
Klebasko Environmental Services,
Odenton, Md.; Cortese Tree
Specialists in Knoxville, Tenn.; Lawn
Logic Landscaping, in Davie, Fla.;
Maier Forest and Tree in Rochester,
Minn.; Superior NW Tree & Shrub
Care, in Seattle; and Wetland Studies
and Solutions in Gainesville, Va.

to fix things, and we needed to fix them soon, and people were frustrated, and people felt very defeated.

And now, if you talk to folks at TruGreen, I think most people feel very positive. We do what's called an engagement score where we survey all our employees every year on how they feel about the company.

And there's four or five different levels of response, but the top two levels of response are what we call an engaged associate. They're proud of the company, they like their jobs, they're not looking for another job. We saw a 20 percent improvement in that this year.

But, most significantly, in our branch managers, that went from a 50 score to a 76 score. So, 76 percent of our branch managers today are very excited and proud of their company.

Two years ago that number was in the 40s and now it's in the 70s. Their belief in the company, which then radiates to the service managers and then down to the employees, has dramatically changed in the last two years.

L&L: What have you done to improve the culture?

DA: We began to do a lot of things to incent our employees around retaining customers. One of the things we did is what we call Lawn Stars. Every quarter, every branch competes around customer count, and the branch that wins in each region, we have 21 regions, we have a prize catalog for all the employees. In addition, each branch competes for a charity each quarter.

So, if the branch wins, not

only do they win prizes, but they pick a charity we then make a \$2,000 donation to. Last year we made about \$125,000 in donations off of that competition. (It was) a lot of cultural change in the company, being a lot more focused on the places they live and work, and beginning to feel like they're winning again, seeing customer count grow again, having tools that they can really believe in that work, both in terms of routing, planning and scheduling, but also mobility tools.

turned the business around, and we've proved that we have a very good business model,—Clayton, Dublier and Rice now is very supportive of both acquisitions and conversions of satellites to branches.

L&L: What kind of acquisitions are you looking at?

DA: Most of the acquisitions we're looking at are more fill-in acquisitions. So, if we have a market that we already have a good branch and we do well in, a chance to be much more dense in terms of customer

"WE'RE SPENDING

a significant amount of money in advertising for the first time in years. One of the rules that I learned a long time ago in retail – don't invite people into your store until you fixed it."

We did a survey around what values did they think we should have. We had about 900 people participate in that. They talked about how we want to be a company of integrity. We want to be a company that focuses on their community. We want to be a company that provides great service.

L&L: Have you opened or closed any branches?

DA: We haven't closed any and we have four satellites we'll convert to full branches this year. Because we had such a good year – and because we've

count. Those are kind of the acquisitions we're focusing on.

L&L: Strictly lawn care? **DA**: Yes, strictly lawn care.

L&L: What's TruGreen's approach to acquisitions?

DA: I guess a term I'd use is historic. So, if you go back two or three years, and you look at how TruGreen was acquiring, that's kind of what we want to do now. We want to invest – it's not a small number, it's in the millions. So we want to invest in acquisitions and this is the year we'll start back. We have a

half dozen or so in the pipeline that we're seriously considering. We'll put some more in soon that we're beginning to consider, so it is something we're getting back into.

L&L: You also did focus groups with customers. What did you learn from those?

DA: If you look at what we're starting to do advertising-wise, we ask our customers, when they hire us, what they are really trying to accomplish. We wanted to identify, is our purpose to just make lawns green and kill weeds or is there something higher we should aspire for?

And what we found was that our customers look at us as a way to live life outside. If you listen to our consumers, they feel like they've almost lost touch with their physical senses. They're so focused on the Internet and the iPhone. When I was a kid you couldn't wait to be outside. Kids today can't wait to get on the Internet or play a video game.

So, the point is that we want to connect with our customers. We want them to get to know their neighbors, want them to live outside with their families. One of the things that came out of the focus groups is, the more that we can help our consumers understand that a beautiful yard, insect control, weed control – all those things are ways that help them live outside and spend more time outside.

L&L: How do you, as the largest lawn care company in the country, have to approach issues like pesticide bans?

DA: You're talking about a level of science that I don't actually



Alexander (pictured here in a white shirt at the company's annual meeting in Savannah, Ga.) makes unannounced visits to branches across the country to find out how the company can be improved.

have great expertise in. But we have a VP of government affairs, we have 12 technical regional managers around the country.

There are chemicals that we don't use and we shouldn't use. We don't use any chemicals that are carcinogens. We don't use any chemicals that are not EPA-approved.

And the reality is, there have been lots of studies (We've worked with lots of universities) that the work we do is actually beneficial to the environment.

Healthy turf grass reduces erosion, reduces water runoff. So, a lot of what we do is trying to help educate decision-makers that there are a lot of benefits to what we do as opposed to just negatives. You have people screaming, "Ban pesticides, ban herbicides!"

We're trying to help people understand that they're hearing a very one-sided argument.

L&L: Do you do that through going to government meetings?

DA: Not me personally, but our team does. We have a VP of government affairs who does that. Our technical managers sit in on town councils and community meetings. We have lobbying groups we support and we work with universities. What we try to do is try to get enough truthful information out so the loudest voice in the room isn't the one you listen to. You listen to facts and science.

L&L: Where do you see the company in five years?

DA: We've begun to grow customers again. I think that's going to accelerate. We're spending a significant amount of money in advertising for the first time in years. One of the rules that I learned a long time ago in retail – don't invite people into your store until you fixed it.

The worst thing you can do is take a store that's out of stock and broken and run an ad, and everybody comes and they go, "Oh, your store is out of stock and broken." So, last year we didn't advertise a lot. This year we'll spend about \$10 million on TV advertising because we think we have the ability today not just to attract customers but to keep customers. When I look five years from now, I think we'll have grown a lot.

We have a number of, I'd call them tangential businesses, that I'm not really ready to talk about. But, again, they relate to living life outside, and they're very close to what we do.

They're not mowing and cutting and so on, but they're close to what we do, and there's some of those that are kind of in a pilot phase or incubation phase that we think we can grow. There are aspects of our business that we think we can grow. For example, as we've done focus groups out west where customers don't typically have lawns, they have a lot of trees and shrubs and desert scape and so on.

We think there's a big opportunity for us there. When you help a customer understand the investment they have in trees and shrubs, and they've never done anything to protect them or treat them, and now you have like emerald ash borer and things attacking their plants.

We think there's a big upside in that area to educate consumers and then to increase the penetration around trees and shrubs. We think there's a big opportunity around nuisance pest control. Those are all areas that over the next four or five years I think you'll see us grow a lot in.

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TOP 100

Leaders from the Top 100 discuss the biggest challenges facing their companies and how they're solving them. Turns out, their solutions work for landscapers of any size.

By Chuck Bowen

s part of this year's Top 100 coverage, Lawn & Landscape convened CEOs, presidents and other leaders from companies on the list. We asked to eavesdrop on their conversations – which ranged from how to find good employees to how to choose services to how to make the landscape industry sexier – so we could share their ideas with the broader industry. On the pages that follow, we have two of those conversations for you. The first is among Jen Lemcke, COO at Weed Man USA in Oshawa, Ontario, and Frank Mariani and Fred Wacker, CEO and president, respectively, at Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill. The second is between Christy Webber, president Christy Webber Landscapes in Chicago, and Jim McCutcheon, CEO, HighGrove Partners in Austell, Ga.



JEN LEMCKE



FRANK MARIANI



FRED WACKER

LEMCKE: Recruiting right now is one of our big issues. We're seeing it in pockets across the U.S. Gone are the days when you can put an ad in the newspaper and get the phone ringing for people coming in.

It's also acquiring online customers and really adapting our technology with some of our processes with customer service. People are expecting a higher level of service, and we've got some of the highest retention rates in our segment of the industry, so we're very happy with that, but I think we could be better, and I think technology will help us be better.

WACKER: Jen, you're talking about the need for assistance to allow for someone coming to Weed Man to be able to engage with you in an easy-to-do-business way so that they could start their program with you?

LEMCKE: A little beyond that. If they want a quote, they fill it out and it goes to the right franchisee. What I'm talking about are the people that come to our website ... but they didn't quite request a quote. We're not doing enough for those people, and then on top of that bringing people to our website.

We have a system where you can manage your account online, pay your bills online, order services, all of that but it's going beyond that, Fred – allow them to maybe not commit fully to a quote or engage with the company. You get these ser-



JIM McCUTCHEON



CHRISTY WEBBER

COMMERCIAL VS. RESIDENTIAL

Jim McCutcheon lays out why he doesn't do residential work, and Christy Webber outlines why she'll never give it up.

MCCUTCHEON: I know everybody around the country, and I've done it myself, thinks they can do residential and commercial. I will debate it with anybody, all day long, that I've never seen anybody in this country do both of those very, very well. I've seen people that do one very well and the other one pretty well, but never seen anybody that does both very well. And I recognize that we're better on the commercial side of things. So, I've eliminated all the residential.

WEBBER: So how much revenue did you give up when you got rid of your residential?

MCCUTCHEON: I sold Charlotte about 10 years ago now. That was about a \$5-million branch. I sold about \$3- or \$4-million worth of residential work here in Atlanta.

WEBBER: We did an acquisition of Kinsella Landscape, which focused basically on HOAs and commercial work, because we were so heavy into the municipal work. And three days ago somebody said to me, this residential gig is so intense – men, trucks, is it worth it? – one of my VPs.

I said, "I will never, ever get out of residential maintenance because it's always been what we're

known for." When I started it, many customers that I've spent 25 years with are still my customers.

MCCUTCHEON: About nine or 10 years ago we started looking at things very differently and kind of split off traditional account managers and reworked that whole thing. Once we got over that hill, the dynamic in that changed significantly. Our enhancements went through the roof.

WEBBER: So you don't have account managers. What do you call them now?

MCCUTCHEON: We split the role down the middle and we have what we call CRMs, or customer relation managers, and they are the ones that deal with the customers. They are managing the portfolios, they are selling enhancements. They're also doing new sales and then they work in conjunction with a separate operations manager.

WEBBER: We call them account managers but they definitely do not deal with the operations at all. I have operations guys that manage the crews, and each guy has four to five crews, so that's 20-some-odd people. Every account manager does about \$1 million. A million-two is about the most they can handle well.

vice companies now, and these are small industries, that will tell you 10 minutes before your technician's about to come in and do a service on your fridge.

WACKER: I can take a shot at our lead challenge in 2015. We probably get a lot of the same

challenges, Jen, but I think recruitment is really important to us, too.

Professionally, we know that sales talent is going to come out of the colleges and universities that have good horticultural programs, and we've turned them into our best source.

It's more than sales, but sales is an important aspect, but it's the people that really get engaged with the clients on a professional dialogue and be able to manage a landscape program.

MARIANI: I think Fred brings up an excellent point. Nobody's going to do a better job of enticing people and getting people excited than their peers. So having these young people visit the schools for the job fairs – they can see students that they were in school with a year or two ago, and say, "Hey, this is a great place to work."

We, in turn, need to be very open and honest and make sure everybody understands that this is what you're going to do when you're at Mariani. We like to say you're going to get your MBA in the field.

I remember years and years ago I would hear horror stories about people taking kid interns and basically throwing them on a lawnmower and leaving them there, or putting them in the field and they're watering or pulling weeds.

At the end of the day too, the thing we can't forget is that this is an industry where the hours can be long and there can be a lot of manual labor. So we want everybody to have an open, honest look at what we're all about and quite frankly – Fred, if I'm not putting words in your mouth – but we feel rather bullish when it comes to middlemanagement and up.

WACKER: I agree 110 percent. Frank and I painted the picture of what we needed and it took a little while for the leaders to kinda get their arms around the fact that if we just continue to grow at the rate that we're growing, you're gonna need to replicate this many people per year in your department to be able to stay even. And once we kinda did that simple math and laid it on the table, it's amazing the uptake.



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JANUARY 2015

SCOTTS acquired Action Pest Control, the first time Scotts has purchased a home pest control business.

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FEBRUARY 2015

southern Botanical expanded into Houston. The maintenance-only firm announced it will begin offering a complete package of services in 2016.

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FEBRUARY 2015

RYAN LAWN & TREE

acquired Maisch Small Engine, a Kansas City-based STIHL dealer.

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MARCH 2015

YARD-NIQUE acquired Estes Landscape in Sharpsburg Ga., which was the company's third acquisition in five years.

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MAY 2015

Scott Jamieson, BARTLETT TREE
EXPERTS, took over as president
of the National Association of
Landscape Professionals. He
replaced Jim McCutcheon, CEO of
HIGHGROVE PARTNERS.

ACQUISITIONS

MASSEY SERVICES made the following acquisitions: Green Pest Services, Austin, Texas; BACO Exterminating Services, Norcross, Ga.; MayDay Pest Solutions, Austin, Texas and Wolf Pest Control, Charleston, S.C.

And our guys and gals ran it out this year and did a great job of recruiting and they got more than we budgeted for. If we get good people, we don't want to lose them to another opportunity that they might take, and then when we get these young folks from the schools recruiting, and then bring in people that are inspired to come because of the enthusiasm that those young folks showed them, then they see, they understand our culture.

LEMCKE: We did an apprenticeship program and what you said, Frank and Fred, it's so true. I had the opportunity to co-chair an event with Steven Cohen from Maryland and he's a professor.

He said exactly what you said. "I'm sick of sending students to these companies and they just put them into these jobs just to get work done over the summers. They didn't give them the tools that they need to succeed after they finish this."

But you're absolutely right, you need a roadmap for these kids to come in to see where they could go with this.

wacker: We connect them with someone and they have a mentor. They've got a clear path in what their early weeks, months and year are gonna look like. They meet with me and Frank, and then carry around a piece of paper that gets signed off by every department. So that time when suddenly they are coming into a company (we're) not just saying, "That's your desk, or that's your truck; get up and work."

READ MORE ONLINE

To read both interviews in their entirety, visit

LAWNANDLANDSCAPE.COM

and search "conversations."

MARIANI: Last year, we made a decision to raise our minimum wage substantially, and to communicate that to Latinos and other minority organizations, and to the public at large.

And so far this spring, we've got about 40 percent more applicants than we had the same period last year.

We just did the math on how many guys were turning over last year where a dime or a quarter or a dollar make a difference. And we just raised it and people are telling their friends. We're getting a lot of men and women coming in the door that were from somewhere else and once they come in and see, and learn the Mariani culture, which is one of respect and reward for hard work, they want to say.

You know, this industry is really a little sad when it comes to the way you promote somebody. If they've been there two years, they do this. If they're three years, then they do that; four years they do that, but quite frankly, they may not have the skill to climb that ladder.

For example, if you can convince us that you're gonna sign up for a class at a local junior college because it's actually gonna increase your skills or your skillset to do something better at Mariani, get a passing grade — we're happy to pay for it.

It's kinda silly, but to a lot of people in the industry, well you're a crew leader when you get a driver's license. I mean, really? I mean you're a truck driver when you get a driver's license. And what – did that help you hone your pruning skills, your horticultural knowledge and all that?

LEMCKE: You're creating a competitive spirit, you know, where you had maybe guys that were motivated before but they're seeing people bypass them. They've either got it or they leave.

MARIANI: Looking at the last 40 years, one of the mistakes I made - I assumed wrongfully that everybody was like me and if you were a laborer then you want to become a crew leader in training, then you want to become a crew leader, then you want to become a supervisor, then you want to become a client representative. And guess what? There are a lot of people that are happy and content being a laborer. You should celebrate that. There's nothing wrong with that.

LEMCKE: It is a huge concern, and to attract good people to our industry, because we're not that sexy industry when kids are coming out of their business schools, their marketing schools, and how do we get in front of them?

MARIANI: Well, when you walk the floor at the trade show in Louisville, it just kills me that we can't make all the different jobs a little bit more sexy – everything from designing multi-million dollar machines, or working for the chemical companies developing new products. I mean, there's so much more than cutting grass and digging holes.



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IN HINDSIGHT

We asked some Top 100 company leaders about decisions they'd want to do over, and some choices they made that they wouldn't change.

Compiled by Brian Horn



LARRY RYAN
RYAN LAWN & TREE

I WOULD NOT HAVE GOTTEN

into Christmas lights. Too much risk and too little revenue when we are still producing revenue from other sources. Also, land-scaping was an area we got into then out of. It is complicated and needs high detail people running it. We did not have that and gladly exited. We would like to someday get back in, but that is in the future.



KEVIN McHALE MCHALE LANDSCAPE DESIGN O

I WOULD LIKE A DO-OVER

with regard to developing a maintenance division sooner than we did. It took us almost 20 years before we understood the importance of renewable income that comes with annual maintenance. Today our maintenance division brings in 25 percent of our total revenue. The benefit of its positive impact on monthly cash flow is huge.



DAVID DuBOIS

MISSION LANDSCAPE

I WOULDN'T BUY A SMALL

company because it didn't work out too well. Companies have values they work by that drive their culture and support their goals to success. When two companies are not enough alike, chances are it's not going to work and for us it ended up taking a very long road to bring it around.



JOE GONZALEZ

ARTISTREE

O

WE WOULD HAVE CHANGED

our company name sooner. When I bought this business back in 1990 - which was then a four-man mow crew - I kept its existing name, Save-On. It was just easier that way, and it also implied that we offered services at affordable prices. But over time, as we expanded our maintenance services and added a design center, we decided that Save-On didn't fit us anymore. We brainstormed new names, held focus groups - and when the name ArtisTree was suggested, we knew we had a winner and had a distinctive new logo created.

We liked the play on words – how the name tied into our industry but also how it suggested our artistic capabilities. When we rolled out our new name and logo in 2002, the public embraced it very enthusiastically and we received incredible positive feedback. Our employees really liked the new name, too, because it made them feel like they were working for a trendsetting firm vs. a generic-type company. It gave them a stronger sense of pride.

10: MISTAKES **10:** ACHIEVEMENTS

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MARIA CANDLER • JAMES RIVER GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

SEVERAL YEARS AGO I DELIBERATELY PUT our company in the painful place of reducing our dependency on H-2B workers. This was so painful and literally changed almost everything about the way we operate. Some locations went cold turkey while others greatly reduced their numbers. As Leit bare and watch the

about the way we operate. Some locations went cold turkey while others greatly reduced their numbers. As I sit here and watch the ridiculous actions of the DOL and DHS, I'm so thankful that we went through that exercise. There is still such an extraordinary need for these workers, but it requires serious balance.



CRAIG RUPPERT

WE CHANGED TO A DIFFERENT BRAND OF

mowers. Even with asking the questions that we thought were the right questions, there were a number of ramifications. Challenges we experienced, like the quality of the cut and operator comfort/ergonomics, became sticking points. If we could go back and ask some of the questions we now know were relevant, it would have led to a more thorough analysis.



TEDDY
RUSSELL
RUSSELL
LANDSCAPE

OUR COMPANY'S
LARGEST
CUSTOMER WAS
NOT PROFITABLE
AND WE DECIDED
TO ASK FOR AN
INCREASE. The
customer went to a
formal bid process
and at the end,
they gave us an
opportunity to match
pricing of the lowest
bid which was less
than what we were
originally being

opportunity to match pricing of the lowest bid which was less than what we were paid. We declined to match the pricing and although we did not retain the property, it has freed up our staff and resources to focus on much more profitable work. I wouldn't think twice about changing this decision and am confident we will perform work on

this property again

one day.



CHRIS SENSKE SERVICES (

IN THE EARLY DAYS OF MY CAREER, I HAD A TEAM OF THREE

employees who worked with me. One early morning they all showed up on my front porch at home and quit. I was really saddened that here was a group of young guys that wanted to do a good job but there was an environment that made the job not worth the hassle. I had made the decision that they were not going to be welcome back to work. A day later, one of them came and asked for his position back. That person has been part of the Senske team for almost 40 years, making incredibly valuable contributions along the way and is VP of the corporation. I sometimes wonder how many others we lost along the way due to our policies or procedures that could have made equal or greater impact on Senske's success.

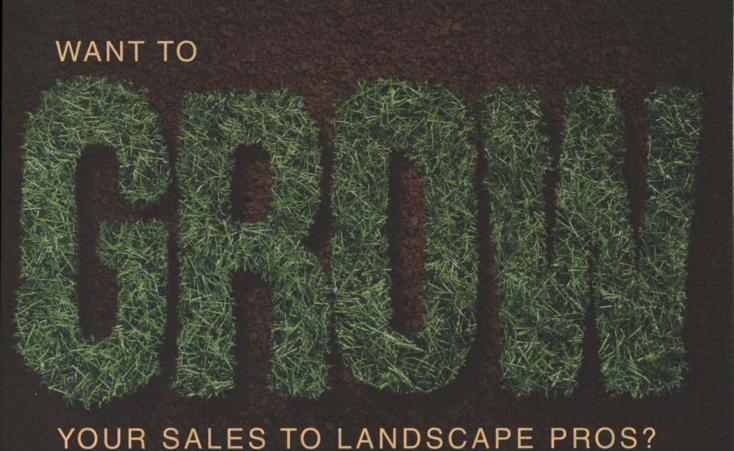


TOM HOUGHNON RELIABLE PROPERTY SERVICES ©

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to make decisions on a number of large package bids with some historical low margins, particularly some winter work that had drastic margin variability depending on the amount of snowfall. These were long-term customers and we had very solid relationships with each of them. We based our analysis on historical data, seasonal data and what type of

higher margin work we would sell to make up for the losses. It was a difficult decision but we were not in the price range that our customer was willing to pay and we lost the business. Over all this work represented over 10 percent of our top-line revenue. We have managed to replace the work with higher margin work that provides the financial goals we need to meet to continue our growth. We also want to make sure we can provide the customer the "contracted experience" they need from their vendors.



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Find the right mower attachments to help crews work smarter. By Holly Hammersmith

sing specialized mower attachments can free up time, manpower and cash, allowing contractors to take on more clients and streamline their current workload.

Contractors say it just takes time and practice to find the right fit.

RECOMMENDED ATTACHMENTS. Geoff Proffitt, president and director of sales and marketing at Hedge Above, based in Wapello, Iowa, has one "go-to" attachment: the Grass Gobbler. This small metal cage with handles sits on a mounting bracket and is designed to catch grass while mowing for customers that want their lawns bagged. However, Proffitt uses his attachments for spring and fall cleanup to pick

up leaves. He does not bag regular clippings for customers throughout the year.

It comes on and off the mower in 30 seconds and is so easy to remove, Proffitt says his 12-year-old daughter could do it. This is key to the efficiency of the attach-

ABOVE: Finding the right mower attachments can make your team more efficient and save your company money.



Geoff PROFFITT

ment as crews will often remove the attachment to dump debris several times during use.

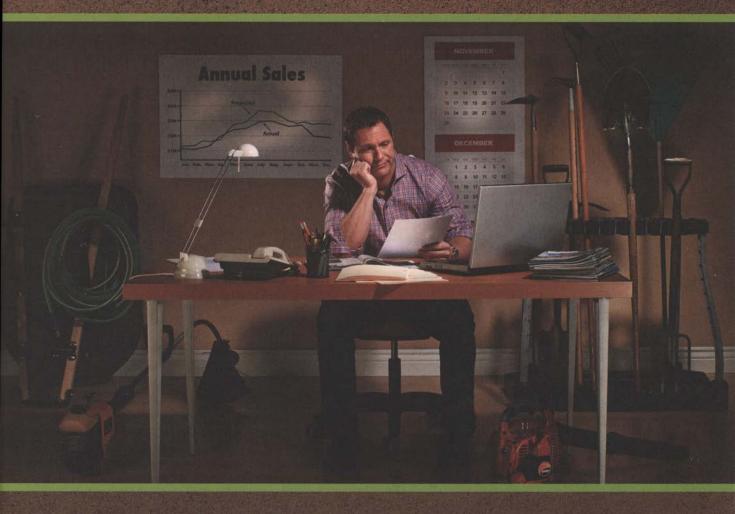
"You want to consider safety," he says. "When a guy's out in the field, or a gal, and has to take that off repeatedly and dump

the leaves out, you don't want something that they're going to struggle with."

Hedge Above provides landscape and bed maintenance to residential and commercial customers. The company employs 16 people and annual revenue for 2015 is projected at \$850,000.

Ed Hoffman, director of production for Clarence Davids & Company, serving

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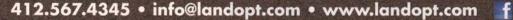
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the Chicago area, says his top attachment is a mulching kit that mounts under the deck where the mower blades are. The kit helps grind clippings during mowing and provides a clean cut without any collection of clippings on the turf. "It's staying right on the lawn," he says.

Michael Casper, operations manager of production for ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design, headquartered in Venice, Fla., says his company also uses a mulching deck on all 60 of its mowers.

ArtisTree is a full service maintenance and design company focused on serving large residential communities. They employ 250 people during peak season and annual revenue is \$16 million.

"We do not discharge any grass. We mulch it, and we do that for many reasons

... for the health of the turf, the environment," Casper says.

Additionally, Casper uses a turbine blower attachment on some mowers, in particular when mowing roadways. The attachment provides cleanup along the way and is quicker

and more efficient than a simple backpack blower, he says.

Michael

CASPER

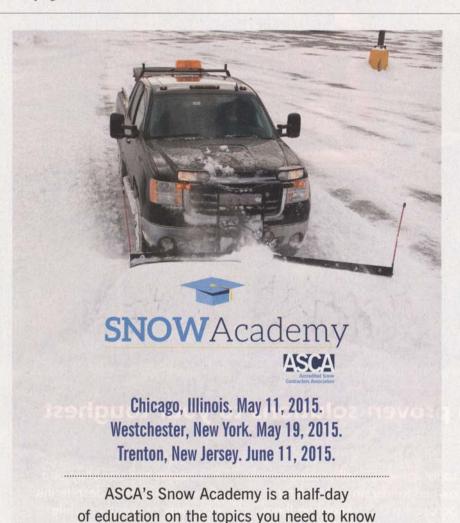
SAVING TIME AND MONEY. In every case, the use of attachments saves both time and money, the contractors say.

"It benefits our company timewise because we're using less time to mow because we're not collecting clippings," Hoffman says of the mulching kit. "That is really time consuming – to bag your clippings. And it helps with your disposal costs because all your debris is staying on site where it belongs, and it also helps environmentally because you're recycling that debris back into the lawn."

This means Hoffman has fewer employees assigned to each job. Hoffman estimates the use of the mulching kit, along with not bagging clippings, has led to a 15 to 20 percent reduction in manpower on a job. "It's significant," he says.

Company-wide, Clarence Davids & Co. employs 250 people and annual revenue is at \$18.5 million. It offers maintenance and landscape construction primarily to commercial and multi-family living spaces.

Casper says he has done internal case studies with the turbine blowers. In a year's time, he found he was able to reduce a six-man crew to a five-man crew because of the time saved using the blower. One challenge, however, has been customer perception associated with this smaller and more efficient crew. "You have to put yourself in their shoes to



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Nashville, TN 800-367-7712 Decatur, AL 800-433-6351 NEW or USED TRUCKS @ www.neelycoble.com kind of see that those efficiencies can actually hurt you because it's very competitive business," he says.

"The faster you go or the more efficient that you are, the perception is that you're going too fast." Some customers, in turn, think they should be charged less for service, Casper says.

In order to combat this, Casper says he points out how thorough his crew is, showing an employee will still use a backpack blower to double check the job. With the Grass Gobblers, Proffitt estimates that using them reduces time spent on a job by 60 percent.

"I know the amount of time that it takes to do a typical fall cleanup using nothing but backpack blowers, tarps and rakes versus the way we're doing it now," he says. "It's just a huge. huge timesaver."

Both Proffitt and Hoffman say the training involved with the attachments they use is minimal. In the case of the mulching kit, once it's installed, the kit simply stays in place, Hoffman says.

ADVICE FOR RESEARCH AND PURCHASING.

Contractors say it's important to thoroughly research and think about the intended purpose of an attachment before buying them for the entire fleet.

Proffitt purchased his Grass Gobblers new (continued on page 104)

THE RIGHT TIME

ifferent attachments aid different seasons. Proffitt says he uses Grass Gobblers primarily in the spring and fall for cleanup of leaves. The attachment is meant to pick up clippings year-round, so other contractors may find this tool to be something they use on an ongoing basis.

Mulching decks are used year-round at ArtisTree, based in Florida. The turbine blower and edger attachments are typically used most in the summertime, Casper adds.

"Our season is in the summer here. When it reaches temperatures in the mid-90s to upper-90s, obviously plants are growing very aggressively – the grass and the shrubs," he says. "We mow every week in the summer so when we get around back to cutting a certain area, there could be 3 or 4 or 5 inches of growth on the grass itself. So imagine that being cut off and kind of spit out onto the roadways and sidewalks."

At Clarence Davids & Co., Hoffman says that the mulching kit is a huge benefit in the fall when leaf buildup is at its height.

"Usually I just leave them on the whole year," he says. "(They are) a big benefit in the spring with spring cleanups, blowing out the beds and then you mulch up all the debris that comes out of the beds."



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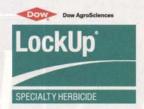


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The pitch: Celsius controls more than 150 weeds, including many difficult-to-control broadleaf and grassy weeds.

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For more information: Backedbybayer.com



DOW LockUp

The pitch: LockUp specialty herbicide provides lawn care operators with postemergence broadleaf weed control in a convenient granular formulation.

- Labeled for use on both warm- and cool-season grasses, LockUp offers control of broadleaf weeds, including white clover, dollarweed and dandelion.
 - It provides activity at low use rates.
 - · It's available in single, two-way and three-way combinations to provide the broadest spectrum of weed control.

For more information: Dowagro.com



FMC QuickSilver

The pitch: QuickSilver is a contact herbicide that's safe on many established cool- and warm-season grasses.

- · The addition of QuickSilver to a broadleaf spray program enhances your application by broadening the spectrum of control.
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For more information: fmcprosolutions.com



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For more information: Lebanon.com



Nufarm Last Call

The pitch: Last Call is a selective herbicide used in cool-season turf weed management.

- It is a post-emergent product that contains a proprietary formulation of fenoxaprop, fluroxypyr and dicamba.
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- Controls a wide spectrum of broadleaf weeds including dandelions, clover and lespedeza and it can be used for the removal of bermudagrass.

For more information: Nufarm.com



Herbicide

Syngenta Tenacity

The pitch: Tenacity herbicide protects your turf, including newly seeded turf, from 46 weeds like crabgrass, ground ivy, clover and nimblewill.

- Controls weeds and grasses pre-and post-emergence, and removes weeds from established and newly seeded turf.
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For more information: TenacityHerbicide.com

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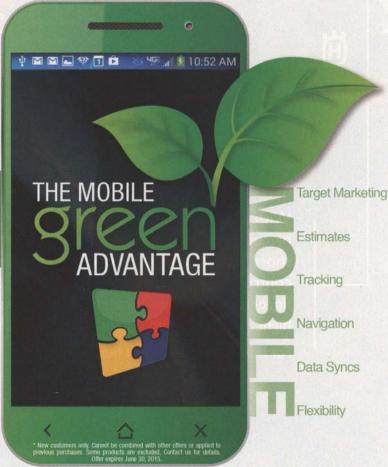
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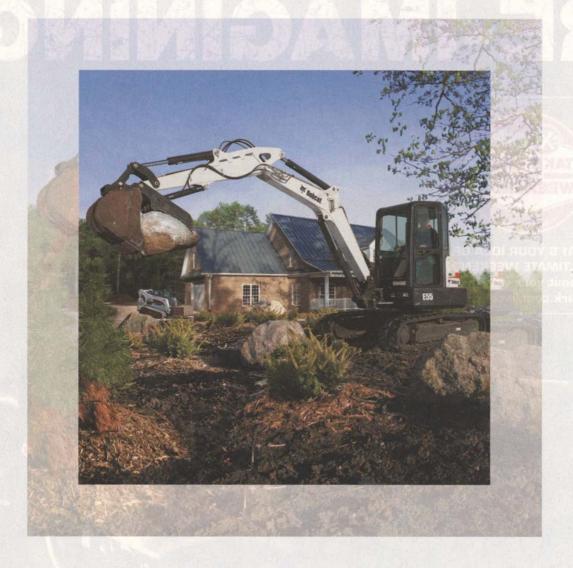


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BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

Manufacturers have spent time and money updating their compact excavators. By Katie Tuttle

ompact excavators can get shoved aside in the landscape industry, with many contractors focusing money and space on skid-steers and track loaders. But before you go ahead and convince yourself that the bigger the machine, the better it is for your company, consider giving these smaller pieces of equipment a try.

RORCAT

For the past two years, Bobcat has been getting Tier 4 up and running on its compact excavators. Tier 4 Final is a set of emissions requirements established by the EPA, which comes into effect this year.

"It may not be that exciting, but it is what happened," says Tom Connor, product specialist for





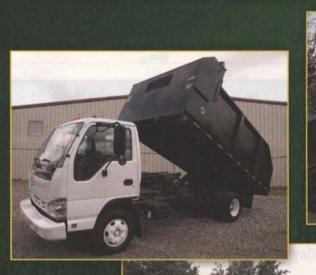
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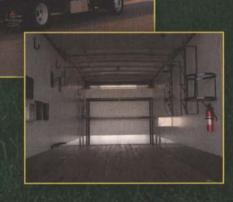
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Bobcat. "Tier 4 is a fair amount of work for one thing."

Bobcat now offers four types of compact excavators in the 3-ton category, which is the bulk of its business in North America.

To coincide with that, Bobcat also came out with a new instrumentation package that offers two different levels: a basic level and then a more advanced one. which comes with a full color screen, full diagnostic capabilities of the machine and the ability to support other programs.

"The instrumentation was a big hit with the dealers and of course, ultimately, the customers," Connor says.

Bobcat also added a depth check, which can guide the

TAKEUCHI. The company added a new compact track loader to its line last year.

The TL8 is Tier 4 Final compliant with high pressure common rail injection and both DOC and DPF exhaust after-treatment.

The track loader comes with a sealed and pressurized cab for operator comfort and the cab features a multi-information display. The cab also comes with the option of an overhead door and hydraulic attachment quick connect.

► TEREX. Last fall, Terex introduced its Generation 2 line of compact loaders. including a mini-track loader. These new loaders feature more than 100 enhancements from the previous models. The improvements were made based on customer and distributor feedback, as well as warranty data collected over the last six years.

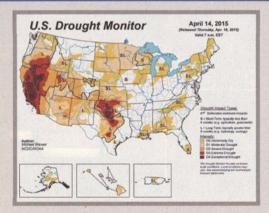
"These features combine to offer operators powerful machine productivity on every jobsite, and equipment owners a high return on investment," says Jonathan Ferguson, regional sales manager for Terex Construction Americas.

Based on the previous loader models. Terex's new GEN2 compact track loader utilizes the company's Posi-Track suspended undercarriage technology. It also features an all-rubber track system, which allows it to achieve higher traction and higher flotation, allowing for use of the machine's higher travel speeds.

operator as he's digging. It helps sustain depth and grade, and create a slope if the machine is being used for that.

"These systems have been common on large machines, but not that common on minis and that's what we wanted to bring down and make it simpler and

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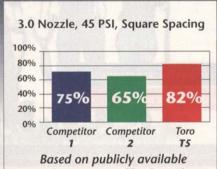
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easier to adapt," Connor says. Connor says you shouldn't assume that everyone can drive a compact excavator or mini-track loader just because they can drive other forms of compact equipment.

"Whereas with bigger equipment, I see fleets where they would never dream of assigning a worker to hop on a 3,500-pound excavator and dig a hole, I see that too often on the mini excavators and compact equipment in general, he says."

Bobcat has also updated its attachments for compact excavators. Fifteen years ago, the company came out with a clamp on the larger machines, and now has made an enhanced



clamp, called the Pro-Clamp. It provides multiple positions for the clamp tip and an alternative tip for that clamp structure to help contractors with a wider variety of tasks.

"It's beginning to really become the norm on machines," Connor says. "We wanted to take it a step further."

JCB

"Right now we're going through a full new generation change for our excavators starting with our 8.5 ton and then it'll start to slowly migrate its way down our line," says Jake Jeffords, compact excavator product manager for JCB.

JCB is updating its compact

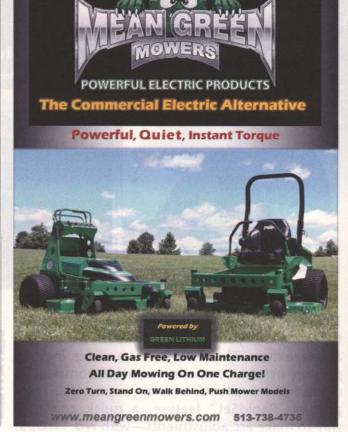
excavators completely to Tier 4 Final.

Instead of having the Tier 4 Final with a diesel particular filter on its machines, JCB has a diesel oxidation catalyst (DOC). With the DPF, the engine will have to regenerate at some point, forcing some operators to stop the machine. The DOC burns while the machine is running, meaning it's able to burn all the gases off.

JCB is also moving away from a hard plastic or fiberglass body on the machine to a 100 percent steel body.

The reasoning behind this is that JCB wants contractors to be able to keep the machine in good condition.







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"A lot of contractors will try to sell them again so (the steel body) makes them look good," says Jeffords.

JCB has also updated the service intervals and service access, making the machines easier to access for checking the oil, checking the hydraulic fluid and anything that involves walking around the machine.

The company also added a 30-degree roll back cab to give access to any of the hydraulic components under the cab for easy maintenance.

JOHN DEERE

Over the past two years, John Deere has been upgrading the five models of compact excavators in its lineup, with the final two launched at the beginning of March.



All of John Deere's compact excavators are now Tier 4 Final.

"Just like the big machines, the smaller ones have to meet those requirements," says Mark Wall, John Deere product marketing manager for excavators. "So now they can take those machines into any area that

requires those emissions standards."

With the Final Tier 4 update, John Deere didn't want the changes visible to operators.

As a result, three of the models run without after treatment devices on them, meaning no change for the operator. The remaining two do have after treatment devices, but running the machine is still seamless to the operator.

"We don't ask them to pause; we don't ask them to hit a button. We don't ask them to do anything outside of their normal operating regiment," Wall says. "Just get in the machine, run it, dig dirt. Do what you've got to do with it." John Deere has also redesigned the cooling to increase the uptime of the machines. The company has gone from a stacked cooling system to a side-by-side cooling system.

"We've listened to what a lot of our customers had told us about compacts and what they were looking for," Wall says. "We tried to incorporate those into the new series."

To help with operator comfort in these smaller machines, John Deere has redesigned the operator station as well, making the door wider for easy entry and exit and giving the operator better visibility through the door and the front.

"The guy that has the big machine, they're coming down to the little ones and getting in those machines," Wall says. "We want them to feel like they're sitting in the big machines."





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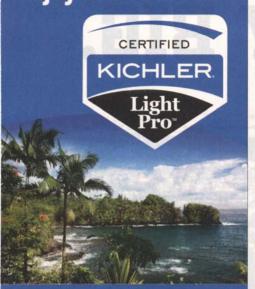






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COMPACT EQUIPMENT



TAKEUCHI

Takeuchi has redesigned its compact excavators from the ground up.

"Takeuchi took the opportunity to build its newest excavator platforms around the new Tier 4 power plants," says David Caldwell, Takeuchi product and training manager. "Machines got a little bigger and a lot more capable."

The company updated the operator stations on the compact excavators, making them more functional and spacious. One of the updates was to put multi-information displays on both of the canopy/cab models. These displays provide the operator with a lot of machine information and allow the operator to adjust the hydraulic flow for the attachments.

The operator station also features a multifunction switch bank that includes DPF control, auto idle, multiple work modes, detent for primary auxiliary circuit and a lift/ overload alarm.



TEREX

Terex recently introduced two new Tier 4 Final compact excavator models to its North American line-up. The machines offer the same features popular on older Terex models, such as load independent flow distribution and Terex Fingertip controls, with the capabilities of the Tier 4 Final diesel engine. L&L

GOING COMPACT

f you already have larger equipment, it may seem foolish or wasteful to put money toward a smaller machine. However, you may find that the benefits outweigh the price, especially with the option to rent the equipment.

"Contractors are savvy when it comes to using this equipment," says Jonathan Ferguson, regional sales manager for Terex Construction Americas. "What they continue to struggle with is when to rent versus when to buy."

His advice is to make sure the compact excavator or mini-track loader is going to be adequate for 85 to 90 percent of your jobsite needs.

"Don't sacrifice power, breakout force or anything else just to save a dollar," he says. "Always buy quality. A compact excavator or mini-track loader needs to be durable and reliable because downtime is expensive."

When you decide to buy, it's also important to decide what brand is best for your company.

"You should look for a distributor who is conveniently located to your jobsites, who can deliver the parts and services you need quickly," Ferguson says. "He says it's also a good idea to consider how responsive and expansive the company's dealer network is and if you're comfortable with the technology that company has put under the machine's hood."

"Contractors generally use the equipment to meet their specific needs," says David Caldwell, Takeuchi product and training manager. "There are many variables a contractor must consider when making an equipment purchase."

One of the variables he includes is transportability. Make sure you don't need special license requirements to move the equipment from jobsite to jobsite. It's also important to consider size.

For more on compact equipment, visit lawnandlandscape.com and search "going compact."



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TRENCHERS. Gilbert Turner, owner of Richmond Irrigation in Midlothian, Va., near Richmond, prefers trenching for most of his work.

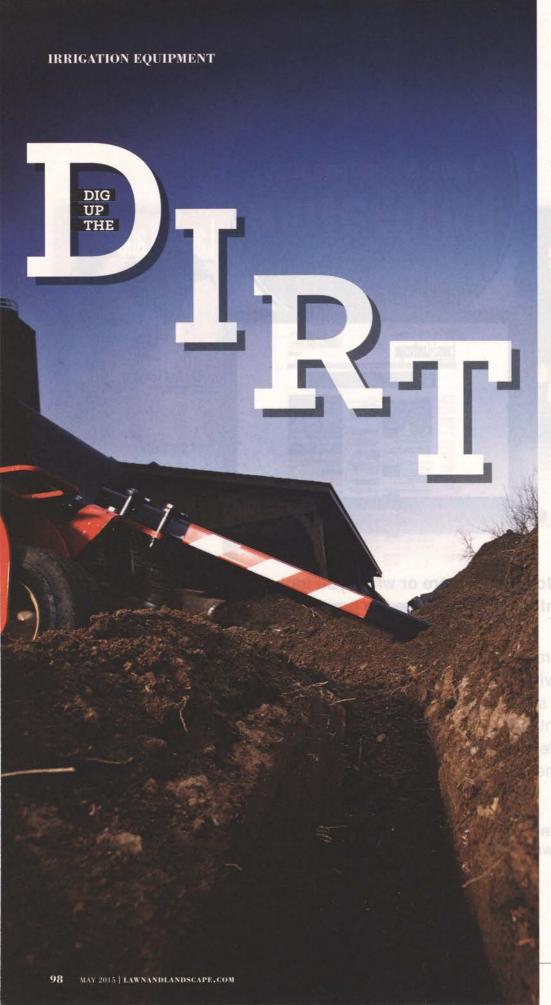
key role in determining which equipment will be the best fit

for the job.

"Different projects mandate which machine makes the most sense to use," Turner says. "The biggest factor is disturbance. For existing lawns and landscapes, you want to plow if possible, but in new construction we trench everything."

Although they can tear up a yard, trenchers allow contractors to dig deeper and wider than a vibratory plow. The size and scope of the project should be taken into account when choosing a trencher or trenching attachment. If the job requires pipe installation with a diameter that is more than an inch and a half, trenching is the way to go, says

Choose your equipment based on the project at hand, considering disturbance and turf damage.



Contractors weigh the pros and cons of trenchers and vibratory plows.

By Catherine Pomiecko





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Brian Moran, president of American Lawn Sprinkler in Dryden, Michigan near Detroit.

To minimize the turf damage created by trenching, Turner looks for machines that have tracks instead of rubber tires. He has found those trenchers to have less ground pressure, better traction in different conditions and less likelihood of getting stuck.

Contractors should also look for machines that fit the logistics of the jobsite. On many residential properties, contractors may need to maneuver tight spaces. A more compact model or a ride-along may be necessary to safely navigate those spaces. Alternatively, a larger and more powerful model will be more efficient on larger spaces, Moran says.

"You have to figure out what it is







2 WAYS TO DIG

CLOCKWISE, FROM TOP LEFT:

- · Trenchers allow contractors to dig deeper and wider than a vibratory plow.
- · V-plows create minimal ground disturbance, resulting in less cleanup and faster completion.
 - · This machine can have a trencher attachment on the front and a plow attachment on the rear.



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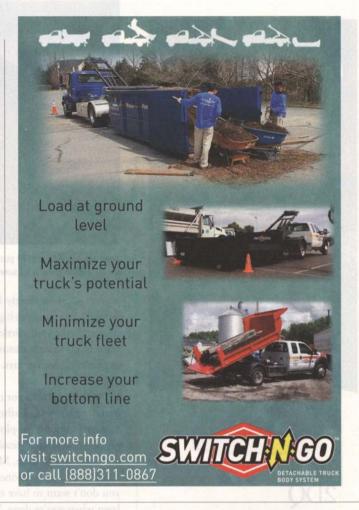
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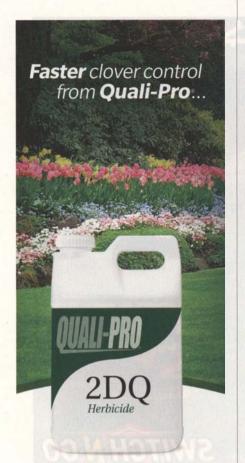
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You may want to rent or purchase plows, depending on how much irrigation work your company does. If you decide to buy, be sure to find a brand that is serviced locally to ensure continued dealer support.

you're going to mostly be doing. If you're getting something too big, you're going to be tearing up the yard a little too much, and you want to do as little disturbing of the ground as possible," Moran says.

VIBRATORY PLOWS. For residential areas and brand new lawns, a vibratory plow may be a smarter choice. V-plows create minimal ground disturbance, resulting in less cleanup and faster completion, Moran says.

"If you're in someone's brand new yard, you don't want to have to replace the whole lawn when you're done. You want it to look exactly like it did when you got there, before you started. And it's possible to do that with vibratory plows," he says.

Turner warns that first-time v-plow users may be in for a learning experience. With plows, you cannot inspect the trenches for unknown utilities or rock, and it is more difficult to gauge exactly how deep pipes will lie below the surface. This is especially problematic in tough terrain where soil settles in multiple layers of varying densities, he says.

"The first couple of jobs you use a plow on, you're not going to be efficient," he says. "You're going to start thinking to yourself that you could have done just as well with a trenching unit."

But after those first few jobs, employees will learn by trial and error the most effective starting points, ending points and other strategies that go into using a v-plow. Before long, Turner says contractors will see how the plow's minimal disturbance can save time.

RENTING VS. OWNING. For Asa Hastings, owner of Aces Landscaping & Irrigation in Dracut, Mass., near Lowell, renting trenchers and their attachments makes the most sense for his business. "Even just the attachment is still very expensive to buy," Hastings says. "It's really easy to rent it for a half a day, pull the pipes and bring it back. Right now, we just don't do the volume that justifies the 10 or 15 grand to buy a trencher. The costs of fuel to pick it up, fuel to drop it off, and the machine rental itself can all be billed to the job."

On the other hand, businesses like Turner's that specialize in irrigation work make purchasing the machine a no-brainer.

"We don't spend a lot of money on equipment repairs. I expect to get 6,000 hours out of a piece of equipment. Once you get past that point, it will keep going, but it will give you some maintenance costs, and worse, downtime," he says.

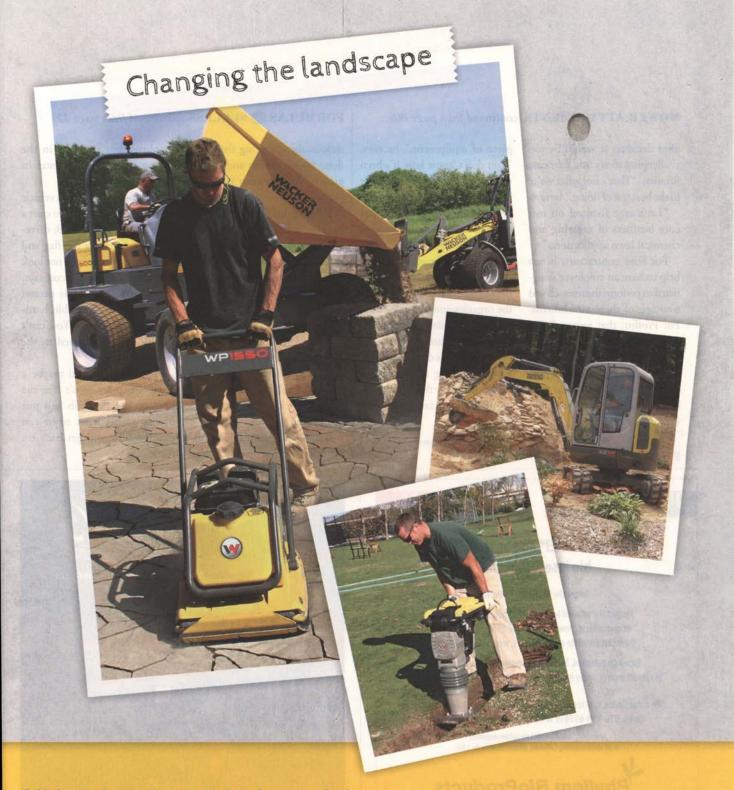
The same goes for Moran, whose company uses its plows every day in the summer. Although yearly routine maintenance costs may be high for his machines, Moran considers owning the plows to be a worthwhile investment.

"They are expensive to maintain - every time you take it in it is about \$2,000 - but if you buy one, you'll have it for over 20 years," he says. "We buy ours used, and long as you get the maintenance done, they will last you a long time."

If purchasing a plow or trencher makes sense, Moran advises finding a brand serviced locally so you'll have continued dealer support.

"A very important thing is to look for someone who can service the machine in your area," he says. "If you find a good deal on a brand but there's no one in your state that fixes them, then you are really out of luck." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Louisville, Ky.



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MOWER ATTACHMENTS (continued from page 80)

after deciding it would be too challenging to try and fabricate his own. "That's not what we're in the business of doing," he says.

"Let's stay focused on our core business of mowing and chemical lawn applications."

For busy contractors, it can help to have an employee designated to perform the research and sourcing of these attachments. For Proffitt, that responsibility fell to his director of retail services, maintenance and safety.

Casper also recommends purchasing equipment new and building a strong relationship with a local vendor.

"You don't know what you're getting when you buy a used piece of equipment," he says. "You don't know how it's been treated. You don't know whether that person used that equipment properly in the manner it was made to be used, so therefore we just buy everything new."

Other considerations include if an attachment will impact mower size, and if it will impact the organization and size of the company's trailer, Casper adds.

"If that attachment goes down, every minute it's down obviously you're spending more time on the job manually than you would be with that attachment," he says. L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

FORMULAS SUCCESS (continued from page 42)

serious about getting the work done for his clients and he has grown his operation over the vears.

He says his firm's job is to provide labor. "That is what landscaping is," Scott says, when you take away materials and designs. "I sell labor to put in those products."

One could argue that drug testing provides assurance that the people he hires are clean. But Scott operates on trust. He expects his employees to come clean and tell him about their past if there are issues he should be aware of.

But he understands that trouble happens. For instance, one employee got tied up "in the wrong situation" and was in court for fraud.

Essentially, he was in a vehicle when a passenger tried to cash a bogus check in the bank drivethrough. "That's a red flag and some employers might not look past his application," Scott says.

But Scott hired this person and he has been a reliable, hardworking employee. "You can't change what happened in the past," he says.

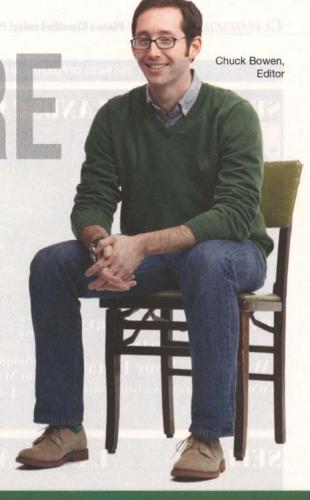
"It happened. And maybe a larger company won't hire the person, but that job will put money in the bank so he can pay the bills and get back on track." L&L





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Interviewed by BRIAN HORN





CHRIS GRAEBER

// GENERAL MANAGER, GARDEN DESIGN

I'm one of the few that started from the onset. I worked at a garden center in high school, went straight into landscape architecture at Texas Tech, came out and went into business. That was a long time ago, like 1978. I owned my own deal for 18 years and sold in with

the TruGreen rollup back in the late 1990s with Minor's Landscape Services.

I started and just loved the landscape installation part of it. Even though I have my license and degree in landscape architecture, I've always migrated to the operations end of the business. I've not been a designer for quite some time.

I think the operations side is financially more lucrative than the design side. If you're in the design side, you have to build up a pretty large firm of other designers to equal what you can do in the operations side.

LOCATION Farmers Branch, Texas TOP 100 RANKING 2014 REVENUE \$40.6 million

> projects - mostly private stuff, not the municipal, public, commercial work. We do also do design/build for retail clients working directly for the homeowners. These projects are not always related to builders we work with. We're primarily in Dallas. We're also in San Antonio and Austin Texas and in Houston, and we're actually doing a major, \$4 million job in Monroe, La., right now.

Garden Design started

about 22 years ago. The

company started doing

builder work for builders

on new homes. It's still a

big chunk of our revenue.

It's probably half maybe

do commercial installa-

tions for any commercial

or just under half. We also

I've been here about two years and we've doubled. The revenue doubled from \$19 million in 2012 to just under \$41 million in December for 2014. So the growth has been phenomenal the last two years and I don't know if it will continue with that kind of a

pace, but it's still definitely healthy.

Part of it's economics. The housing business in Texas anyway is really healthy and so we have a lot of builder work. There is a good bit more commercial work than there used to be. So more than anything, it's the economy improving the markets. We haven't expanded our service lines footprint too much other than we've pushed more commercial into the Austin-San Antonio market, which previously had just been builder.

We're an ESOP. When we're hiring a manager; we're really hiring a partner. You don't want to go through that process and then have somebody leave six months down the road.

I think the big thing that will hopefully continue to move forward and evolve is more of the smaller and mid-sized companies embracing technology becoming more professional. This industry, back when I started, was your pickup truck and a magnetic sign on your door and you're in business.

Many companies never bothered with

licenses and insurance and all the things that you really have to have so hopefully the industry will continue to evolve to be better at the game of business. When they're as good at that as they are at the game of landscape you'll see companies that are started by a guy who is just looking to make fast money and not really looking to have a company that's going to be a real business. That's what I see improving over the next five years. I've seen it the last five or 10 years. That's come a long, long ways and it's still got a ways to go.

Don't to be afraid of competition. There's not very many secrets left in the landscape business. Much of it's been printed in magazines like Lawn & Landscape over the years. We all use the same labor markets. We buy our plants from the same places pretty much and we buy the trucks from Chevy and Ford so the difference is really understanding the business part of it. L&L



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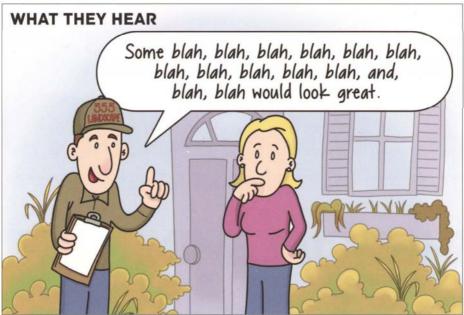


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