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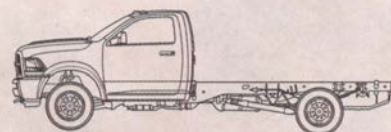
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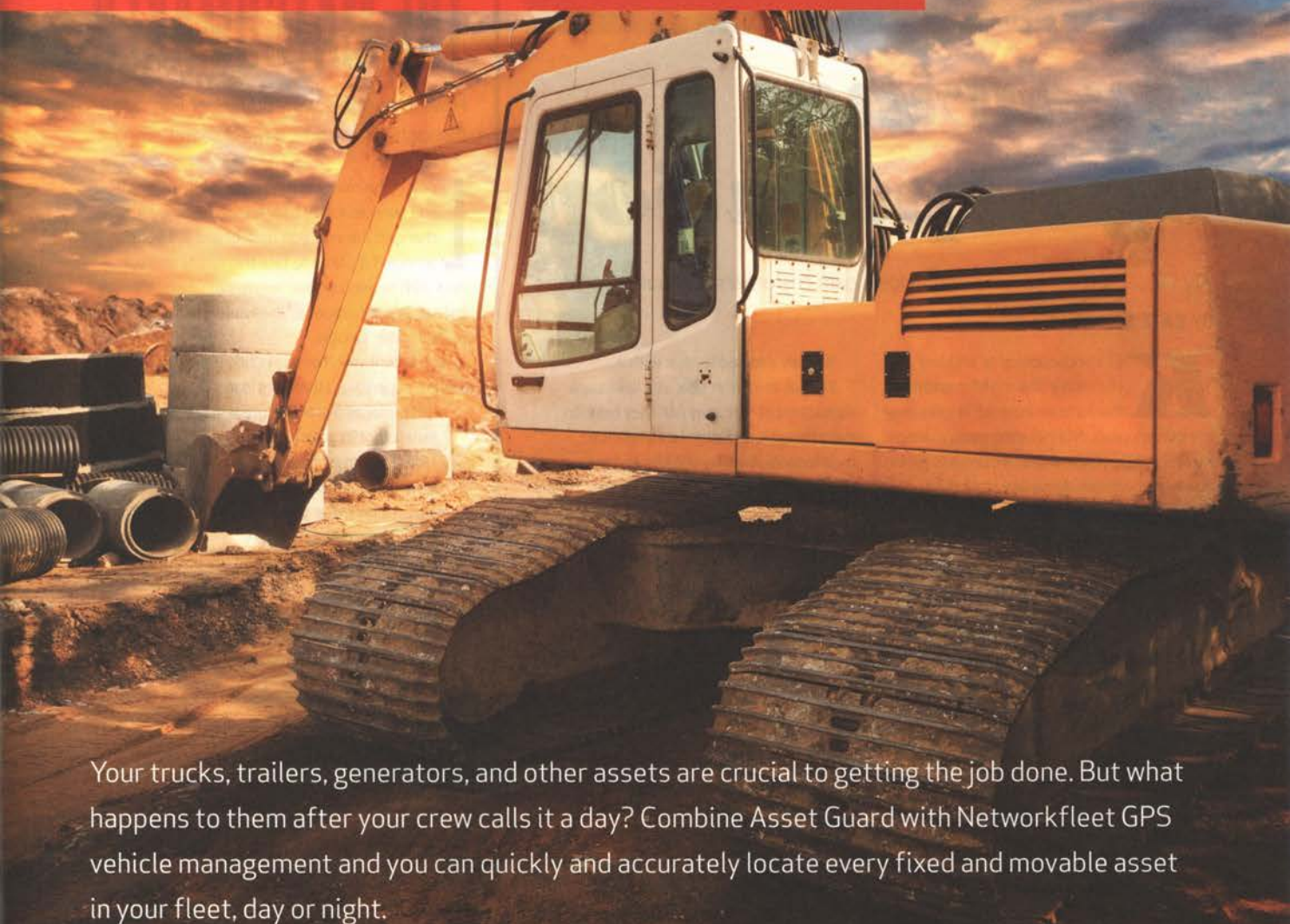
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ONLINE CONTENTS

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



Kujawa bought the company's signature orange trucks in 1960 from a dealer who said he couldn't move them.

Growing by reputation

KEI LANDSCAPING'S branding helps it gain customers without advertising.

BY KATE SPIRGEN

KEI Landscaping is picking and choosing the right customers thanks to an increase in sales over the last few years. Not including snow management, the Milwaukee-area company has grown 30 percent without doing any marketing.

"Our branding is our trucks and equipment parked out in front of prestigious clients," says Chris Kujawa, executive vice president. "We don't do any advertising; it's all person to person."

KEI's signature orange trucks were the result of a good deal in the 1960s that stuck. The city of Escanaba, Michigan had bought four trucks from International Harvester but could only take two. The trucks were set up perfectly but the dealer said he couldn't move them.

"I said, 'Why?' and he said 'They're orange,' because they had been bought by a municipality," Kujawa says. "And I said, 'I don't care. I'll take them. It wasn't that long thereafter that marketing and branding sort of came into its own. People started saying what color should we use in this ad and will it appeal more to women or to men and orange was the color of confidence and safety.'"

So they decided to stick with it.

KEI got its start in 1964 as a landscape management company but they now do everything from design to installation, maintenance, holiday lighting and even interiorscapes and some construction. Nearly all of their clients are commercial properties with 5 to 10 percent of business coming from high-end single family residential customers.

The team of 100 to 120 staff members stays busy year-round moving from maintenance to lighting to snow plowing.

KEI has one central headquarters and three satellite locations that serve mostly as yards for parking and staging. A supervisor at each location handles their own accounts, with most construction jobs coming out of the headquarters in Oak Creek.

To keep track of proposals, estimates, jobs, billing and inventory, KEI uses Asset software and is transitioning to handheld devices to easily keep track of man hours. But finding the right people to complete the needed man hours has been a struggle.

Visit bit.ly/KEIbranding to read the full article on the Lawn & Landscape website.

The Matchmaker:

How to Connect With Buyers Online Through the World's Largest Search Engine



Chris Heiler

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- How to demystify SEO and learn how search engines really work (and what they want)
- How to leverage your unique knowledge and expertise to attract buyers
- How to turn objections and uncomfortable questions into a sales magnet

Visit bit.ly/HeilerGoogle to watch a replay of Heiler's webinar.



SOME OF OUR MOST-READ STORIES FROM AUG. 1 - SEPT. 30.

DOL announces overtime changes – bit.ly/DOLovertime

ACA update – bit.ly/ACAupdate

To seed or not to seed – bit.ly/Installturf

Noons on the move – bit.ly/Noonsmove

Huston brainstorming session – bit.ly/HustonMAD



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EDITOR'S INSIGHT

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

Focus on gratitude

Ten years ago, Glenn Rieker lost his sister. She felt sick one day in September and was dead seven days later. She was 56.

"I went back to my clients and said, 'Every morning, I'm eating breakfast at home. We're not going to work weekends.' We'll start work at 8 a.m. and stop at 5 p.m. I don't want to be married to a business. I'm riding my bike. I'm going to be a little kid every morning, then go to work and do the serious stuff."

In short, Glenn said, he realized that life was too short to spend it caught up worrying about the wrong things.

Glenn runs MKEGreenworks, a small landscape company in Wisconsin, with his wife, Cheryl. I called him to talk about how he uses technology to be more efficient, but it's this part of our conversation that stuck with me.

November is a month when we (hopefully) focus on gratitude and thanksgiving, because in the normal hustle of everyday life, it's easy for us to lose sight of those small things that are so important. I have three kids, so sometimes the morning rush of packing lunches and getting the kids to

the bus stop on time can suddenly seem so important – can suddenly seem like the most important thing in the world – that I don't realize that, really, I get to walk my oldest daughter down the street and talk with her while the sun rises. Instead of getting up early and checking my email for emergencies, I can focus instead on the fact that I get to have coffee with my wife before she leaves for work.

Maybe for you it's the rush of morning roll out and two guys calling in "sick" and a skid-steer that won't start. Maybe it's the stress of trying to make up for three days of rain in a row, or how to get to five sales calls all over town in three hours.

At one point, my life was severely out of balance. I was too focused on work and not enough on my family. I was traveling 120 days a year. I was always first at the office and last to leave. I don't do that anymore. I still work hard and I still really enjoy what I get to do every day, but I have a new perspective now.

All that stuff that seems so important in the moment – the school bus, the email, the broken equipment, the next call – isn't, not in the long run. Here's what is important: I



have a beautiful and smart and caring wife who helps make me better. I have three amazing kids who teach me something every day. I have good friends and a family that loves me. I have a great job where I get to talk with folks like Glenn.

In short, I have a lot to be grateful for, and that's what I work every day to focus on. — *Chuck Bowen*

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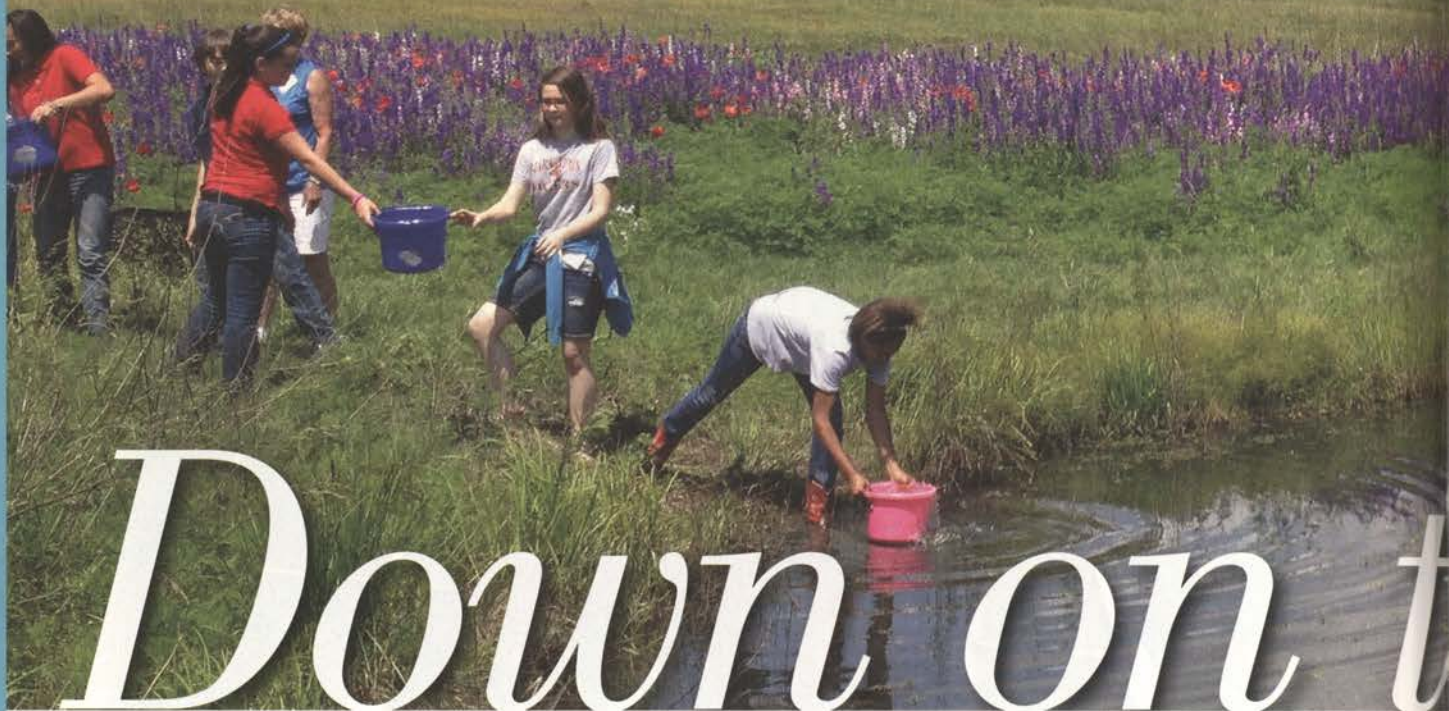
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Down on the

Brad Johnson has the end in sight for his lawn care career, but that doesn't mean he will have a lot of downtime on his hands when he calls it a day. By **Brian Horn**

Retirement is creeping up on Brad Johnson. He's been in the lawn care business 30 years, and is thinking about life after the green industry.

"We're looking at our exit strategy, sooner than later," says the 61-year-old owner of Lawn America in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "I'm not going to be killing weeds when I'm 80 years old, hopefully." But Johnson also doesn't plan on playing golf all day or relaxing on the beach.

Instead, he wants to oversee the Oh Be Joyful Farm, a nonprofit set on a 38-acre farm he bought three years ago with two foster homes to help at-risk youths. Johnson and his family moved out to the farm 30 minutes outside of Tulsa, Oklahoma, to get away from city life.

The property was setup for horses, but Johnson and his wife, Becky, didn't know how to raise them.

Instead of scrapping the setup, they invited kids from an emergency foster care system in Tulsa to the farm to learn about business and the outdoors.

"We hope to plant some seeds with some kids," he says. "Some of them will germinate; some of them will lead to big-



GOOD WORKS

Have you completed a charity project you are proud of or helped out your community in another way? Email Managing Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net to be considered for coverage in a future issue of **Lawn & Landscape**.

ger and better things. "Not all of them, maybe not even most of them, but there will be some victories that come out of this."

"The end game is to get these kids that have been from abusive situations into a caring, Christian home."

FARM LESSONS

The Oh Be Joyful Farm is a place where kids have the chance to work and play outside.

he farm

TEACHER AT HEART.

Before he was in the lawn care business, Johnson was a Sunday school and seventh grade science teacher, and a coach, so using the property to help children was a natural progression for Johnson.

"We wanted to share that with other people that don't have an opportunity to get out in the country, and especially kids," he says.

The couple bought dogs, goats, cattle and chickens, planted blackberry and blueberry patches, and over the past three years the program evolved so much that they made it an official 501(c)(3) non-profit in December.

"We would have them come



The Oh Be Joyful Farm is designed to help kids get placed in foster homes and teach them life lessons while enjoying the outdoors.

out for three or four hours and do various activities and go fishing and run around – just interact with the animals and play games," he says. "They love it. These kids have behavior prob-

lems when they're in a shelter, many of them, but you get out in the country, you get them with caring adults and they're fine. They're just kids." Johnson then invited kids from an inner-

city school he volunteers at to the farm to experience country living.

"These are sixth graders and half of the kids have never even caught a fish or been around farm animals," he says.

However, Johnson really wants the property to house foster families.

The land had two houses on it, so two foster families moved in and the organization is subsidizing their rent.

"The foster kids that are living there ... they come and help feed the animals and work on the farm," he says.

"That's part of what we're doing too is providing two homes, and maybe more eventually, to families that normally wouldn't

L&L INSIDER

For more news, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com

have the means to have a lot of foster kids, but can do so because of the support that we provide for them."

FUNDING THE FARM. Johnson says he uses LawnAmerica's profits to support 95 percent of the farm, with the other 5 percent coming from donations.

Legally, he has to get LawnAmerica's support down to approximately 30 percent in the next couple of years. He would like to add more homes and financial assistance for foster families since there is property available.

"There's a lot of families that would like to do this but they just don't have the financial means to do so, so any help at all is great," he says.

Since Johnson is still learning the ropes of running a 501(c)(3), he hasn't really aggressively approached customers about donating.

Eventually he would like to do so, and invite people to visit the farm and meet the kids in hopes of finding a fit for a foster family.

"We hope that they get out and rub shoulders with these kids and see that they're not bad kids. They're just kids that need some care and need a good home, and that they'll decide to be foster families," he says.

Johnson says many of the children who visit the farm are good kids, but have come from rough situations at home and are hoping for a change.

"These kids will come up to you, you're out in a pasture doing stuff or you're on a tractor or you're fishing, they'll come up, pull your pants leg and say

'Oh, can you adopt me? I'd give anything to live here,'" he says.

"There's just several, after they come out and they just look around and say, 'Man, I'd give anything to be able to live out here at this place.' What do you with that? You can't take in 24 kids at once, but you can maybe help a few of them find a family that wants them."

OUTSIDE THE BUBBLE. Johnson also took the kids down to the farmer's market, set up a stand and taught them how to sell blackberries and blueberries, which also helped them learn people skills.

"We wanted to give them a little taste of what it's like to be in business, and what it's like to work on a farm because it's not Disneyland out there," he says.

"It's not just all fun and games. They'll have fun but they're going to work too. I mean, clean out the horse stalls, work on the berry patches, and feed the chickens, all the animals. We've got chickens and goats and cows and all kinds of animals out there."

Johnson is currently looking for a farm manager, and would like to earn enough money from food harvested on the farm to help support it.

Aside from learning basic life skills, Johnson says the farm will also help kids appreciate the outdoors.

"We want them out from under the TV screens and out from under the computers, away from the iPads and get outside, and get dirty and work," he says. "That's not just foster kids, but all kids need more of that." To donate, visit bit.ly/ohbejoy.



John Dotto, product application specialist, gives a tour of the new ET65 excavator at Wacker Neuson's plant and visitor and training center.

WACKER NEUSON MAKES MOVES INTO LANDSCAPING

The company launched a rebranding initiative in 2014, and recently released a new line of excavators, wheel dumpers, wheel loaders and more.

MILWAUKEE – Wacker Neuson is making moves in the landscaping industry, releasing new lines of excavators, wheel dumpers, wheel loaders and more.

The company, based in Munich, Germany, launched a rebranding initiative in 2014 and now markets under the slogan "All it takes."

From 2004 to 2014, the company has tripled its revenue, and on Oct. 14 it hosted a release of its newest product lines at the plant, and training and visitors' center in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin.

"We don't want to be the heavy equipment guy," said

L&L ON THE ROAD



Johannes Schutze Vohren, regional president, North America. "We want to be the small to medium construction guy."

ET65 AND ET90 EXCAVATORS.

"They're heavier; they're stronger, but they're more compact than they used to be," said Marcus Auerbach, director of market

development. The lower center of gravity and compact size allows the excavators to get into tighter spots. Both are equipped with Tier 4 Final turbo-charged engines that save 20 percent on fuel while increasing performance by 30 percent.

Engineers moved the arm to the right side of the cab to increase visibility into the trench and bucket from the cab.

The newly-designed controls allow the operator to change the control pattern with one switch.

Arms now have 20 percent more breakout force. "The breakout force is where it really, really counts," Auerbach says.

The three-pin linkage on the bucket and 200-degree expanded angle of rotation allow for more rotation and deeper digs.

Cabs now come standard with air conditioning, cell phone chargers and holders and air-cushioned operator seats.

A standard hydraulic quick-attach makes changing attachments easier and a standard diverter valve on the auxiliary hydraulic line allows to switch between hydraulic thumb and a hydraulic breaker without disconnecting hoses.

The 6.5-ton ET65 model has a breakout force of 11,398 pounds of force, maximum digging depth of 13 feet, 9 inches.

The 9-ton ET90 has a breakout force of 15,829 pounds of force and a maximum digging depth of 15 feet, 2 inches.

EW65 AND EW100 EXCAVATORS.

The new generation of wheeled excavators can just pack up and go without needing a truck and trailer, allowing for faster

transport. The 6.5-ton EW65 is powered by a 48.5-horsepower Perkins Tier 4 Final engine, offering excellent power and low fuel consumption, and a top speed of 18.6 mph.

A new three-pin bucket linkage system provides a breakout force of 12,152 pounds. The linkage system also optimizes the bucket's angle of rotation to keep the load secure in the bucket before dumping.

The new front and rear stabilizer blades are designed to provide stable operation.

To provide a clear view of the attachment and jobsite, the boom has been shifted to the right, allowing the operator a better view through the large windows.

The 10-ton EW100 is powered by a 117-horsepower Perkins Tier 4 interim turbo diesel engine that delivers 15 percent more power and 17 percent lower fuel consumption than its predecessor. The four-cylinder, 3.4-liter engine incorporates a common rail fuel injection system, charge-air cooler and diesel particulate filter.

With a top speed of 25 mph, the EW100 can also maneuver in tight spaces with a new all-wheel steer system that reduces the turning radius by 5 feet compared to the previous model. A turning radius of 13 feet may make it easy to maneuver in confined areas.

The new EW100 can dig deeper and reach farther, improving overall productivity. Other updates include a new boom that allows it to dig more than 14 feet deep with a 24-foot reach.

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RELIABLE PROPERTY SERVICES, T.R. GEAR LANDSCAPING ACQUIRED

A 33-year Brickman veteran will lead the newly formed Five Seasons Property Management.

PHILADELPHIA – Five Seasons Property Management, a newly formed, privately held company based in Pennsylvania, has acquired two of the industry's largest companies.

In late July, Reliable Property Services, based in St. Paul, Minnesota, was acquired, and the purchase of T.R. Gear Landscaping in Fairfield, Ohio, was completed in late September.

Combined, the two companies had 2014 revenue of approximately \$45 million. Reliable was listed at 42nd on the 2015 Lawn & Landscape Top 100 list with \$30,300,000 in revenue and 385 employees.

Greg Odhner, director of operations for Five Seasons Property Management, says the current management teams of both companies will stay in place.

"I think their business processes, the people within the company – we're very excited about working with them – and their business systems," Odhner says about what made Reliable and T.R. Gear good acquisition targets.

"We're out looking at some quality companies across the country we believe we can acquire and add value to, and help them grow and give them better opportunity," says Odhner, who spent 33 years with Brickman before retiring in 2013 as division vice president.

Five Seasons, which was founded this summer, serves commercial, industrial and golf course maintenance clients throughout the Midwest. Reliable and T.R. Gear had operations in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois, Iowa, Ohio and Kentucky. – *Chuck Bowen*

ASK THE EXPERTS

Maintenance malaise

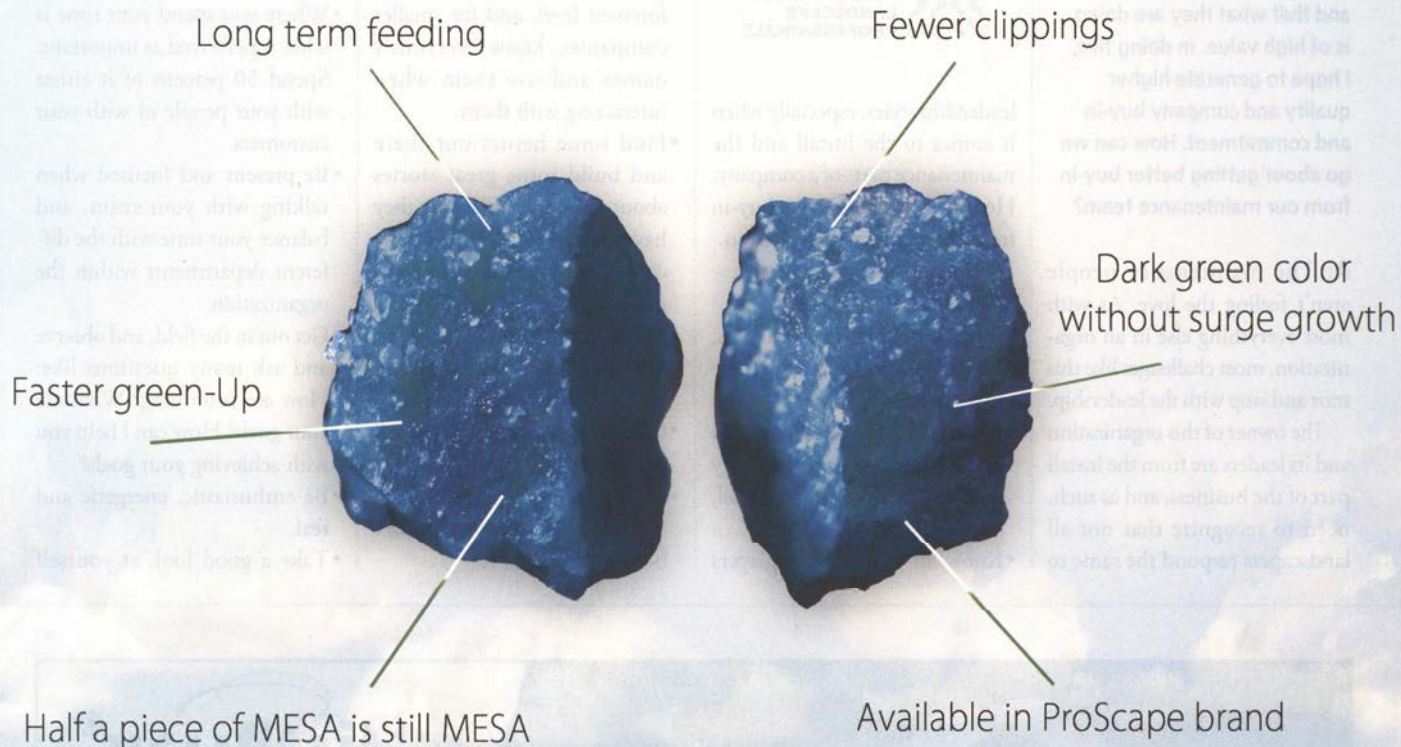
Q: Our company has historically had good luck with team member motivation and participation within our design/build and installation divisions. Our problems seem to stem from our maintenance division. Our leadership team is motivated to push landscape maintenance

as one of our three primary business avenues. This obviously poses a problem considering our maintenance team member buy-in has been a large issue with my company since its formation.

We are looking for methods or ideas to convince our maintenance teams that they

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are not just "cutting grass" and that what they are doing is of high value. In doing this, I hope to generate higher quality and company buy-in and commitment. How can we go about getting better buy-in from our maintenance team?

A: The maintenance people aren't feeling the love. As with most everything else in an organization, most challenges like this start and stop with the leadership.

The owner of this organization and its leaders are from the install part of the business, and as such, need to recognize that not all landscapers respond the same to



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leadership styles, especially when it comes to the install and the maintenance parts of a company. Here are a few ideas to get buy-in from the maintenance division.

BUILD A GREAT CULTURE

- Review your vision, mission, core values and success behaviors statements.
- Get these into easily defined and understood terminology and have them embraced by all, starting with the leaders.
- Know all of your key players

by name at least through the foremen level, and for smaller companies, know everyone's names and use them when interacting with them.

- Find some heroes out there and build some great stories about those folks and how they have succeeded and helped the company achieve its vision and mission.
- Establish the ground rules for behaviors. Recognize and reward the right behaviors and results.
- Celebrate successes from all departments.
- Have people buy in somewhere else when they don't or won't buy in originally.

BE PRESENT AND BE POSITIVE

- Where you spend your time is what is perceived as important. Spend 50 percent of it either with your people or with your customers.
- Be present and focused when talking with your team, and balance your time with the different departments within the organization.
- Get out in the field, and observe and ask many questions like: How are you doing? What are your goals? How can I help you with achieving your goals?
- Be enthusiastic, energetic and real.
- Take a good look at yourself

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¹ Crosswind Assist engages automatically when sensing dangerous wind gusts at highway speeds exceeding 50 mph. Performance is limited by wind severity and available traction, which snow, ice, and other conditions can affect. Always drive carefully, consistent with conditions. ² Driver is responsible for monitoring fluid levels and tire pressure between service visits. See Maintenance Booklet for details. Options shown. Not all options are available in the U.S.



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and your leaders, and see where they are spending their time and attention.

- Practice active listening skills.
- Observe others carefully, under both good conditions and not so good conditions.

OVER-COMMUNICATE

- Communicate and then communicate some more.
- Hold town hall meetings to give out a company status on a regular basis.
- Take some small groups out to a meal and break bread.
- Conduct employee surveys by an outside party.
- Let them have a voice on matters – issues, program development, etc.
- Meet one-on-one with a simple "touch base" regularly.

FIND AND HELP

BUILD CHAMPIONS

- After you have your top leaders, align with them, then seek out and build champions within the ranks.
- Make certain they know, understand, actively embrace and live the culture.

CLEARLY DEFINE ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

- Be certain everyone knows individual expectations.
- Define the results that are expected.
- Track key measurables.
- Provide the needed tools and resources to achieve the results.
- Give feedback regularly.

There's quite a bit of territory here to cover, but once in place, I truly believe there will be better buy-in from the maintenance team. I am certain that you are not the only company that has faced this challenge.

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

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

NEW PRODUCTS



Coxreels Hose Strain Relief Kit

The pitch: The Hose Strain Relief Kit protects hose fittings and connections from potential damage by providing strain relief when the hose is fully extended on the reel.

- Under use, the clamp takes on the force from the over-extended hose and protects the hose fittings and connections at the riser from excessive tension.
- It is available for hand crank and motorized reels with hose sizes between 1/2- and 1-1/2-inch hose inner diameter.
- All existing hand crank and motorized hose reels in the field can also be modified to accommodate this kit.

For more information:
Coxreels.com



Hybrid GOAT 22T

The pitch: The 22T is a tracked mower, which features Evatech's hybrid technology that allows consumers to mow steep slopes safely, economically and in an environmentally friendly way.

- The 22T generates its own electric power and does not contain any fluids that could be harmful to the lawn.
- It can run for approximately 2.5 hours on only 0.3 gallon of gas.
- It features a 22-inch blade deck, making it capable of mowing half an acre per hour of sloped property.
- Because of its low center of gravity and high torque electric motors, the 22T is capable of mowing slopes of (50 +/- 10) degrees.

For more information:
Evatech.net

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Sidewalker

The pitch: HammerHead Trenchless Equipment's 2 1/2- and 3-inch Sidewalker models received upgrades, which include the quarter-turn Power Port Reverse feature and Debris Free Tailcone.

- The 3-inch Sidewalker now has a uniform profile along its entire length, increasing striker size and impact power.
- The Power Port feature not only makes reversing the tool easier but also boosts impact power by up to 25 percent.
- Like all HammerHead models, Sidewalkers operate at 110 psi.

For more information:

Hammerheadtrenchless.com



Stander ZK

The pitch: With the introduction of Wright's 72-inch Stander ZK mower, customers will now have the choice of three AERO-CORE deck sizes: 52-inch, 61-inch and 72-inch.

- The 72-inch Stander ZK's wider cut, push-button deck lift, powerful engine options, mowing speed of 12.5 mph, and fully independent left/right hydro systems all contribute to the mower's improved productivity.
- Reinforced wheelie wheels and elastomer bumpers for progressive ride control help the mower hug the ground on all types of terrain.
- The deck is equipped with anti-scalp rollers for smooth, even results, even on varying terrain.

For more information: Wrightmfg.com

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ROB & DUPLICATE

Simple solutions to common problems you face every day



ABOVE: Glenn and Cheryl Rieker use the Evernote app to track everything from project photos to spreadsheets to how many wet suits their clients have at their vacation homes.

► The two-person company relies on technology to efficiently execute large-scale projects.

TECH TRACKING

BY CHUCK BOWEN

GLENN RIEKER AND HIS WIFE, Cheryl, have been in the green industry for 40 years, and their niche is maintaining large properties for wealthy clients. Many of the properties they care for at Grafton, Wisconsin-based MKEGreenworks are vacation homes on Lake Michigan.

MKE pulls in around \$250,000 a year from just seven high-end clients. The only employees are Glenn and Cheryl. Seventy percent of the revenue is maintenance, the rest comes from construction. Since the beginning, the Riekers have relied on technology to help them stay lean, efficient and deliver outstanding customer service.

“PEOPLE ARE SO BUSY looking for the next job instead of kissing the rear end of the job they do have.”

Glenn Rieker, managing partner, MKEGreenworks

“I can’t service 100 clients,” Glenn says. “I can service 10 \$100,000 clients really well.”

In the early 2000s, the Riekers were working on a lot of second homes, and sometimes wouldn’t see clients for a year or two. So the couple started building websites to

help them follow the project from start to finish. Their adoption of technology continued. Three key tools help them handle higher-level aspects of their work.

1. Smartsheet sends emails to clients, reminders to vendors and easily allows shifts in the schedule in case of a rain delay.

2. Time Master records all time and materials charged for each job, so they can report to clients exactly what they spent.

3. Evernote manages spreadsheets, project photos and diagrams of underground utilities for quick reference on site. Invoices imported into Evernote become searchable. Clients also often ask the Riekers to help manage their vacation homes, and the app tracks items like wetsuit inventories.

Their ability to quickly find information and respond to requests (even helping a customer pull a jet ski out of Lake Michigan late at night) helps the Riekers build deep relationships and customers appreciate their high level of service.

“People are so busy looking for the next job instead of kissing the rear end of the job they do have,” Glenn says. “Nobody focuses on Disney-level service anymore.” **L&L**



IDEA #1

► Never say no – even if the client needs help pulling a jet ski out of the water at 10 o’clock at night.

IDEA #2

► Send hand-written notes when clients pay their bills, and when you start the season’s work.

IDEA #3

► Install metal plant ID signs for new gardens, so clients can easily identify varieties when their friends ask.



I drive a pickup to work, not a hybrid.

I do love trees. I'm just not a hugger. Don't get me wrong, I care about the environment. I mean, how couldn't I? I'm the one responsible for keeping every one of my customers' properties looking spectacular, day in and day out. Then again, I care about a lot of things. Number one on my hot list these



days is how I'm going to remain profitable in the face of rising fuel costs. So when my Grasshopper dealer told me about how their fuel-injected diesel engines could save me literally tons of fuel AND put dramatically fewer emissions into the air we breathe, I was all ears. After a test ride, a night's sleep and kicking it around with my operators, I decided to give it a shot. And after a summer of flawless cuts with minimal downtime, and thousands of dollars of fuel savings, I became a true believer.



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

TRUCK STOP EDUCATION

LAST MONTH, A LOCAL TRUCK STOP ASKED US TO QUOTE some landscaping at their location. I have seen the huge, new operation. I met him two hours after he called in and while walking around on the site with him, I asked him how many quotes he was getting. He said, "Hopefully just one – yours. I've had an incredibly hard time finding someone who would even work with us. People don't show up, or they show up and they don't get back to you. Or they do crummy work, which is what we have now."

Wow, I thought, I often hear landscapers telling me they need work, how could he have such a hard time finding a landscaper? I got him a quote back the next day and after a week of him getting approval from corporate, we were awarded the job. It was about six days' worth of work for us. Not a huge job, but not a small one either. It looks like we're going to get to take care of the truck stop now as well as do a lot of other things for him. So, what are two lessons? Here they are:

1. Handle your phone calls promptly. We live in a "people want it now" world. If your calls are answered promptly by a smiling professional who can get the prospect or client a solution quickly, you will sell the job more than 75 percent of the time. So, how are your calls handled? How easy are you to do business with?

How fast do you get back to clients and prospects?

I sold a job valued at over \$12,000 just by showing up and being easy to do business with. I think we do a pretty good job with this at Grunder Landscaping Co., however we can always get better. So, I'm going to talk to my entire team about this by the time you read this. What do you need to do? What are you going to do?

2. Always ask your clients, "What's next?" When I built my new home almost 10 years ago, we had all the hardwood floors and carpets put in by a very good company. Their workmanship was excellent and we were happy. Now, I need new carpeting in many parts of the house because four kids and two dogs destroy stuff! I'm going to go with someone other than the company that put the flooring in when we built the

house. Why? Because the company that works at my office asked me if I needed anything at home, that's why. No other reason. They caught me on a good day.

How many sales have you lost just by not asking your clients what's next? How many of you know that after 10 years a home landscape is in need of enhancing, and you just call your clients and see if you can come talk to them?

I know we have some work to do there, folks. We worried far too often about some marketing gimmick when a phone call to a client and asking them if they want to talk or, even better yet, sending a photo of what their place looked like 10 years ago and one now and a note or email to see if they think they could use a little tune up?

Had the company that installed my carpet called me two years ago because they know carpet lasts about that long in a busy house, they would have gotten the order, I can almost promise you.

So, how are you doing with asking your clients "what's next?" Marty Grunder, Mr. Bigshot marketing, leadership, and professional speaker guy, has to tell you Grunder Landscaping is NOT very good at this, and we're going to get good

at it because I know it could mean hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of work to us next year.

NO BAND-AID NEEDED. We all get caught up from time to time in bright, shiny objects. That's called innovation. At the end of the day, stick to the basics and you'll find success faster than if you are always trying new things and never completing the things you started. These basic ideas alone I shared with you will make your business better. Stay focused on what matters most and what makes the biggest difference in your client's eyes.

Let me close with a story. Recently, while on a consulting visit with a growing landscaping company, the owner proudly showed me a tackle box full of gift cards from restaurants and the local car wash, note cards and other trinkets to give unhappy clients. He said, "My managers carry these in their trucks and when a client is unhappy, we can spring into action." I gave him a puzzled look and he said, "You don't like my idea, do you?" I said, "I'd rather your company be so good at the basics, that you didn't need a box like that in trucks to make clients happy." He frowned and said, "You're so smart, it's nuts."

To which I said, "Nope, I used to carry stuff like that myself until I realized rather than putting a bandage or gimmick on the problem, it would be better to go train and educate our team on the mistakes we are making and trying to eliminate them altogether." I now know a focus on the basics, like the two shared above, make a huge impact. Hopefully you've taken this route as well. **L&L**



At the end of the day, stick to the basics and you'll find success faster than if you are always trying new things and never completing the things you started. Stay focused on what matters most and what makes the biggest difference in your client's eyes.



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BENCHMARK YOUR PERSONAL LIFE

HAD JUST LEFT A CLIENT NEAR BOISE, IDAHO, and was driving along U.S. Highway 95 on my way to see a client in Kalispell, Montana. It was a perfect mid-September day with puffy white clouds above me and open dry road ahead. The Salmon River rushed downstream heading my direction – first on my right side, then on my left.

As I wove my way along a river traveled by Lewis and Clark more than 200 years ago, I mused about the book project that I was working on: "Benchmark This!: Financial, Business and Personal Standards for Landscape Installation Contractors."

Specifically, I thought about the concept of flourishing (attaining success in all facets of your life) and how it provides an intuitive, yet objective measure of one's life, career and general progress toward achieving a life lived well. On this particular day, I'd place myself at a 9.3-9.5 ranking out of a possible 10. Life at this particular moment in time was very good for me.

My thoughts then turned to two individuals who, one month ago, were at the other end of the spectrum. Both had crashed and burned. One made choices that put him on the road to recovery while the other refused to change and teetered on the brink of personal disaster.

THE TRAIN WRECK. Too many of us go crashing and thrashing through life, leaving bodies in our wake. Oblivious to the destructive path that we sow, our efforts, like the wind from a tornado, spew carnage in all directions. Not only does the damage mount around us, but it also takes an internal toll that, in the end, is perhaps more destructive than the external one. Often it is not until the damage – both external and internal – is severe enough that one is forced to face the problem. I've seen it time and time again – people on the road to personal destruction. Some stop the momentum, change course and prevent a train wreck. Others either take corrective action too late or don't take any at all.

MEASURING INNER SUCCESS. Two friends turned me on to the concept of flourishing a number of years ago. Dr. Scott Waller, Ph.D., is a political science professor at Biola University near Los Angeles. Dr. Stan Wallace, Th.M., is the president of Global Scholars, an organization that places academics in developing countries around the globe. Prior to my discussions with Stan and Scott on this subject, my measurement of my personal life was foggy and subjective, at best. If I felt good at the moment, life was good. If,

on the other hand, my emotional roller-coaster took a dip, so did my state of being.

Your life and its development have many facets. In order to flourish, all aspects need to be in order and improving. When they do, you don't necessarily achieve "nirvana." However, you experience a sense of satisfaction and direction that, while subjective, is palpable and measurable. How do you measure it? You measure it through your intuition.

You know intuitively whether you are anxious or not, frustrated or not, worrisome or not, aimless or not. Certainly, you can fool yourself and others. (The psychotic says that $2 + 2 = 5$ and believes it. The neurotic says that $2 + 2 = 4$ but worries about it.) However, as a general rule, you know your state of being.

UNLOCKING INNER SUCCESS. Look at it this way. A jewel thief that desires to break into a safe and steal a family's fortune rotates the dial as he attempts to perfectly align the tumblers. When he does, the fortune is his. Or so he thinks.

Similarly, as we align all of the facets of our life in a healthy manner, we experience joy, peace, patience, self-control and financial, social, intellectual and vocational success. Your job is to work at prop-

erly developing and aligning the various elements of your life – getting a good education, developing healthy social skills, preparing for your chosen vocation, paying attention to your physical and emotional well-being, etc.

The two friends that I mentioned earlier had, over many years, gotten seriously out of kilter. For whatever reason(s), due to insecurity, clinical depression, bad choices, P.T.S.D. (post-traumatic stress disorder) etc.; they were not flourishing. Like the frog in the kettle that fails to jump out as the water heats up, they didn't recognize it at first. The frog got cooked but fortunately, one of my friends did not. He responded positively to feedback from those who loved him and he got help. The other friend is still in a state of denial and may lose his family and his livelihood.

NEVER TOO LATE. Benchmarks aren't just for Xs, Os, numbers and money that you'll read about in Lawn & Landscape's special section this month. The most important ones are intuitive and go beyond mere numbers. They measure your personal well-being and tell you whether you are "on track" or not.

The concept of flourishing helped me benchmark this important aspect of life. I pass it along hoping that it might help you, as well. Ask yourself if you are flourishing in all areas of your life. If not, take action and do something about it. Seek out help if necessary.

If you know someone who is in serious decline, reach out to them and encourage them to get help. There are professionals who specialize in this area. It's OK to admit that you're not always OK. **L&L**



If you know someone who is in serious decline, reach out to them and encourage them to get help. There are professionals who specialize in this area. It's OK to admit that you're not always OK.

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BY JUAN TORRES

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.

CONNECT WITH YOUR HISPANIC WORKFORCE

BY 2060, THE U.S. CENSUS BUREAU ESTIMATES that Latinos will represent almost one-third of the population; that's 119 million people. This poses a huge challenge, as well as an opportunity, for the landscape industry, which comprises over 35 percent Hispanic laborers.

The strong work ethic and skill set of the Hispanic workforce can help to ensure a sustainable growth for the industry for years to come, but more often than not, landscape companies lack the tools needed to successfully promote their Hispanic employees to supervisors and managers.

Generally speaking, upper management is largely Anglo-Saxon and the labor force is Latino, predominantly Spanish-speaking. Upon arrival, many immigrants claim they understand the English language, however, in reality, many don't. They have a great sense of pride and are willing and looking to be helpful, but their lack of language skills can cause a disconnect and can lead to unintentional errors due to miscommunication between employer and employee.

The key to resolving this long-standing concern lies in a two-way effort to bridge linguistic and cultural barriers, both from the workforce and the managerial team.

SPANISH-LANGUAGE MATERIALS.

New hire training sessions should be offered in Spanish, adding

visual aids and demonstrations to enhance learning and provide alternative components for employees to better gauge instructions and materials. Do not Google Translate your materials.

The Hispanic community is heterogeneous in that it is comprised of many different nationalities and backgrounds that are diverse when it comes to traditions and linguistics.

Even vocabulary and accents differ depending on regional backgrounds. Invest in a translator who can accurately interpret the language so that it reflects its original meaning and resonates with culturally diverse Spanish-speakers. It's also important to work with local banks that have bilingual staff.

CREATING A SENSE OF TEAM.

We can all agree that pay

isn't everything. Respect in the workplace is valued by all, especially by the Latino culture. Hispanic laborers are committed and hardworking, but more importantly, they are loyal. Creating company culture that is fair, promotes unity and encourages a sense of family will make the workforce feel like a fundamental part of the company.

Treat your workers as equals and learn about their families and culture. Holding bi-annual company family picnics is one way that you can create a stronger-knit team and instill a sense of camaraderie.

PROMOTE HISPANIC WORKERS.

Keep your eye on those Hispanic workers that have made great strides and have shown leadership skills and promote them to managerial roles. By recognizing these committed employees and the results that they have driven, the company boosts workforce morale by encouraging upward mobility among their employees and sets an example of how hard work and learning results in growth. Highlighting the opportunities that are available for development, management can fuel motivation to ensure better efficiency and quality of work.

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

One way we can promote learning is by offering resources and incentives for our workforce to continue their

professional development. Employees were trained to accomplish tasks in certain ways and are hungry to learn more. Providing a bonus for those who complete an English as a Second Language (ESL) program or a special certification gives them the motivation to make the time and effort and move forward.

A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY.

Sometimes when we are caught up in the day-to-day, we don't realize that stepping out of our comfort zone and taking up a new challenge can provide added benefits for our businesses.

Learning some basic Spanish vocabulary can make all the difference when communicating with a Hispanic workforce.

Taking Spanish lessons will not only help management to speak with their laborers, but it will also show employees that they are an integral part of the company and that management sees the value in strong communication.

CONSTANT COMMUNICATION.

The simplest and most important take-away from all this information is that management needs to be in constant communication with its workforce. Don't just talk to your workers when you need something done. Learn about them. Relate to them. Ask them if they have questions or need further clarification. If you want to better connect with your employees, remember two things: eye contact and the magic word – "gracias." **L&L**



Providing a bonus for those who complete an English as a Second Language (ESL) program or a special certification gives them the motivation to make the time and effort and move forward.

The author is chief operating officer of Denison Landscaping and the president of the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance.

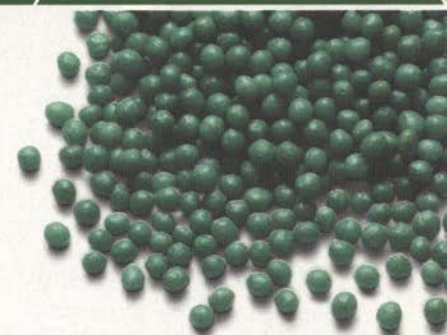


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RELAXED PACE

Rick Meinzer controls growth at Platinum Landscape to win the race. By Brooke N. Bates

LAST TIME WE TALKED TO RICK MEINZER for a 2006 cover story, he ran Platinum Landscape with no office staff, no secretary, no payroll or accounting. He answered the phone himself, went on sales calls himself, and built strategic partnerships to supplement his small team of seven – which performed \$1 million in landscaping installations annually.

“We have deliberately delayed our corporate structure so the owners are touching the customers,” Meinzer told us then.

With a lean approach to minimizing expenses and maximizing efficiencies, Meinzer strategically controlled the growth of the company, keeping profit margins high and overhead low. This conscientious mindset paid off when the economy crashed – Platinum experienced its two best years of business during the recession.

SERVICE SHIFT

Meinzer stopped commercial work to focus on high-end residential.



COMPANY PROFILE

"Our lean structure was a Godsend. It enabled us to survive relatively stress-free," Meinzer says now. "Because we chose to be fair and honest and deliver a great experience for our clients in the years leading up to the recession, we got referral jobs no one else even knew about."

Business has continued to grow since then, with double the revenue and a slightly larger team of 11 seasonal employees, but Platinum Landscape is still extremely lean.

The company constantly seeks ways to maximize efficiency and profitability without sacrificing service, which requires Meinzer to be more selective about the projects he undertakes and



“YOU NEVER SEE one of my guys leaning against a shovel, asking the foreman what to do next. As I have given my guys more responsibility, I have been blown away at how they stepped up.”

**Rick Meinzer,
chief creative officer,
Platinum Landscape**

more strategic about the way he spends his time.

STEP UP TO SERVICE. As chief creative officer, Meinzer still does the estimating and business development for Platinum Landscape. There's still no office staff, and he still answers his own phone. But many of the other tasks he previously handled – like scheduling crews, ordering products, coordinating subcontractors and fielding customer questions – he delegated to crew leaders.

Earlier this year, Meinzer promoted an operations manager and two team leaders, who each oversee a crew of four. He's also bringing a general manager

on board to oversee day-to-day operations, office management and business development.

This shift in the organizational structure has been slow as Meinzer spent years leading by example to illustrate the service he expected from employees.

"My biggest obstacle had been trying to do it all myself," says Meinzer, who founded Platinum in 1998 after 10 years working as a business consultant at what's now FranklinCovey. "I spent years educating and training my guys on the customer experience I wanted them to create. I slowly asked my senior guys to talk to customers more. I let them handle problems I would usually handle. I let them

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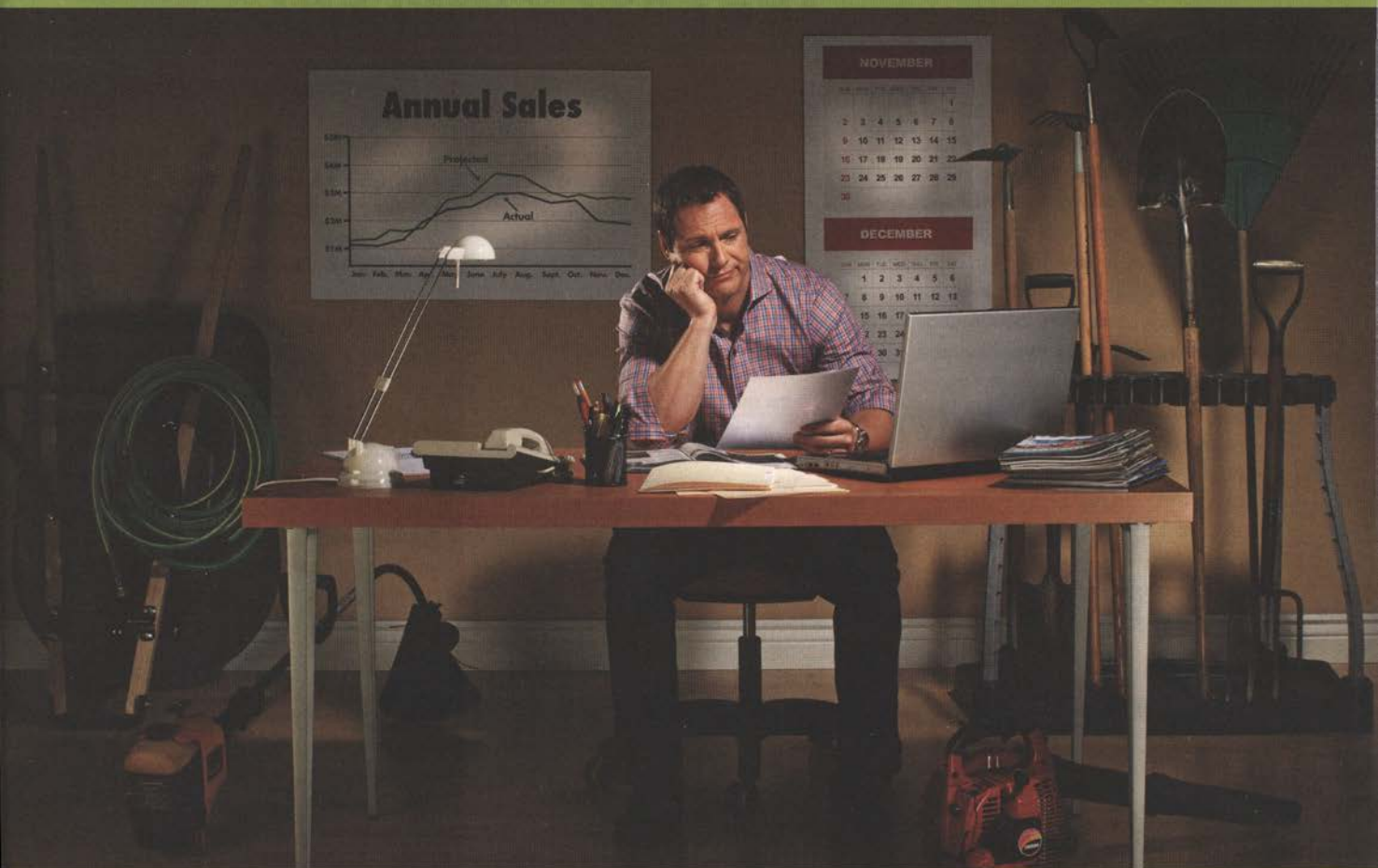


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COMPANY PROFILE

solve problems I would normally solve. I learned that slow is fast when it comes to developing your people."

Several employees have been at Platinum more than a dozen years – plenty of time to absorb Meinzer's passion and preferences by observing him in action. Even without formal training, he noticed that employees closely watched how he handled client conversations and tried to mimic his approach. Now, he regularly meets with crew leaders to advise and instruct, using role play exercises to train for real-life situations.

Besides subbing out a few trades like hardscaping, fences and pools, Platinum performs most landscaping installations in-house, "which allows us to be super-efficient and keeps our quality high," Meinzer says.

With only two crews, everybody has to pull their own weight to maximize

THE LAST 2 PERCENT

"It's easy to get excited about the project at the beginning while everyone is energized about 'what's going to happen,'" says Rick Meinzer, chief creative officer at Platinum Landscape in Cedar Hills, Utah.

"Maintaining that enthusiasm throughout the project is harder."

To keep his team of 11 employees motivated throughout the entire project, Meinzer stresses the importance of final details as the finishing touches to ensure that landscapes exceed client expectations.

"We can do 98 percent of the project right, but if we fail on the last 2 percent, that's what the client remembers," he says.

"So we place major emphasis on the last 2 percent. Warranty work, questions, adjustments, whatever is needed – we

show up and address it. We stay in frequent communication after the job to make sure the transition is smooth."

Many clients told Meinzer they were sad to see crews leave at the end of a project because they loved watching from the windows as their properties transformed. To ease that anxiety, Meinzer built in a follow-up process to keep in touch with customers after completion.

"We try to ease that separation by staying involved, checking in frequently, walking the property to make sure things are growing in well, and letting them know that we are still keeping an eye on their recent investment," he says.

"When we make sure each client is thrilled with the experience, these clients are more than happy to refer us to their friends and family."

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COMPANY PROFILE

productivity.

"We keep our crews small so that everyone has to produce," Meinzer says, noting that each crew generates close to \$1 million in revenue.

"You never see one of my guys leaning against a shovel, asking the foreman what to do next. As I have given my guys more responsibility, I have been blown away at how they stepped up. Now I feel kind of foolish that I didn't relinquish things years ago. Everyone wins when you share responsibility: They feel more engaged, and I have more time to work on things I never had time to work on."

CALCULATED GROWTH PLAN. To further maximize the efficiency of his small team, Meinzer tightened the



Meinzer partners with a landscape architect, and they meet together with clients on-site to discuss options. The architect drafts a design, and then Meinzer reviews to make revisions before presenting to the client.

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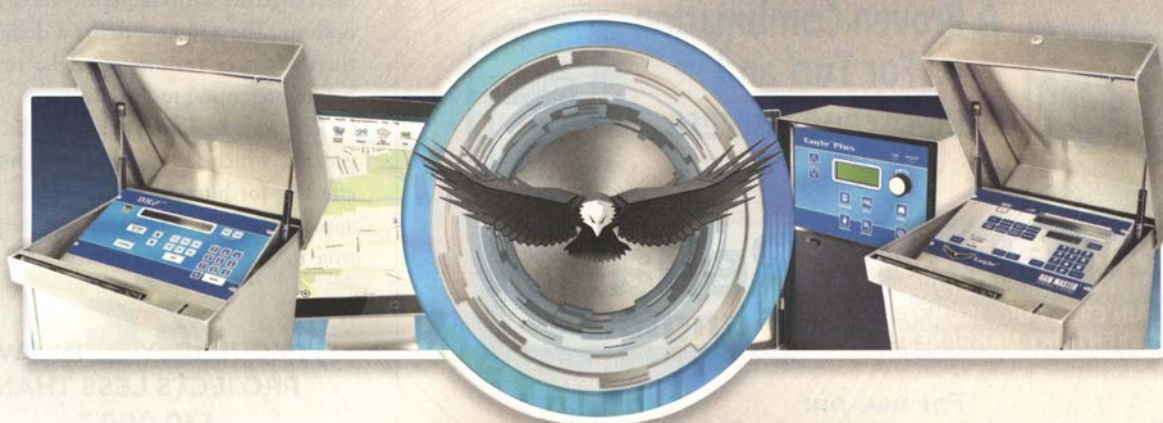
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COMPANY PROFILE

company's focus on certain types of projects.

"We totally moved away from commercial work and only do high-end residential," he says. "I regularly turn away projects less than \$30,000. Annually, that equates to about \$500,000 in revenue I choose not to

pursue. Some may think that is stupid, but it allows me to focus on high-dollar, high-margin projects. We have been very selective in the work we do, and as a result, more of it continues to come our way."

Now that he doesn't have to worry about

bidding commercial work, Meinzer can be more strategic with his time. He personally calls each lead to screen potential clients. If they agree on the budget and the design process, he agrees to a one-hour consultation — where he closes the sale 90 percent of the time.

During the design phase, Meinzer partners with a landscape architect, and they meet together with clients on-site to discuss options. The architect drafts a design, and then Meinzer reviews to make revisions before presenting to the client.

That way, he closely manages the design process, which is less expensive and more effective for him to sub out. Once clients approve the plans, Meinzer passes the project over to the operations manager, who then

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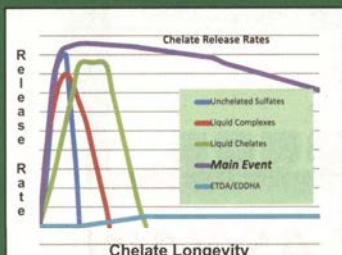
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**Rick Meinzer, chief creative
officer, Platinum Landscape**

becomes the client's point-of-contact — freeing up Meinzer from the ongoing visits, calls and questions that his team can handle.

"I spend a lot more time on the design side, exploring different solutions," he says. "We can consider things that, quite frankly, I just didn't have time to explore before because I was so busy. Now that I have time to think through scenarios with clients, it's resulting in bigger projects, so that time is actually increasing our per-job revenue."

Slowly and surely, Meinzer is building the company's capacity to take on more work. In fact, he is nurturing a third crew leader to potentially promote in 2017, but he's not in any hurry to grow.

"We could add a third crew, but I have deliberately managed growth to keep our service high while generating solid margins," he says. "I care more about profit margins than I do overall sales volume. Both are important, but like I said in 2006, I would rather make 25 percent profit on \$1 million than 12.5 percent on \$2 million." **L&L**

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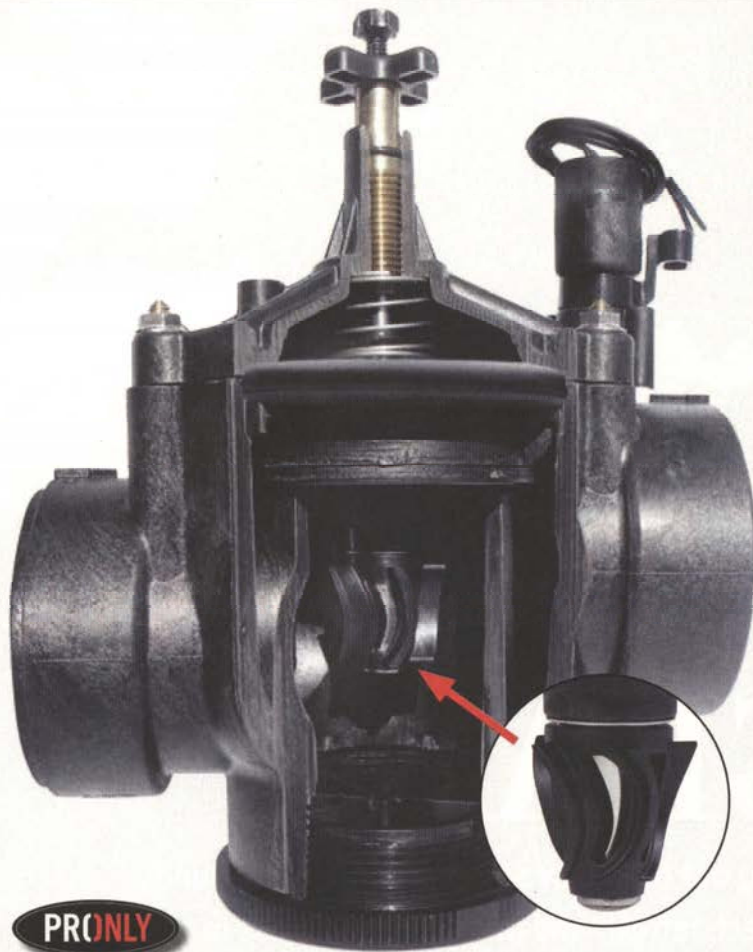
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SHIFTING GEARS

Closing out the 'busy season' brings opportunity to reflect, refresh and prepare for success in 2016.

By Kristen Hampshire

After the last leaves are collected and the grass stops growing, there's a seasonal shift in the landscape industry that can feel like found time. Depending on your location, that transition may last a few weeks or a couple of months. Of course, there's never down time in running a business, but there's a change of pace. An opportunity to shift gears for even a short while gives owners a chance to reflect, plan – or dig in and jumpstart an initiative, launch an advertising campaign, train employees. The list goes on.

This month, Lawn & Landscape spoke to three owners about how they spend this time during the season's change.

Reboot and refresh

Winter is the busiest time of year for Daniel Currin, president of Greenscape in Holly Springs, North Carolina. Not because he's out servicing clients or barraged with calls, but because he's tucked into an office, planning and budgeting – closing out the year, dealing with taxes. "Just all of those decisions need to be made and finalized," he says. "For me, spring and summer are actually slower."

Strategic planning time at Greenscape starts in summer, and when the calendar shifts into fall, budgets are created. "Knocking out a first draft by Thanksgiving is always our goal," Currin says. Then comes tax preparation, followed by a focus on hiring, advertising and other administrative to-dos.

This is not stuff Currin can do during the season. In fact, his management team has a "rule" for him, he says. "I'm not allowed to make any strategic implementations during spring or fall – so we really look at summer and winter as time to work on strategic initiatives," he says.

Training efforts are also focused during summer and winter, when the landscape maintenance schedule eases up.

The office isn't the only busy place in winter at Greenscape. The shop is bustling, says Josh Jones, fleet manager. Crews mow up until Christmastime, and then all mowers and equipment are brought in for refurbishing. Jones works from a detailed checklist: changing oil, checking safety systems (such as the strobe lights on all mowers), adjusting tire air pressure, and so on.

"We decide which mowers we are going to retire," Jones says. Currin says the company takes advantage of some vendors' end-of-year promotions, even if new equipment purchased won't be put into service until spring.

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They also determine how much more equipment is necessary to fulfill the company's growth goals.

Though landscaping is a seasonal business, and because the grass does stop growing for some time during winter in the Carolinas,

the sense of urgency for field duties wanes.

"We need to give ourselves and our employees some 'change in season' so they can find some work-life balance, because we run hard in spring and fall. If we did that year-round, we'd burn people out and this

would be an unhealthy work environment," Currin says.

Currin says the encourage employees to take their time off during the slow season. "That way, they are ready to go in spring and fall when we get that (customer) demand."

GREENSCAPE

Daniel Currin, president

LOCATION:

Holly Springs, N.C.

ESTABLISHED:

1979

EMPLOYEES:

110

2014 REVENUES:

\$13 million

CUSTOMERS:

20% residential, 80% commercial

SERVICES:

Maintenance, design-build, snow removal

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

CAPITALIZE

ON YEAR-END DEALS.

Talk with vendors about incentives for making purchases at year-end – and include your CPA in this discussion, as well. "Model year end" sales can benefit the budget, and your tax bills.

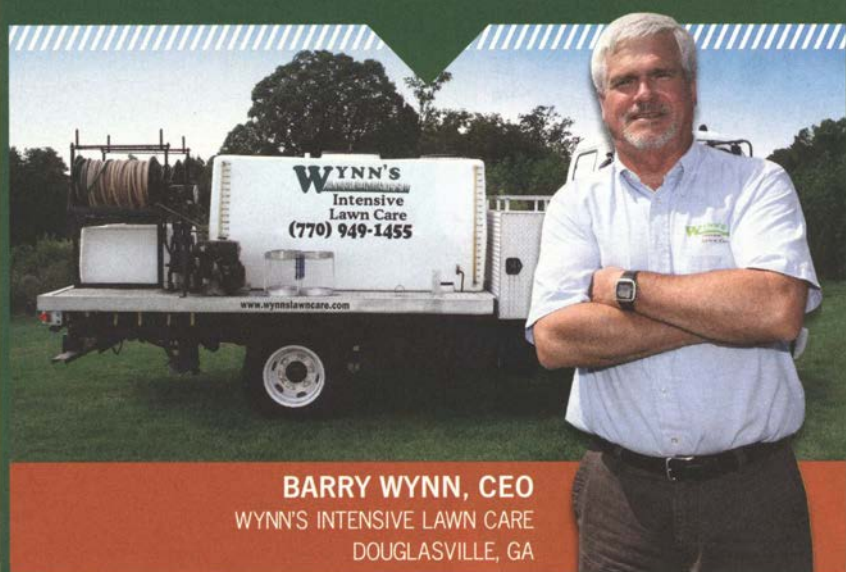
OFF-SEASON STRATEGY.

The busy season is no time to introduce a new process, Currin says. So all strategic initiatives are funneled into summer and winter, when the schedule loosens up a bit. "That's when we focus on projects to move the company forward," he says.

PRESS 'RESET.'

"This is a seasonal business, and there are seasons in life," Currin says, suggesting that owners give employees some breathing room between busy periods. And, management needs to also take a break from the busy. "We need to take the time and effort to refresh," he says. "Our business is not the end, it's the means to the end." In other words, take that trip – allow yourself a slow day.

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Slow down with class

Rail City Garden Center is located in the desert of Reno, Nevada, a region going through four years of severe

drought. Reno also charted some of the worst national foreclosure rates during the economic recession. So the notion of shifts,

seasonal or not, or slow times in business take on whole new meaning. But business has actually been quite steady for Pawl Hollis, president of the retail garden nursery and full-service landscaping firm he started almost 20 years ago.

In fact, there's only about six weeks during the year when the schedule actually winds down a bit. That time is dedicated to equipment repair, staging classes at the garden center, training employees and even handling a snow event or two.

Hollis wasn't seeing people spend on enhancing landscapes several years ago, but that has "dramatically turned around," he says.

"We are also getting more inquiries on commercial landscaping and maintenance," Hollis says. "Edible gardens have taken a big

"It definitely gets slower (in winter), but hopefully this year with snow and the construction work that's coming in, we should stay busy."

**Pawl Hollis, president,
Rail City Garden Center**

upturn and we do a lot of classes. We call it our Green College, and it includes sessions on how to construct raised beds, composting, pruning."

Classes begin in February at Rail City. "It gives people something to do, and they'll start ordering and planting seeds, or planning ahead," he says. "We hope to get that first touch with them in the spring before they really have to do the work, then they remember we are here with the product or services they need."

Rail City shifts into the education/pre-spring season at this time because while the calendar year is closing out, the company is still busy with holiday business on the retail side. "On the landscaping side, we do

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FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

RAIL CITY GARDEN CENTER

Pawl Hollis, president

LOCATION:
Reno, Nev.

ESTABLISHED:
1996

EMPLOYEES:
20

2014 REVENUES:
\$2 million

CUSTOMERS:
80% residential,
20% commercial

SERVICES:
Maintenance, landscape
installation, hardscape, water
features, synthetic turf, retail
garden center

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

HAVE CLASS.

Providing planting-inspired classes at the garden center in February stokes customers' interest in services so when the weather breaks, they can call on Rail City for services and products.

TRY SOMETHING NEW.

Hollis will test some new hardscape materials this winter when the business slows down in January. "We'll do some training on paver installation and stackable wall (products)," he says.

FOCUS ON TREES.

Dormant pruning keeps the service schedule relatively full when other maintenance is "at ease." "We do a lot of cleanup during the winter," Hollis says.

maintenance and construction until the end of November," Hollis says.

Then, there's a bit of a "seasonal shut down," he says, adding that the time is dedicated to onsite construction at the facility, including landscaping there "because our facility is tied into the garden center so much."

For roughly six weeks from mid-December through January, Hollis cuts down staff by about 50 percent. These employees are still on call for snow removal and other jobs, and during a heavy snow year they get full-time hours.

Those who stay on staff handle tree service, pruning and cleanup. Hollis is an ISA-certified arborist and the company offers a complete tree service. And, as long as there isn't snow and the ground is thawed, construction can continue on customers' properties. "We can still install pavers," Hollis says.

For two solid weeks during the company's slower time in winter, crews repair and service all vehicles and equipment. Every truck, trencher, grinder and other pieces of equipment goes through an assessment for proper operation and safety. "I can keep our main people pretty busy," Hollis says.

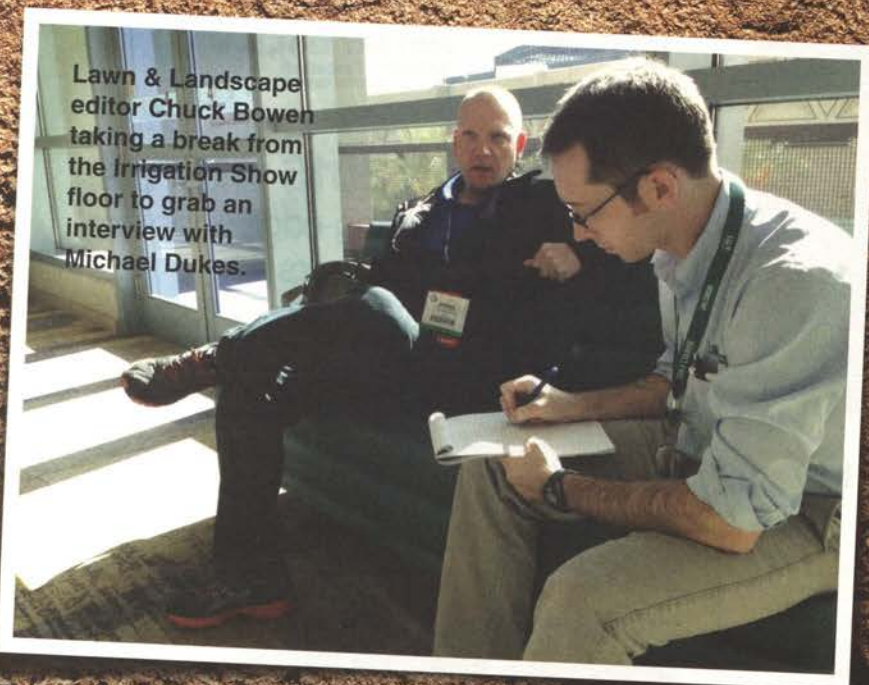
Beginning in February, crews can perform pond cleanout services. By the first of that month, the company is ramped up for spring, budgets and marketing campaigns are planned, and customers are enrolling in classes in anticipation of warmer weather.

"It definitely gets slower (in winter), but hopefully this year with snow and the construction work that's coming in, we should stay busy," Hollis says.

Lawn & Landscape is Connected



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



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

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Off-season staffing

January is planning time at Falling Leaves Lawn Care, and as the days grow shorter and fall cleanup winds down, Chris Wagon, president, can focus on working on the business. In Atlanta, where the firm is based, snow events are rare and handled with some skid-steers and plows. And, while crews may be performing some pruning in winter, mowing stops for a period of time before February.

"We might not be in the field quite as much – but we are getting ready for spring," Wagon says.

Planning actually starts in the field with customer conversations, which happen in late summer/early fall, usually before the big leaf cleanup push. August is a slower time because of the sweltering heat – Turf just isn't growing that fast.

During that time, and rolling into September and seeding/aeration season, Wagon and account managers are conducting property walk-throughs with clients.

"Our relationships are huge, and, while I'm the president, I'm still responsible for about 45 clients who I try to meet with

at least twice a year, if not three times," Wagon says.

Fast-forward to December, when the office quiets down and Wagon can dig into planning and scheduling. He looks at mulch and pruning services that happen right off the bat in January, and handles marketing before the spring rush.

This year, Wagon plans to do more advertising in January to recruit employees so he can staff up to meet a 15 percent growth goal. And rather than bringing in employees one or two at a time for training, Wagon wants to stage an official kick-off date for the season, and a "big hire day" and group training prior to that.

Wagon hopes this strategy will ensure cohesive messaging to crews and more continuity. And a "start time" on the calendar (Feb. 15) gives the company a goal date to work toward with hiring efforts.

Wagon will ramp up marketing during slow times – so there's really nothing slow about off-season at Falling Leaves Lawn Care. And he'll use the time in between fall and spring busy seasons to build up the database of the company's CRM software, which is linked to the company's marketing campaigns. He'll plan all of that marketing during year-end and January.

Meanwhile, services don't halt in winter. "We try to get as



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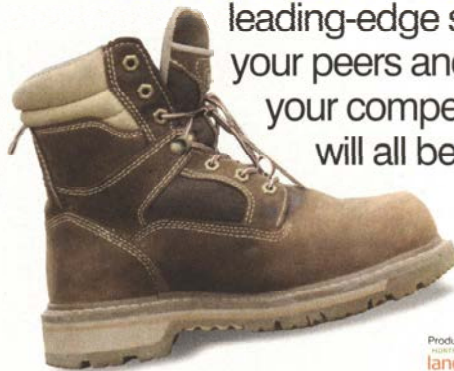


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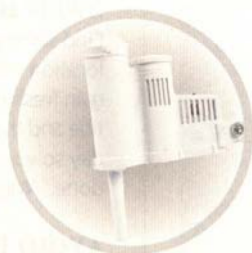
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much down for our recurring revenue clients in terms of pruning as possible, and we do lots of cutback and cleaning out beds – whatever needs to be done, whether it's laying down pine straw or hardwood mulch," he

says. "About Feb. 15 people get the itch, and by March 1 it's absolutely crazy."

Wagnon's planning process involves working backward from the problem. In this case, it's labor (as with most landscape firms). "You

have to write out a plan," he says. "What is your ideal start time? How many folks do you need? How many hours do you want those people to train before the start date? Get it on paper," Wagnon says. **L&L**



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FALLING LEAVES LAWN CARE

Chris Wagnon, president

LOCATION:

Atlanta

ESTABLISHED:

1998

EMPLOYEES:

30 during high season;
20 in winter

2014 REVENUES:

\$1.5 million

CUSTOMERS:

65% commercial, 35% residential

SERVICES:

Landscape maintenance
and enhancements

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

ASK FOR HELP.

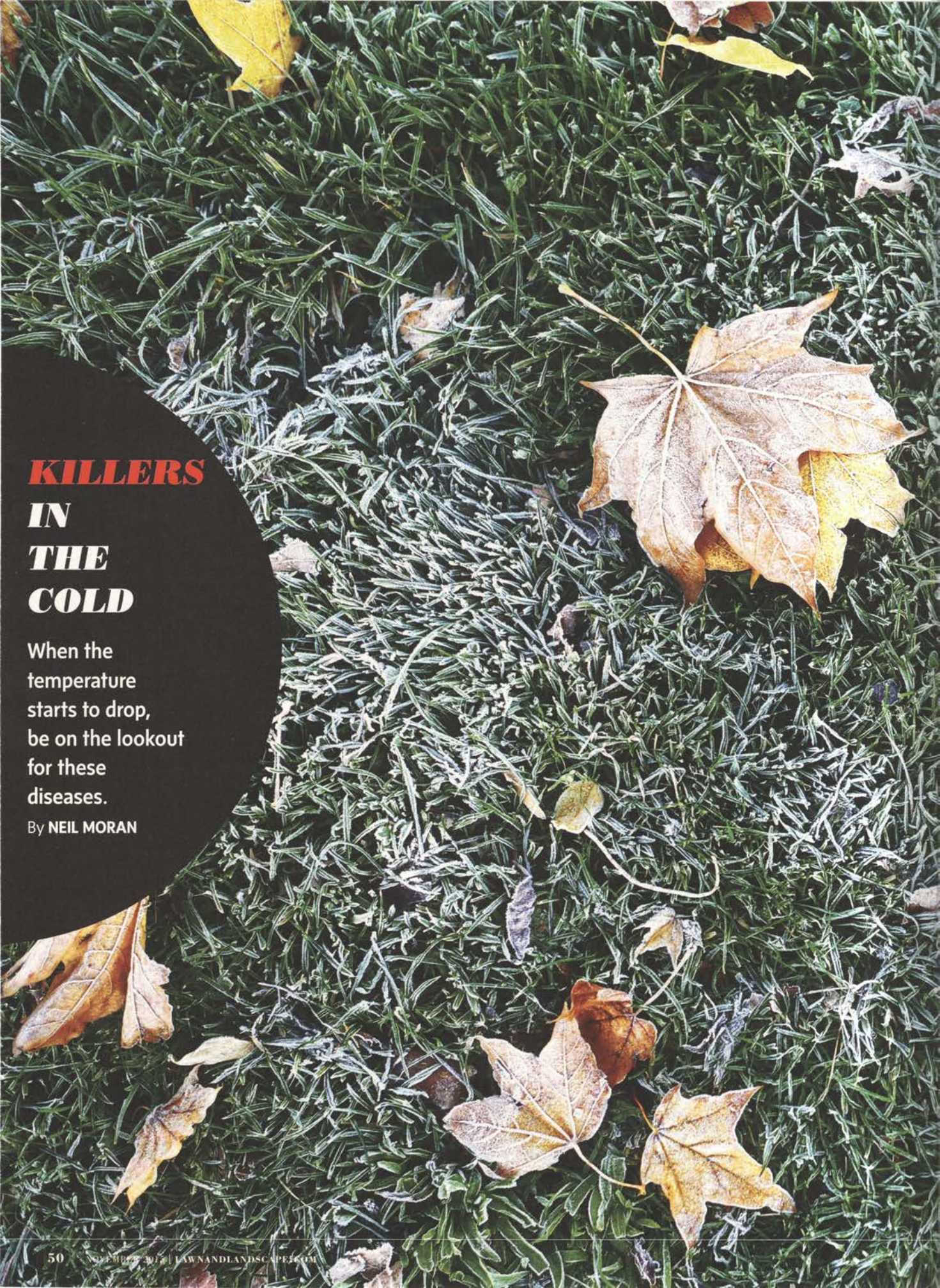
The slow season is an ideal time to consult with advisers or consider bringing in a consultant to work on the business. "Evaluate your company," Wagnon says. We don't want a consultant here in the middle of the rush."

SWITCH UP THE OFFICE.

Find somewhere quiet to reflect and plan — a location outside of the office where you can gain fresh perspective. "Break the daily routine and then schedule and regiment your day so you can make time to get planning done," Wagnon says.

AVOID PROCRASTINATION.

Plan while you have downtime rather than waiting until issues crop up during the high season. "While you have less (labor) hours and fewer folks in the office is a great time to reflect and not necessarily work in the business, but work on the business," Wagnon says.



KILLERS **IN** **THE** **COLD**

When the temperature starts to drop, be on the lookout for these diseases.

By NEIL MORAN

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OTHERS KNOCK WALLS DOWN.**



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Kubota

If an ounce of prevention equals a pound of cure, then lawn care operators would be well advised to try to prevent winter diseases rather than have to deal with the ugly aftermath when spring arrives. This is particularly true on high value turf like commercial and residential properties where a well-manicured lawn is desired.

It's not always easy to treat a disease before it occurs, but if you've kept good mental and/or written record of your residential and commercial lawns, you should know what ailments might be on the way.

PACIFIC NORTHWEST. The Pacific Northwest is a region of peaks and valleys and climatic differences that will keep an LCO on his toes. These differences can produce a variety of turfgrass diseases, according to Alec Kowalewski, assistant professor and turf specialist with the Department of Horticulture at Oregon State University.

Kowalewski says the LCO has somewhat of a balancing act between doing too little and doing too much when it comes to managing several diseases he sees in his region, which include snow mold, red thread, rust, dollar spot and leaf spot. Snow mold can be treated

prior to the turf going dormant with demethylation inhibitors (DMI). Otherwise, he says not to exceed 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet when doing late fall applications.

Too much nitrogen can stimulate growth and lead to instances of snow mold. He says snow mold develops in the Willamette Valley even in the absence of snow. He cautions against applying any fertilizer over the winter after the turf has gone dormant in areas where there is no snow cover.

Conversely, red thread, a disease that turns the leaf surface of perennial ryegrass red, can occur from a lack of nitrogen. If the LCO knows red thread may be a problem, they're advised to fertilize with nitrogen in the late fall, before the turf goes dormant, at the rate of 1 pound per 1,000 square feet.

"You should have it in mind to do a fall fertilizer application to prevent rust and red thread and don't fertilize over the winter to treat snow mold," Kowalewski says.

Rust is a problem on Kentucky bluegrass in the region. The remedy for rust is to fertilize at the rate of 1 pound per 1,000 square feet.

"Nitrogen is a limiting factor in rust," Kowalewski says.

Dollar spot, which is grouped into the category with red thread and rust,

can also be controlled with a fall application of nitrogen.

On newer perennial ryegrass lawns, the occurrence of leaf spot can be an indication of lack of a fall application of nitrogen. Again, Kowalewski recommends an application of 1 pound of nitrogen per 1,000 square feet of turf. These applications can take place late into the fall in this region.

SOUTHWEST. As might be expected, turf and lawn diseases in the arid southwest are influenced by water, too much or the lack thereof.

Although Mother Nature is the culprit in a lot of winter turf diseases, LCOs in this region need to pay close attention to irrigation practices, according to Dr. David Kopec, extension specialist at the University of Arizona.

Winter brown blight occurs on overseeded bermudagrass that is seeded with perennial or annual ryegrass. Winter brown blight can occur on cold, wet soils that have been irrigated too much or drain poorly. Sometimes this is due to LCOs not switching from a germination schedule to maintenance schedule in their irrigation.

"Aerification at this time of the year is not advisable, rather, correct the irrigation clock," suggests Kopec. Fungicides available that can be applied in the late fall include iprodione, vinclozalin, chlorothalonil, thiram and myclobutanil.

In the higher elevations in the west where Kentucky Bluegrass is the grass of choice, powdery mildew can actually cause death of the turf. It occurs in late fall in heavily shaded areas. Kopec says resistant cultivars are available. Fungicidal options include mancozeb and myclobutanil, myclobutanil, propiconazole, triadimefon and triticonazole.

Rapid blight, a relatively new disease, affects cool season grasses that are used to overseed bermudagrass in the early

"One of the most important cultural things a turf manager can do to decrease the severity of snow molds is to ensure the turf is completely hardened off going into the winter by avoiding excess fertility late into the fall."

John Inguagiato, assistant professor of turfgrass pathology at the University of Connecticut

fall. It is most pronounced during periods of drought when salts don't drain from soils.

"Turfs which use saline water or have saline soil with moderate soil sodium levels are most

susceptible to this disease," Kopec says.

Aerification can help only if it is done in conjunction with adequate rainfall or irrigation practices that will wash away salts during

the summer months. Although rapid blight is not a fungus, there are two fungicides that can act as protectants: pyraclostrobin and mancozeb. These can be applied in late November.

Late fall might be a time when many LCOs are putting the tools and equipment away for the winter.

However, the season for fungal diseases on turf may be just getting underway. Making the right choices in cultural practices and chemical and fertilizer applications will ensure a nice greenup in the spring and a happy customer.

MIDWEST AND NORTHEAST. Lurking within the soil of lawns and turf are pathogens for different types of snow molds that will put an ugly face on a turf stand when spring arrives.

"Our primary concern in this region is snow mold," says Loren Giesler, soybean and turf specialist at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. "Once you've had it, you know it's there. It has these great survival structures in the soil."

He says snow mold is a particular problem where snow cover is very deep or it has been piled high and deep by snowplows and drifting. The freezing and thawing that occurs when the temperatures fluctuate between about 27 and 40 degrees is what really activates this fungal disease.

Some steps that can be taken that don't require chemicals include erecting snow fences to contain snow drifts and spreading snow out during the course of plowing. Giesler also says there are fungicides that can be applied in late November in his region, before the turf goes dormant.

In the upper Midwest, near the Great Lakes, LCOs are likely to encounter three different types of snow mold: pink, gray and speckled. Planning to treat these fungal diseases is critical.

"The problem is it develops under snow cover, especially with speckled and pink snow mold," says Paul Koch, assistant professor of plant pathology, at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

"So if you don't put down protection, it will be too late."



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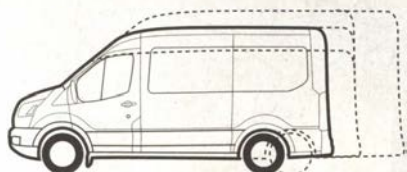
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LAWN CARE

He says snow mold will more likely be treated with fungicides if it is a high value lawn or turf, like golf courses, than home lawns.

The patchy spots you see in the spring as a result of snow mold will actually repair themselves with good cultural practices.

"Typically, most lawns don't require snow mold protection because the grass species in lawns are a little more resistant to snow mold development, and when the disease does occur the turf usually recovers fairly quickly."

Snow mold is also a persistent problem in the northeast, according to John Inguagiato, Assistant Professor, Turfgrass Pathology at the University of

Connecticut. New Englanders also see occurrences of pink, speckled and gray snow mold.

Besides treatments with fungicides, there are several cultural practices that will help decrease the severity of snow mold.

"One of the most important cultural things a turf manager can do to decrease the severity of snow molds is to ensure the turf is completely hardened off going into the winter by avoiding excess fertility late into the fall," Inguagiato says.

He adds that LCOs should also set the mower settings a little lower for that final cut of the season to remove leaf blades that can trap moisture, and to

remove leaves and other debris before the snow flies.

SOUTH. Jim Kerns and his undergrads are busy at North Carolina State trialing fungicides to see which ones will be most effective on at least two maladies of lawns in the South: spring dead spot and large patch.

Kerns, a turf pathologist at NC State University, says LCOs need to monitor rainfall and soil temperatures this time of year.

A lot of rain and soil temperature hovering around 70 degrees is ideal breeding conditions for large patch, a fungus that colonizes in zoysia and bermudagrass.

"I always advocate for our

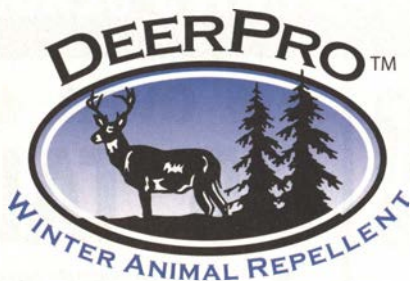
LCOs to monitor soil temperature and rainfall in the fall," Kerns says.

Spring dead spot is a more serious problem for the LCO as it kills the entire plant.

Unlike snow mold, which only kills the leaf blade and thus can repair itself in the spring, there is a sense of urgency in treating spring dead spot.

He adds it could be June or July before spring dead spot recovers, prompting fungicidal treatments, whereas large patch, especially on bermudagrass, may recover with the right aeration and fertility program. **L&L**

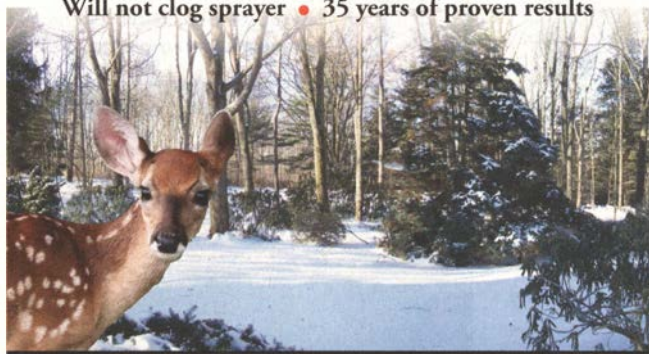
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KEY BENCHMARKS

Our panel of experts offers up a baker's dozen of must-watch numbers.

By Kristen Hampshire

SO, HOW'S BUSINESS?

Answering this simple question requires some real analysis if you're going to benchmark your operation – really determine how your firm is performing against industry standards. First, you need solid data. Next, you must understand which numbers matter most: what to measure, what to watch. Once you zero in on those numbers, the question is, "Where do I stand? What does high performance look like?" And, of course, diligence plays a strong role in improving benchmarks – continuous tracking, monitoring and planning.

If you own your numbers, measure them and watch them, you can change your business future for the better. The 2015 Benchmarking Your Business Report lays the groundwork for a fresh journey in managing your landscape operation, no matter your service focus or fiscal status. Use the charts as worksheets to begin collecting valuable data. Then begin tracking the key benchmarks we outline here.

Let's get started.

OWN IT: We'll define the benchmark so you can understand exactly what the number means and why it matters to your business. (We'll also point out why ignoring the number is probably a bad idea.)

MEASURE IT: You'll learn how to calculate the benchmark, and what the numbers actually mean. How do you know if your performance is outstanding, or outright sad? Don't worry, we'll help you gain some clarity so those numbers look more approachable and you can use them to improve your business.

WATCH IT: Autopilot is not an option. If you breeze through the calendar months without watching these benchmarks, you'll get surprises. Surprises cost a lot of money. We'll offer some advice on how often to track benchmarks.

1. Revenue vs. Budget

OWN IT: This is a comparison of the revenue your business is actually generating to the budget you created. "The purpose is to see if you're on track with your sales – if your sales are more than what you budgeted or if they are under budget. Then you can determine what to do to get those sales back on track," says Jim Huston of JR Huston Consulting.

MEASURE IT: Take your budget and line it up with your profit and loss (P&L) statement. From that report, review the various departments in your business and compare actual revenues to the budget. This measurement is important because there are fixed costs you must pay every month. "Your fixed costs will eat up your profits if you are not tracking and hitting that revenue number for the year," Huston says.

WATCH IT: Monthly

2. Sales Backlog

OWN IT: Find out if you have enough sales in the pipeline to meet your revenue goals.

MEASURE IT: This benchmark is easy to overlook only because contractors often do not have a system in place to track backlog. "We use a Microsoft Excel sheet and track it pretty extensively," Huston says. "I want to know exactly what is sold, and what is pending and what's in the pipeline."

That pipeline is critical. For residential installation businesses, aim for about two months of backlog. For commercial installation, backlog might be six months out or more.

Maintenance backlog is a little different since it's recurring revenue, but Huston advises having contracts for spring sealed in winter. "The backlog you really want to track is enhancements – all the extras," he says.

Companies can also use software tools to track sales in the pipeline, says Bill Arman, consultant/partner in The Harvest Group. Tracking salespeople is critical. "If you start with the sale goal first, and work your way back to how many proposals must be submitted to get a sale, you'll have a better understanding of what is required to achieve your goal," Arman says.

WATCH IT: At least monthly; ideally weekly, or even daily





3. Accumulated GPM to Date

OWN IT: Gross profit margin is sales minus direct and indirect costs. So, the money you'll bring in for all the work you do after you pay bills: materials, labor, subcontractors, rental equipment and so on.

MEASURE IT: Here are the targets: commercial installation, 25%; residential installation, 35%; maintenance, 35%; lawn care, 50%; snow, 50%; irrigation, 50%. All of these gross profit margin benchmarks are "plus or minus 5%." So, there is some leeway – but shoot for these profit ranges, Huston says.

WATCH IT: Monthly

4. Revenue Per Employee

OWN IT: This is how much revenue each employee should generate, and it is an indicator of performance and profitability on jobs.

MEASURE IT: First, figure out revenues for each division by man-hours, Huston says. And be sure to take subcontractor costs out of the equation, because they can make it look like you're producing less revenue per employee, Huston says.

For example, an installation crew member generates \$100,000 per year (you've divided projected revenue for this division by crewmembers in the field producing the work). If your season is nine months long, that person should generate approximately \$11,000 of revenue per month. A three-person crew should bring in \$33,000 of revenue per month.

WATCH IT: At least monthly

5. Efficiency: Hours Budgeted/Hours Worked

OWN IT: Measure efficiency in your business by reviewing the hours budgeted by a job, and comparing that to the actual hours spent. By dividing the hours budgeted by hours worked, you'll get an "efficiency rating," says Marty Grunder, green industry consultant.

MEASURE IT: Contractors at all levels can understand this basic math. "If a job took longer than budgeted, that's not good," Grunder says. "This is one of the first (benchmarks) we think about: time. It's something everyone in a company can understand and an owner can find ways to improve."

Grunder tracks efficiency on a board so every employee can see. Jobs budgeted for 15 or more man-hours go on the board. "We put the actual hours next to the budgeted hours so we can see how everyone is doing," he says. "It's full transparency."

Grunder recommends shooting for 105% efficiency. "That means, on average, you are about 5% under what you bid, which should lead to improved profitability, provided you hit the materials estimate correctly," he says. "There's a lot more that goes into a successful company than these two things, however, it's a great start and something everyone in the company can understand and rally around."

WATCH IT: Weekly

6. Cash Flow: Short-Term Assets vs. Liabilities

OWN IT: Want to find out if your business has positive cash flow? This is the number to hone in on: short-term assets vs. liabilities. The operative word is short-term. We're not talking about long-term liabilities like the cost of your facility, trucks and equipment. "We're talking about accounts payable, taxes, your line of credit and credit cards," says Jason Cupp, a Kolbe Certified growth consultant.

MEASURE IT: Cash flow is not only how many dollars are in your checking account. What many contractors overlook is the fact that many of those dollars are "claimed" by debts not yet paid. "They may be pushing out payables to 90 days, or have a huge credit card balance they are not paying back," Cupp says. "So, in fact, they have negative liquidity even though there's money in the checking account to make payroll."

Track short-term assets vs. short-term liability by adding up all of these liabilities – what you owe vendors, banks, etc. Compare that number to actual cash in the business. If your liabilities exceed assets, then you've got negative cash flow – even if the bills aren't due yet and money's in the bank.

Here's how you figure out your assets-to-liability ratio. If you have \$100,000 cash in receivables, but you owe vendors \$250,000, your ratio is 2.5. "This is not good," Cupp says.

On the other hand, if you have \$100,000 in receivables and owe \$60,000 to vendors (an acceptable ratio), your ratio is 0.6. "That means 60% of cash coming in your door will service short-term debt," Cupp says. The lower the debt ratio, the better.

WATCH IT: Monthly

7. Equity Compared to Previous Year

OWN IT: This is essentially the book value of the company. "Business owners want to increase their equity year over year," Cupp says. That happens by paying off debt, increasing profitability and watching the numbers. A positive equity trend over the years indicates continued improvement. If you ever want to sell your business, buyers want to see this upward trend.

MEASURE IT: There isn't an ideal number here – it's a matter of watching performance and ensuring that equity increases every year. "You want positive numbers," Cupp says, adding that he takes depreciation fees out of this figure.

WATCH IT: Monthly – but take a good, hard look at year-end.

8. COGS

OWN IT: COGS is your cost of goods sold, and the benchmark is a percentage of sales. Say you made \$100,000 in a month and spent \$55,000 (materials, labor, subcontractors, workers' compensation, fuel). Divide COGS by the revenue, in this case \$100,000, and you'll get a percentage that tells you how efficiently your business is running.

MEASURE IT: No matter the size of your business, COGS should be less than 60%. If COGS is off-mark, you're either not charging enough for services, or paying people too much – and you're not efficient. A small maintenance business might have a COGS of 35% to 45% of sales, Cupp says. "A large company with a lot of employees and other divisions besides maintenance might be 50% to 55% percent of sales. And a construction company will typically be more than 50%."

WATCH IT: Monthly



9. Overhead Cost to Revenue Percentage

OWN IT: This number will tell you what it costs to run your business.

MEASURE IT: Find out by figuring out your overhead (rent, loans, owners' salary, office staff, computer system, utilities) – any cost required to keep the lights on. Overhead should be about 25% to 35% of revenues, Cupp says.

If you add cost of goods sold to this figure – say 50% or 60% – you can determine net profit. So, 25% overhead as percent of revenue plus 60% COGS equals 85% in expenses, leaving you with a 15% net profit margin.

"You want overhead to stay static as you grow," Cupp says. Increasing sales and maintaining overhead will ultimately increase your net profit if cost of goods sold are in line.

"There are businesses that take on too much overhead, so they have to increase sales. Or, they have an efficient business but they don't have enough sales to service the overhead so their profitability decreases."

WATCH IT: Monthly

“
THERE ARE BUSINESSES THAT TAKE ON TOO MUCH OVERHEAD, SO THEY HAVE TO INCREASE SALES. OR, THEY HAVE AN EFFICIENT BUSINESS BUT THEY DON'T HAVE ENOUGH SALES TO SERVICE THE OVERHEAD SO THEIR PROFITABILITY DECREASES.
”

Jason Cupp, a Kolbe Certified growth consultant



10. Extras Sold

OWN IT: How are you enhancing your recurring revenue with add-on sales? Every maintenance contract represents a sales opportunity, and that's what percentage of extras sold in relation to maintenance sales will tell you, Arman says.

MEASURE IT: For a standard commercial maintenance business, Arman likes to see 30% to 35% of recurring revenue in enhancements. A company servicing high-end residential clients might have enhancements up to 80% to 100% of recurring revenue.

For example, a maintenance contract on a commercial account that brings in \$100,000 of revenue per year should also produce \$30,000 to \$35,000 per year in enhancement revenue. That enhancement number can double the overall revenue on an account that's high-end residential, taking a \$100,000 recurring revenue property to \$200,000 total revenue for the year including enhancements.

WATCH IT: Monthly

11. Accounts Receivable Aging

OWN IT: "You can do everything right: You can have a safety program, enhancement sales and grow the business every year – but if you don't collect the money, it's for naught," Arman says. Accounts receivable aging is what clients owe you – and how long they're taking to pay you.

MEASURE IT: You're not the bank. When clients drag out payment beyond 30 days, you're essentially giving them a loan. The first key to controlling accounts receivables is to bill on time – don't wait until the end of the month. "If you have a \$5,000 maintenance contract for July, you should be billing that the first week of July or even the last week of June to get the cash flow," Arman says.

Bill enhancements immediately. And take advantage of technology like electronic funds transfer (EFT) or automatic withdrawal payment plans. "Cash flow can tear away your profit margin," Arman warns. "We like to see accounts receivables at less than 30 days, and no more than 60 days," he says.

WATCH IT: Weekly, or more often

12. Liability (Cost of Lost or Damaged Property)

OWN IT: When a vehicle or piece of equipment is down, how much does that cost your business? By tracking the cost of damaged vehicles and equipment, you can flag hiring and training problems. (Is one employee racking up major repair bills?)

MEASURE IT: Focus on the big bloopers – especially if damage is out of disregard for your equipment and tools, Arman says. There isn't an exact number or percentage to watch here, but keep the number on your radar and connect the dots if liability increases. "This information can be part of your review and training process," Arman says.

WATCH IT: Monthly

13. Net Profit and Your P&L

OWN IT: Net profit is the number that tells you whether you're making money – or spending more than you produce. "We're in the business to do two things: grow and profit," Arman says.

MEASURE IT: Most landscape maintenance and construction companies are 8% to 12% net profit, and some successful maintenance firms are netting up to 20%. "Tree companies tend to be more profitable, as well as companies with snow blended into the mix because gross margins on snow are higher," Arman says. (Review our benchmarking charts on pages 14 to 15 for specifics.)

WATCH IT: Monthly

“

**TREE COMPANIES
TEND TO BE MORE
PROFITABLE, AS WELL
AS COMPANIES WITH
SNOW BLENDED INTO
THE MIX BECAUSE
GROSS MARGINS ON
SNOW ARE HIGHER.**

”

Bill Arman, consultant/partner
in The Harvest Group



PRICE IT RIGHT

Forget guesswork, and stop focusing on what every competitor is charging. Smart pricing is based on real numbers – your numbers.

By Kristen Hampshire



WHAT'S THE FIRST BURNING QUESTION

that comes to mind when you meet another landscape contractor? If you're like most contractors, it's: How much do you charge for services?

Smart pricing isn't about a happy medium, or being the highest or lowest in the market. Market forces, service mix, client make-up – all of these factors figure into a pricing model. And unless you're sharing notes with a competitor, or someone located in your region, you're comparing apples to oranges.

If you know your numbers, you can nail the perfect price so your business profits. And isn't that the point of a price – to charge for services so you can make money?

"When you know your numbers, you are so empowered – you know exactly what it will take to complete a job," says Marty Grunder, green industry consultant. You'll know whether you can let out some rope when a client asks to cut back a price. And you'll know when to hold tight. You don't want to work for free, remember.

Losing nickels and dimes is a big deal when you look at the cumulative effect of poor pricing. Being "a little off" can cost a lot of money that companies could be keeping as profit.

Jim Huston, consultant/owner of JR Huston Consulting, shares how a company employed technicians who worked nine hours per day, but the owner was only billing seven hours per day for

each employee. That added up to \$120 per day of under-billing – and \$120,000 for the year. When figuring price, the owner simply didn't account for all of his technicians' time.

Another client increased his price by \$10/hour per employee in September because he wasn't achieving profitability benchmarks. (Those are found on page 10.) "We realized this in February, and this year, he increased his rate by \$10 and it made a huge difference on his net profit year-to-date," Huston says. Specifically, this contractor will "find" an extra \$60,000 in revenue by correcting that pricing discrepancy.

Pricing properly is the key to actually making money in business, but a range of market forces and even client scenarios that make picking your price challenging. Here are some factors to consider as you build your price.

A HISTORY LESSON. Start pricing right by reviewing your mistakes. You know, the job you bid on for 100 hours and spent 150 hours completing – or the account that gets billed \$5,000 per month but seems to tie up all your time.

Rather than brushing off pricing mistakes with a "we'll do better next time" attitude, really study what went wrong (and right). Talk to your crews; find out what happened in the field. Do so with a mind toward improvement, not reliving the past.

"Smart entrepreneurs don't make the same mistakes over and over," Grunder says. "Keep score. Pay attention to pricing mistakes so you can reflect on what happened and make changes."

SCOPE OUT YOUR MARKET. If you're a landscaper in Tampa, Florida don't bother comparing your pricing with an owner in The Hamptons. Cost of living is different – so is the client base and the overall economy. Know what competitors are charging, but focus on companies that are in your area and that perform the services you also offer to your target customers.

"If you must charge dramatically more to make a profit than your competitor, then maybe that's a service you should not take on," says Jason Cupp, a Kolbe certified growth consultant.

So, before you do take on a

tion), the company is more profitable than ever. They are already back up to more than \$1 million in sales. They realized that their cost of goods sold for landscaping was \$0.75 to the dollar, and it is \$0.45 for maintenance."

The improved profitability has lessened owners' stress. "Their lives are drastically different both financially and operationally," Cupp says.

KNOW YOUR HAWS. Hourly average wages (HAWs for short) is "the core of how you price your work," says Bill Arman, consultant/partner in The Harvest Group. HAWs includes burden

then divide it by the number of employees to get the average wage. Then, add the labor burden. The result is your hourly average wage. The price of your services must cover this wage plus account for a profit.

Cupp refers to this figure as the "loaded cost of employees," and he reminds contractors that it's much more than the hourly wage.

COST OF MATERIALS. Now that you know your HAWs, figure in the cost of materials to find out what a project is really going to cost you. Again, this depends on the service. Landscape installation services are materials-

the \$7/square foot option. If you bill that client a price-per-square foot to complete the job, there's a major profit discrepancy there.

Or, what if a job requires more equipment, or will take more time because of access issues on the property or other complexities? A straight-up square foot pricing structure might be good for a back-of-the-napkin estimate, but it doesn't account for variables that can add up and eat away profit.

OVERHEAD RECOVERY. You've got your hourly wage and know the materials cost. You've figured in time for the nuances of the job – the hours you'll bill for the project. What's left is overhead: The cost of keeping your lights on.

"Office staff does not make the company a single dollar – by answering phones, invoicing, getting the mail," Cupp says. "The people who make your company are those out working in the field."

That means, all of those administrative expenses must be rolled up into a nice, neat hourly cost that can be included in your pricing. Otherwise, you're footing the bill for overhead from your own paycheck. "Recovery" is the key word here – you want pricing to automatically recover the cost of your overhead.

CONCLUSION. So, are you running a business that turns a profit, or working around the clock to pay the bills? Pricing is the difference between profit and loss – between running a business, or the business running you. \$

SMART ENTREPRENEURS DON'T MAKE THE SAME MISTAKES OVER AND OVER. KEEP SCORE. PAY ATTENTION TO PRICING MISTAKES SO YOU CAN REFLECT ON WHAT HAPPENED AND MAKE CHANGES.

Marty Grunder, green industry consultant

new service, determine whether you can achieve a desirable profit margin and still compete in your market.

One of Cupp's clients earning \$1.1 million annually – \$400,000 in construction and \$700,000 in maintenance – discovered his revenue and profitability would increase if he closed the landscape install division.

"Maintenance is fully scheduled and there aren't as many weather and material issues, and it's not as capital intensive," Cupp says. "After two years of not doing landscape (construc-

(taxes, workers' compensation, health benefits, Social Security, Medicare, etc.) for every revenue stream.

The labor burden for positions in a landscape company varies. For example, tree climbers have a higher labor burden because of workers' compensation costs – safety is a bigger issue for the tree professional than a gardener. That's why you must figure HAWs for every profit center.

Here's the math Arman provides to figure out HAWs: Add the base pay rate for each person in the given revenue stream,

intensive; maintenance is more about moving equipment.

Cupp advises against pricing per square foot, since materials costs can vary significantly. For example, say a client chooses pavers that are \$22/square foot vs.





SEE HOW YOU STACK UP

Use our exclusive research to learn how your operation compares to the rest of the industry.



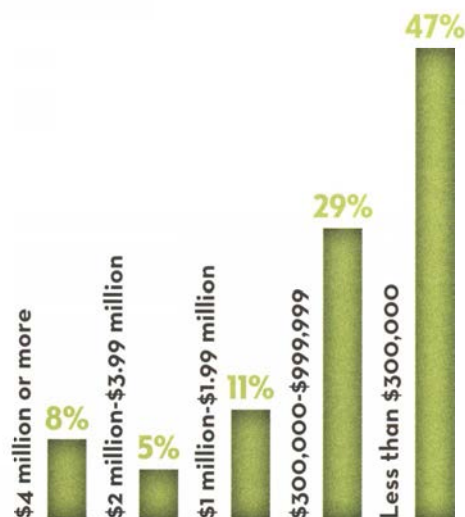
E'VE BEEN PUBLISHING our annual Benchmarking Your Business report for more than a decade, and it's still one of our most popular sections. It's the best place for landscapers and lawn care operators to learn how their own numbers measure up to those of their competitors and the industry as a whole.

In the pages that follow, we offer up data that outline revenue, profit margins (net and gross), as well as rates of pay for employees and managers. For the 2015 report, we teamed up with Readex Research, which allowed us to ask more detailed questions and dig deeper into the areas you told us you wanted to know more about.

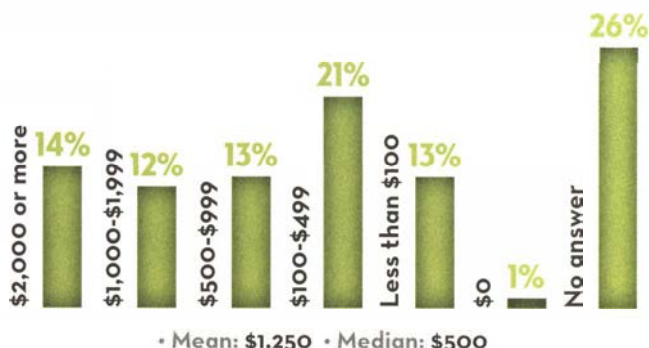
So, you'll also get insight into nationwide employee retention rates, percentile breakdowns of owners' salaries, average profit per customer, hourly labor rates and average crew sizes.

Crunch the numbers to see how your operation stacks up to the industry nationwide – and visit our Benchmarking Your Business app at Lawnandlandscape.com/benchmark to see how your numbers compare to specific regions and download segment-specific budget calculators. – *Chuck Bowen*

WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S GROSS REVENUE IN 2014?



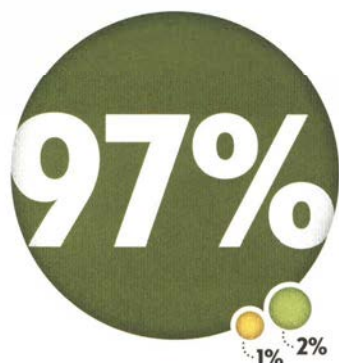
WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S AVERAGE PROFIT PER CUSTOMER IN 2014?



WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S AVERAGE REVENUE PER CUSTOMER IN 2014?

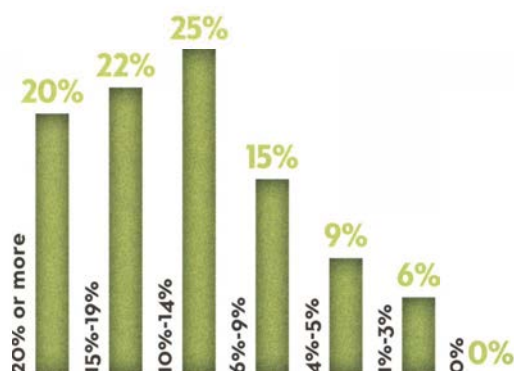


WILL YOU TURN A NET PROFIT IN 2015?



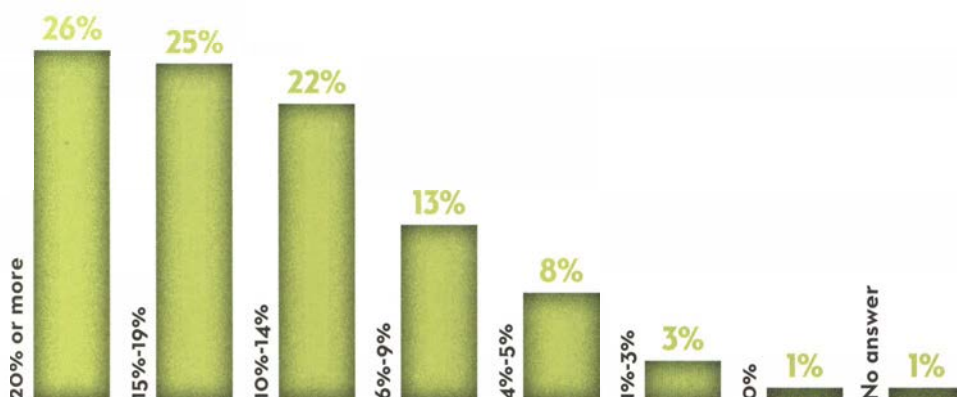
● Profit ● Loss ● No answer

IF YOU SAW A PROFIT, IN WHAT RANGE WAS YOUR NET PROFIT MARGIN?



• Mean: 12.9% • Median: 14%

WHAT DO YOU ESTIMATE YOUR LOCATION'S 2016 NET PROFIT MARGIN TO BE?



• Mean: 14.1% • Median: 15%

COMPARED TO 2015, HOW DO YOU ANTICIPATE YOUR LOCATION'S 2016 GROSS REVENUE TO CHANGE?



ON AVERAGE, WHAT DOES YOUR LOCATION CHARGE PER HOUR FOR LABOR FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES IT PROVIDES?

\$46

Landscape maintenance

\$56

Landscape construction/
design/build

\$55

Lawn care/
chemical application

\$60

Irrigation installation/
maintenance

\$80

Snow and ice management

\$67

Tree care

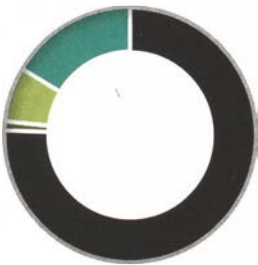


SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The 2015 Benchmarking Your Business survey was designed jointly by Lawn & Landscape and Readex Research, and fielded from Aug. 5-17. The survey's 289 responses represent an estimated population of 15,300 landscape contractors. The margin of error is 6.0 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level. Some charts do not total 100 percent due to rounding.



DOES YOUR LOCATION LEASE ITS MOWING EQUIPMENT, BUY IT OUTRIGHT, OR A COMBINATION OF BOTH?



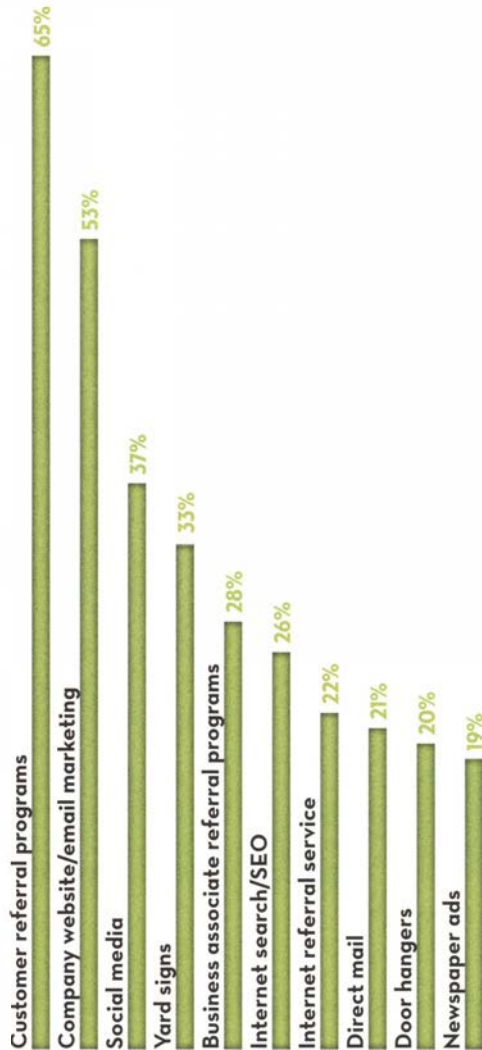
- Buy: 75%
- Lease: 1%
- Both: 7%
- Don't have mowing equipment: 16%

FOR HOW MANY YEARS DOES YOUR LOCATION TYPICALLY LEASE ITS MOWING EQUIPMENT?

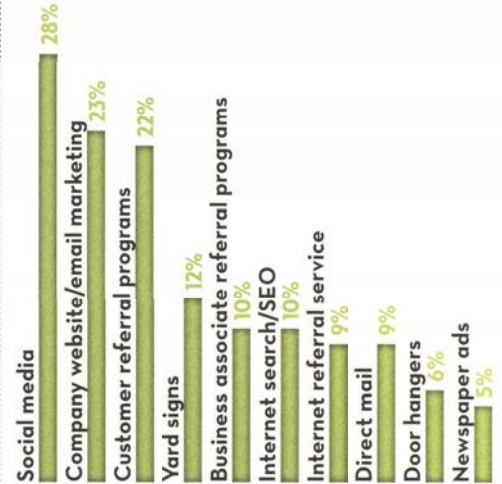


- Less than 1: 14%
- 1: 5%
- 2: 29%
- 3: 38%
- 4: 10%
- 5 or more: 5%

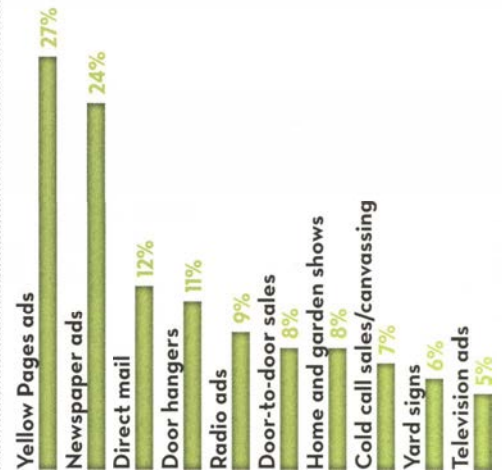
WHAT MARKETING METHODS DOES YOUR LOCATION USE TO OBTAIN NEW BUSINESS? (TOP 10 RESPONSES)



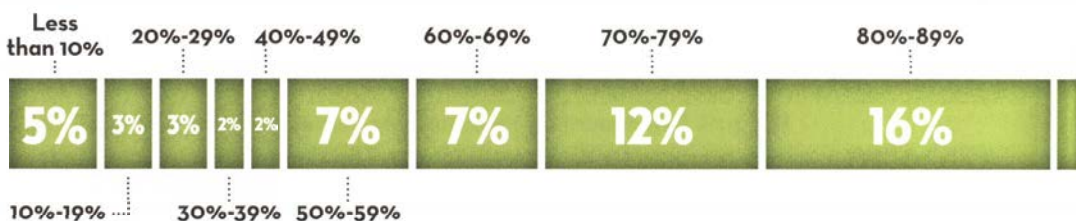
WHAT MARKETING METHODS HAS YOUR LOCATION **STARTED USING IN THE PAST THREE YEARS? (TOP 10 RESPONSES)**



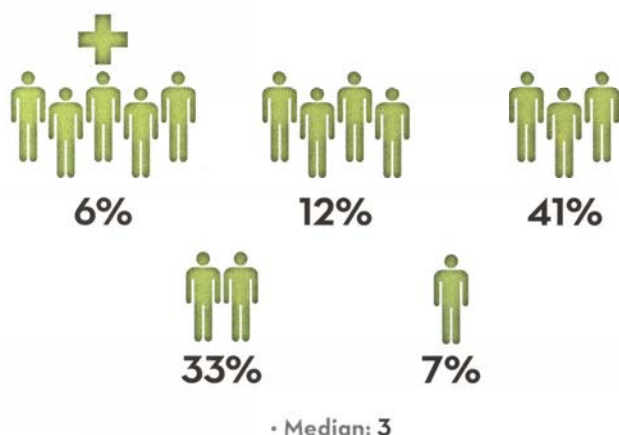
WHAT MARKETING METHODS HAS YOUR LOCATION **STOPPED USING IN THE PAST THREE YEARS? (TOP 10 RESPONSES)**



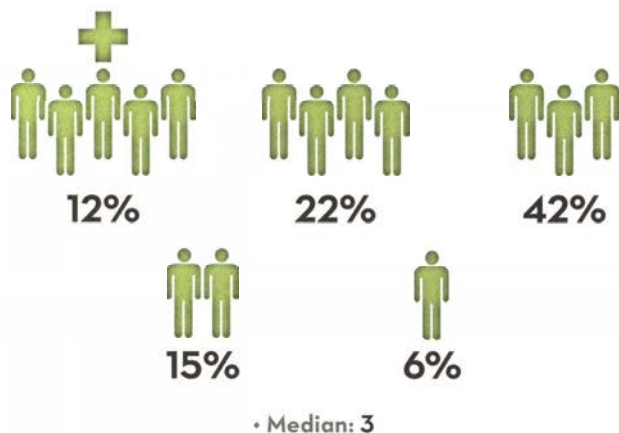
WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S RETENTION RATE FOR ITS EMPLOYEES IN THE PAST 12 MONTHS?



INCLUDING YOURSELF (IF APPLICABLE),
WHAT IS YOUR LOCATION'S TYPICAL LANDSCAPE
MAINTENANCE CREW SIZE?



INCLUDING YOURSELF (IF APPLICABLE), WHAT
IS YOUR LOCATION'S TYPICAL LANDSCAPE CONSTRUCTION/
DESIGN/BUILD CREW SIZE?



90%-99%

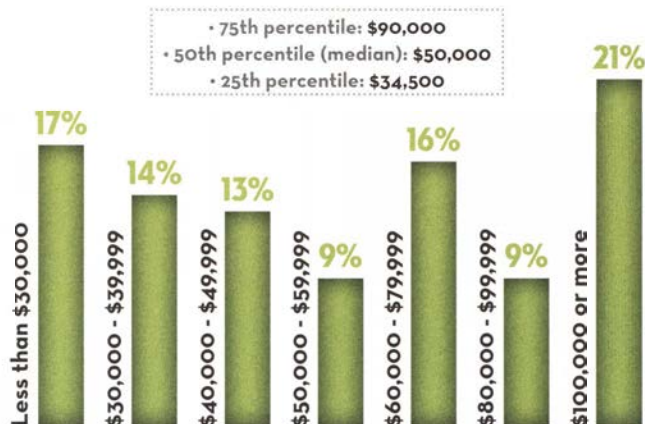
100%

13%

27%

• Mean: 76% • Median: 84%

AS OF JUNE 1, WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S AVERAGE
ANNUAL SALARY FOR ITS OWNER/PRESIDENT?



AS OF JUNE 1, WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S AVERAGE
ANNUAL SALARY FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS?

\$50,000

Owner/president

\$40,800

Landscape designer

\$55,000

Landscape architect

\$40,000

Supervisor

\$50,000

Account manager

\$36,500

Office manager

\$49,900

Salesperson

\$35,000

Crew foreman/leader

AS OF JUNE 1, WHAT DID YOUR LOCATION PAY PER HOUR,
ON AVERAGE, FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING POSITIONS?

Mower operator: Entry level ... **\$10** Experienced ... **\$12**

Mechanic: Entry level ... **\$14** Experienced ... **\$18**

Irrigation technician: Entry level ... **\$12** Experienced ... **\$16**

Spray technician: Entry level ... **\$12** Experienced ... **\$15**

Construction worker: Entry level ... **\$11** Experienced ... **\$15**

P&L PLANNER

Start your annual budgeting process with these samples for each of your landscape profit centers.

MAINTENANCE

COST OF GOODS SOLD (Direct Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Materials (with tax)	5-10%	7.5%
Gas & oil	3-5%	4%
Labor (field)	30-40%	35%
Labor burden (field)	20-30%	25% (as a percent of labor)
	8-10%	9% (as a percent of sales)
Subcontractors	0-5%	2.5% (can vary dramatically)
Equipment*	9-13%	11%
Equipment rentals	1-2%	1.5%
Miscellaneous direct job costs	0-2%	1%
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS	60-70%	65% of sales
GROSS PROFIT MARGIN	30-40%	35%

GENERAL and ADMINISTRATIVE (G&A) OVERHEAD (Indirect Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Advertising	0.5-2%	1.25%
Bad debts	0.5-1%	0.75%
Utilities	0.25-0.75%	0.5%
Donations	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Downtime	1-2%	1.5%
Downtime with labor burden	1.25-2.5%	1.75%
Dues and subscriptions	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Medical insurance for office staff	0-2.5%	1.75%
Interest and bank charges	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Licenses and related bonds	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Office equipment, computers, software	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Office supplies	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Professional fees	1-1.5%	1.25%
Cell phones	0.5-1%	0.75%
Rent	2-4%	3%
Salaries, office staff/officers	10-12%	11%
Salaries labor burden	12-15%	13% (as a percent of labor)
Small tools/supplies	0.5-1.0%	0.75%
Taxes (business asset tax)		0.1%
Training and education	0.2-0.3%	0.25%
Travel and entertainment	0.3-0.5%	0.4%
Uniforms and safety equipment	0.2-0.5%	0.4%
Vehicles, overhead	1.5-2.0%	1.75%
Yard expense and lease-hold improvements	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Miscellaneous	0-0.1%	0.05%
TOTAL INDIRECT COSTS	24-26%	25%
NET PROFIT MARGIN	10% (good) 15% (very good) 20% (outstanding)	

* Includes insurances, depreciation, repairs, mechanics, fuel, etc., for all vehicles and field equipment but minus G&A overhead vehicles

LAWN CARE

COST OF GOODS SOLD (Direct Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Materials (with tax)	15-25%	20.05%
Gas and oil	2-4%	3%
Labor (field)	20-30%	25%
Labor burden (field)	20-30%	25% (as a percent of labor)
	5-8%	6.5% (as a percent of sales)
Subcontractors	0-5%	2.5%
Equipment*	8-12%	10%
Equipment rentals	0-1%	0.5%
Miscellaneous direct job costs	0-1%	0.5%
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS	50-60%	55%
GROSS PROFIT MARGIN	40-50%	45%

GENERAL and ADMINISTRATIVE (G&A) OVERHEAD (Indirect Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Advertising	2-6%	4%
Bad debts	0.5-1%	0.75%
Utilities	0.25-0.75%	0.5%
Donations	1-2%	1.5%
Downtime	1.25-2.5%	1.75%
Downtime with labor burden	1-1.5%	1.25%
Dues and subscriptions	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Medical insurance for office staff	0-2.5%	1.75%
Interest and bank charges	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Licenses and related bonds	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Office equipment, computers, software	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Office supplies	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Professional fees	1-1.5%	1.25%
Cell phones	0.5-1%	0.75%
Rent	2.0-4.0%	3%
Salaries, office staff/officers	10-12%	11%
Salaries labor burden	12-15%	13.5% (as a percent of labor)
Small tools/supplies	1-1.5%	1.25%
Taxes (business asset tax)		0.1%
Training and education	0.2-0.3%	0.25%
Travel and entertainment	0.3-0.5%	0.4%
Uniforms and safety equipment	0.2-0.5%	0.4%
Vehicles, overhead	1.5-2.0%	1.75%
Yard expense and lease-hold improvements	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Miscellaneous	0-0.1%	0.05%
TOTAL INDIRECT COSTS	29-31%	30%
NET PROFIT MARGIN	20-35%	27.5%

📄 VISIT LAWNANDLANDSCAPE.COM TO ACCESS OUR BENCHMARKING YOUR BUSINESS APP, WHICH INCLUDES INTERACTIVE BUDGET CHARTS, PLANNING GUIDES FOR TREE CARE, SNOW AND IRRIGATION SERVICE AND REAL-TIME FINANCIAL COMPARISONS FOR YOUR REGION.



DESIGN/BUILD

COST OF GOODS SOLD (Direct Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Materials (with tax)	27-33%	30%
Gas and oil	3-5%	4%
Labor (field)	18-22%	20%
Labor burden (field)	20-30%	25% (as a percent of labor)
Subcontractors	0-10%	5% (can vary dramatically)
Equipment*	8-10%	10%
Equipment rentals	2-3%	2.5%
Miscellaneous direct job costs	0-2%	1%
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS	65-75% of sales	70%
GROSS PROFIT MARGIN	30-40%	35%

GENERAL and ADMINISTRATIVE (G&A) OVERHEAD (Indirect Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Advertising	1-2%	1.5%
Bad debts	0.5-1%	0.75%
Utilities	0.25-0.75%	0.5%
Donations	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Downtime	1-2%	1.5%
Downtime with labor burden	1.25-2.5%	1.75%
Dues and subscriptions	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Medical insurance for office staff	0-2.5%	1.75%
Interest and bank charges	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Licenses and related bonds	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Office equipment, computers, software	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Office supplies	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Professional fees	1-1.5%	1.25%
Cell phones	0.5-1%	0.75%
Rent	2-4%	3%
Salaries, office staff/officers	10-12%	11%
Salaries, labor burden	12-15%	13.5% (as a percent of labor)
Small tools/supplies	1-1.5%	1.25%
Taxes (business asset tax)		0.1%
Training and education	0.2-0.3%	0.25%
Travel and entertainment	0.3-0.5%	0.4%
Uniforms and safety equipment	0.2-0.5%	0.4%
Vehicles, overhead	1.5-2.0%	1.75%
Yard expense and lease-hold improvements	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Miscellaneous	0-0.1%	0.05%
TOTAL INDIRECT COSTS	25%	24-26%
NET PROFIT MARGIN	10-20%	15%

IRRIGATION SERVICE

COST OF GOODS SOLD (Direct Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Materials	10-20%	15%
Direct labor	22-25%	23.5%
Labor burden	25-35%	30% (as a percent of labor)
Equipment*	8-10%	9%
Subcontractors	0%	0%
Miscellaneous	0-2%	1%
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS	45-55%	50%
GROSS PROFIT MARGIN	22-28%	25%

GENERAL and ADMINISTRATIVE (G&A) OVERHEAD (Indirect Costs)	RANGE	AVERAGE
Advertising	1-2%	1.5%
Bad debts	0.5-1%	0.75%
Utilities	0.25-0.75%	0.5%
Donations	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Downtime	1-2%	1.5%
Downtime with labor burden	1.25-2.5%	1.75%
Dues and subscriptions	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Medical insurance for office staff	0-2.5%	1.75%
Interest and bank charges	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Licenses and related bonds	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Office equipment, computers, software	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Office supplies	0.2-0.4%	0.3%
Professional fees	1-1.5%	1.25%
Cellphones	0.5-1%	0.75%
Rent	2-4%	3%
Salaries, office staff/officers	10-12%	11%
Salaries, labor burden	12-15%	13.5% (as a percent of labor)
Small tools/supplies	1-1.5%	1.25%
Taxes (business asset tax)		0.1%
Training and education	0.2-0.3%	0.25%
Travel and entertainment	0.3-0.5%	0.4%
Uniforms and safety equipment	0.2-0.5%	0.4%
Vehicles, overhead	1.5-2.0%	1.75%
Yard expense and lease-hold improvements	0.1-0.2%	0.15%
Miscellaneous	0-0.1%	0.05%
TOTAL INDIRECT COSTS	25%	24-26%
NET PROFIT MARGIN	15-25%	20%

NOTE: These benchmarks apply to a typical economy, so account for some shrinkage of gross and net profit margins in a recessionary economy.

RESHAPING. REFINING. RE-IMAGINING.



IT'S NEW. AND, THERE'S NEVER BEEN ANYTHING LIKE IT.

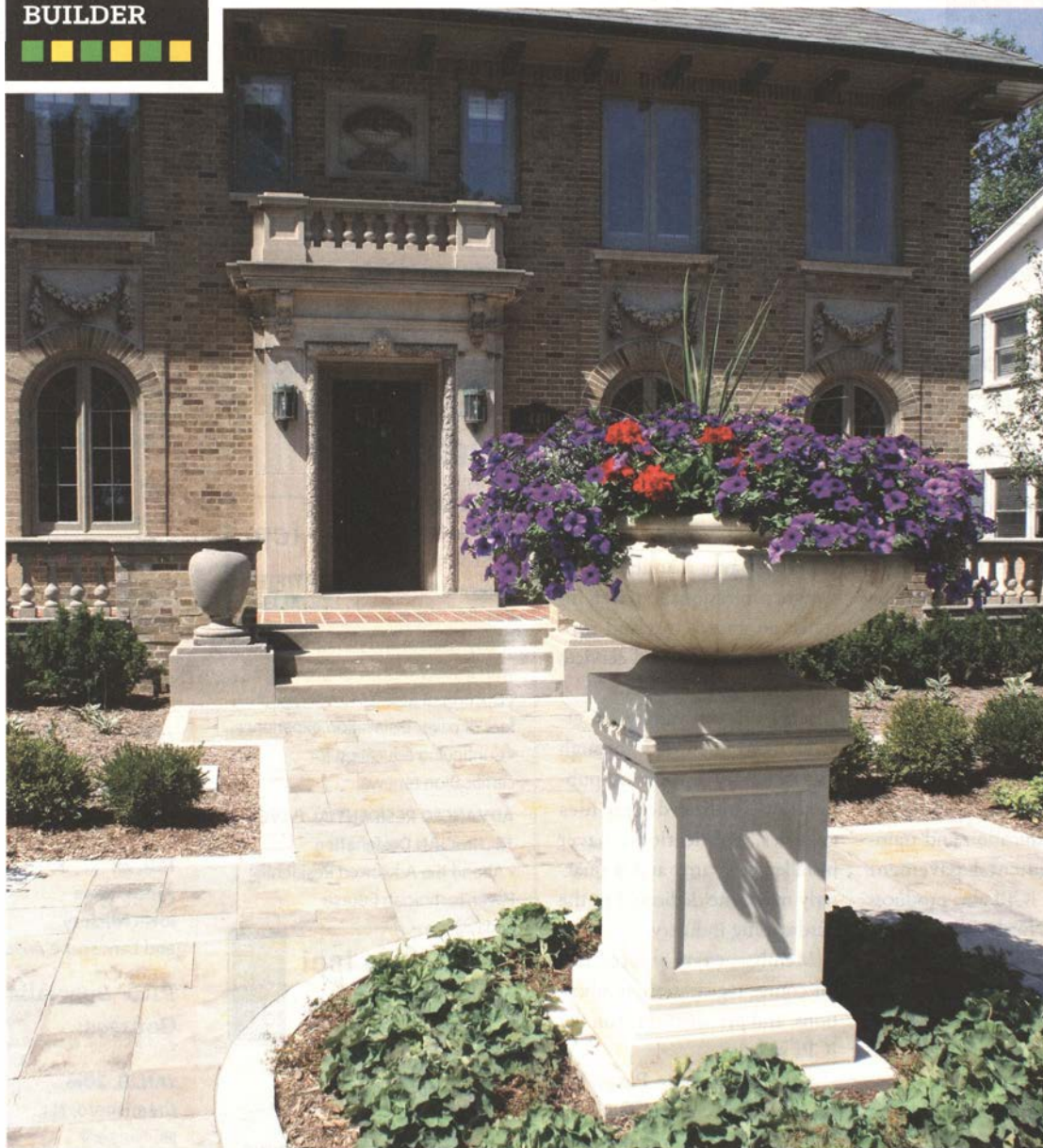
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Welcome reception

How Stano Landscaping upgraded the entrance for an Italianate residence in Milwaukee.

+ ICPI certification opportunities + Profile: Terrapin Landscaping

A SUPPLEMENT TO

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 **icpi**
Interlocking Concrete
Pavement Institute

ICPI notebook

The latest news for landscapers from the hardscaping association.

The Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute (ICPI) announces media partnership with Lawn & Landscape

The ICPI announces a new partnership with Lawn & Landscape magazine to assist them in educating landscape and hardscape contractors on construction best practices. ICPI plans to support the magazine in presenting editorial content to educate readers on technical challenges facing contractors on a daily basis.

The ICPI is the leading resource for education and training for segmental pavement contractors. ICPI also produces Hardscape North America, the largest national trade show for hardscaping. Training is provided by leading educators in the industry with years of hardscape contracting experience.

Each month ICPI will bring information to you about education, advocacy, construction and marketing. This issue focuses on installer certification and designations from ICPI.

• **ICPI Vision:** As background, ICPI supports members in assuring segmental pavement systems are the preferred choice for sustainable and environmentally friendly pavements in North America.

• **ICPI Mission:** ICPI's mission is to increase awareness, acceptance and use of segmental concrete pavement systems in North America.

• **ICPI Membership:** Membership consists of segmental concrete paver manufacturers, design professionals, paver installation contractors and suppliers of products and services related to the industry.

ICPI offers a variety of services to its members through its vast library of technical publications, online design idea galleries, publications, paver installer programs and a quarterly magazine dedicated to the hardscaping industry.

Members enjoy reduced fees for course registration, publications, and priority listing on the ICPI website.

• **ICPI Concrete Paver Installer Certification:** Begun in 1994, the ICPI Concrete Paver Installer Certification program has seen over 25,000 installers taking the course and exam.

This certification is now recognized by design professionals as it is continually promoted in ICPI guide specifications, publications, and its quarterly magazine Interlock Design which is distributed to over 28,000 design professionals, contractors, suppliers and manufacturers.

ICPI also promotes installer certification in national articles in consumer and trade publications.

ICPI Certification and Designation Opportunities

ICPI CERTIFIED INSTALLER

- Attend the Concrete Paver Installer Course (2-day course) and pass an exam with a score of 75% or greater.
- Document at least 10,000 square feet of paver installation experience.
- Continuing education for certification renewal



ADVANCED RESIDENTIAL PAVER TECHNICIAN Designation

- Attend the Advanced Residential Paver Technician Course (2 days) and pass the exam with a score of 75% or greater.
- Current ICPI Concrete Paver Installer Certification
- Document at least 50,000 square feet of paver installation experience in the residential market.



COMMERCIAL PAVER TECHNICIAN Designation

- Attend the Commercial Paver Technician Course (2 days) and pass the exam with a score of 75% or greater.
- Current ICPI Concrete Paver Installer Certification
- Document at least 50,000 square feet of paver installation experience in the commercial market.



UPCOMING COURSES

Concrete Paver Installer Courses:

DEC. 1-2, 2015
Charlotte, N.C.
Blue Max Materials
& Belgard Hardscapes

DEC. 14-15, 2015
Henderson, Colo.
Pavestone

JAN. 6-7, 2015
Indianapolis
Indiana Green Expo
& Techo-Bloc

JAN. 11-12, 2016
Greensboro, N.C.
NC Nursery & Landscape
Association/Belgard

FEB. 22-23, 2016
Ames, Iowa
Iowa Nursery
and Landscape Association

PICP Specialist Courses:

JAN. 11, 2016
Greensboro, N.C.
NC Nursery
& Landscape Association

Advanced Residential Paver Technician Courses:

DEC. 3-4, 2015
Boston
New England Grows

DEC. 15-16, 2015
Knoxville, Tenn.
Belgard Hardscapes
and Adams Products,
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For more on ICPI and certification, visit ICPI.org.

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WELCOME RECEPTION

An Italianate residence along Lake Michigan's shoreline in Milwaukee had an existing entrance walk that was unimpressive and in disrepair.

The client requested Milwaukee-based Stano Landscaping design an entrance courtyard that respected and complimented the formal architecture of the home, and a wow factor that would turn the heads of passers-by. The project was implemented in 2013, with design and construction completed in 45 days. The \$48,000 project was designed by Daniel Norris.

1. A broad paver walkway establishes a dominant center-line axis, which resonates throughout the entire design. As one approaches the residence, the walkway broadens into a bell-shaped courtyard that creates a spacious outdoor room.

2. The courtyard is anchored at its center by a planter urn, creating the focal point and visual impact the owner desired. After an exhaustive regional search, this planter was chosen for its appropriate scale, architectural style and classic simplicity. The planter consisted of a 42-inch diameter ribbed bowl, supported by a classic paneled pedestal.

3. This planter was also selected because it successfully mirrored the decorative bowl image in the original carved-stone panel located above the front door.



BEFORE



PHOTO COURTESY OF STANO LANDSCAPING



PHOTOGRAPH BY
TIMOTHY

1

2

3



Design your dream

Terrapin Landscaping shifted from mostly mowing into doing the work owner Mike Corsie is passionate about: sophisticated design/build projects for clients who care about quality.

By Kristen Hampshire

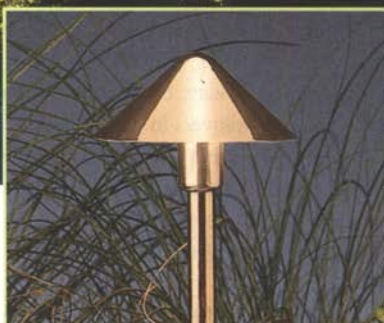
After a decade in business, Mike Corsie felt like he was losing out. With two full-time mowing crews and 70-plus clients who only hired Terrapin Landscaping to cut lawns, Corsie was frustrated that property owners who had worked with his company were going elsewhere for their large design/build projects.

"I felt like I was getting trapped into that category of, 'Terrapin Landscaping is a lawn-mowing company,'" says Corsie, president of the Kennebunkport, Maine-based firm he started in 2001, after years of working in the industry for other landscaping businesses.

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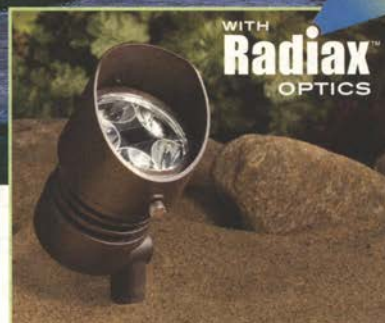
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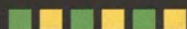


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There was an evident gap between how Corsie wanted Terrapin to work on a client's property – as a complete solution for maintenance, design projects and more – and how clients viewed the company's capabilities.

Corsie believed marketing and image were the crux of his problem.

He wanted to evolve into a primarily design/build firm that could capture significant projects, which earn higher profit margins than maintenance (about 20 percent vs. 10 percent).

"I would be at a customer's property for maintenance and see a new patio," Corsie says. "And I'd say, 'Oh, you did a patio. I didn't know you wanted a patio. I would have liked to do that.' And they'd say, 'I didn't know you did that.'"

This dialogue concerned Corsie, and it interfered with his growth plans for the company. Corsie always appreciated the recurring revenue maintenance brought in.

He built a loyal client list and became a visible player in his area with mowing, but he wanted to flip his crew breakdown and operate two gardening/installation crews and a single mowing team.

"Like any businessman, it's hard to say no, so the lawn mowing part of the business grew, and everyone saw us out there mowing 300 accounts," Corsie says.

"But, no one ever saw us doing the design/build projects. They just weren't as prominent, so the last couple of years we have been focused on pushing that part of the business."

Corsie began efforts three years ago to shift the business mix to primarily design/build. The un-



Corsie cut back on mowing to focus more on design/build projects.

“We transformed the business from a company that was doing smaller plantings and patio jobs into a company that could handle anything from ground-up site work to large stone walls.”

Mike Corsie, Terrapin

veiling of Terrapin Landscaping's new website was in July this year. Here are the steps Corsie took to change his business course.

TRIMMING BACK MOWING. Corsie's weakness is saying no.

"Eventually, I was putting so much energy into a part of the business that I wasn't as interested in," he says of mowing.

Mowing is an important part of the business, Corsie says. "It's reliable work."

But crews were so dedicated to maintenance that there was little time to even consider other projects. Corsie had to cut out some mowing before he could grow the design/build side of the firm.

So last year, he selected about 20-30 clients that were solely mowing accounts and never asked Terrapin to do anything more.

Corsie sent out a letter explaining that he wanted to focus the company's energy on design/build and hardscape work.

He gave them a referral to a trusted mowing professional in town. The arrangement worked out because this guy only wanted to mow lawns, and Corsie was looking to pass on some of

those accounts. Then this spring, Corsie mailed out another wave of letters to about 50 more mowing-only clients.

Today, the firm has the most employees in its history, 22, and is running one mowing crew, an installation crew and a crew that flexes between maintenance and gardening.

INVESTING IN INSTALLATION. If Corsie was going to sell design/build work beyond the patios and more basic installations, he needed to build up his resources. That started two years ago with recruiting a stone mason.

Next, Corsie went to the bank for an SBA-backed loan to finance equipment purchases. Those included an excavator, skid-steer loader and a larger truck.

"Overnight, we transformed the business from a company that was doing smaller plantings and patio jobs into a company

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A well-designed partnership

Maintenance has helped build relationships for Mike Corsie over the years, especially a partnership with Snug Harbor Farm. At first, the nursery owner had clients who were unhappy with their mowing services, so he approached Corsie, president of Terrapin Landscaping. "He asked me if I could help him out, and the relationship blossomed from there," Corsie says.

Then, the nursery owner was also struggling with staffing a landscaping crew. Corsie wanted more of this type of work to build up the installation side of his operation. "I said, 'Why don't you have us do your landscape?' and we went from there," Corsie says. The nursery owner is an established designer. So now, he completes the design work for Corsie's clients, and Terrapin executes the project.

Now that Snug Harbor Farm completes designs for Terrapin clients, Corsie can dedicate more time to administrative work. "He does the design and drawings, and when it's our client, I do the presentation and implement the design," Corsie says.

This partnership has fast-forwarded Terrapin Landscaping's installation business in numerous ways. For one, Corsie now has access to a reputable designer, and he can free up time he was spending on this activity to sell or manage other business issues.

And, since Terrapin has the equipment and crews to complete major design projects, Corsie fulfilled a need for Snug Harbor Farm. "It's mutually beneficial," he says.



Today, Terrapin has the most employees in its history, 22, and is running one mowing crew, an installation crew and a crew that flexes between maintenance and gardening.

that could handle anything from ground-up site work to large stone walls," Corsie says.

As for hiring employees, Corsie says letting go of so many maintenance accounts alleviated the stress of keeping mowing crews staffed. "On the mowing side of the business, it had been very difficult to find people who are reliable and who do the job the way you want," he says.

"Every year, I felt like I was having so much turnover in that side of the business. I would finally get to the point where I felt comfortable with an employee and he wouldn't come back, then I'd have to start all over in the spring."

The split crew spends two days mowing and the rest of the week on landscape crews mulching, pruning and performing other gardening tasks. "Those guys are the type who are up for anything," he says.

REBRANDING THE BUSINESS. Winning clients' trust is the key to

securing the larger installation jobs, Corsie says.

And while Terrapin has a name in the area, he wanted to be sure clients recognized the firm could carry out sophisticated, high-end projects.

Corsie realized he needed to rebrand the company and take a second look at his logo and marketing materials.

"The marketing company convinced me that the clients I want are looking for a mature, professional company, and I felt like maybe my logo did not reflect that," he says.

"Breaking up with a logo that has been associated with your firm for 15 years isn't easy. 'I felt like people knew my logo and I didn't want to do anything completely different. I just wanted to freshen it up and make it look more professional,' he says.

In the end, the green sea turtle that has always been associated with Terrapin Landscaping got a modern facelift and a fresh color palette.

A new website is easier for visitors to use, and for Corsie to update. Plus, he's optimizing his social media.

Meanwhile, a partnership with a local nursery is driving more installation business to Terrapin's door (see sidebar), and Terrapin completed its first out-of-town project in Marblehead, Massachusetts, this season.

"We work for the owner here and he knew us and trusted us for his other home," Corsie says, adding that this is another way the company could expand. "I would definitely travel again for a job, and we had a fun time doing it."

2015 has been the biggest year yet for Terrapin Landscaping, with revenues mid-season already matching those of last year.

"That has to do with the installation work because it's a much higher profit margin," Corsie says.

"When you take more energy and manpower and focus on that part of the business, that's where you can get results." **L&L**



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Brains when it RAINS

It's becoming easier for landscape contractors to manage irrigation systems thanks to smart controllers.

By Catherine Pomiecko

There are smart phones, smart TVs and smart cars. Now, many companies are bringing intelligent technology to the irrigation industry, too. Smart controllers analyze local weather data, soil conditions and many other specific environmental factors to accurately and automatically determine and adjust watering schedules. By upgrading existing sites to smart controller systems, contractors can minimize the time spent monitoring irrigation and still rest easy knowing that each site will receive optimal irrigation year round.

RACHIO SMART WI-FI SPRINKLER CONTROLLER. The latest controllers, such as Rachio Smart Wi-Fi Sprinkler controller, are taking technology a step further with Wi-Fi or cellular connection.

Clay Kraus, director of professional programs for Rachio, remembers one contractor in southern California who had just set 10 to 15 controllers up for his clients right before new watering restrictions were imposed. Instead of having to drive his truck out to each one of those sites and change their schedules, the contractor was able to do it remotely with his phone, Kraus says.

Beyond convenient access, Internet-based controllers gather information from multiple servers and databases stored in the Cloud to calculate precise watering times. The smart controller can look at past data as well as the forecast to make irrigation decisions, versus depending on sensors and weather stations.

The setup process for Rachio collects detailed information about the property, including soil type, plant type, sunlight, elevation and even nozzle type for each zone. Rachio is also an evapotranspiration-based controller, which estimates the moisture loss in plants to determine how much water is needed from the irrigation system.

These property data, combined with real-time weather condition data, results in an adaptive system that requires little physical interaction with the device, Kraus says.

The latest software version for Rachio, which updates to Rachio devices with the Cloud, includes flex schedules, which

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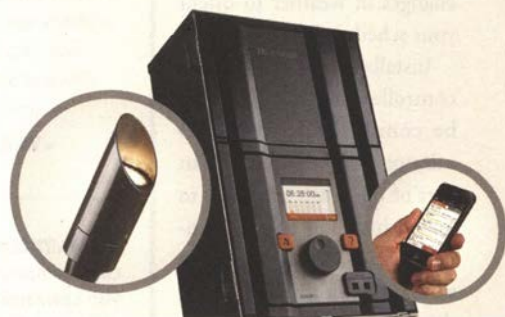


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See how it works at the Irrigation Show, Booth 1224



uses the idea of Management Allowable Depletion (MAD) to determine a more dynamic watering schedule, says Ben Blackmer, Rachio's director of product marketing.

"If you think about the dirt as a sponge, you actually start fully saturated and as that water begins evapotranspiration and the dirt gets to a certain level of dryness, that's when we start to water," Blackmer says.

ETWATER HERMITCRAB. ETwater offers a product that is also cloud-based manageable through a smartphone and, as its name suggests, evapotranspiration based. The device, known as the HermitCrab, can attach to any existing irrigation system and take over the scheduling, no replacements required.

ETwater also uses predictive analytics to determine whether or not to irrigate. For instance, in August in Tampa, Florida, ETwater's sites required no irrigation at all due to wet conditions and continuing rainfall, says Pat McIntyre, ETwater chairman and CEO.

"We use science to establish the right initial schedule, we use ongoing weather to adjust every day, and we use predictive analytics to anticipate changes in weather to orient your schedule," he says.

Installation time for smart controllers like ETwater can be completed in about 15 minutes. The most important part of the setup process is to establish strong cellular connectivity. But, if connectivity should go out for any reason, the system will alert the user

BUYER'S GUIDE

Remember this information when controller shopping.



ETwater

- **WHAT IT IS:** Hermit Crab device connects to any existing controller. Managed with app or desktop site.
- **HOW IT WORKS:** Cloud-based, cellular connection, evapotranspiration, predictive weather used to automatically adjust irrigation.
- **COST:** \$35/month subscription plan, with cost of retrofit controller device \$0 for a 3-year agreement, \$99 start-up for 2-years, and \$249 start-up on a 1-year agreement.
- **FEATURES:** Accessible through a phone app, adaptive to custom watering times and zones, EPA and SWAT certified, cycle and soak option.
- **WEB:** Etwater.com

SMART CONTROLLERS: For a chart comparing these products, visit Lawnandlandscape.com and search "brains when it rains."



Irritrol Climate Logic

- **WHAT IT IS:** A wireless sensor, an SD card with 10-years of weather data, and a receiver, which attaches to a controller and is compatible with several models of existing controllers.
- **HOW IT WORKS:** Converts historical and today's data to a percent of the hottest month's watering time to automatically adjust irrigation. The sensor includes a temperature monitor, rain sensor and solar monitor that shuts off irrigation during rainfall and cold weather.
- **COST:** \$229
- **FEATURES:** wireless, EPA and SWAT certified
- **WEB:** Irritrol.com



Rainbird ESP-SMTe

- **WHAT IT IS:** A controller box and weather sensor that can be retrofitted to existing traditional controllers.
- **HOW IT WORKS:** The user chooses a time window for irrigation, and the controller decides which zones to irrigate and for how long based on data from the rain sensor, temperature, and calculated ET.
- **COST:** \$200- \$250
- **FEATURES:** Tipping rain gauge, adjusts frequency and duration, 22-zone capable, automatically uses cycle and soak, EPA certified.
- **WEB:** Rainbird.com



OnPoint EcoSystems Watersage

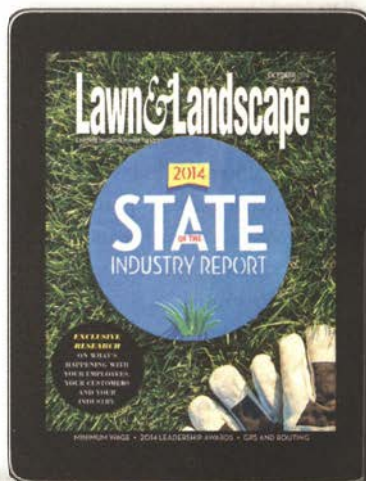
- **WHAT IT IS:** Small device replaces existing controller, must be housed in a controller box (not water resistant).
- **HOW IT WORKS:** Cloud-based, Wi-Fi connection, evapotranspiration used to automatically adjust irrigation. Must pair with rain sensor to shut off during rainfall.
- **COST:** 8-zone \$549, 16-zone \$799
- **FEATURES:** Runtime calculator with cycle and soak option, can be manually adjusted at front panel, EPA certified.
- **WEB:** Home.onpointeco.com



Rachio

- **WHAT IT IS:** Device replaces controller. Managed with an app or desktop site.
- **HOW IT WORKS:** Cloud-based, cellular connection, evapotranspiration, predictive weather used to automatically adjust irrigation.
- **COST:** 8-zone \$249, 16-zone \$299
- **FEATURES:** Accessible through a phone app, cycle and soak option, Flex Schedules option using MAD theory, integrates with other connected smart devices (i.e. Nest thermostat), EPA and SWAT certified.
- **WEB:** Rachio.com

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and the sprinklers will still operate with what plans had been stored from the day before.

"Anyone who pays a water bill is going to get the value associated with water conserva-

tion. Anyone that is maintaining a landscape is going to get the value of an intensely-determined irrigation schedule for the plant material. And anyone that is servicing an

account is going to get the value of easy access to the control system," McIntyre says.

ONPOINT ECOSYSTEMS WATERSAGE. Smart controllers can help contractors automatically abide by locally mandated restrictions.

OnPoint Ecosystems' Watersage helps contractors get the most out of designated watering days while saving significant amounts of water. Dan Palmer, OnPoint Ecosystems president, says water usage is reduced because of Watersage's adjustments based on both macro conditions between seasons and micro daily observations.

"The typical customer sets their controller for what's going to be watered in the summer to keep everything looking good," Palmer said. "But plants have a lot of activity when there's a lot of solar radiation and sunlight and a lot less activity as the seasons change. Plants can be over watered and still look good, but you can apply a lot less water and things would still look good."

Another cloud-based system, Watersage also features a runtime calculator, which will recommend the cycle time and soak time based on absorption rates and landscape elevations to prevent water runoff. The controller does not adjust for forecast weather to ensure adequate watering in the event that a forecast is incorrect, since the opportunity for watering is already restricted.

"Every day is an understanding of what yesterday was – more humid, less wind, temperature was lower, etc., and so I can water less," Palmer says.

Smart controllers garnered a good reputation in some areas, they also leave question marks in others because they only do what you tell them to do, Palmer says.

"We provide a two-week view into what the controller is planning to water," he says. "The visibility gets people comfortable with the technology."

IRRITROL CLIMATE LOGIC. For contractors with skeptical customers, they can encourage a smart controller upgrade by pointing out the potential cost savings not only in their water bill but also in the form of rebates.



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Many water municipalities will provide such rebates for devices with EPA certifications, such as Irritrol's Climate Logic system.

Climate Logic uses three components: a wireless sensor, a receiver module that attaches to an Irritrol controller and an SD card with 10 years of weather information for the site's zip code loaded onto it. Climate Logic combines the average historical weather data in the SD card with the real-time weather data detected by the sensor to calculate a watering percentage that meets both EPA Watersense requirements as well as Smart Water Application Technology (SWAT) testing by the Irrigation Association.

"It's like having someone watching the weather in your yard each day and resetting your controller each evening," says Keith Shepersky, product marketing manager. "You set your controller for the hottest time of year, which becomes 100 percent for the sensor, and it goes up and down from there."

RAIN BIRD ESP-STME. Similar to Irritrol and Hunter Industries' controllers, Rain Bird's ESP-SMTE smart controller is a standalone, on-site unit consisting of a weather sensor and a controller box.

What makes Rain Bird different is how its sensor functions.

While traditional sensors estimate rainfall by the amount of moisture in the air, the SMTE controller uses a tipping gauge to measure rain to the 100th of an inch, says Jeff Westphal, Rain Bird product manager.

"Rainfall is not estimated, it is not taken from historical value, it's taken from what actually happened on that customers site," Westphal says.

The SMTE controller uses this rainfall data, as well as temperature readings, to calculate ET every evening for each zone. SMTE can be built out to 22 independently monitored zones, suitable for contractors with large commercial clients. Each zone is

calibrated based on its unique landscape characteristics. During the setup process, the user selects a timed window in which the controller can operate, and the controller then picks and chooses which zones need irrigation and for how long based on the daily calculated ET rate.

"Customers may be accustomed to a very fixed, rigid schedule," Westphal says. "The SMTE doesn't require that. Very few smart controllers adjust frequency, most will adjust the duration but won't cancel irrigation for a day or move it to one day out." **L&L**

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

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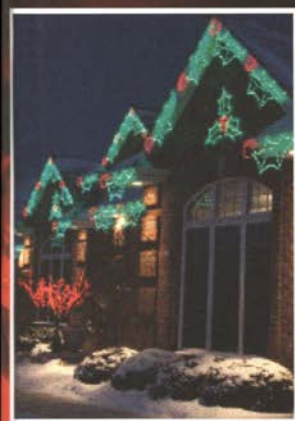
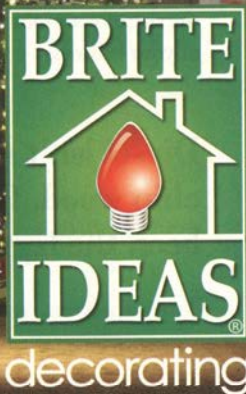
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Most chippers that are used daily should have a lifespan of 10-15 years, provided that the machines undergo regular maintenance such as daily greasing, oil changes and changing out knives regularly.

DON'T GET STUMPED

Purchasing the right grinder or chipper for your company comes down to a few simple questions. By Hilary Daninhirsch

Wood chippers and stump grinders are essential components of every tree care business. Choosing which one to buy should not be too taxing of a process for one major reason – there are only a handful of manufacturers of these products, and most of the features and functions are similar in nature.

Thus, the question of what to purchase depends primarily on the size of your jobs and the size of your business.

WOOD CHIPPERS. Although there are some electric versions, mainly geared toward home use, wood chippers for commercial use run on either gas or diesel.

California's recent passage of laws regulating emissions of small engines has propelled manufacturers to make a more fuel-efficient gas chipper.

Because of this, the Denver-area landscape company Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care switched from using diesel to

gas chippers in the past couple of years. Nate Talocco, senior operations manager at Swingle, says he prefers gas, anyway.

"Diesel isn't strong enough to run an engine hard enough to chip wood. Gas technology with a fuel injector engine has been the biggest change to the whole industry," he says.

Others, however, prefer diesel, such as Admiral Tree Service in Pittsburgh.

"It gives you better horsepower

than gas; it runs a lot smoother," says Robert Jeke, the company's vice president.

For the most part, wood chippers are pretty standard.

Basic machines translate into basic principles: "The bigger the chipper, the bigger the wood you can chip," Jeke says. If you are working with smaller trees, a smaller chipper will do the job.

Some come with winch cables and grapples, but all wood chippers should have standard safety features.

"There's a reverse bar on all newer chippers," Jeke says. A good thing, especially if someone's foot gets caught between rollers, for example.

How many chippers you need depends on the size of your business and how often they're being used.

"It's based on the forecast for how much work we are going to be doing that season," says Bjorn Gjerde, CFO of Senske services, based in Kennewick, Wash., with additional locations in Idaho, Utah and Nevada.

Swingle reported owning about 50 chippers, but for smaller companies like Admiral, three chippers of varying sizes fit the bill.

Most chippers that are used daily should have a lifespan of 10-15 years, provided that the machines undergo regular maintenance such as daily greasing for proper lubrication of moving parts, oil changes, changing out knives regularly and routinely checking inspection points.

"Maintenance is imperative," says Talocco, adding Swingle's chippers undergo daily, weekly and monthly inspection and maintenance.

"Diesel isn't strong enough to run an engine hard enough to chip wood. Gas technology with a fuel injector engine has been the biggest change to the whole industry."

Nate Talocco, senior operations manager, Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care

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TREE CARE



Maintenance on chippers is imperative at Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care with the machines undergoing daily, weekly and monthly inspections and maintenance.

Regular maintenance will not only preserve the chipper's life but will make everyday usage go more smoothly. "Efficiency is the name of the game in this industry," Jeke says.

Talocco says the industry is working on releasing a hydraulic wood chipper sometime in the future, though its effectiveness and popularity remains to be seen.

STUMP GRINDERS. More varieties exist in stump grinders than in wood chippers. Talocco says that choosing a stump grinder often comes down to safety features, as the machines are dangerous to operate.

For example, remote controls are a newer safety feature so the operator doesn't have to be standing next to the machine. Another option is a plexiglass screen that protects the operator from flying debris.

And similar to training wheels on a bike, some models have an extra set of wheels to prevent it from tipping over or toppling down a hill.

A bigger machine will do a bigger job in a speedier amount of time. "When we're doing residential work, we tend to default to a wide

machine to get into backyards without having to move fences," Gjerde says.

Talocco recommends having different sized machines for different applications; a determining factor would be making sure the grinder be able to access the stump, whether it's in a small space in a backyard in a raised planter or something closer to the street, for example.

Maintenance issues are similar to chippers. It's important to place them on a routine inspection schedule.

Talocco says for Swingle, the lifespan of the grinders, which are used daily, are 5-10 years, while Jeke reports his company's grinders have lasted 12-15 years.

Gjerde says checking the teeth are important, as they are easily breakable and bendable.

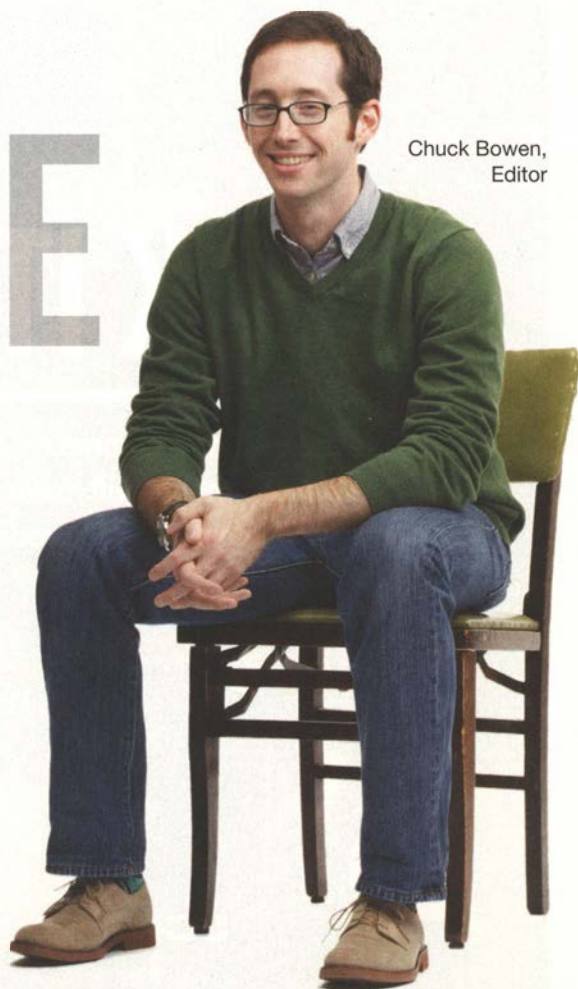
Like chippers, the choices are diesel or gas, but unlike chippers, stump grinders are predominantly diesel fueled, at least at this point in time.

However, this could change in the near future, says Talocco, as emissions laws also affect grinders. **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Pittsburgh.

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When it comes to compact equipment, these attachments will make sure you get the most bang for your buck.



JCB STANDARD-DUTY BRUSH CUTTER

The pitch: Available in standard and high-flow models, JCB's new standard-duty brush cutter is one of more than 30 attachment families available for the company's skid-steer and compact track loaders.

- Designed to clear light to medium density brush and hardwoods up to 4 inch in diameter, the brush cutter is good for roadside maintenance, right of way clearing, site preparation and trail maintenance.
- Dual pressure relief on the hydraulic motor protects against pressure spikes that could potentially damage the drive system.
- Bi-directional cutting blades allow operators to cut in both directions and reduce maintenance costs.

For more information: Jcbna.com



BLACK SPLITTER S2X 800

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

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For more information: Blacksplitternj.com




BOBCAT DEPTH CHECK SYSTEM

The pitch: The new Bobcat Depth Check grade control system is available for use with E32, E32i, E35, E35i, E42, E45, E50 and E55 models, with either standard or long-arm iterations.

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For more information: bobcat.com



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³Program available only at participating dealers and dealer participation will vary. Loaners used for residential purposes provided within 72 hours. Some conditions and restrictions apply. Additional program offerings available for an added cost. See participating dealer for complete details and program offerings. Loaners used for commercial use provided within 24 hours and for residential purposes within 72 hours.

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SNOWEX MINI PRO 575

The pitch: The Mini Pro 575 Tailgate Spreader is designed to be an option for both large and small snow and ice control contractors.

- Intended for spreading salt, sand and de-icing materials on roads, driveways, parking lots and recreational paths, the Mini Pro 575 comes standard with a receiver hitch mount.

- The Mini Pro 575 features a modular steel frame with a high-density polymer, UV-protected material hopper.

- Designed to carry up to 350 pounds of salt, sand or de-icing material, the Mini Pro 575 is recommended for use with utility vehicles, compact pickups, sport utility vehicles, ½-ton pickups, small- to mid-size tractors and skid-steer loaders.

For more information: Snowexproducts.com

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The pitch: The Terex Loegering Eliminator rake is a non-hydraulic attachment that has no moving parts.

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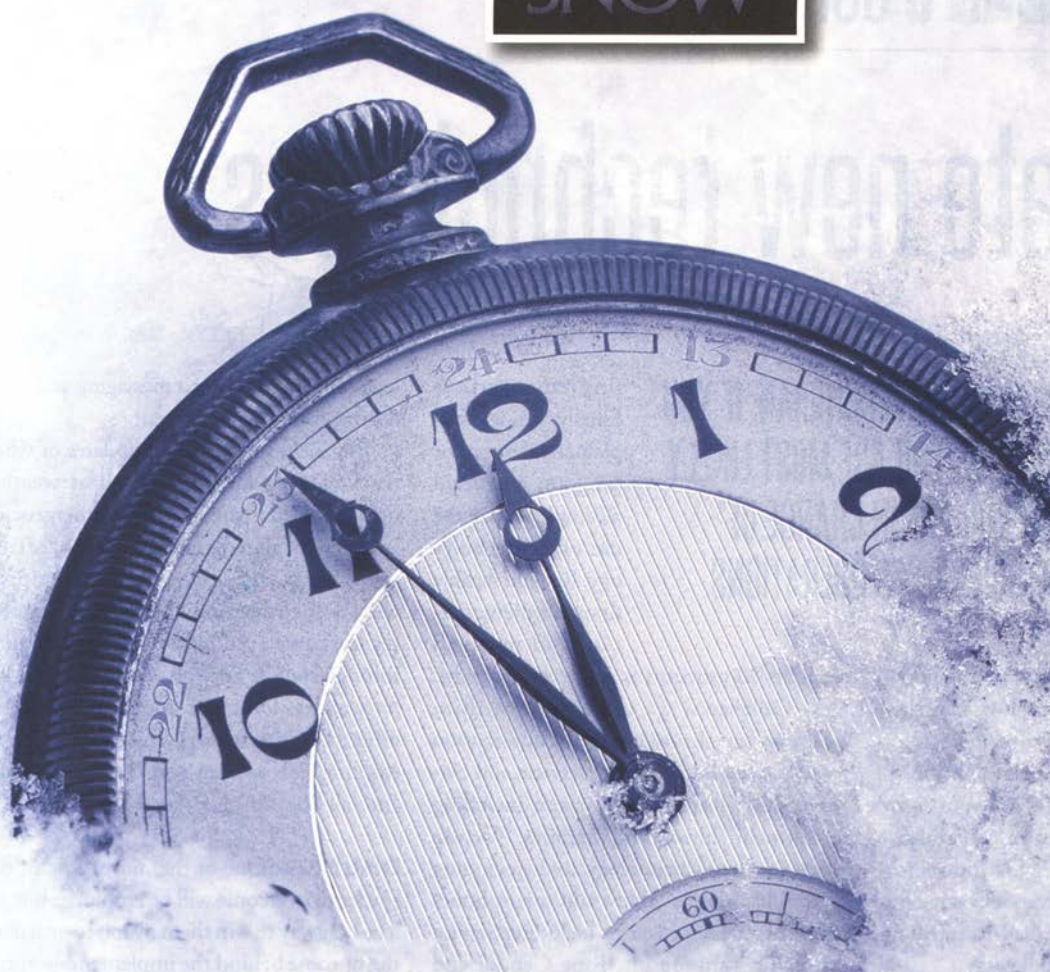
- Its teeth are designed to loosen soil and can be used along driveways, walks and curbs.

- Multiple sizes of the Eliminator rake attachment available to fit an operator's needs: 42 inches, 72 inches and 84 inches.

For more information: Terex.com

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Integrate new technologies

BY MIKE CALLAHAN

YOU ARE NOT THE SNOW PLOW TECHNICIAN. IF YOU ARE READING THIS ARTICLE, YOU ARE MOST LIKELY AN ENTREPRENEUR OR YOU ARE IN CHARGE OF SOME FACET OF YOUR COMPANY'S OPERATIONS.

Nowhere in your job description should it read: the person who plows snow, salts slippery surfaces or clears sidewalks.

You are probably asking what this has to do with integrating technology into your snow removal operations. The truth is, I realized several years ago technology is the vehicle for success. In order to successfully scale my snow removal company, I had to integrate and effectively utilize technology.

I knew the right technology would enable us to ensure that all of our processes and procedures were being executed appropriately and our systems were holding our people accountable for consistent results. If you are the snow plow technician, this implementation is not possible.

THE PROCESS. Begin by taking an aerial view of your current processes and systems, and determine which ones lend themselves to automation through technology. Consider those areas that are easily monitored. Next, choose one area for implementation and research your technology options.

Select the program or tool that will provide you with the best return on investment following implementation. Instead of immediate full scale implementation, consider beta testing the tool or program with one person or a small group within your organization.

This will allow you flexibility to troubleshoot any issues that will arise prior to full

implementation. Finally, you will implement the tool or program and train all employees on the use of the technology. Remain flexible upon implementation and make all

necessary adjustments as you learn and grow.

At Callahan's, we came up with three areas that lent themselves to the automation process: sales, fulfillment of services and employee and subcontractor systems including recruitment, hiring and training. We use a core group of technology tools including GPS units, mobile tablets and smartphones as well as several programs including Service Autopilot, Infusionsoft, Ring Central and Microsoft MapPoint to manage the areas.

IN ACTION. The power of technology is harnessed from the first minute a potential customer interacts with our company. Their contact information, service request and property measurements are logged in Service Autopilot and Infusionsoft simultaneously. And so begins the standardized and automated sales process. These programs enable the sales team to follow up on the sale until it is closed or becomes a lost lead, fulfill the service request and follow up to ensure customer satisfaction.

Once a potential customer becomes a client, we use Service Autopilot and Microsoft MapPoint to maximize route efficiency. After optimization of residential routes, we are able to provide service to approximately 70 driveways per route with an average drive time of approximately 27 seconds between stops. Service Autopilot and Ring Central automate communication with customers

regarding service via text messaging and email during a snow and ice event.

This includes providing updates of when trucks are dispatched as well as weather updates during snow and ice emergencies. In addition, all plow and salt trucks are hard wired with GPS units and are equipped with web-enabled mobile tablets. Employees use Service Autopilot and Ring Central through mobile apps on the tablets to allow for seamless communication to those in the office. GPS is employed for real time crew tracking, job costing and coverage for slip and fall litigation.

CHALLENGES. One of the most difficult obstacles to overcome will be employee buy in. The best way to win them over is to articulate the purpose behind the implementation and help them understand the benefits for the company and their daily responsibilities. Training and support are critical in moving employees forward during your transition. Most importantly, be proactive in addressing employee objections.

Whenever implementing new technology, plan for growing pains and a hefty learning curve. But don't lose hope. The transition from antiquated systems and processes to technologically-advanced ones may not be popular at first but, if you are willing to put in the work, you will surely see the payoff. Within just a few short weeks, you will begin to see the fruits of your labor and your technology paying major dividends for your bottom line. Be the entrepreneur who gets results, not the snow plow technician trapped in the day to day minutia of his company. **L&L**

The author is owner of Callahan Lawn Care and Property Maintenance. He has been in the snow business for more than 15 years. He can be reached at mcallahan@giemedia.com

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From right: Nick Sarandos, Pete Schepis Jr., Joan Schepis (owner), Pete Schepis Sr. (owner), Jason Grissom, Len Herdt, Josh Cameron.

12-MONTH RELIEF

Put clients on year-round service plans to ease snow-removal headaches. BY **HOLLY HAMMERSMITH**

The Greenwood Group has found success in creating a 12-month service model for its customers in Missouri — adding snow services for landscape clients, and vice versa.

Pete Schepis Jr., director of operations, says the full-service landscaping company based in Wentzville about 40 miles west of St. Louis services mostly commercial customers, and stresses the benefits of dealing with just one contractor year round than trying to manage several vendors.

“If we do the maintenance, we’re conscious of where we’re pushing the snow, how we’re treating the plants around the

snow, so that we’re taking care of our property as a whole,” he says.

In return, landscape maintenance contracts usually run three to five years and the snow removal contract is signed new each year because salt prices vary from year to year.

“We very rarely will take on a snow client that’s not a landscape maintenance client,” he says.

COMMERCIAL AT THE CORE. On the snow removal side, 100 percent of clients of the Greenwood Group are commercial. These clients include HOAs, some office buildings and large apartment complexes. Total revenue in 2014 was at \$3.3 million. Of that amount about \$580,000 came from the company’s snow removal service.

Snow removal service started with a few office clients. As more clients began to ask for the service, it increased. Today it’s rare for The Greenwood Group to take on a new client without having them agree to service for both the green and white seasons.

“We wanted to try to have something to do in the winter,” he says. “Then as the company got bigger, it’s become more of a necessity for us to continue to do the snow removal.”

OFF-SEASON MANAGEMENT. Weather in St. Louis is a little finicky. Some seasons The Greenwood Group is still providing leaf removal through November and December. Snow removal may not really pick up until January

or February, but it does help even out revenue year-round, Schepis says. Snow removal usually continues through the beginning of March.

The Greenwood Group employs about 20 full-time employees. Those individuals are cross-trained to work both the landscape and snow removal routes. With the addition of seasonal workers, that number jumps to slightly more than 60. For the company’s largest job site, a condominium apartment complex with more than 500 driveways, about 20 laborers are needed for hand shoveling alone. “Those hand labors come just for



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snow removal, only work in the snow, and that's it," he says. "It is a lot of stuff to do. It's mostly sidewalks and stuff. I mean we can get through it with one plow truck, and maybe a little bit of help from the Bobcat in some of the parking lots, but it's mostly sidewalks."

PLANNING FOR THE SEASON.

Prep for the snow removal season typically begins the first of August, Schepis says.

"We used to wait until mid to late September, and we just started finding out that's too late. It's always easier for us to get access to salt, the earlier that we start getting into it, figuring

out our clients, and getting our stuff ready," he says.

"Once we get into September we'll start to get some of the equipment out and start to service it and things like that, so that we're not in a pinch just in case we ever get a rare November storm." In addition to ordering salt and getting equipment ready, Schepis says his team will be in contact with clients to negotiate those winter contracts.

"For the snow we start to get the contracts ready and start to talk about it in August, which is hard because it's usually the hottest month, here in St. Louis, is August, and people don't really want to talk about snow, but

that's what we found is the best way to work it for us," he says.

Once contracts are in place, it helps The Greenwood Group better plan for how many of those hand laborers they will need. Snow removal routes are scheduled based on proximity of clients to one another.

Because The Greenwood Group's office is 20 minutes from some of their snow removal jobs, trucks may be prepped and depart from different locations so they can start on routes faster and so employees have a shorter drive in, Schepis says.

SET THE SCENE. This staging may occur the day before inclement

weather is predicted. Managers and staff will deliver equipment to the staged location in advance of the storm. If a compact tractor or skid-steer is going to be used at a job site, it may also be brought to the client's location prior to the start of snowfall.

"Just trying to be as ahead of the game as we can is always helpful to us," Schepis says.

"We load all of the plow trucks, we load all of the salters, we load everything before anybody can go home and get rest. We try to do that 24 hours before the storm. That's our biggest benefit."

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finish up with another crew until all the work is complete.

Normally crews consist of three to five people: one plow driver, and the rest working by hand shoveling walks and driveways, or removing snow using a skid-steer. Two salting trucks operate separate from these crews and drivers start their routes approximately three hours after the plows.

"We want those salt trucks running from job to job to job constantly," he says. "If something needs retreated, or depending on temperature, we get some refreeze, or something like that." **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Cleveland.

TIPS FOR FINDING AND MANAGING EXTRA HANDS

When a single client has more than 500 driveways that need plowing, it's all hands on deck. But where are those extra hands found?

Full-time employees at The Greenwood Group are asked to spread the need via word of mouth. The company has also posted ads in and around town to find extra help. "Hand laborers" shovel snow for the company on a seasonal basis and are paid as independent contractors. Many of these people come back year after year, Schepis says.

"We don't try to drive them to the ground. We try to give them some breaks and we try to pay them pretty quickly because most of the people that are coming and doing it for us, it's either supplemental income or it's because they don't have work in the winter," he says.

These workers are called in per incident via a phone tree. Making those calls early is key, often two days

before a storm is predicted to hit, Schepis says. If the forecast doesn't pan out the phone tree is enacted again to call the workers off.

"It very rarely hinders them from wanting to come to the next one," he says. "I understand that people need to work, and people need to pay their bills so we just try to treat them as nice as we can, and hopefully they'll be back to us for the next storm."

While these contract workers are not typically given background checks, Schepis says it hasn't been an issue thus far. Schepis says his company uses E-Verify to verify employment eligibility.

A bigger issue, perhaps, has been the occasional individuals that come in ready to work and don't realize how labor-intensive hand shoveling is.

"They might make it one or two hours, and then they're asking to go home, and then those guys don't get asked back the next time," he says.

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SNOW SCHOOLING

More than 200 contractors attended the ASCA Executive Summit in Vermont.

The Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA) closed the books on its 2015 Executive Summit, which took place at the scenic Stowe Mountain Lodge in Stowe, Vermont in August.

The three-day event featured record attendance of more than 200 contractors, and the unveiling of a new event, the ASCA Action Network (AAN).

This state-based initiative is intended to build support at a grassroots level for legislative initiatives that will improve the environment you do business in. To date, the ASCA has been successful in getting tort-reform legislation introduced at the federal level. At the state level, the association has gotten bills introduced in Illinois and New Jersey that would eliminate hold-harmless agreements from your winter service contracts.

When adopted, this legislation will have an immense impact on how you do business by essentially placing the job of winter snow and ice mitigation into the hands of the professional, where it belongs.

Attendees also had the chance to network with other contractors and hear a handful of speakers, including Joyce Layman of JL Enterprises, a professional coaching company. She instructed attendees how to change their thought patterns, how to turn obstacles into opportunities and how to tap into internal motivators to accomplish bolder goals.



ASCA Executive Director Kevin Gilbride (far right) moderates a discussion with Chad Oberson, Dan Sneller and Scott Neave about their experiences going through the ISO process.

Stowe Mount Lodge, in Stowe, Vermont, was the site of the 2015 Executive Summit.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMIT



The marshmallow challenge

Executive Summit educational speaker Joyce Layman, JL Enterprises, left, challenged attendees with a number of management exercises. She instructed attendees how to change their thought patterns, how to turn obstacles into opportunities and how to tap into internal motivators to accomplish bolder goals. What "stuck" with most participants, though, was Layman's "Marshmallow Challenge," in which challenged teams to erect the tallest, free-standing structure constructed from a few strands of spaghetti, a short length of tape and a marshmallow.

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Paul Vanderzon,
Metal Pless, and
2015 Leadership
Award recipient
Chad Oberson,
Oberson's
Snow and Ice
Management.



Lee Trachtman,
Global Industrial
Services and guest.

Networking

Event planners made sure Executive Summit attendees had ample time to network with one another. Contractors took this time to talk a lot of shop and pick each other's brains about their approaches and philosophies toward snow and ice management. The first evening's kick-off opening reception and dinner featured a good, old fashion barbeque-style meal served in the shadow of Stowe Mountain.

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A change in who is eligible for overtime pay could have a drastic effect on your business.

BY MARK E. BATTERSBY

THE INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE can be tough on collecting income taxes, but is even tougher where payroll taxes are concerned. Mistakes in withholding and paying over withheld taxes to the IRS can be expensive even, as the IRS recently revealed, when a third-party payroll service is involved.

Every employer faces countless rules regulating the payments made by the snow removal and ice management business to its workers. There are rules that dictate when and which workers must be paid overtime, the amount of taxes that must be withheld and when they must be paid over to the IRS.

Unfortunately, the potential for even more payroll problems recently increased for many snow removal contractors when the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) proposed new payroll-related rules.

OVERTIME BURDEN INCREASED. A study from CareerBuilder found almost two-thirds of American workers think the eight-hour work day is a thing of the past, and the DOL agrees.

While the DOL's recent proposal didn't go quite as far as California, which considers checking email when not at work as overtime, it has proposed new rules for overtime pay.

The DOL's rules do not limit either the number of hours in a day or the number of days in a week that an employer may require an employee to



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LABOR REGULATIONS

work, as long as the employee is at least 16 years old. Similarly, the DOL does not limit the number of hours of overtime that may be scheduled.

However, the rules do require employers to pay covered employees not less than one and one half times their regular rate of pay for all hours worked in excess of 40 in a workweek, unless the employees are otherwise exempt.

The new rules, which are expected to take effect in 2016, would raise the threshold at which workers making up to about \$50,000 annually, even those classified as managers and currently exempt from overtime

➡ **WHERE AN EMPLOYEE IS SUBJECT TO BOTH THE STATE AND FEDERAL OVERTIME LAWS, THE EMPLOYEE IS ENTITLED TO OVERTIME ACCORDING TO THE STANDARD THAT WILL PROVIDE THE HIGHER RATE OF PAY.**

rules governing hourly employees, qualify for overtime pay under the Fair Labor Standards Act (states have different overtime protections). The current salary threshold set in 2004 is \$455 per week (\$23,660 per year).

THE DOL'S OTHER RULES. Not all employees or all snow removal businesses are covered by all of the DOL's rules. Exceptions include employees of retail stores and service establishments with annual gross receipts less than

\$500,000, outside salespeople and executive, administrative and professional personnel.

However, snow operations not covered by the federal laws are most likely subject to similar overtime laws in their state. Where an employee is subject to both the state and federal overtime laws, the employee is entitled to overtime according to the standard that will provide the higher rate of pay.

Seasonal employees are employees that will only work during busier periods.

Unfortunately for those in the industry, there is no definitive answer to whether or not seasonal

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employees are entitled to overtime. Wage and employment law varies from state to state, so checking local regulations is vital.

CORRECT DEFINITIONS. Employees are treated as taxable workers subject to payroll taxes, while independent contractors are responsible for paying their own taxes. Workers can be either employees or independent contractors, although both the DOL and the IRS are often skeptical of either label.

The line between independent contractors and employees is not always clear. Usually, workers are considered employees if the snow

removal business has the right to direct and control the way they do their work, rather than merely the results of the work. However, just because a worker agrees to be paid as an independent contractor doesn't mean it's legal.

HUSBAND AND WIFE BUSINESSES.

Spouses who jointly own and operate a snow removal business and share in the profits and losses are considered partners, regardless of whether there is a formal partnership agreement.

The wages of an individual who works for his or her spouse in a trade or business other than a partnership are subject to income

tax withholding and Social Security and Medicare taxes—but not Federal Unemployment Tax Act (FUTA) tax.

Payments to a child under age 18 who works for his or her parent are not subject to social security and Medicare taxes if the trade or business is a sole proprietorship or a partnership in which each partner is a parent of the child.

Payments to a child under age 21 who works for his or her parent in a trade or business are not subject to FUTA tax. The wages of a child are subject to income tax withholding as well as Social Security, Medicare, and FUTA

taxes if he or she works for

- A corporation, even if it is controlled by the child's parent.
- A partnership, even if the child's parent is a partner, unless each partner is a parent of the child
- An estate, even if it is the estate of a deceased parent.

ACA CONFUSION. The Affordable Care Act (ACA) redefined full-time employment, at least when it comes to its controversial benefits and penalties.

First, every snow removal contractor and business owner should understand that the ACA's taxes and tax credits are

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based on the number of full-time equivalent employees (FTE) and their average annual wages – not on the number of full-time employees.

In simple terms FTE or “full-time equivalent” equals (the total number of full-time employees) plus (the combined number of part-time employee hours divided by 30). Seasonal employees, contractors and business owners don’t count toward the total for most businesses.

And don’t forget the Medicare tax hike. The Medicare Part A tax is paid by both employees and employers. Often overlooked however, is the fact that a con-

WHILE THE DEPARTMENT OF LABOR’S RECENT PROPOSAL DIDN’T GO QUITE AS FAR AS CALIFORNIA, WHICH CONSIDERS CHECKING EMAIL WHEN NOT AT WORK AS OVERTIME, IT HAS PROPOSED NEW RULES FOR OVERTIME PAY.

tractor or business with profits more than \$250,000 faces a 0.9 percent increase (from 2.9 percent to 3.8 percent), on the current Medicare Part A tax.

Since this tax is split between the employer and employee, they

will both see a 0.45 percent increase. Small businesses making under \$250,000 are exempt from the tax. Employees making less than \$200,000 as an individual, or \$250,000 as a family, are also exempt.

PAYROLL TAXES. All employers are required to collect and remit payroll taxes. Uncle Sam is reportedly gunning for small businesses with delinquent payroll tax problems. Because small businesses are the largest contributors to the annual tax gap, the IRS appears to be cracking down on them.

While some payroll taxes are not payable by the snow removal business, they must be collected as withholding and turned over to the IRS.

Failure to collect and pay over those taxes can mean a 100 percent penalty tax – accruing additional penalties and interest



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the longer it goes unpaid.

Approximately 40 percent of small businesses use a third-party payer for tasks ranging from paying employees to Federal employment taxes, according to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA).

While third-party payer arrangements usually work as intended, there have been instances in which third-party payers receive funds from employers for payment of payroll taxes, but they have not remitted those taxes to the IRS.

This causes significant problems for employers because the funds have been expended but

the taxes are still due.

In a recent audit, the TIGTA evaluated whether controls are adequate to protect the taxpayer's and government's interests when third-party payroll providers are not compliant with payment and filing requirements.

Until the IRS is able to connect missing payments for withheld taxes to the employer, the clock continues to tick on those unpaid payroll taxes as well as interest and penalties.

REDUCE PENALTIES. One of the nastiest and most feared taxes currently imposed is the "Trust Fund Penalty Tax," a whopping

100 percent penalty on payroll taxes withheld from a snow removal business's employees, but not forwarded to the federal government.

The fear stems from the IRS's authority to assess the penalty on all "responsible parties," a label that can include the owners, shareholders, partners, members, managers and officers in a snow removal or ice management business.

But, avoiding payroll tax penalties, especially those that result from audits, is possible. Reducing payroll tax penalties levied as the result of an IRS audit or even resulting from errors

detected by the snow company itself begins with asking the IRS to abate or eliminate the payroll tax penalty. They have the discretion to waive penalties, especially if the penalty is the exception, not the rule.

Obviously, understanding the basic rules for withholding payroll taxes – and the requirement to pay over withheld amounts – on the wages of all employees in the snow removal business is a good start.

Guidance and advice from a competent, qualified adviser is virtually a necessity. **L&L**

The author is a financial writer based in Ardmore, Pa.

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Fact from fiction

BY KEVIN GILBRIDE

The Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA) launched four years ago to address the serious issues not being acted upon in the professional snow and ice management industry. In fact, issues such as industry standards, reasonable insurance rates and legislative initiatives were the same ones the Snow and Ice Management Association (SIMA) was unable to accomplish, for whatever reason.

However, the ASCA attacked these issues head on and was extremely successful in achieving tangible, forward progress on a number of these fronts. In fact, it is part of the ASCA's mandate to do so. Now it seems SIMA is singing an entirely different tune.

Recently, SIMA has expressed interest in pursuing legislative initiatives. And to its credit, that group has gotten behind the Simplifying Technical Aspects Regarding Seasonality Act of 2015 (STARS Act), which, in a nutshell, would amend the Internal Revenue Code to exempt seasonal employees from the definition of "full-time employee" for purposes of the employer mandate to provide employees with minimum essential health care coverage.

However, the ASCA has visited your elected representatives in D.C. on multiple occasions over the last four years and has successfully lobbied on your behalf in support of the Lawsuit Abuse Reduction Act. Passed in

the House last month, we are now actively lobbying for its support in the Senate.

Closer to home, the ASCA, to date, has gotten legislation introduced in six states, with more on the way. This legislation would limit liability transfer (hold-harmless agreements) from owners to contractors. The ASCA will get this passed.

In the past, SIMA's leadership expressed little interest in establishing official Industry Standards. However, recently that group released a glossary of industry terms, and in it they claim they are a standards development organization.

SIMA is not accredited to do so, unlike the ASCA which received ANSI accreditation to develop official industry standards. Furthermore, ANSI allows only one standards organization in an industry, therefore SIMA's claims that is a standards development organization are not credible. Now consider the problems with one of SIMA's unofficial definitions:

SIMA defines Zero Tolerance as: *A level of Service that typically requires bare pavement or minimal accumulation at all times.*

The ANSI/ASCA System requirements for Snow and Ice Management Services (Industry Standards) definition of zero tolerance is: *Zero tolerance. A common term that is used in the snow and ice management industry that is not a realistic or reasonable*

SIMA HAS CHOSEN TO COMPETE WITH THE ASCA TO SILENCE VOICES FROM WITHIN ITS OWN MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONING THE ASSOCIATION'S GLACIAL PACE TOWARD INDUSTRY ACTION.

property condition (also referred to as a "Slip-Free Environment" or "Slip-Free Condition"). It is impossible to achieve bare and wet pavement at all times under all conditions. True "zero tolerance" is an unrealistic expectation, as is a snow free environment.

Those tasked with snow and ice management on any given site with a zero-tolerance parameter should strive to achieve "bare and wet" conditions on pavement and sidewalk surfaces.

There is no set "trigger depth" for starting services when zero tolerance is specified and it is normally expected that service providers will start servicing with a pretreatment, and continue service as the snowfall

begins, and throughout the snow event.

Which definition would you want used in the court of law for you? I ask you, how is SIMA serving its membership?

Finally, consider the fact that SIMA has funded the Sustainable Salt Initiative, a Canadian-based study aimed at regulating salt usage, including recalibration from storm to storm and from property to property. Think about it; regulating your ability to manage ice by dictating the amount of salt you can use on a client's property will lead to slip-and-fall claims, which you will lose.

The ASCA never intended to compete with SIMA on industry issues. Rather, SIMA has chosen to compete with the ASCA to silence voices from within its own membership questioning the association's glacial pace toward industry action.

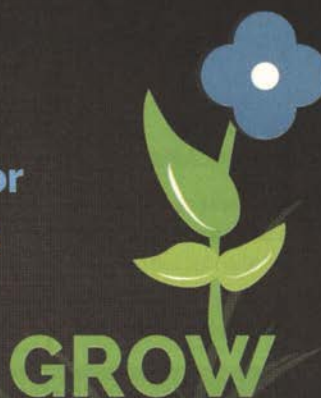
By doing so, SIMA has set in motion actions that could result in dire consequences for your business and the industry. I encourage you to challenge SIMA's leadership about its recent actions, and question whether its short-term efforts to be perceived as proactive are worth your viability in the long term. Our message is simple and has not waived since day one: Join the ASCA. We're working for you, not against you. **L&L**

The author is executive director of the ASCA.

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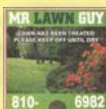
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LETTERS to the EDITOR

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

We want to know.

Call or email
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TIPS FROM THE TOP

Interviewed by **BRIAN HORN**

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J.T. PRICE

// CEO, LANDSCAPE WORKSHOP

This is my second run at landscaping. I worked at a private equity firm that invested in an equipment company, so I had some experience on the equipment side of the business.

I work for a family owned holding company

(McKinney Capital) that has a number of operating investments. As we made acquisitions in the landscape industry, because of my familiarity with the industry, I raised my hand and said, "Hey, I really am interested in this industry. I'd like to take a shot at working with Landscape Workshop." Several add-on acquisitions later, and this is what I spend most of my time doing. I've been running Landscape Workshop for 18 months now with my team.

LOCATION

Bessemer, Ala.

TOP 100 RANKING

75

2014 REVENUE

\$20.4 million

We are really focused on organic growth and that's a shift. The

reason we've done three acquisitions in the last 18 months is they were three perfect acquisitions for us, one that got us into the Knoxville market, one that really took us from being a bit part player in

Montgomery, Alabama to being the number two player in that market. Then this third acquisition, which is not closed yet, will get us into Nashville, but once we are in a market, our goal is to grow organically, invest in sales and marketing, invest in the best people and the best equipment.

A lot of the success that we're having right now at Landscape Workshop, it's not that I'm doing anything right. It's that we've built

a phenomenal team (over the last year.) We hired a guy named Paul Young who grew up at TruGreen LandCare and he's our operational leader. We brought in a great finance leader. We brought in a great sales and marketing leader. I'll take our team of general managers who own our office P&Ls, I'll stack them up against anybody.

Coming out of horticulture programs, you have to pay a little more for that talent, but it more than pays for itself in terms of efficiency and professionalism, and in terms of how we face the customer. If I understood that sooner – that the talent is everything – we could've made even more progress than we have.

I share all of our financial data to many, many managers in our company. There are about 50 people at Landscape Workshop who see our financials every month. We get on the phone and we talk about them. If our shareholders win, our people win financially. I think that's pretty rare in the industry. How can we ask our people to manage without that information?

The folks who I work with are very, very capable, and I defer to them in their subject matter areas because they know more than me. I think a lot of folks don't necessarily want have people smarter than them around. If I can be the dumbest person at Landscape Workshop, that's fine with me. It's important that I know enough to be able to walk on to a property and have an opinion as to whether we're doing great work or not.

It's not important to me that I'm an expert on plant varietal selection because how am I ever going catch up with somebody who has a degree from Auburn University in horticulture and has spent the last 20 years thinking about which plant to put in which geography? So, I've spent a lot of energy learning from the best how to do quality control and how to provide useful feedback from a customer perspective, but there's no way I'm ever going be a true horticulture expert. I'm starting too far behind. **L&L**

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