

2015 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

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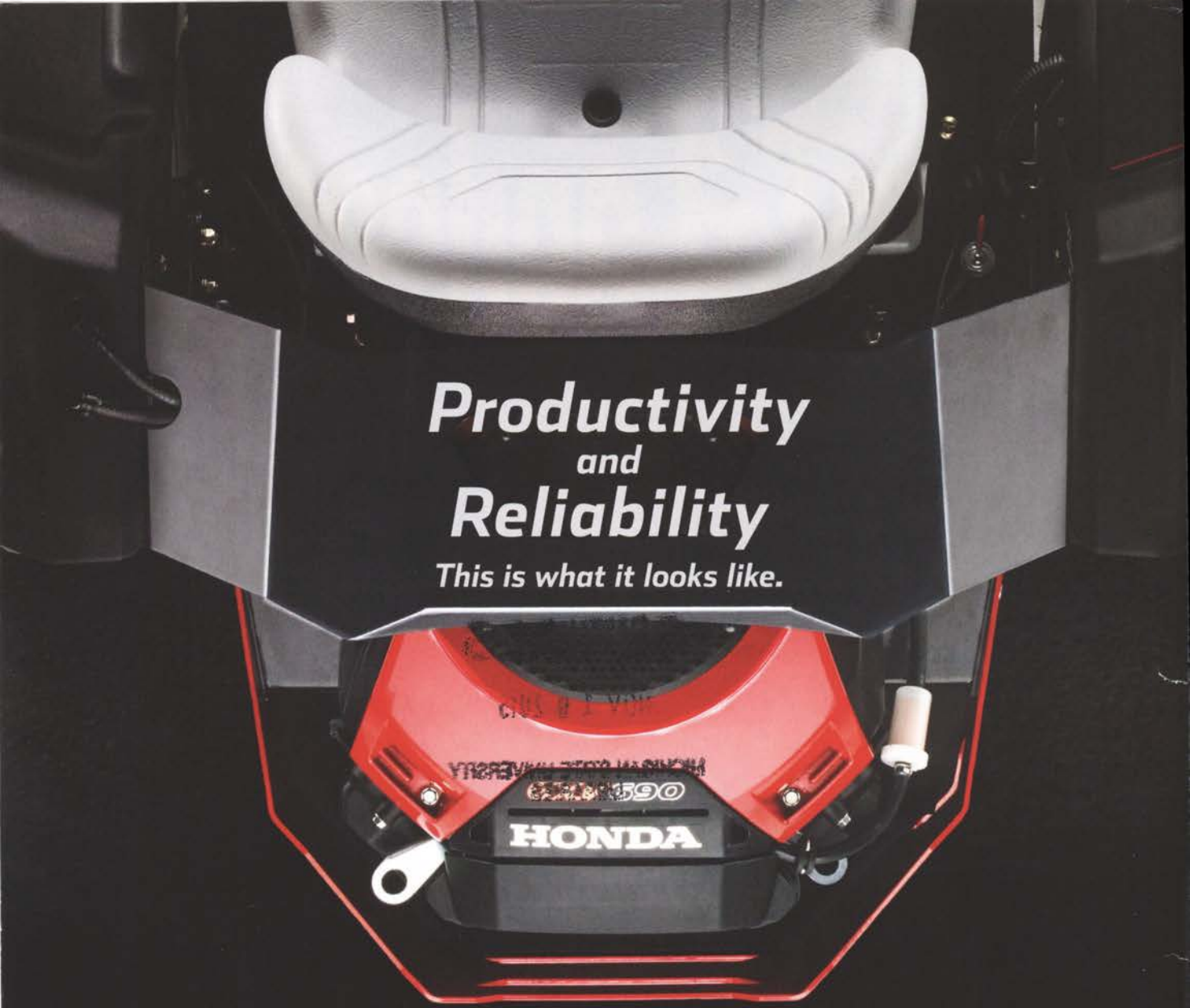
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Jerry Schill, owner, Schill Grounds Management in North Ridgeville, Ohio

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"I think one big thing that we're dealing with, and the whole industry's going to deal with - or is dealing with - is labor. The labor market is pretty difficult right now."

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ONLINE CONTENTS

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Standing out

AVANT GARDENING AND LANDSCAPING has firmly planted its reputation for creative and quality work.

Liza Lightfoot was gardening on the side while attending University of Wisconsin Madison, feeding a longtime fascination for plants by getting her hands dirty with side jobs around town. The plan, before landscaping took center stage, was to become a jazz singer.

"But I realized that was probably not the best career choice if I wanted to survive," says Lightfoot, with a hint of a British accent. She was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, and came to the U.S. in 1974. "I was starting to get my jazz vocal degree and about two-thirds of the way through, I decided that if I worked half as hard at

something else, I might actually make money." She was already drumming up business with a partner, and an aptitude test indicated that landscape architecture would suit her talents and personality. So she switched majors.

That was 30 years ago, and now Avant Gardening and Landscaping is celebrating that landmark anniversary, serving high-end clients in a market that has been generous to Lightfoot's business over the years, she says. Visit, bit.ly/llavant for the full version of this story. For more on Lightfoot, turn to page S19 of our State of the Industry report.



WEBSITE DELIGHT

HEAD OVER TO LAWNANDLANDSCAPE.COM

right now to see our brand new layout. We've made a number of changes, and some of them include:

- The design is a lot cleaner and stories are easier to read. We also have better search functionality and more specific categories.
- At the bottom of every story, we've added links to similar stories you might be interested in.
- For those interested in numbers, we've created a section where you can find all of our

research reports and stories to help you better understand how the industry is doing.

- News sections are broken down into specific sections like mergers and acquisitions and technology.

Email Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net and let him know what you think.



KNOCKED OUT

One contractor interviewed in August's Rob and Duplicate section (bit.ly/lawnrd) described how he used punch-lists to keep his company efficient. He said:

"We have found that using regular punch lists for our landscape management crews/projects that are generated from one of the management team has been very useful in keeping productivity up and prioritizing workload. These lists may be short for smaller projects and longer for estate gardens."

— Peter Estournes, Gardenworks, Healdsburg, Calif.

He even shared those punchlists with us, which you can download by visiting bit.ly/lpunch1 and bit.ly/lpunch2. You can read this month's Rob and Duplicate on page 24. If you have any ideas that have made your business run more smoothly, email Editor Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net for a chance to be featured in a future issue.



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EDITOR'S INSIGHT

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

Forget H-2B. Start hustling.

In case you've been living under a rock, there's a massive labor shortage in the landscape industry. Forty-four percent of contractors say they have at least one open position. Three-quarters say a lack of employees hinders their growth, and a lack of quality help is cited most often as the biggest problem facing the business in the next three years.

Things should be going well. The economy is improving. Many contractors report they're having one of their best years. Customers are finally spending again after years of a recession-induced hangover.

But that's just it. Because the economy is improving, entry-level laborers are getting better offers elsewhere. Guys who used to drive mowers can go make more hanging drywall or laying asphalt. Brian Lemmerman, who we interviewed for this month's Tips from the Top, lost an employee (and not even a *good* employee) to a road crew, where he turned a stop sign for \$15 an hour.

And the H-2B program, which used to be a reliable source of seasonal help for the industry, has been whittled down to nothing but a headache. The 66,000 cap gets met in the blink of an eye. And a shutdown of

the program this year – caused by bickering among the federal agencies that oversee it – meant that landscapers who requested help got it weeks late, losing out on hundreds of thousands of dollars in spring revenue.

Leonard Quiroz has taken matters into his own hands. Quiroz, the chief operating officer at Uyeta Landscape & Maintenance near Seattle, is working to get landscaping added to the curriculum at his local vocational school. The goal is to have a two-year program that graduates students trained up in horticulture and the soft skills they need to succeed at a green industry company, and then take that curriculum to schools around the state. It's not a short-term solution, but it's something, and it can't hurt.

"Everybody can win from this. It starts to get us a pool of people who have some experience right out of high school," Quiroz told me. "We have to solve this problem if we want to grow to where we want to be. Stop flapping your gums. Let's do something."

There are many solutions to this labor problem. H-2B is dysfunctional and the industry must move past it, and keep hustling for other sources of labor.

Maybe the answer is cheaper, more-



efficient machines to save on back-breaking work. Maybe it's paying crews more. Maybe it's time to start poaching your guys back from the construction companies. In reality, it's some mix of all these things and more.

Landscapers can hustle when it's time to get something done. If you're having trouble finding (or keeping) employees, you aren't alone in asking why. It's just time to find some better answers. — *Chuck Bowen*

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GOT A BEAST OF A JOB?



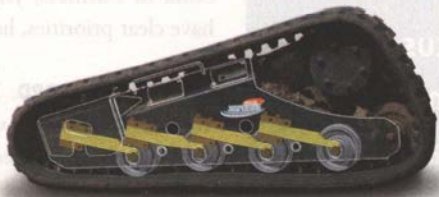
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The art of acquisitions

Jim Huston's summer brainstorming session focused on the ups and downs of buying companies and an inside look at one of L&L's Top 100 companies. By Brian Horn

With the economy continuing to improve, the amount of companies being bought and sold will surely heat up. Two companies who have incorporated mergers as a growth strategy were part of Jim Huston's brainstorming session, "Going M.A.D." (mergers, acquisitions and divestitures) in Raleigh, N.C., in August.

Brian DuMont, owner of Yard-Nique, based in Raleigh, and Brian Lemmermann, owner of Somerset Landscape, based in Phoenix, talked about how they've approached mergers in recent years.

Yard-Nique has seven locations across the Southeast U.S. and revenues approaching \$25 million. Three of those seven locations were acquired, with two taking place in the past 16 months. Somerset has grown from almost \$7 million in 2011 to \$35 million this year. Lemmermann, who you can read more about on page 226, has acquired 10 companies since 2011 and currently has offices in California, New Mexico, Texas, Utah and Nevada, and Arizona.

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT. DuMont is usually looking at two to three companies at a time. He is open-minded about deals, but always has a strong idea about what he is looking for in a company. Whether it's a strong culture, the equipment or the book of business, you should have clear priorities, he said.

SPREAD THE WORD. DuMont and Lemmermann will both send word out to people they

meet in the industry, stating they are in acquisition mode. DuMont will also task branch managers with bringing back three potential companies that fill Yard-Nique's requirements.

HELP AND HURT. When it comes to brokers, DuMont said:

- A good broker is worth every penny.
- Bad brokers can break a deal.
- When not using a broker, things can get emotional and expectations and demands can become unrealistic.

NO WHOLESALE CHANGES. When DuMont is in discussion with an owner about buying a company, he is clear he doesn't want to buy it and then completely erase what the owner has done. He said when he lays out this plan, the owner is more inclined to sell, and at a better price, because DuMont values the history of the company.

AFTER THE SALE. DuMont said he has handled post-acquisition incorporation both ways.

He has changed the name and leadership of an acquired company and rebranded it as Yard-Nique, and he's left a company's brand alone. It all depends on how strong the brand is and how much he likes the leaders.

Both Lemmermann and DuMont say they have learned a lot of new systems and practices from companies they've acquired. They say you have to be humble and can't come in right away and start implementing your systems when the company you're acquiring may have better ones in place.

THE FIRST VISIT. When first visiting the site of a company he has acquired, Lemmermann doesn't want to "come in and make a splash."

The first thing he does is get the buy-in from the lower and middle levels of the organization.

The worst case scenario for Lemmermann is a manager who wants to start his own company and take the crews with him. If he can get immediate buy-in from the crews, he has a better chance of avoiding that situation.

The first weekend after he acquired a company in Las Vegas, he spent time with the employees below the supervisor/managerial level in the office and in the field. "We come in really softly," Lemmermann said. "We start with easy suggestions that can help operations, but we are taking just as many positive systems back to the parent company."

DuMont approaches the first post-acquisition meeting by telling employees he admires what they've built and he has no plans to make wholesale changes. Yard-Nique also likes to start a newly-acquired company with a win like purchasing new mowers or repainting some trucks.

ORGANIC GROWTH. While acquiring companies is a great way to grow, it shouldn't be the only way you increase your revenue, Lemmermann said.

"If you aren't able to grow organically, any acquisition can quickly become a liability and put your entire organization in jeopardy," he said. "Acquisitions can be dangerous and are only a piece of a strong growth plan."

8 THINGS TO LEARN FROM DuMONT

L&L visited two of Yard-Nique's offices in the Raleigh, N.C., area, including the corporate headquarters. Here's what we learned.

• **ONSITE FUELING.** Workers fill up in the morning and fill up every truck and machine before leaving. This avoids crews making any stops for fuel during their routes.

• **ASSIGNED PARKING.** Crews have assigned parking spots for trucks, which makes morning roll-out less chaotic. Every project manager has a pod to store equipment like blowers and excess materials near his crews' parking spots. Each project manager averages about three crews.

• **BREAKING NEWS.** Every office has a newsboard where news about employees can be posted. This is a place where the company can share good news about the company and individual employees. The information is collected and posted by the branch manager.

• **AHEAD OF THE REST.** A construction member can earn a Y/N sticker on his hard hat for going above and beyond. The stickers are a public way the company can acknowledge workers who have gone above and beyond. The company also gives out awards, like a new pair of safety glasses, for workers who have been excelling on the job.

• **DRESSED FOR SUCCESS.** The company makes all new laborers buy five uniform shirts as a way to show the worker is committed to Yard-Nique. The shirts cost about \$5 and can be deducted from paychecks. Once the shirt becomes worn out the laborer can trade in the shirt for a new one at no cost.

• **LOOKING GOOD.** The company is still in the process of painting 100 trucks with the new company color (orange) and new company logo. "I wanted to set us apart from the typical brown and green," DuMont said.

• **HOUSE AIN'T A HOME.** The company's main headquarters is spread out between three houses built in 1865, 1901 and 1920. The houses were considered uninhabitable, and DuMont bought and rehabbed them.

• **ORGANIZED FROM THE START.** The company hired a human resources director, Kelly Somers, two years ago, and among the many ways the hire has improved the company is the onboarding process that was installed after Somers joined. When new employees start, they are set up with everything they need on the first day. Whether it's new uniforms, a new truck or a laptop, the items are ready on the worker's first day.



Design, build and sell

L&L attended NALP's Design Build Installation Symposium in Boston to learn about best practices in a growing segment of the green industry.

By Kate Spirgen

Design/build business is booming again as the economy and the housing market recover, so we headed to Boston for the National Association of Professional Landscapers' symposium covering everything from hiring and retention to green walls and roofs. As part of the symposium, attendees toured different living wall locations.

INBOUND MARKETING. Tyler Richer, principal implementation specialist at Hub Spot, an inbound marketing and sales software company, gave tips on inbound marketing, creating buyer personas and creating the right content to keep them interested.

- The customer now has control of the buying process and researches extensively before making a purchase.
- To attract leads and engage with prospects, create authentic content and personalized interactions throughout the buying process.
- More useful content means better search engine optimization.

In order to know your perfect customer, you have to know who you are trying to sell to and what their wants, needs and personality are.

You can do this by identifying certain factors and creating a buyer persona. Here are some of the common factors:

- Common behavior patterns
- Pain points
- Goals, wishes and dreams
- General biographic and demographic information

"If you don't know your buyer personas, every aspect of your inbound marketing will suffer," Richer said.

The buyer's journey is the active research process a potential buyer goes through. Once you can identify where they are in the buyer's process, you can send them the right content from your website. The stages and appropriate content are:

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"I don't want to feel like my business is running me"

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Awareness: I have a problem or need.

Content: Research reports, expert content, case studies, educational content

Consideration: I have a solution.

Content: Live interactions, expert guides, comparison white papers

Decision: I need to buy the solution.

Content: Vender comparisons, costs

Once you know your buyer personas, you can create and optimize content around each keyword or phrase they would be searching. Be sure to target

locally so that you're attracting the right people. For help, get a Google local listing and get a report from GetListed.org to show you where you're starting.

HIRING AND RETENTION. Alex Pratt, area director of hiring and retention for Omni Hotels and Resorts, gave tips on hiring, training and retaining the right people.

- In order to find the right people, you need to know your market.
- To retain the right people, you need to do repetitious reinforcement. For example, if someone is doing

well, tell them every week.

- To build your bench, identify your key players and ask them to help you recruit.
- Hold everyone to the same standard.
- Give those employees who want to move up the opportunity to do it.

"Being known as a company that promotes from within is a major factor in impacting retention," he said.

GROWTH AND PROFITS. Ken Thomas of Envisor Consulting gave strategies to help contractors grow their businesses to a

stable and profitable place. He started out as a small operation and while he knew a lot about landscaping, the business side was a tough lesson. "You can be a great cook, but you might not be able to run a restaurant," he said.

Thomas said the life cycle of a business is like an S curve starting with startup, moving into growth, then adolescence, maturity and succession and decline.

"It takes the intentional actions of leaders and management doing the right things at the right time to make it to maturity," he said. He noted that

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process is key to moving from the adolescent to the ideal phase: maturity. But working harder is not the answer.

Here are his tips for moving into maturity:

- In the absence of a process problem, if something goes wrong, it's a people problem.
- Divide the duties of sales or you will be stuck working in your business instead of on it.
- Your system is only as good as it performs during a rush.

GREEN ROOFS. George Irwin, founder of Green Living Technologies International, went over some of the best practices for creating green roofs and walls, part of a growing niche. "Don't ever associate green roofs with low maintenance. There's no such thing," he said.

- One of the biggest challenges is in the waterproofing. Media will spill out and roots will grow out of the box if it isn't done properly.
- If you don't fertilize, the first year will be fine, the next six months will see decline and then it will require a renovation.
- Use 20 percent organics in the soil and topdressing with compost every spring.
- Slow release fertilizer is a bad idea since it will just run off of the roof rather than sinking into the soil.
- Make sure to take water weight into consideration.
- Irwin recommends sod over seed to cut down on maintenance.



ND Landscape keeps things running smoothly

As part our trip to the Design/Build Symposium, we also stopped by ND Landscape in Georgetown, Mass., to find out how the company does business.

ND LANDSCAPE has been in business for 33 years in Georgetown, Mass., providing design/build, maintenance, enhancement and snow removal services for both residential and commercial customers. The company does \$8.4-8.5 million annually and has spent the last two years focusing on its commercial maintenance division, which brings in \$1.3-1.4 million, and the enhancement side, which does about \$1 million. "That's absolutely our weakest link right now," said co-owner Nick DiBenedetto.

It took ND Landscape 18 to 20 years to break the \$1 million mark, which they did by taking a hard look at who was owning each area like sales and management. They put systems in place to keep things moving smoothly, which helped them stay on track, DiBenedetto said, but it was "really tough."

The company uses BOSS Landscape Management software to track jobs, materials and man-hours. The software will spit out a job ticket telling crews what materials they need, where they're going and how much time they have to complete the project.

That way, if a project uses too much material or

ND Landscape has streamlined its yard for maximum efficiency with seven stations dedicated to a daily or weekly task.

- **STATION 1:** Off-loading
- **STATION 2:** Truck washing
- **STATION 3:** Vehicle and equipment service
- **STATION 4:** Communications
- **STATION 5:** Bulk loading
- **STATION 6:** Equipment loading
- **STATION 7:** Parking

takes too much time, managers can see the pain points and ask the right questions.

The system didn't work well for them for two years but then they brought in a consultant who taught an employee how to best use it. "You really need a power user," DiBenedetto said.

The software tracks hours live and ND Landscapes uses tablets to help crews stay on track. Getting some of the older crew members on board with the new system has been tough, DiBenedetto said, and the company has lost a few foremen because they didn't want to deal with the new regiment.

NOONS ON THE MOVE AFTER TRUGREEN ACQUISITION

After selling their \$8 million Noon Turf Care business to TruGreen last month, Christopher and Matthew Noon won't be sitting idle for very long. The duo is already working on a new franchise, Smart Lawn, which they plan to launch in January of 2016.

"We found there's a niche to offer better service for clients across the country," said Christopher, who also operates Green Light Consulting.

Noon said he's been in talks with TruGreen and its former parent company ServiceMaster since he entered the lawn care business in 2007. The pair had been thinking about franchising for a couple of years. When they received a "generous" offer from TruGreen, the two took it and can now concentrate on the franchise.

"It comes down to the opportunity," he said. "We were in one region and a small territory, and I think our talents will be served better nationally and hopefully internationally one day.

Noon said eight employees from the Noon management team will join the start-up, while the rest of the company's employees were

offered positions with TruGreen. The Noons will be co-CEOs of the new operation with Christopher focusing more on the sales and marketing side and Matthew on the vision and strategy. Their longtime CFO Stephanie Lee will focus on finance and operations.

While Noon has a non-compete with

"We started with nothing and put our heart and soul and life into it. So it was tough to part ways, but we knew we had another plan in line, sort of our second act."

— Christopher Noon

TruGreen in Noon's existing territories, which was a couple of counties, the plan right now is to start franchising along the East Coast to as far west as Illinois and then expand into the midwest and south.

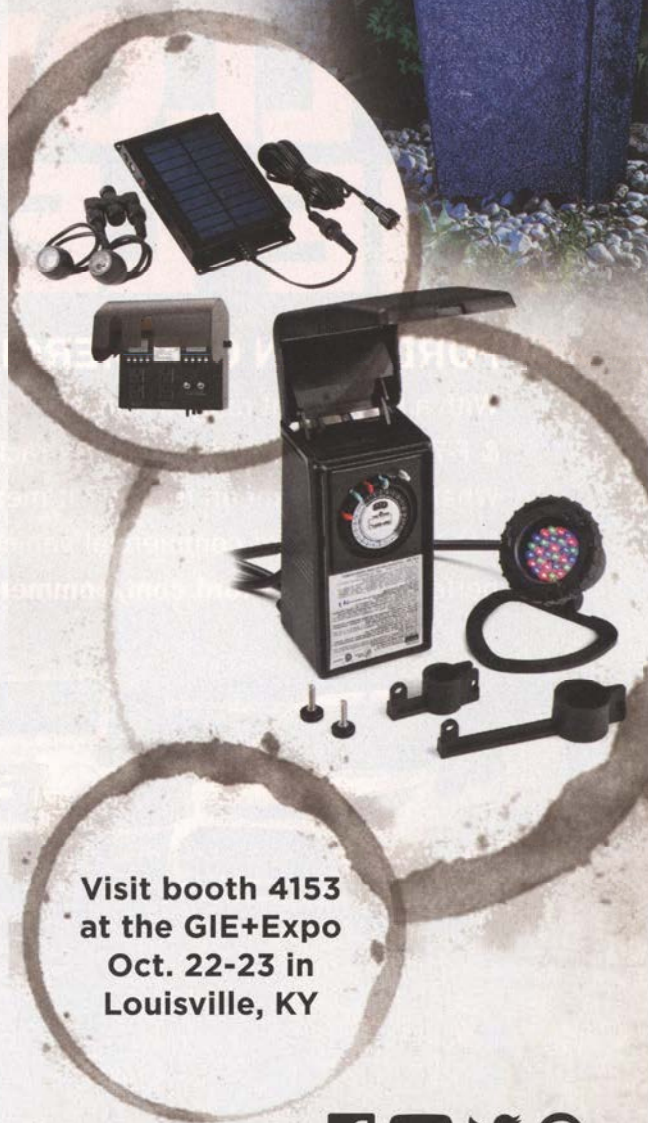
Noon said it was a difficult decision to sell the company he and his brother started from scratch at the end of 2007, but he was impressed with the new TruGreen leadership team and vision for the future.

"They were concerned about our employees, and very concerned about our client base and quality we were offering," he said. "We felt great about the deal. It's never easy because you are emotionally attached to clients and employees. We started with nothing and put our heart and soul and life into it. So it was tough to part ways but we knew we had another plan in line, sort of our second act." — Brian Horn

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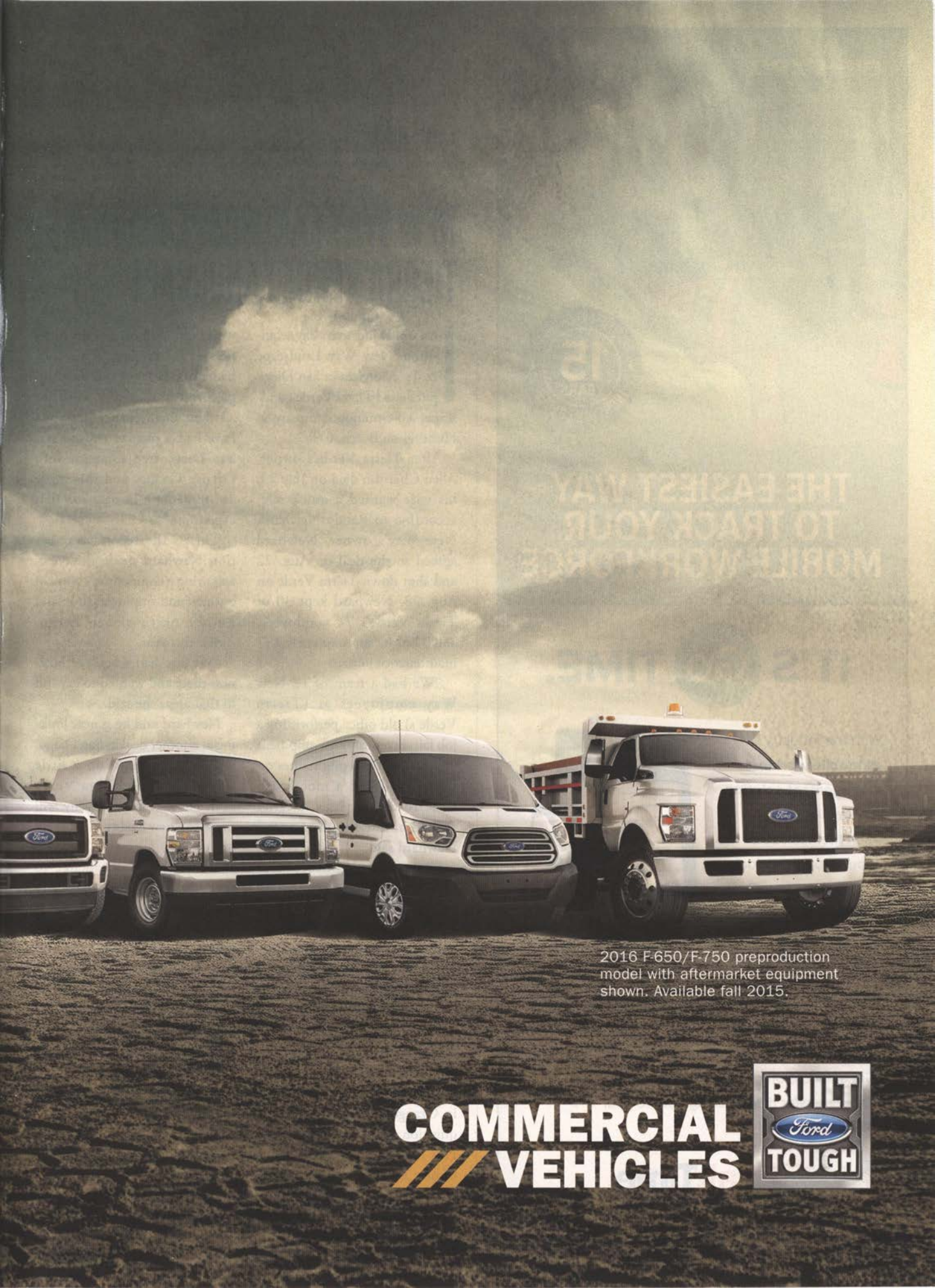
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NEW WAY LANDSCAPE ACQUIRES TIERRA VERDE LANDSCAPE

In a whirlwind seven-day acquisition, New Way Landscape & Tree Services in San Diego purchased Tierra Verde Landscape, a \$4-million company in Huntington Beach, Calif.

After Tierra Verde's owner, Allen Chariton died on July 24, his wife wanted a quick sale, according to Randy Newhard, New Way's owner. Newhard agreed to the deal on Aug. 22 and shut down Tierra Verde on Aug. 28. Newhard kept 30 of Tierra Verde's 74 employees, and 35 of its approximately 137 maintenance jobs.

"We had a team of 12 New Way employees at (Tierra Verde's) old office performing a job fair, inventorying equipment and trucks, changing names on trucks, and had a mobile lab there to do physicals, e-verify and administering drug tests," Newhard said.

"Potential employees were interviewed and were called on Sunday to start Monday. This deal all happened basically within a seven-day period. Acquisitions should usually take four to eight weeks."

Newhard said he was attracted to the business because of its tree care services and its presence in Orange County.

"We have a book of business in Orange County and this acquisition added to that portfolio. Plus it added an immediate list of new management companies

we could potentially do business with," he said. "Plus, they had a tree division and they also performed arbor care work for all their maintenance acts. We have had a plan to expand our San Diego tree company into Orange County and this made an immediate impact for that expansion."

This is the second acquisition Newhard made this year, acquiring a competitor's book of business and employees in Inland Empire north of San Diego, earlier this year.

"We also had a book of business there and wanted to expand in that area," he said.

Newhard said he is now looking at another deal in San Diego, which he plans to do a little slower than the Tierra Verde deal. He said the company will move to a new facility in October of this year.

"It has been a challenge to execute this all in a basically seven-day period," he said. "If not for my daughter Kathryn Dejong who is president and runs the operations, along with the rest of our staff who jumped in with both feet to get this up and running, I don't know if we could have pulled it off. Actually, I know we could not have."

New Way Landscape was number 88 on Lawn & Landscape's 2015 Top 100 list with revenue of \$17.5 million and 235 employees. — *Brian Horn*

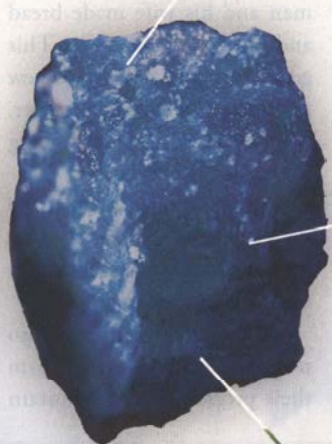
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ARTISTREE ROLLS OUT 'THANK A LANDSCAPER' PROGRAM

Sometimes the smallest gestures have the biggest impacts.

Like the gift of coconut bread and jam, which were given to ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance and Design as a unique way of thanks.

The company had been asked to help transplant fruit trees that were being removed from the future site of a sales center.

The landscape chairman of the homeowners association board didn't want to see the trees destroyed, so he asked

ArtisTree to transplant them around the community. As a way of thanking ArtisTree, the chairman and his wife made bread and jam from the trees. This gesture sparked ArtisTree's new program, Thank A Landscaper, which was launched in the spring (thanklandscaper.com.)

It gives people the chance to thank anyone that has had an impact on their experience with the green industry.

"We want to go quietly into neighborhoods and transform their properties and maintain

them well, but it would be nice to be acknowledged," said Debra Morrow, vice president of marketing.

The company decided to start an initiative to thank landscapers for the work they do.

A photograph taken of Orlando Otano Ramon, one of ArtisTree's crew members, was turned into an artistic card and given out to people to



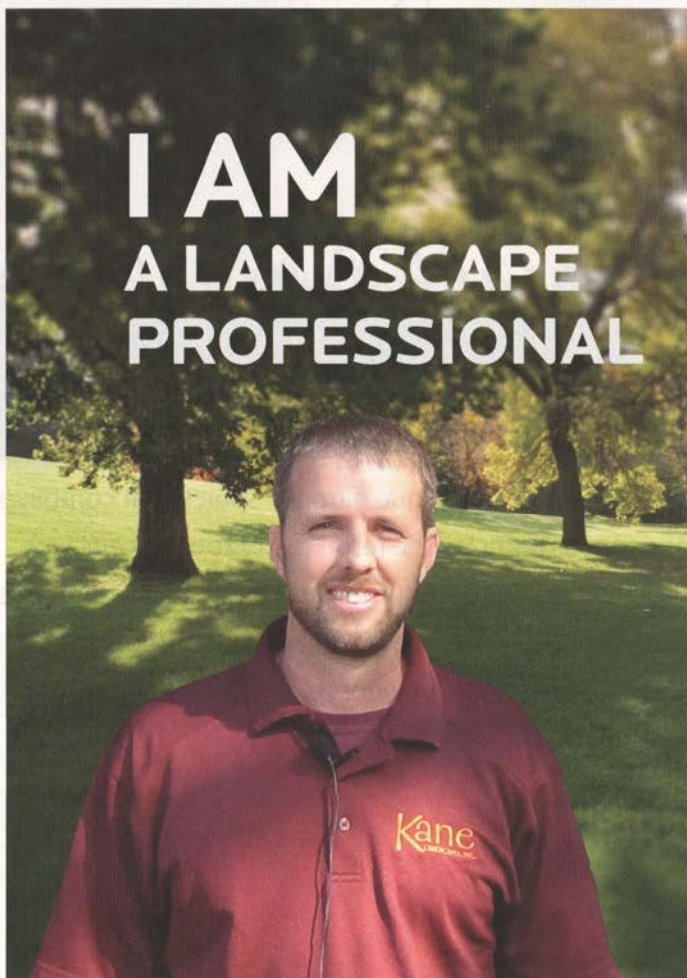
raise awareness to the program.

At the site, people can click a tab and thank any individual or company.

"If people have a more positive perception of landscapers, whether degreed or not, designers or not, manufacturers

or not, we can all go down the river together and benefit from the positive perception," she said.

—Katie Tuttle



"Joining NALP is definitely worth the investment, not only for the professionalism that it brings to your company, but also for what you can learn."

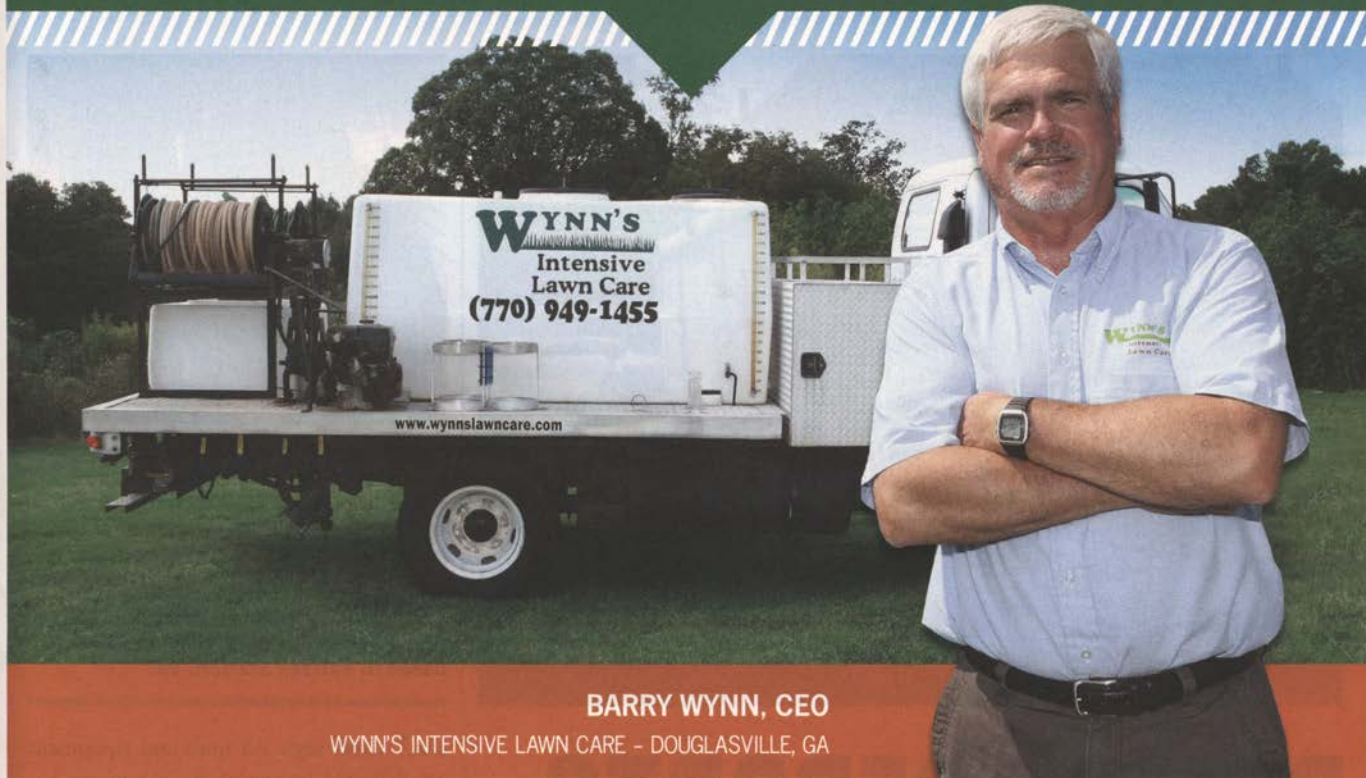
— Josh Kane, Landscape Industry Certified, Kane Landscapes, Inc.

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ABOVE: Any equipment or tools the crew will need for a job are delivered to the job site in one of the company's trailers. The trailer and enclosed equipment will stay on site until the job is finished.

► Groff Landscape Design is a \$1.4 million-design/build company based in Fairfax Station, Va.

DIRECT REPORTS

BY CHUCK BOWEN

EACH OF ROBERT GROFF'S JOB SITES is a magnet: All materials are shipped there instead of his yard, and his crews report directly to the project.

Groff, president at Groff Landscape Design in Fairfax Station, Va., does all design/build work and about \$1.4 million a year.

Instead of paying his two crews of five field employees each to spend two hours a day in traffic, Groff has them drive their own vehicles straight to the job site.

He says this keeps them more engaged and focused. They aren't spending time at the shop gassing up equipment or load-

“ANYTHING THAT WE USE frequently, it's in that trailer and nothing more.”

Robert Groff, Groff Landscape Design

ing materials. None of the crew members need a CDL and having fewer trucks (and truck drivers) saves wear and tear on Groff's pick-ups.

“Instead of wasting one to three, four, five, six man-hours a day of travel and load up time, all of the guys are at the job

site,” Groff says. All tools and equipment are delivered in one of the company's 16-foot enclosed trailers by the project manager, left at the site for the duration of the job and removed when the project is finished.

The trailer is organized with anything the crew is going to need for the job: a Troy-Bilt tool box, a rack to hang shovels and rakes, and crates on shelves to hold fittings. Racks on top hold pipes and ladders.

“Anything that we use frequently, it's in that trailer and nothing more,” Groff says.

“If we need it once a year, we're not going to put it in there because it's just wasted space.” Instead, project managers will bring specialty equipment in their trucks as needed.

Groff says the time his employees save using this direct-report system allows them to finish five more jobs each year.

That adds up, especially when Groff figures his average revenue per project is \$32,000. **L&L**



IDEA #1

► Email clients the day before you're set to arrive to make sure necessary utilities (like water and electric) are turned on.

IDEA #2

► Keep extra pieces of key equipment (saws, compressors, drills, etc.) in the trailer.

IDEA #3

► Have all materials drop-shipped to your job site to save loading time at your yard.

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



RAISING YOUR PRICES IS ONE OF THE WAYS YOU CAN BECOME MORE PROFITABLE. However, the best way to improve profitability is to work on your efficiencies. If you've read my column here in L&L for a long time, you'll recall that I mostly talk about leadership development, sales, marketing and family. Well, this month, I'm going to get really tactical with you and share my top five ways to add thousands of dollars to your bottom line right now. So, here goes:

1. Create a sense of urgency at your company for the morning routine. At HighGrove Partners in Atlanta, owner Jim McCutcheon and his team have arguably created the most impressive rollout routine I have ever seen. Their team gathers in a circle in their mammoth shop. They get very quick safety instructions and updates for the day, and all methodically, like the U.S. Army, walk to their trucks and leave in single-file fashion quickly, safely and impressively. If you are late for work, you don't work. They have a clock that shows the goal and they track the departure time of every truck that leaves each morning. Their trucks are all the same, the equip-

ment on them is all the same, and they get parked inside, so there's no loading or unloading.

2. Have clear, highly detailed work orders. Jarod Hyson at Earth, Turf & Wood in Denver, Pa., has work orders and drawings like I've never seen before. The hours budgeted for the job are on them. They have a planning meeting before his crews ever set foot on the property. Many people in his company are involved in the bidding process so there is experience share and buy-in. Which job do you think the crew is more excited to work on? The one they had a say in? Or the one they did not? Too many landscapers don't plan well on the front end

and they pay for it big time. Include photos and have correct prints. Put the work order together with the intention that whoever sold it won't be available, and your perspective will change. Detailed work orders don't cost; they pay.

3. Have trucks with boxes that carry everything you may need. One of the first areas I help struggling landscapers improve is their truck set up. You lose money when your team loads and unloads tools. You lose money when you have to drive clear across town with a pole pruner for a crew that should have something like that on their truck. When I see a company with a flatbed truck and no tool boxes, I see a company that must enjoy throwing money out the window. Grunder Landscaping Co.'s trucks cost more but they are worth it and make us a sizable return on our investment. Folks, think about that and stop buying trucks off the lot. Order them and have them customized.

4. Have standard operating procedures (SOPs) for all that you do. The key word here is *all*. As I type this column, I am on a flight to Atlanta to work with a landscaper. Where do you think airlines would be without standard operating procedures? How many lives would be lost if the pilot didn't go through a series of steps before, during and after each takeoff and touchdown? Jeffrey Johns runs one of the Southeast's most successful landscape maintenance firms, Coastal Greenery. They have procedures for everything, and everyone there knows them, believes in them and practices them. Procedures take the guesswork out of things. When your team isn't guessing, they are working and gathering momentum that turns into dollars.

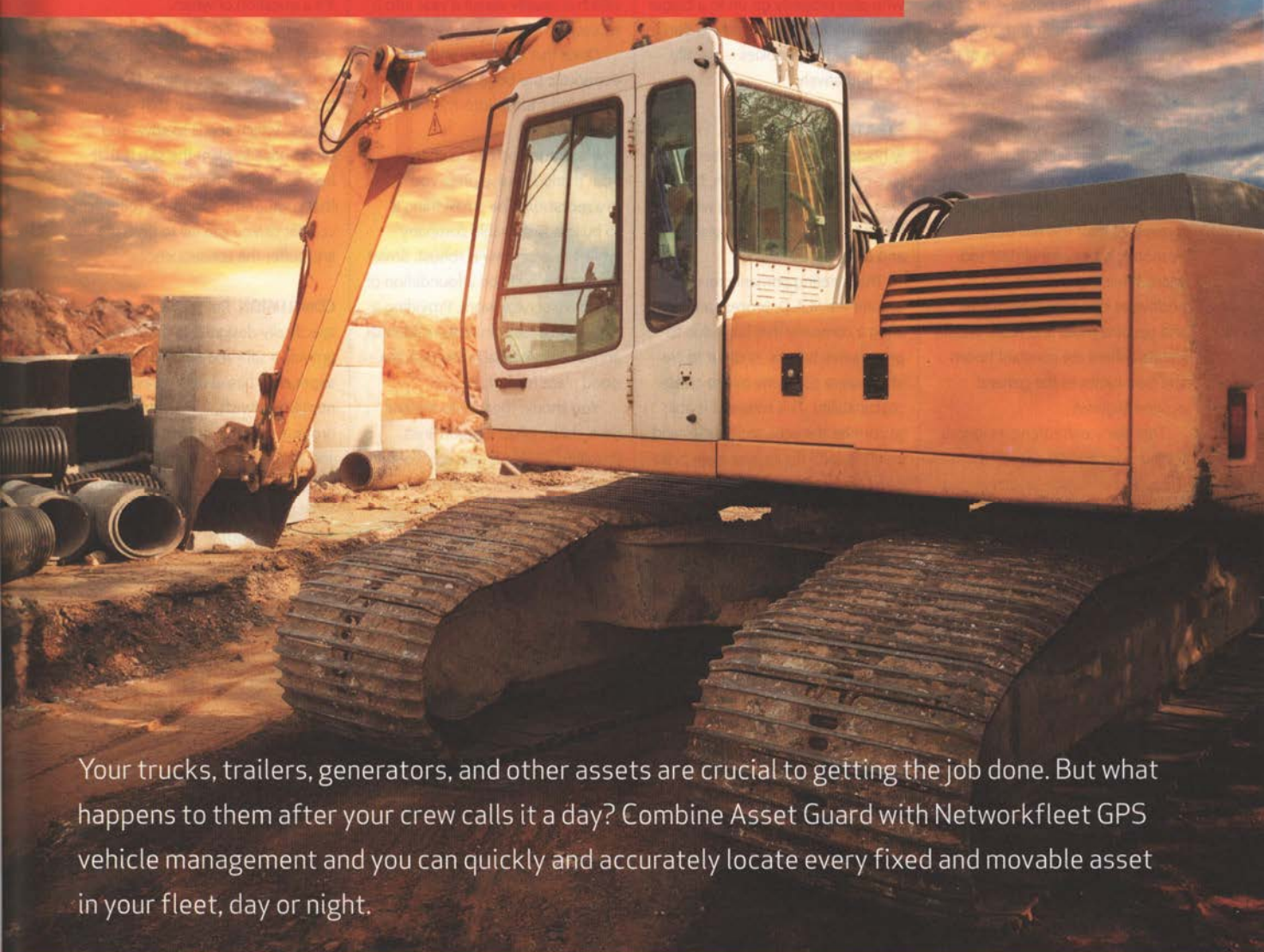
5. Have a culture of continuous improvement. Industry equipment company Ariens/Gravely has this figured out as well as anyone. Its facility in Brillion, Wis., is the gold standard for continuous improvement. (Full disclosure: I work with Ariens/Gravely to provide sales training and employee mentoring.) Everyone there, including the company CEO Dan Ariens, is part of the process. It's an attitude; it's a culture. If Dan weren't behind this, think about how easy it would be for others to not be supportive of it. Everyone who works at Ariens/Gravely is empowered to speak up about ideas that would make them more efficient and the leadership team there listens and implements the ideas. All of you can accomplish more working together than trying to improve by yourself.

Look closely at how you are doing at the five things I laid out above and make a commitment to get better *now!* **L&L**



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JIM HUSTON runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm.
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WHAT GOES UP...

T HIS YEAR HAS TURNED OUT TO BE A BOOM YEAR for most green industry contractors. Phones have been ringing off their hooks ever since the first hint of spring and good weather. Just about all facets of the industry are at pre-recession levels. However, the question is: "How long will this boom cycle last?"

Just as water seeks its own level, the economy seeks equilibrium. What goes up cannot keep rising forever. At least this has been our economic history for almost 100 years. While the overall trend is positive as our economy creates and sustains more and more wealth (capital), there are constant boom and bust cycles as the general economy grows.

Too many entrepreneurs ignore these cycles and do not see them as being a good thing – a winnowing process of sorts. They expect the economy to perform like a roller coaster that eternally climbs and never drops.

If you plan properly, you can counter the busts and ride the booms to prosperity. Just as a roller coaster climbs, dips, twists, turns and drops, creating an exhilarat-

ing experience, so too can proper planning turn the ebbs and flows of the economic cycle into a constant wealth building experience. Those who plan properly go on to a bigger and better future. Those who don't often lose their cookies – literally and figuratively.

STRATEGY FOR SUCCESS. I recently hosted a brainstorming session (see page 10) in the Raleigh, N.C. area. It's a M.A.D. meeting where we focus on mergers, acquisitions and divestitures.

The meeting primarily revolves around the M.A.D. process and creating a company that has value to prospective buyers. In order to create value, a company has to create sustainability. This means it is able to counter the economic cycles and create wealth for its owners in both good times and bad. It is constant and dependable streams of cash that buyers are looking for.

While no one segment of the green industry is bullet-proof, some get bullet-riddled in a recession. For instance, in a downturn, the

first few markets to flush down the toilet are residential installations and commercial home production lots, followed by general commercial installations. Government installation projects are somewhat resilient until they become hyper-competitive when commercial and residential installers with no work jump into it, which is usually about a year into a recession.

Once this happens and the economic pie begins to shrink, companies jump into the maintenance market.

It's almost too late to change your market course once you're in a recession. The smart thing is to build a sustainable company while the economy is robust. Smart contractors build on a foundation of repetitive service work. Providing a "full-service" spectrum to residential and/or commercial customers is a good place to start.

You should then try to expand your chemical application lines. Irrigation service is also an excellent area to grow, as is Christmas décor. Tree services and pruning should not be overlooked due to the necessity to prune such for both safety and aesthetic reasons. Enhancements for both residential and commercial maintenance clients should

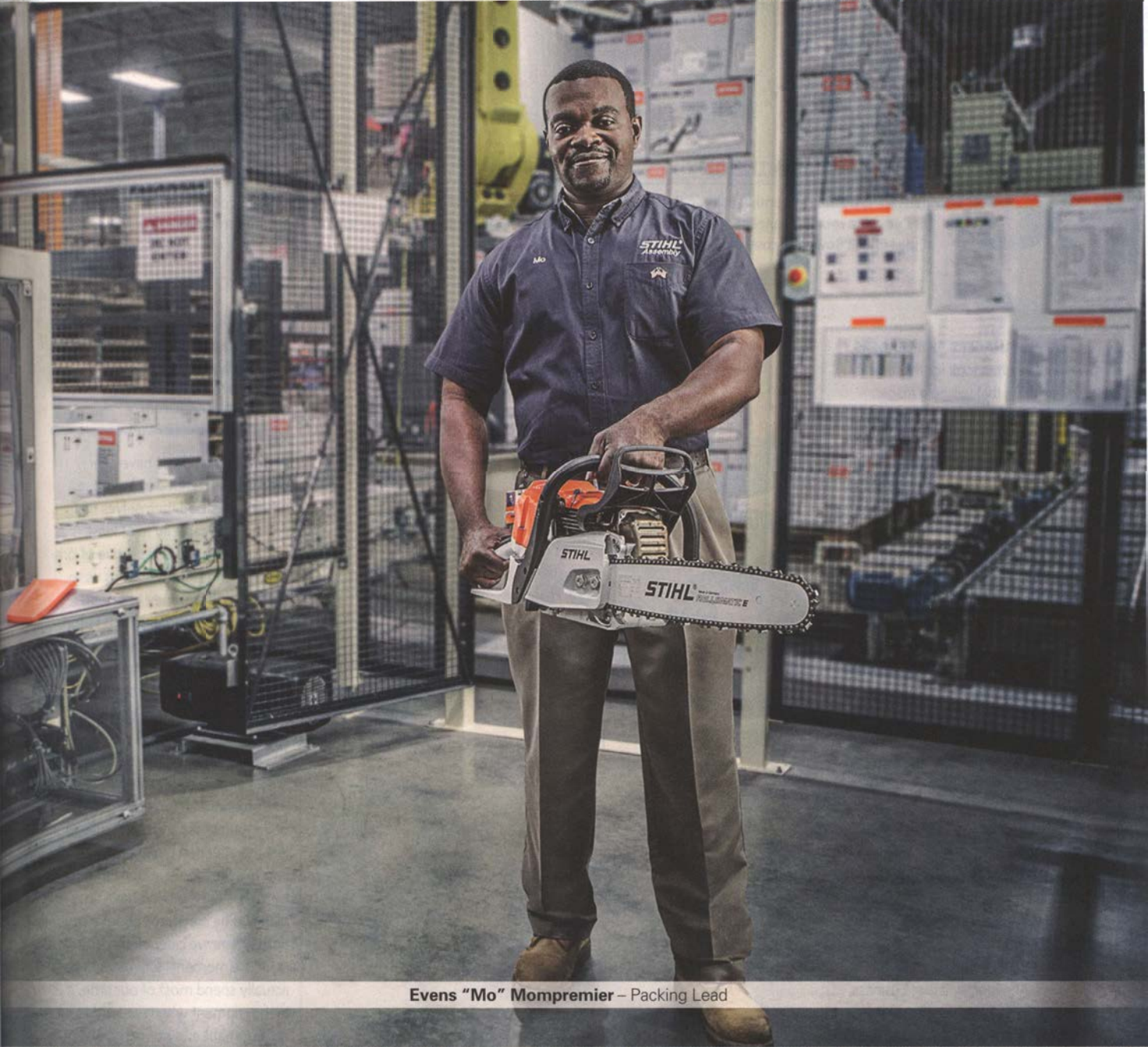
be vigorously pursued as well as fine gardening for homeowners.

It's not that you want to ignore installation projects. Just be aware that, like the blitz in football, if you live on installation projects alone, you'll die by them. If all you do is installation projects, it's not a question if you're going to get burned, it's a question of when.

Someone once said that the seeds of an organization's destruction are sown from within. How true. The good news is that you choose which seeds to sow. You can choose to plant the seeds that lead to long-term sustainability and that counter the economic roller coaster or you can fail to diversify and suffer the consequences.

CONCLUSION. Roller coasters are specifically designed and built to provide a safe and exhilarating experience based upon gravity and numerous twists, turns, dips and drops. Economic downturns are not. Just as there is no eternally climbing roller coaster, there is no such thing as an eternally growing economy without cycles that go "Boom!" and then go "Bust!" The good news is that you can choose to grow consistently through these cycles if you plan properly. It's up to you. Choose wisely, my friends. **L&L**





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BY SCOTT JAMIESON

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, factual advice on solving your labor problems. Email Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net with topic ideas.

AS MANAGERS AND LEADERS, we often look for that one thing that will be a magic bullet to propel our team to great performance. My experience has shown me that there is no one best program or training regime, but there are great tools to put in the toolbox.

A few years ago, I was working with a consulting group called Transform out of Maryland to help me with sales training, and during our work together they introduced me to the Enneagram. The Enneagram is a nine-pointed model (ennea means nine, gram means model) that helps people understand how they and their personality operate. The Enneagram has been taught at the Stanford Business School and has become more visible in business training. Much of its previous use has been in spiritual teaching and therapy work, but my use of the Enneagram has focused on the business aspects.

What gets in the way of what you want, whether it is in business, family, friendships or your spiritual connections is the same: It's you. What prevents you from being who you want to be or where you want to go is always the same: It's you.

The Enneagram describes nine personality types, or "lenses," through which people see the world. These lenses are all different, and when we start working with the Enneagram we realize that everyone sees the world differently. We all have different strategies for a successful life. We all define a successful life differently and, beyond that, we all have different pathways to achieve that success.

The Enneagram's personality styles are those places each of us tend to center on, or spend most of



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INDIVIDUALIST

PERSONALITY PROFILES AS A HIRING TOOL

our time. They are our home base. No one type is better or worse than another, but the true learning is that they are different and people view their lives and the world through their own personality lens. For example, when you walk into a room does your attention go to who has the power? Does your attention go to what is wrong and needs to be fixed? Does your at-

tention go to who needs help? Or does your attention find worry and worst-case scenarios?

So what does this mean for you as a leader of your team, and how is it going to help you attract and keep great people? When leaders realize that people see the world differently than they do, they broaden their perspective and understand their team better.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT the Enneagram, check out Enneagramworldwide.com and Transforminc.com.

The best leaders I have ever worked with tended to be those who understood themselves first and had the capacity to at least acknowledge the perspective of others. The Enneagram teaches us to enter into the journey of self-discovery and appreciation first before trying to figure others out. When leaders begin to consciously impact others, they go off "automatic" and make their actions and behaviors much more intentional.

For key meetings I ask myself, "What impact do I want to have in this situation?" It forces me to think of the outcomes and the results, not just the intention I might have going into the situation. Certainly this is much easier when you have time to plan and be conscious about a situation. Where we can get into trouble is "in the moment" where we actually spend most of our time. It is in the moment when we tend to be on automatic and not conscious of our impacts until it is too late.

The best leaders are those who are present in the moment and very conscious of the impacts they are creating. The Enneagram is one tool that can help you better understand yourself – and your team – and be more present in the moment. I have found the Enneagram one of those studies that forces you to go deeper if you are interested in learning more. The Enneagram is a lifelong study and practice for those who see its value. **L&L**

The author is a vice president at Bartlett Tree Experts, Northbrook, Ill., and president of the National Association of Landscape Professionals.



CALLBACKS DAMAGE RELATIONSHIPS.

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Solutions for the Growing World



While Jon Rick flies between two states to operate two companies, he is training his employees to take on more daily responsibilities so he can focus on the big picture. By Brooke N. Bates

AIR APPARENT

J

ON RICK BOARDED 143 FLIGHTS LAST YEAR. About every three days, he landed in either Denver or Bismarck as he flew back and forth between two businesses.

“If I don’t keep moving, I get stir crazy,” says Rick, who initially chose lawn care over finance (his college major) because he didn’t want to be inside at a desk all day. He didn’t realize that his “desk” would become a mobile office in the sky.



DOUBLE TIME

Rick is president of both J. Rick Lawn & Tree and Dakota OutdoorScapes.

After graduation, Rick became part-owner and general manager of the lawn care company where he worked during college. After several years building his experience, he started J. Rick Lawn & Tree in 2011. He did all sales and applications himself the first year, then hired technicians as the Colorado Springs-based company grew.

Then, in the summer of 2012, wildfires ravaged Colorado, practically shutting down businesses like Rick's as thousands of residents evacuated. Rick traveled back to his hometown of Bismarck, N.D., where he stumbled onto an opportunity.

"I had quite a few friends that were struggling to find landscape contractors. It was small stuff – grading and putting rocks and edging around houses – but they just couldn't find contractors," he says. "So I

ended up doing some work in Bismarck on my vacation. After talking to more people, I realized the demand for good contractors was there due to all the new construction."

That fall, Rick went on a "fact-finding research mission" to Bismarck with Tim Emick, owner of a landscaping company in Colorado Springs. They met with several builders, developers and realtors to evaluate the market opportunity. Blending Emick's landscape construction experience with Rick's sales savvy, they founded Dakota OutdoorScapes in time for the 2013 season.

"Lawn care is an easier business model," Rick says. "The returning revenue and the sellable aspect is the best in the industry, where it's more recession-proof and it's easier to manage. Landscape construction is more exciting because you're transforming a

FREQUENT FLYING ADVICE



on Rick lives most people's nightmare – spending a lot of time in airports due to his frequent trips between.

Bismarck, N.D., and Colorado Springs, Colo.

"During landscape season, I'm in both offices every week," Rick says. "I'm in each place for about three days, so I'm usually in the airports two to three days a week going back and forth."

Those airline miles have taught Rick how to manage his busy schedule effectively – and technology helps. He prefers email to phone, for example, because if he only has a 20-minute window, it's much quicker to send several emails than to wait for people to pick up phone calls.

Technology enables him to work anywhere – even in the air. Rick travels with his iPhone, iPad and laptop to work remotely. By using his iPad on his cellular network, he can connect anywhere without relying on Wi-Fi. Because the files for both companies are stored on the cloud, he can access anything at all times.

"I carry a mobile office with me to manage my time effectively so I don't have down time," he says.

He also plans his flights accordingly to maximize his time in each office.

"I choose flights in the evening so I'm not missing phone calls or emails," he says. "It's being creative about scheduling times to travel, and being extremely effective when I'm there by setting up back-to-back appointments. Any office work or phone calls, I need to do later or early in the morning so I can meet with people throughout the day."

Hopefully, all the work now will pay off later, he says.

"It is a lot of travel, which I enjoy for the most part, but it does get old when you pull in your driveway at 12:30 a.m. and you have to get up at 5:30," says Rick, 31. "I don't have a wife, I don't have kids, so it's easy for me to do. But at some point I will, so that's why, while I'm young, I'm trying to put certain pieces in place so I won't have to be in either spot at any certain time."

COMPANY PROFILE

blank canvas into something beautiful, and you deal with higher dollars. But you have to sell it every year. So there are big differences and things to like and dislike about both.”

A TALE OF TWO COMPANIES. Though located about 775 miles apart, the Colorado lawn care company and North Dakota landscaping company help each other grow. Besides sharing some key employees, including Rick, president of both J. Rick Lawn & Tree and Dakota OutdoorScapes, the businesses tap into each other’s best practices.

“There are always certain systems I see in place at one company that work really well that we’ll implement at the other company,” Rick says. “For example, we use Real Green software for lawn care in Colorado (at J. Rick). It’s really not really applicable for landscape construction, but the back office work is cumbersome for smaller landscape jobs, so we’ve implemented Real Green software for Dakota as well.”

Both companies’ software, data and files are stored on the cloud, making it easy to access anything from either company on any device. Starting this year, Dakota will add lawn care to its landscaping services – further leveraging the Real Green software as well as J. Rick’s lawn care experience. The companies share many of the same systems, processes and back-office staff. But even within similar frameworks, people interact differently across the country – giving Rick plenty of stories to share with his teams.

“Having two companies in two different states gives you some perspective,” he says. “You get to be around a lot more people, different attitudes and different cultures. ... There’s definitely a lot of sharing back and forth: saying, ‘Here was the experience, here was the customer’s take, and here’s the outcome.’”

Rick regularly shares customer feedback so employees can see examples of great service from both companies. When customers barbecue wild game to thank the crews, for example, or email Rick saying they can’t believe how late the crew worked, or how clean they left the sidewalk – those examples can spur consistently high-quality work.



Together, J. Rick Lawn & Tree and Dakota OutdoorScapes employed 19 people last year and expect 25 this year. Rick hires people who can be self-sufficient and make their own decisions.

“We want people to know that we’ll take care of their property to the best of our ability, and make the experience as painless as possible,” Rick says.

GROOM AND GO. Though Rick is the main shared resource between the companies, several back-office associates also split their time – without leaving Colorado.

Emick’s other company, Timberline Landscaping, shares an estimator and an office manager with Dakota OutdoorScapes. J. Rick’s office manager assisted with both companies, but since her recent promotion to operations manager, Rick hired an office assistant who now crosses over as well.

At Dakota, Rick promoted an experienced foreman to project manager last year, increasing his responsibility over crews and customers – both for Dakota and Timberline. He hired a project coordinator, who focuses on Dakota. Meanwhile, a strong lead technician at J. Rick ensures there aren’t quality issues for Rick to deal with in Colorado, either.

Rick’s next hire will be a service manager to be in charge of the irrigation and lawn care divisions and help the warranty/irrigation/lighting side of the construction division.

“This area has seemed to take a lot of time away from our project manager, when he should be managing the construction side, and it has also taken a lot of my time,” he says.

Learning to delegate these responsibilities has been key to growing both companies. Rick used to manage every aspect himself – doing his own measurements, estimates, proposals and designs, often working until 10 p.m. after a full day in the field. Now, he

puts employees in charge of those pieces so he can focus on the big picture.

While he’s still the face of both companies, in terms of sales and networking, Rick is starting to train a newly promoted operations manager on sales calls. He’ll keep training employees to pick up responsibilities, freeing him to grow the company.

“In a lot of companies, you see owner/operators get stuck working in the field, but as we’ve grown, my focus (has become) managing the people that do those things,” Rick says. “My whole goal on hiring people is so, once they’re trained, I can get out of their way and let them do their thing. One of the biggest things I look for is someone who can be self-sufficient, who has a proven track record of making his or her own decisions and not relying on somebody else.”

Together, the two companies employed 19 last year and expect 25 this year. They made approximately \$1.5 million in revenue in 2014, and Rick predicts 25-30 percent growth this year. That’s slower than the 70-80 percent growth he’s been seeing, but he wants to make sure star employees are comfortable in their expanding roles before picking up pace again.

“My plan is to groom employees this year to start taking over more of my roles and responsibilities so they can replace me, so we continue to grow and hire more people and the people I train will train people,” he says. “The key has been putting the right people in the right places and promoting from within when we have superstars. We want to keep that train going because it’s definitely those people that make it happen.” **L&L**

2015 STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

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JOHN DEERE

A SUPPLEMENT TO

Lawn & Landscape



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Shake the money tree

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Maze of regulations

Doing our part



ONCE AGAIN, JOHN DEERE is proud to support Lawn & Landscape's State of the Industry Report. This valuable information helps all of us gain a deeper understanding of industry trends, identify opportunities and gain insight into what's ahead for our industry.

As you review the data, you'll find 2015 has been a significant year for many in the industry. In fact, many landscape contractors report that they are experiencing one of the best – if not *the* best – year since the Great Recession. Many report that customers are spending again, especially on outdoor living spaces and landscape enhancements.

This is great news for all of us, but the year was not without challenges. A lack of labor is creating a bottleneck in operations – 77 percent say a lack of qualified employees is a limiting factor to business growth. Finding quality employees also ranks as the top item on the list of

concerns for contractors – 45 percent say it will have the most impact on their location's business in the next three years.

But despite these challenges, the landscape business is a good business! Landscape contractors are generating a median revenue of \$217,000, and nearly 70 percent of the contractors surveyed have been in business for 10 or more years.

Also, other indicators such as housing starts, home values and employment figures support a continued positive outlook for the industry.

After you read through this issue and examine how your business compares to those included in the survey, I encourage you to tune in to what's happening in your community and local government.

As landscape professionals, you certainly understand the value of well-managed green space in your community. But do your customers? How about your local officials?

Turfgrass provides significant environmental benefits to our communities like stormwater management and filtration, environmental cooling, carbon sequestration, oxygen production, dust control and more.

Managed landscapes are not only important to our bottom lines, they are important for our environment. We all need to do our part to educate our customers and our lawmakers about the benefits of turf.

I also urge you to get involved with industry associations, such as the National Association of Landscape Professionals and the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance. Both associations work on behalf of the landscape industry to ensure that policies and laws are created to protect



KEN TAYLOR, CLP

General Manager
John Deere Corporate Business Division

the rights of landscape professionals and their customers to create and maintain healthy, viable and beautiful landscaped spaces.

We need to work together to ensure the outlook of the professional landscape industry continues to be bright.

In addition to supporting the industry, John Deere is committed to supporting you, the landscape professional. Yes, we offer the most extensive line of equipment to meet your demanding needs, but we also support your business through the best dealer network in the industry. With GreenFleet Loyalty Rewards, Uptime Solutions and customized financing through John Deere Financial, John Deere can support you, and your business, like no other equipment manufacturer in the industry.

We'd welcome the opportunity to earn your business and provide you with the support you need to harness the positive trends we see in the landscape industry. **soi**

“I encourage you to get involved in the communities you serve to promote the benefits of well-planned, developed and managed landscapes.”



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Ready for takeoff



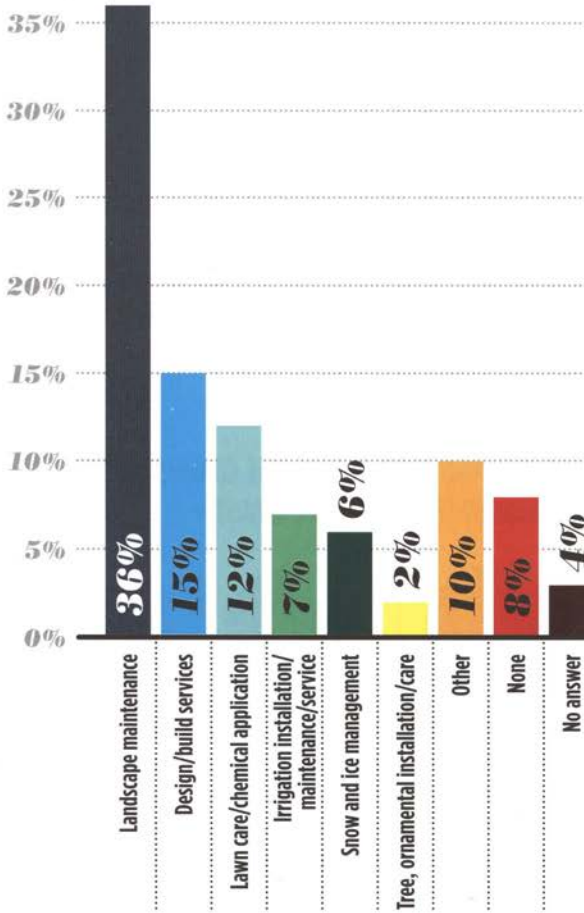
Our latest data tell a story of an industry poised for more (and steady) growth.



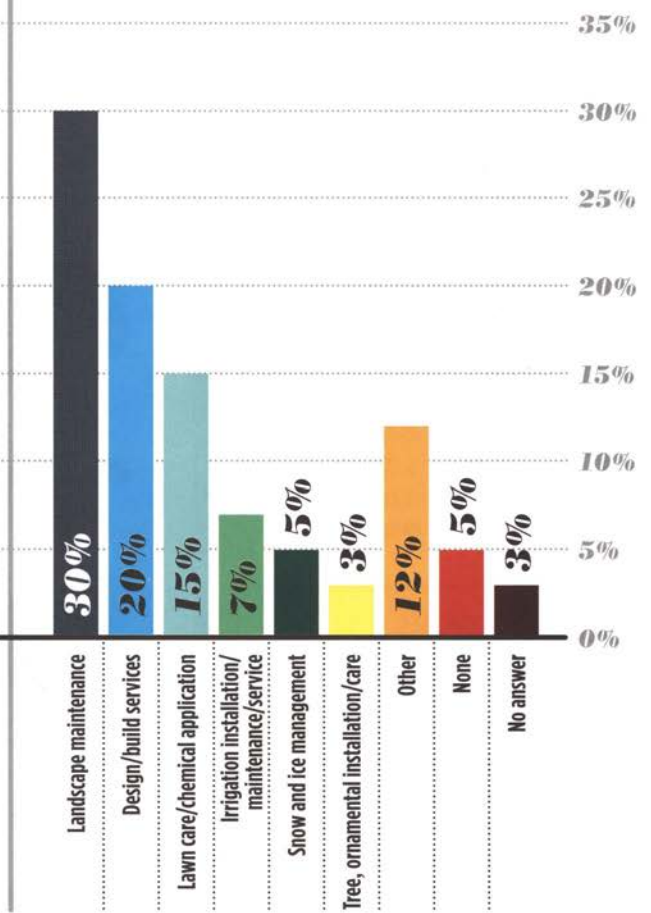
I**N THE NEXT FEW PAGES,** we've pulled out some of the most important data from this year's State of the Industry survey to help you better understand what's happening nationwide, and put your own operation in context. The landscape industry has finally recovered from the hangover of the Great Recession. Contractors across the country are raising prices, and report that customers are spending again – especially on outdoor living and construction projects. Maintenance continues to dominate the share of trailer (and P&L) for most landscapers, topping

lists for both the fastest-growing and most-profitable services offered. As owners age (more than half are 45 or older, and the median age is 51) and as more private equity money continues to pour into the industry, landscapers are looking to sell. A quarter of contractors say they plan on selling their business in 10 years, and 40 percent of those say they have an articulated exit strategy. The biggest limit on business is a lack of labor – owners cite a dearth of quality employees as having the biggest impact on their business in the next three years, more than insurance costs, low-ball competitors and fuel prices. – *Chuck Bowen*

WHAT WAS THE FASTEST-GROWING SERVICE YOUR LOCATION OFFERED IN 2014?



WHAT DO YOU PREDICT WILL BE THE FASTEST-GROWING SERVICE FOR YOUR LOCATION IN REVENUE IN 2015?



WHAT WAS YOUR LOCATION'S GROSS REVENUE IN 2014?



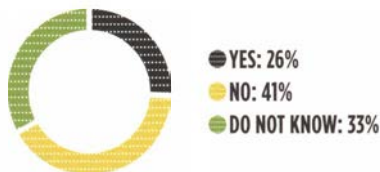
Median revenue nationwide:

\$217,000

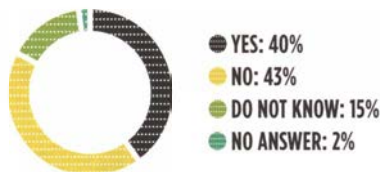
DID YOUR LOCATION TURN A PROFIT IN 2014?



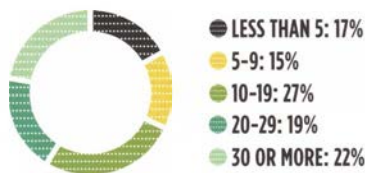
DO YOU ANTICIPATE YOUR LOCATION'S BUSINESS WILL BE SOLD IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?



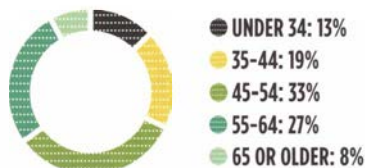
IS THERE AN EXIT STRATEGY – AN ARTICULATED PLAN TO SELL THE LOCATION'S BUSINESS?



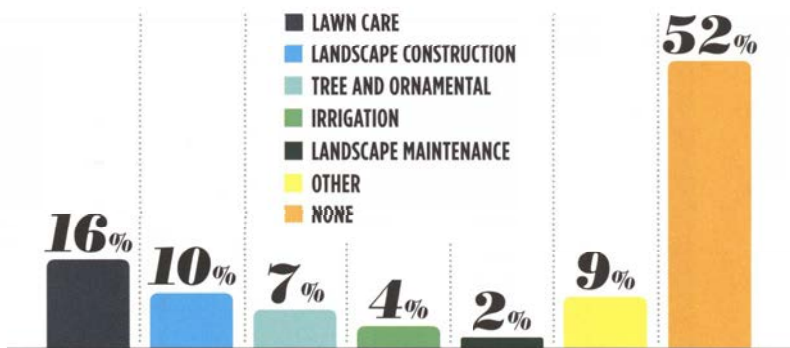
HOW MANY YEARS HAS YOUR COMPANY LOCATION BEEN IN BUSINESS?



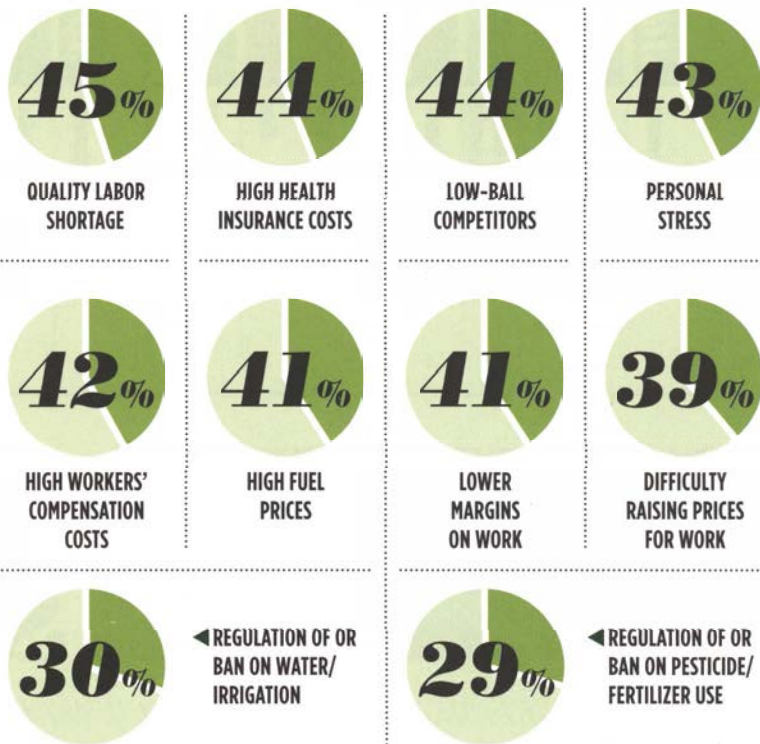
WHAT IS YOUR AGE?



WHAT SERVICES HAS YOUR LOCATION STOPPED OFFERING IN THE LAST THREE YEARS?



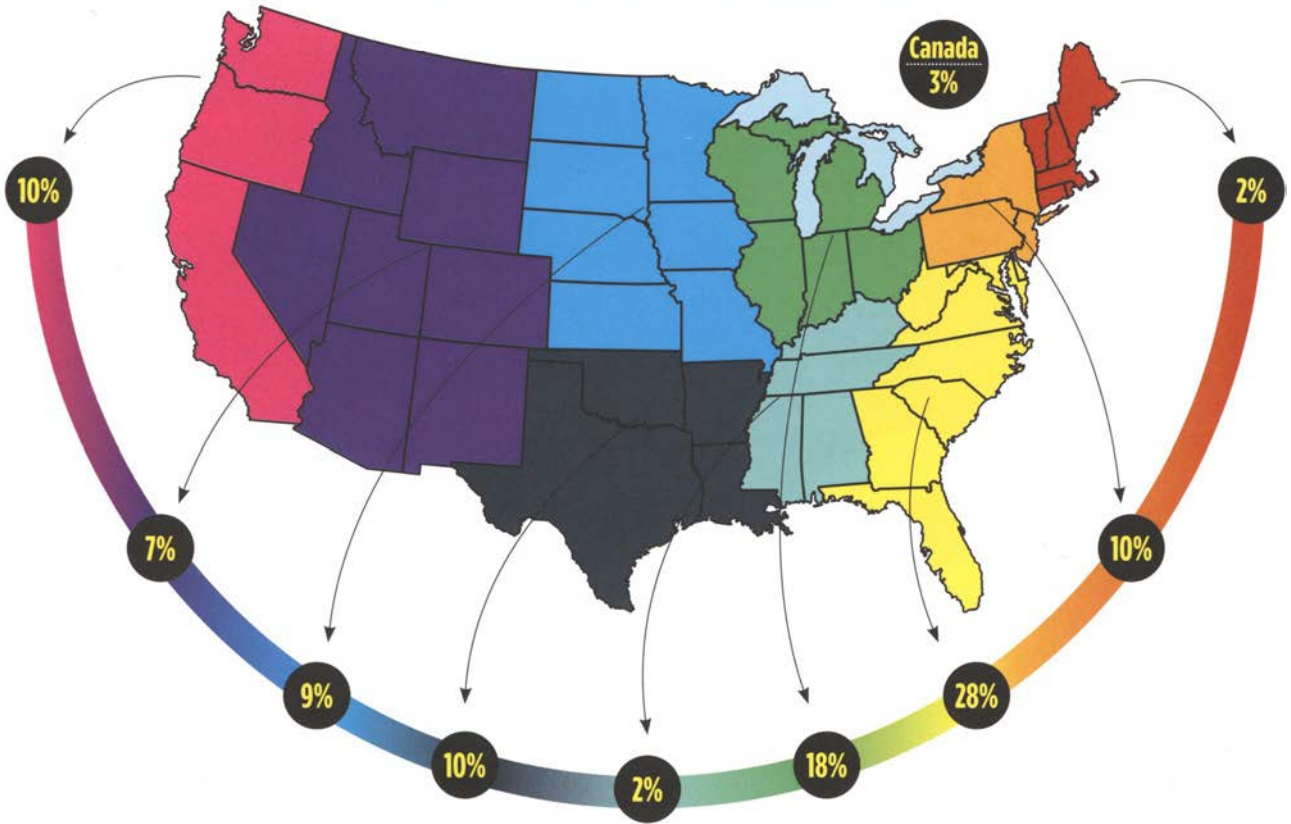
WHICH OF THESE ISSUES WOULD YOU RATE AS A TOP CONCERN FOR YOUR BUSINESS IN THE NEXT THREE YEARS?



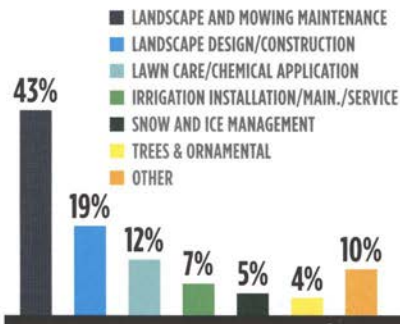
SURVEY METHODOLOGY

THE SURVEY SAMPLE OF 10,584 WAS SELECTED IN SYSTEMATIC FASHION BY LAWN & LANDSCAPE AND READEX RESEARCH FROM A LARGER SAMPLE REPRESENTING 21,167 RECIPIENTS. THE SURVEY RAN FROM JULY 7-16, AND THE MARGIN OF ERROR FOR PERCENTAGES BASED ON 241 USABLE RESPONSES IS 36.3 PERCENTAGE POINTS AT THE 95 PERCENT CONFIDENCE LEVEL. SOME CHARTS DO NOT TOTAL 100% DUE TO ROUNDING.

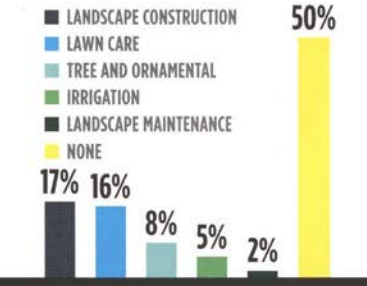
WHERE'S YOUR COMPANY LOCATED?



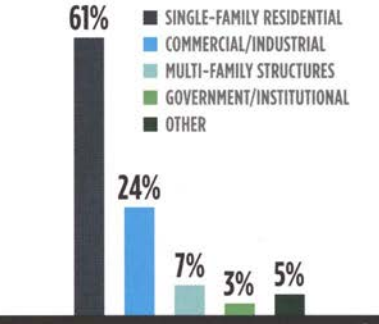
WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR LOCATION'S 2014 GROSS REVENUE CAME FROM THE FOLLOWING SERVICES?



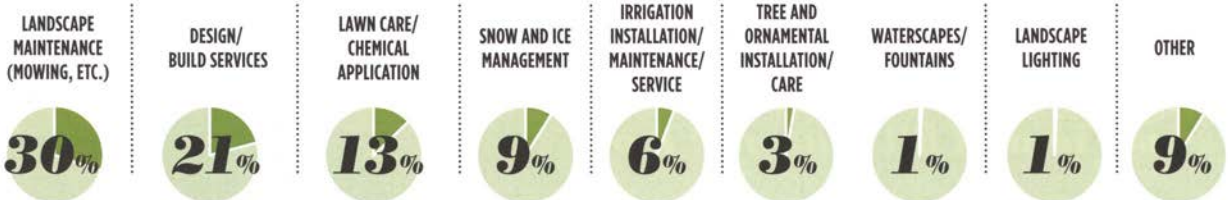
WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING SERVICES DO YOU PLAN ON OFFERING IN 2015 THAT YOU DON'T OFFER NOW?



WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR LOCATION'S 2014 SALES CAME FROM THE FOLLOWING PROPERTY TYPES?



WHAT WAS THE MOST-PROFITABLE SERVICE YOUR LOCATION OFFERED IN 2014?





“We can’t make the grass grow all winter and we can’t make it snow all summer. Our H-2B staff only come in and fill seasonal jobs.”

Jerry Schill, owner, Schill Grounds Management in North Ridgeville, Ohio



SCHILL
Grounds Management

HAMSTRUNG BY H-2B

How a government shutdown of the seasonal program exacerbated the industry's ongoing labor crisis. By Kristen Hampshire



FOR THE LAST 15 YEARS, Schill Grounds Management has prepared for the season by hiring H-2B workers in the early spring. These are skilled, seasonal employees who help tackle the large volume of work through the start of summer.

"We can't make the grass grow all winter and we can't make it snow all summer. Our H-2B staff only come in and fill seasonal jobs," says Jerry Schill, president of the North Ridgeville, Ohio-based company.



SCHILL
Grounds Management

In the spring, a lawsuit and intra-agency bickering forced the H-2B program to shut down for two weeks. Applications started being processed again, but the program's future – and landscapers' ability to secure workers through it – remained in question throughout the season.

In Ohio, the 20 H-2B workers Schill expected to start work in April weren't admitted into the program at all. And Schill didn't find out that this critical labor pool would not be available for the firm until May.

In the past, by the time Memorial Day came around, an estimated 60 percent of man-hours dedicated to cleanup, pruning and mowing were already completed.

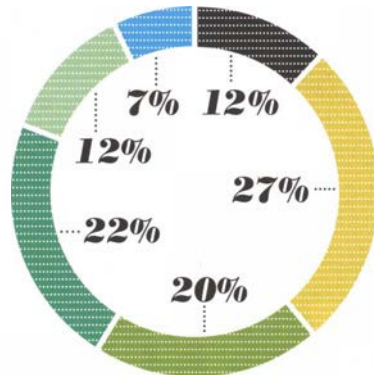
"It was all hands on deck when we lost that staff," Schill says. "We had to hire a fractional HR firm and spend a ton of money on social media and advertising to recruit in any way, shape or form that we could. We were forced to expedite training and cram what we might take a couple weeks to do into five days to get people out in the field."

In all, he spent \$19,500 for the HR firm, \$2,450 on advertising, \$18,522 for online training assessments and orientations and figured an acquisition cost per employee of \$336. The company's attrition rate was 55 percent. And after all that, Schill's crews still blew budgeted hours on jobs, and quality suffered.

Not getting the H-2B crews this year set Schill back for the year, and there's a trickle-down effect of how a labor shortage impedes his business in the long term.

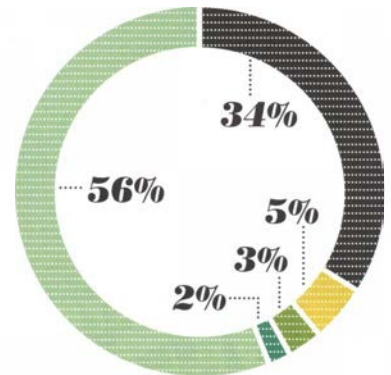
"You slow down growth, stop buying trucks and mowers, quit opening other locations, stop hiring managers," he says, and the list goes on.

HOW MANY EMPLOYEES (FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, SEASONAL) DOES YOUR LOCATION HAVE?



- 1
- 2-4
- 5-9
- 10-29
- 30 or more
- No answer

HOW MANY OPEN POSITIONS (FULL-TIME, PART-TIME, SEASONAL) DOES YOUR LOCATION HAVE?



- 1-3
- 4-5
- 6-10
- More than 10
- None

LABOR CRISIS. The delays and problems with the H-2B program are long-standing and are just the latest chapter in a growing labor crisis in the landscape industry. Based on the latest State of the Industry data, more than a third of landscapers have one to three open positions at their companies. And two-thirds say a lack of quality employees hinders their location's growth. A shortage of good help is cited as the top problem facing landscapers' business success in the next three years – more of a problem than fuel costs, prices, health insurance costs and low-ball competitors.

LOCAL REPLACEMENTS. Josh Denison, vice president of labor and human resources at D.C.-based Denison Landscaping, knows Schill's story all too well. His company's

H-2B workers were 9½ weeks late this year, and he figures actual revenue lost at \$70,000 per week – or about \$665,000 for the season. Add in opportunity loss (work turned away, missed deadlines, lost contracts) and that figure jumps to \$120,000 per week.

To cover the missing crews, the company clocked a total of 90,000 hours of overtime in the spring and workers were "dead on their feet," Denison says. "It was like working a 36-hour snowstorm and continuing at that pace for two months in a row," he says. Denison finally finished spring cleanup on July 2.

H-2B has been a significant part of the labor pool for Denison Landscaping for many years, but the program has become increasingly difficult to manage. But the

“H-2B employees are proud of our industry ... and they're real happy to show up to work every day.”

Shayne Newman, president, Yard Apes

company struggles to find employees domestically.

"There is a lack of local workers," Denison says. "If companies such as my family's cannot perform on our contractual obligations, then we lose business. If we lose business, we lose customers. If we lose customers, we do not need our current employees. Without the H-2B program or a viable labor force, Denison and many companies will not survive and will be out of business."

Denison took a gamble while watching the cap ahead of time, seeing that he might not receive his 200 workers on the date of need he prefers in February.

"So, I called my agent and I asked, 'Is it too late to change my date of need?' He said, 'You're crazy,' and I said, 'I don't care,'" Denison says. "If I would have gone with the Feb. 15 or March 1 date like I normally do, we would have been capped out of the program completely. I would not have gotten any of my guys. But through all of the processing delays and the governmental red tape, I made the call to move our date of need to April 1."

Denison's first group of H-2B workers showed up on April 24. The last group arrived by May 8. To make up for the delay, Denison hired 142 people locally between mid-February and late May. Of those, only a half-dozen were still working for Denison Landscaping in August.

"The average turn-around time was one week," he says.

CAREFUL PLANNING. Shayne Newman, president of Yard Apes in New Milford, Conn., posts a "help wanted" sign in the window of his high-visibility headquarters every spring. Usually that sign is up for a month before the busy spring season starts.

"We kept the sign up all year," he says.

Recruiting quality part-time labor locally is one of the biggest challenges for landscape firms, and programs like H-2B fill a critical personnel void. With the construction industry more vibrant now, the local labor pool in many regions is even

more scarce, says Joe Gonzalez, president of ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design in Venice, Fla.

ArtisTree did not get its H-2B workers this year, and usually the company is awarded the same team of individuals from Mexico who have become part of the company over the last decade. "They know what the job requires, so they come and get right to work," Gonzalez says.

When Gonzalez found out two weeks before the expected arrival of his H-2B that no one was coming, he scrambled. "We sent scouts out around town, and we ran ads, of course," he says. "We went to a temp agency and got the required people."

But the quality of work dropped and overtime increased. "We only accumulated half of the number of employees we needed, and the quality level was much lower so our jobs came under more scrutiny in that first month or two before we were caught up," Gonzalez says.

Gonzalez estimates overtime cost of \$20,000 per week because of not having his usual H-2B crews on board, and the local part-timers he brought on just didn't compare. "Their pace of work and familiarity of the job and endurance is just not there," he says.

Gonzalez knows he will have to curtail growth if he cannot recruit dependable labor – either H-2B or domestic. With the healthy HOA market in his region, there is plenty of maintenance work, he says. In spite of labor challenges, the company grew its landscaping business (staffed by local workers) by 30 percent in 2015. "We are getting ready for next year," he says, "and I believe that whether or not we have H-2B we can plan more intelligently and not get caught by surprise."

WORTH THE HEADACHE. Planning in advance for H-2B requires at least a seven-month window, says Newman of Yard Apes, who got his 12 H-2B workers this year. He can tell the labor market is getting even tighter, though. When Yard Apes put out its fall advertisement for local workers



90,000 HOURS

HOW MANY HOURS OF TOTAL OVERTIME DENISON LANDSCAPING'S CREWS LOGGED IN THE SPRING

"IT WAS LIKE WORKING A 36-HOUR SNOWSTORM AND CONTINUING AT THAT PACE FOR TWO MONTHS IN A ROW," SAYS JOSH DENISON, VICE PRESIDENT OF LABOR AND HUMAN RESOURCES AT THE D.C.-BASED COMPANY.

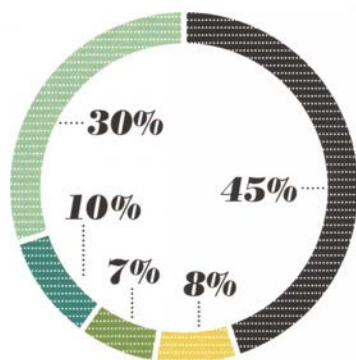
as part of the H-2B process, the company received no applications. Usually, the firm receives 10 or so phone calls in response to the ad.

During peak season, Yard Apes needs 20 seasonal workers. Half of those are local staff, and the other positions are fulfilled by H-2B visas.

"H-2B employees are proud of our industry; they're proud to call themselves landscapers, and they're real happy to show up to work every day," Newman says. "They are eager to learn."

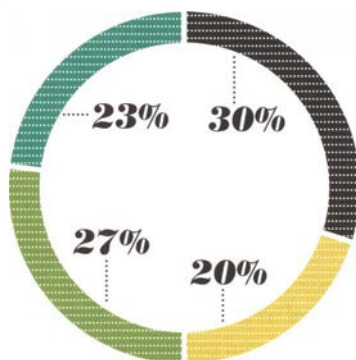
That's also why Denison has brought on more than 200 H-2B workers on average per year for its three locations since 2001 – even though the cost and headaches, and downright risk of not getting employees, are a reality of the program. This year, Denison spent about a quarter-million dollars on the H-2B program. He figures the cost of one H-2B worker – "to get

HOW MANY NEW EMPLOYEES DOES YOUR LOCATION HIRE EACH YEAR?



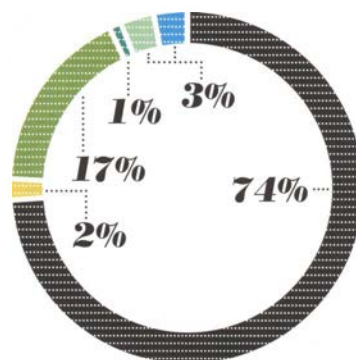
- 1-3
- 4-5
- 6-10
- More than 10
- None

HOW MUCH DOES A LACK OF QUALITY EMPLOYEES HINDER YOUR LOCATION'S GROWTH?



- Hinders a lot
- Hinders
- Hinders somewhat
- Does not hinder

HOW HAS YOUR LOCATION'S USE OF THE H-2B PROGRAM CHANGED IN THE LAST THREE YEARS?



- Did not use at all in last 3 years
- Use more
- No change
- Use less
- Stopped using
- No answer

them up the road, processed and to work” – is \$1,600. That includes processing and visa fees, transportation/travel costs and uniforms.

That’s nothing compared to the loss of revenue when H-2B workers are not on the team, as Denison learned for two months last spring. Denison says politicians and even other business owners are shocked when he shares the numbers. Denison has traveled to Capitol Hill several times a month for the last nine months to make the case for removing cost and administrative obstacles from a program that provides the workers that are so vital to his business.

“I tell people this and they look at me like I’m crazy,” he says. “But that is the truth behind what the federal government has done to the H-2B program.”

Denison wonders what will happen if he doesn’t use the H-2B program next year. His company has already moved forward

with the application process – as have Schill, Yard Apes and Artis Tree. Denison wants to wean off the program. Right now he’s spending as much as \$2,000 a week advertising for fall labor. But as Gonzalez noted, it’s not that easy. Workers in Mexico and El Salvador are a dependable part of the team for nine months out of the year, and have been for the last decade and more. They’ve come to rely on the work just as much as the landscapers who hire them.

ONE MORE FIGHT. With prevailing wage a concern and the DOL no longer accepting private or government wage surveys, the cost of paying H-2B and all employees could make the program, and simply keeping people on board, more expensive than what companies can afford. Denison is expecting his prevailing wage to come in at \$13.80/hour, which is a 35-percent wage increase.

“This causes a ripple effect in all wages across the board,” Denison says. “If your \$10.30 basic domestic or H-2B laborer has an arbitrary wage increase, then you have to adjust wages across the board in a sliding scale to keep it fair and balanced. What happens to the \$12 guy if the new guy is making more? And what happens to the \$15 guy?”

Prevailing wage is one more labor battle to fight. In the meantime, Denison doesn’t want to cut off H-2B.

It’s a conundrum. You can’t work with the program; you can’t work without it. The cost and administrative stress is mounting, but backing off isn’t a solution if there’s no other labor to fill the gap.

“These are jobs we have proven (to the government) that we cannot fill domestically, so H-2B is not a short-cut or a crutch,” Schill says. “We have this need.” **SOI**



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Mowing goes mobile

Homeowners can now hire you with the tap of an app.

How instant-ordering is changing the landscape industry for the better.

By Chuck Bowen



HERE'S AN EXCESS OF SMARTPHONE APPS

that let homeowners order lawn mowing services with the tap of their finger. The apps are the next generation of online directories like Angie's List and Thumbtack, and join tech giants Google and Amazon, which have both invested in their own home services software.

The app LawnStarter announced earlier this year that it's raised \$6 million, and is the latest in a long list of mostly regional apps that are building armies of landscapers in select markets who can provide services – mostly lawn maintenance, but also snow plowing and tree work – for a fixed price. They remove the burden of selling new work and collecting payment, sending vetted leads directly to contractors and paying regularly twice a month.

Steve Schell, who runs Schell's Lawn Care with his son, Ryan, typifies the contractor who uses these apps. He offers full-service landscaping to a mostly residential customer base. He started his part-time business this year – he does about \$10,000 in annual revenue – and relies on an app called Mowz almost entirely for marketing and new business.

"We took off like gangbusters, and a lot of it's thanks to Mowz, to be honest," Schell says. "It's given us a lot of exposure to some interesting neighborhoods we probably wouldn't have ever thought of."

Schell says he gets about 30 to 40 leads a day through the app, of which he accepts about four or five. Many of the jobs he accepts are repeat customers, too, as homeowners become more comfortable ordering lawn service via their phone.

"I think this is becoming more the norm. I've definitely noticed over this last summer, we're getting a lot of repeat customers," he says.

Mowz, which also offers snow plowing services, is the largest app of its kind with 2,500 contractors across 38 markets. Mowdo is beta-testing in Seattle, Austin and Omaha, and works with the website Thumbtack to provide contractor contacts in other markets. CEO Mike Fingado said that when the app launched in Seattle, it got more than 250 requests from contractors to join. He's currently working with 15, and has requests from 15 other states to expand. Ryan Farley, co-founder at LawnStarter, which just netted \$6 million in funding, used to run his own landscaping company in high school. His app has about 100 contractors in Austin, Washington, D.C., and Orlando.

The apps' algorithms set prices for services, using a combination of the lawn's size, length of grass, obstacles like fences and some market pricing data. From interviews with contractors, the prices are typically on par with the local market – often between \$25 and \$40 per cut. And users said they can report back if a homeowner's report of their lawn's condition isn't accurate.

"They set the price until I get there. That's a big problem with the app – I get there and people say they don't have a fence. They have a fence. They say their grass is short. I get there and it's 3 foot tall," says Lauren Cress, who runs HillCress Lawn Care in Atlanta with his uncle, Christopher Hill.

Cress projects he'll hit \$80,000 this year in total business, and says Mowz jobs bring in about \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month.

Developers say most contractors on their rolls are one-man operations, or run a couple of crews. They must have some level of general liability insurance and commercial-grade equipment.

Landscapers we spoke with say they use the apps as a turn-key marketing and lead-gen service, picking up new work that helps fill gaps in their schedules and increases route density. There's no selling involved – leads come right to their phones – and they're free to accept or reject as they see fit.

"At the end of the month, we send out statements and theoretically people pay in 15 days. That doesn't mean they all do," says Erik Carvotta, owner of ETC Services in Hendersonville, Tenn. "I don't have to sit around printing invoices.... I don't need to be on the phone hours every day talking to somebody if they had an issue. As far as payments, I don't have to worry about when we'll get paid."

Carvotta has used GreenPal, Mowz and Task Easy to pick up

business. GreenPal, which solicits bids from several contractors and allows the homeowner to choose, has been the biggest hit, he says. In July, it added \$7,000 to his top line revenue.

Last year, ETC did \$270,000 in annual revenue, and Carvotta credits the apps for a good chunk of his growth, and for saving him a lot of aggravation.

"There's no selling or haggling over prices. They get set by the app," he says. "I don't have to go out and hunt down customers. I don't have to advertise. I don't have to go out and quote. ... I don't have to chase anyone down." **SOI**

"We took off like gangbusters, and a lot of it's thanks to Mowz, to be honest. It's given us a lot of exposure to some interesting neighborhoods we probably wouldn't have ever thought of."

**Steve Schell,
owner of Schell's Lawn Care**



Shake the money tree

Landscapers across the country are raising prices (and profit margins) as the economy improves. By Brian Horn

AS COSTS FOR LABOR, MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT CONTINUE TO INCREASE, landscapers are finding some solace in their success with raising prices. Nationwide, almost two-thirds – 63 percent – charge more for services now than they did three years ago. Here’s how landscapers in several markets are taking initiative and upping the ante for their operations.

POLITE PASS

When Randy Newhard presents customers with a price increase, he doesn’t know if they will accept, but he is hoping they are at least open to negotiating.

“Sometimes it’s 2 percent, up to 5 if you can get it,” says Newhard, owner of New Way Landscape & Tree Services. Newhard really only goes up to 4.8 percent so it doesn’t seem as high as 5 percent. He has parted ways with smaller customers who rejected a price increase and who didn’t fit in the company’s ideal route density, as well as customers who haven’t seen an increase in a few years and the jobs are 20 percent or more below where they should be price-wise.

“We will politely say we can’t perform to expectations at current rate and we will offer our 30-day notice,” he says.

The only customers he doesn’t increase prices for are those who have been with the company less than a year, and any

New Way Landscape and Tree

Location: San Diego
Revenue: \$17.5 million
Employees: 235
Services: Design/build, maintenance, tree care



contracts for military housing, since those are non-negotiable contracts. Newhard’s increases have been for cost of living, and he can’t recall the last time he increased prices for existing customers to improve profit margins. But he is doing that by building in a 7-12 percent increase on new work he’s bidding on this year.

“All of us in San Diego are pretty close to the same bid rate,” he says. “It’s all a function of hours, which equals a monthly price. Say we come in at \$3,300 and someone comes in at \$3,000, well we probably aren’t going to turn down the job, we’ll just adjust the man hours.”

“If we lose them, we lose them. ... We really want good, quality clients.”

Liza Lightfoot, Avant Gardening and Landscaping

A NUANCED APPROACH

When pricing jobs, Robin Luce is always cautious about how to approach new clients compared to existing ones.

"I am raising prices on new jobs," says Luce, owner of Jubilee Landscape in Fairhope, Ala. "On existing jobs, it's always sensitive. We are not as tolerant of bad customers. We've fired a few customers, and we will be seeking some increases."

On new jobs, Luce will seek a 7-8 percent increase, while on existing jobs he'll try to negotiate a 3-4 percent increase. He's parted ways with some customers who won't accept a steeper price, but tries to find them someone new to do the job.

"Everybody agreed to move on, no hard feelings," he says.

Jubilee Landscape

Location: Fairhope, Ala.
Revenue: More than \$4 million
Employees: 65
Services: Design/build, maintenance



But Luce isn't always willing to let a customer go and sometimes margins have to take a backseat, he says. Luce says he hasn't gotten too much resistance, partly because customers expected prices to go up this year, and because of the good relationships he's built with clients.

"It's the person that you don't have a good relationship with that is really hard to raise prices on," he says.

ROLLER COASTER APPROACH

Business has been good for Nelson Lee and Landscapeworks, but that doesn't mean he's been able to increase his profit margins. Instead, he's only raised prices an average of 3-5 percent for more than half his customers to cover increases in materials and insurance.

"A lot of people expected prices weren't going to increase, so there was a lot of expectation and a lot of competition," says Lee, president at the Hawthorne, N.J., company. He says there was also an expectation to cut some prices, which he did for 6-8 percent of commercial maintenance customers.

"Commercially, the only thing I can explain is we had two bad seasons, snow-wise, back to back," he says. "Usually when you have two bad seasons of snow back to back commercially it's a little more difficult because they were not expecting to sell that budget."

The one area he was able to increase somewhat significantly was design/build where he raised prices 10-12 percent. If he received a call asking why he was raising

Landscapeworks

Location: Hawthorne, N.J.
Revenue: More than \$2 million
Employees: 41
Services: Design/build, lawn care, irrigation



the prices, he explained the cost of materials and insurance increased, so he had to cover that somehow. Plus, Lee hadn't raised their prices in a while. Lee says the last time he raised prices was seven or eight years ago, and that was a 5 percent increase.

"They were on the low side to begin with. In order to come out with any kind of profit we had to increase them," he says.

The customers that Nelson let stay at the same price had multi-year contracts or he promised when they were negotiating in the spring that he wouldn't ask for an increase.

"We mentioned we wouldn't increase the prices and if we didn't increase, they wouldn't have to go out to bid and they would re-sign with us," he says.

The Plant Concierge

Location: Dallas
Revenue: \$1.25 million
Employees: 16 full time
Services: Design/build, irrigation maintenance, maintenance, interiorscape



PURGING FOR PROFIT

In the past three years, Thomas Fancher has been steadily increasing prices, and decreasing his count of unprofitable customers.

"Little by little, especially as we are bringing on new clients, and purging non-profitable clients, with every new client we have been increasing (prices)," says Fancher, who runs The Plant Concierge with co-owner Darren Ezell.

"About three years ago we went up about \$3 per man-hour, so roughly 10 percent or so. We continued to go up until we felt we reached our peak as to what the customers were willing to pay based on our services."

He made increases to current maintenance customers where needed but capped it at a 10 percent increase. On new jobs, Fancher raised rates from \$35-\$42 a man-hour on maintenance and \$40-\$50 on installation work.

At the \$42 and \$50 (level), we felt we'd reached that and increased our profitability margin to a point where we were happy and the clients were happy," he says. He only received pushback on the price increase from about four to five of his more than 150 customers. "The customers that we lost due to price increase were the ones we were anticipating and hoping we would lose," he says.

Since the company does high-end residential work – the average home is worth \$1.2 million – clients understand if they want a nice property it will take a lot of maintenance.

"We are constantly seeking out better, more profitable-properties and/or larger properties that allow our guys to be on a property for a longer period of time so we can continue to increase without having to add more crews, because the Dallas market is very tough now," he says. "Labor is at a premium and it is very scarce. Your smallest properties are your biggest problems."

All American Lawn & Limb

Location: Davis, Okla.

Revenue: \$20,000

Employees: 3 seasonal/part time

Services: Maintenance, lawn care, tree service



ACROSS-THE-BOARD INCREASE

This year was the first time Daniel Sierra has had to significantly increase prices since he founded All American Lawn & Limb in 2008.

He raised prices for his accounts 5-10 percent across the board, and 10-15 percent for some of his bigger clients, where he did chemical lawn care and took care of flower beds with seasonal color.

Sierra says he has raised tree prices a minimum of 10 percent based on the difficulty of the job.

When Sierra first approached customers about a price increase he thought he'd get pushback, but says he experienced none.

"I went in there with each customer preparing for a battle to explain myself in depth, but it didn't turn out that way," he says. "I said, 'This is where I need to be,' and they were happy with my work so they weren't resistant to paying a little bit more."

Sierra, who is also a manager at a lumber company, has 15 steady customers and 10 more he services occasionally.

Sierra says he forecasted out a bit, so, for example, instead of raising a customer's price \$10 now, he raised it \$20, but promised he wouldn't increase it again for a few years.

He increased prices because of some upgrades in equipment, but also for more money in his bank account.

Sierra charges \$75 for smaller jobs and \$150 for the larger maintenance jobs, and most are residential, but he has a few commercial accounts.

"I had a little more cost there, but ultimately I needed a bigger margin. Life changes. I was married and I had a son," Sierra says.

"He was a new addition to the family when I took some of these accounts in, so I had to grow my margins as well."

YOU GET WHAT YOU CHARGE FOR

Liza Lightfoot decided enough was enough and it was time for a change.

The president of Avant Gardening and Landscaping says she got fed up with her 2-3 percent profit margins and decided to raise prices to generate a 9-10 percent margin. That meant raising prices in 2014 about 20 percent on average, and she wishes she would have done it 30 years ago.

"Coming out of the recession we had profit margins that were really low," she says. "I just decided with the upturn in the market that I was going to take advantage of that and it hasn't hurt me at all."

The frustration led Lightfoot to approach any pushback without fear. To her, the team at Avant Gardening does quality work and she wants clients who will pay for it. She didn't get much resistance to a price increase, and didn't see any decrease in new customers.

"If we lose them, we lose them," she says. "Our philosophy is we really want good quality clients. We've really changed our mindset from accepting at 2 percent to trying to hold steady at 9-10 percent."

Avant Gardening and Landscaping

Location: McFarland, Wis.

Revenue: \$1.4 million

Employees: 21

Services: Design/build, maintenance, snow removal



In addition to price increases, she now charges \$100 an hour for a design, and views it as a way to weed out clients who are price shopping.

"It's made a tremendous difference to the business," she says. "We vet clients at the outset. So, if people aren't serious, they don't pay the fee. If they are, they do. It saved us time and increased success."

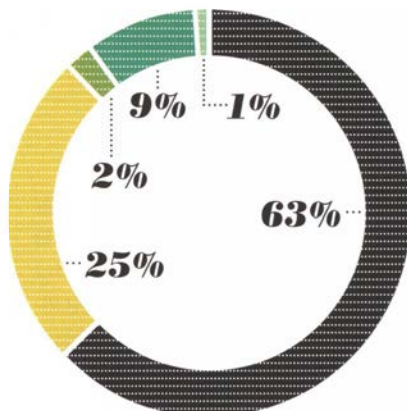
While it may not be easy to get in the mindset of raising prices and possibly losing customers, Lightfoot has some advice: "Have courage," she says. "You aren't tearing your hair out running after lots and lots of work. You are doing better work with fewer customers and getting paid for it. Having fewer customers is not a bad thing if they are high-end customers." **soi**

**"I needed a bigger margin.
... I was married and had a son."**

Daniel Sierra, All American Lawn & Limb

Compared with three years ago, how have your location's prices changed in general?

- I charge more now
- I've made no change
- I charge less now
- I can't compare – I wasn't in business three years ago
- No answer



“Thanks to the ACA, employers can offer more and better quality benefits.”



A maze of regulations

Despite a ruling from the Supreme Court on the Affordable Care Act, landscapers still struggle to cut their way through increasing levels of red tape.

By Mark E. Battersby

THE U.S. SUPREME COURT HAS RULED that the tax subsidies for health insurance provided by the federal government to citizens in the 34 states that have not established the health insurance marketplaces or exchanges were legal. That means some 6

million people, including the nearly 3.5 million people on small business plans and small business owners, self-employed professionals and early retirees who depend on subsidized health care costs, will continue to receive them.

Unfortunately, despite those subsidies and other tax incentives, healthcare costs

continue to skyrocket. And, according to a report from the Urban Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank, small businesses are among those most vulnerable to the steep healthcare cost increases. In 2013, just 32 percent of businesses with fewer than 25 workers offered health coverage to employees.



THE ACA TODAY. Admittedly, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) provides professional landscape contractors and their businesses with insurance options and increased buying power via the government-sponsored marketplace – as well as an overwhelming amount of confusion and paperwork. What can lawn care and landscaping business owners do to keep healthcare costs manageable while complying the ACA's updated and ever-changing rules?

First, it should be understood that the

ACA's taxes and tax credits are based on the number of full-time equivalent employees (FTE) and their average annual wages, not solely on the number of full-time employees. In simple terms, FTE 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.

THE DOWNSIDE. Other than the sharply escalating costs, every landscape contractor should be aware of the ACA's downside. Although the negative side effects of the ACA are very real for some landscape businesses, many of the earlier radical claims were over-dramatized.

Of those who are required to comply,

Overtime could get overhauled

The U.S. Department of Labor has proposed a change to federal overtime pay requirements, raising the exempt status of overtime pay to \$50,440 in 2016. Under current rules, an employee is exempt from overtime if he earns a salary of more than \$23,600 annually, and his primary duties are managerial, professional or administrative.

The DOL's new proposal more than doubles the threshold to \$50,440 annually. Employees who makes less than \$970 a week would be classified as hourly, and would be paid overtime if they work more than 40 hours a week.

According Lawn & Landscape research, the average landscape company pays its salaried employees (account managers, supervisors, crew foremen/leaders and designers) less than \$50,000 a year. Under the DOL's proposal, all of these positions would become hourly jobs.

"Everybody is going to have to look at their workforce, how they're being paid and how they're being classified, and make decisions of whether they're going to change how they do that to meet the requirements," says Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the National Association of Landscape Professionals.

The proposal hasn't been finalized, and likely won't be until 2016. – *Katie Tuttle*

Waters of the United States rule stays murky

In September, a federal judge in North Dakota clarified his Aug. 27 decision blocking the implementation of the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Waters of the United States rule, which went into effect Aug. 28. He refused to impose a nationwide injunction on the EPA's rule clarifying the scope of the Clean Water Act.

The rule is meant to clarify which streams, tributaries and wetlands are covered by the Clean Water Act. The judge's injunction applies only the 13 states that filed for it: Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming.

Most other cases have been consolidated into one lawsuit at the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in Cincinnati.

Proponents of the rule say it does not expand the Clean Water Act's coverage or add new permitting requirements, but opponents are calling the rule a power grab. Many are concerned about the impact this will have on land use and construction, as well as public and environmental health. If expanded, the rule could require landscapers and LCOs to file permits when working near vastly more bodies of water; it could also impose Total Maximum Daily Load limits on smaller bodies of water. — *Chuck Bowen*

EPA tightens up training

EPA in September proposed stronger standards for applicators who apply restricted-use pesticides. The agency's changes would require all applicators to be at least 18 years old, and certifications would have to be renewed every three years. And employees working under the supervision of certified applicators would now need training on using pesticides safely and protecting their families from take-home pesticide exposure. — *Chuck Bowen*

only truly large businesses that don't currently offer benefits and employ many low wage full-time workers face truly hard decisions. Those businesses offering higher wages typically already provide benefits, while smaller businesses (with between 100 and 50 FTE) will benefit greatly from not paying a fee on the first 30 employees. So, a business with 100 FTE and 60 full-time workers will only owe the fee for 30 employees, assuming, of course, that they currently insure no full-time employees.

THE UPSIDE. It's safe to say the smaller the businesses, the better the tax breaks. The ACA provides small businesses with affordable insurance options, cost assistance and increased buying power via the Small Business Health Options Program (SHOP). Small businesses with fewer than 50 FTE employees can use SHOP to get better deals on employee insurance, but aren't mandated to do so. Consider a few of the ACA's other and applicable rules:

- Small lawn care and landscaping businesses can see up to a 50 percent reduction in their share of the cost of employee premiums. Employers with fewer than 25 FTEs, paying average annual wages below \$50,000, qualify for tax credits to help pay employee healthcare premiums. Employers with 10 or fewer full-time employees, paying annual average wages of \$25,000

or less, qualify for the maximum credit of 50 percent. The amount employers do pay is tax deductible and can be carried forward or backward.

- Thanks to the ACA, employers can offer more and better quality benefits. In fact, because small businesses are able to shop for group health plans on their state's health insurance marketplace via SHOP, a landscape contractor now has the same buying power as larger businesses. Along with tax credits and increased buying power, many landscaping businesses may now be able to provide benefits to their employees.

- The self-employed with no employees can get health coverage through the health insurance marketplace for individuals, but not through SHOP.

OPTIONAL STRATEGIES. Instead of shifting to the individual markets, some businesses have opted for a high-deductible group plan and set up a health reimbursement arrangement (HRA) to help offset employees' medical expenses. An employer can dictate the expenses they will reimburse, thus limiting their out-of-pocket exposure.

An HRA can be structured so that if an employee does not use the money in an HRA, the money will still belong to the landscaping business. An HSA is another option, but it gives employers less control over how the money in an account is spent.

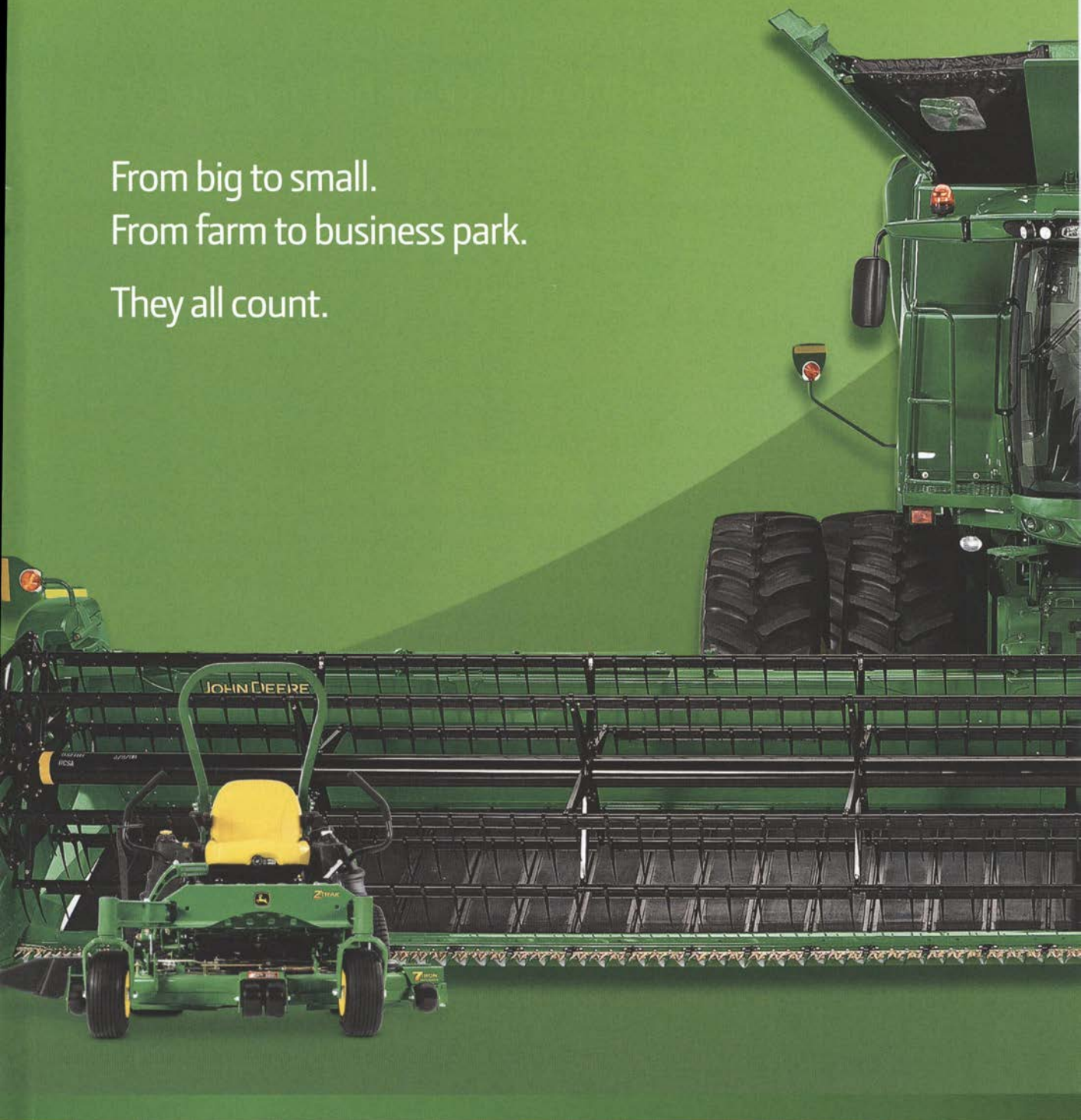
THE SUBSIDIES. Self-employed contractors and workers in small businesses can buy subsidized individual health insurance plans on government-run exchanges. This has reduced the uninsured rate among non-elderly workers at businesses with fewer than 50 employees from 23.5 percent in June 2013 to 13.2 percent currently. The uninsured rate among self-employed workers fell from 30.4 percent in mid-2013 to 19.6 percent.

The subsidies, available to anyone who earns between 100 and 400 percent of the poverty level, have helped reduce the cost of insurance — at least until recently. Escalating insurance costs have already begun impacting landscaping businesses.

Despite the ACA's benefits to contractors and their employees, deciphering its ins and outs has been a challenge to many landscapers. Be sure to consult with a professional adviser to make sure you understand the law's implications for your company. **SOI**

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

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FUEL SMART

“If they’re not budgeting properly or don’t have a grasp on their financial situation and fuel costs, it could put them under if they aren’t prepared for it.”

Zak Bittner, maintenance division manager, Mirror Landscapes

Your company isn’t going anywhere without fuel. Here’s how three landscape firms manage it wisely.

By **Kristen Hampshire**

FUEL KEEPS A LANDSCAPE BUSINESS RUNNING, but the cost can be a killer without careful monitoring and diligent budgeting. The good news is there are more tools out there than ever to help track fuel consumption and improve economy. Plus, several years of serious gas price spikes have taught business owners lessons about the importance of watching those pennies at the pump to maintain profitability on jobs.

This month, Lawn & Landscape spoke to three companies about how they manage fuel expenses and the systems that keep them running strong. Here’s what they had to say.

Technology like GPS tracking and Google Maps has made monitoring fuel costs much easier in recent years.

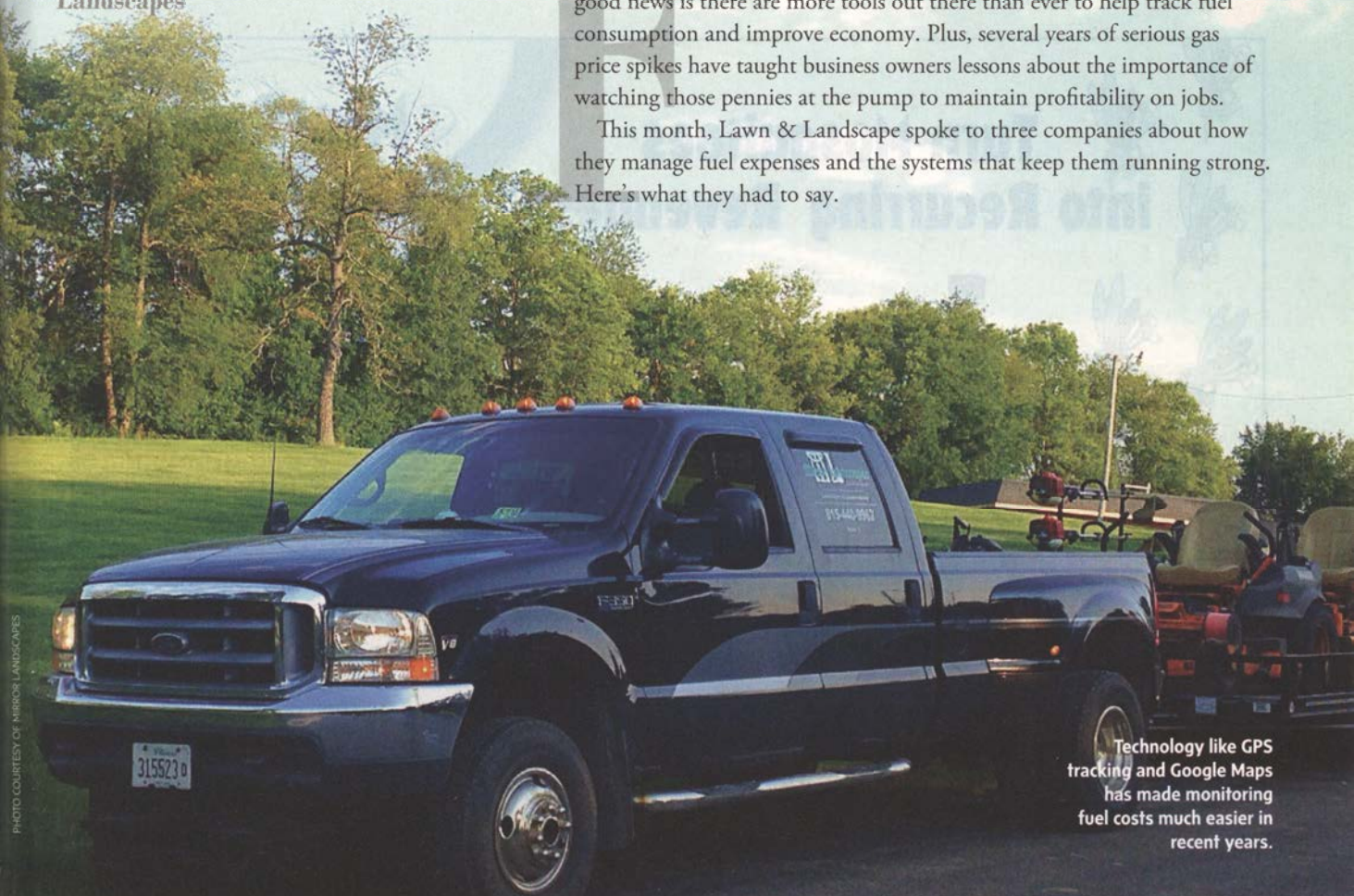


PHOTO COURTESY OF MIRROR LANDSCAPES

**SEBERT
LANDSCAPE**

Steve Pearce,
general manager

LOCATION:
Bartlett, Ill.

ESTABLISHED:
1985

EMPLOYEES:
357

2014 REVENUES:
\$31.2 million

CUSTOMERS:
100% commercial

SERVICES:
Maintenance, landscape
installation, snow

Fueling alternatives

Trucks in the Sebert Landscape fleet travel no more than 20 miles per day during the green season because of tight routing. The 170 trucks are not guzzling the bulk of the gas consumed annually at the company. It's the equipment – mowers, hand-held equipment and skid-steers.

And, according to Steve Pearce, general manager, this season the mowers have been putting above-average hours on commercial properties in the Chicago area where Sebert is based.

When the ground dries out,

crews are encouraged to really examine whether mowing a property is essential. "Crews want to mow because they want to do a great job, but there are times when you just don't need to mow and we instruct our crews to revert to using that man-hour time to details on job sites (in late summer) when the weather is dry," Pearce says.

During drier summer days, Sebert may pare down to four 10- to 11-hour workdays rather than five days of operating in the field. "We end up with basically the same amount of man-hours per week, but we are not driving

those trucks around or taking the mowers out and we can take one day of fuel use out of the picture."

Fuel savings like this can make or break a fuel budget, which involves careful tracking, monitoring and input from key managers. Sebert spent about \$1.3 million on fuel last year.

The annual process includes figuring the average fuel consumption per crew. Then, the company anticipates 15 percent increase in fuel prices for the coming year, which has generally been the price trend at pumps in Illinois, Pearce says. The company also accounts for an 8-12 percent annual growth rate.

"We keep our fuel budget in line with where we think the



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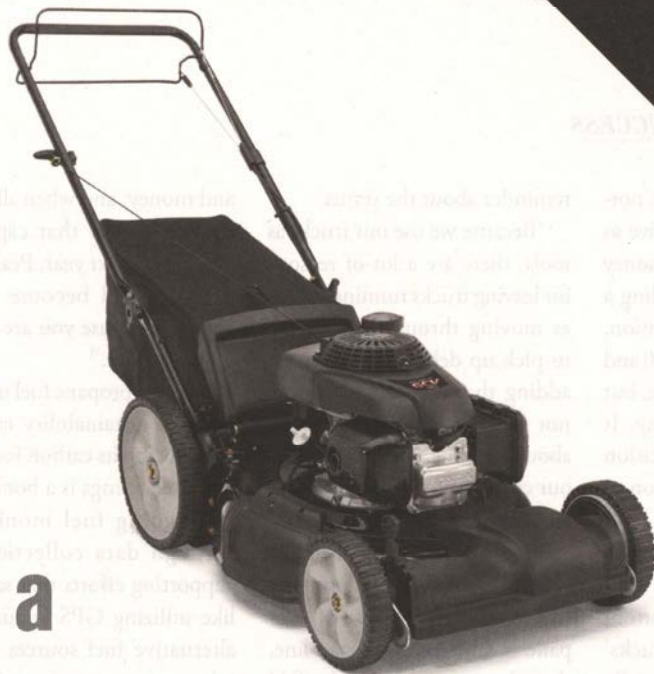
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FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

market will be," Pearce says, noting that Sebert is conservative so the company doesn't lose money if fuel prices increase. Adding a fuel surcharge is not an option. "We tried that in 2009/2010 and it was just a small surcharge, but we cut that out right away. It wasn't a good business decision based on our clients' reaction to it," Pearce says.

Some efforts Sebert takes to reduce fuel consumption that make an impact on the bottom line include using the trucks' GPS system to monitor idle time. An "idle alert" email is emailed to supervisors when trucks idle for longer than 30 minutes. Then, based on the situation, crews may get a gentle

reminder about the status.

"Because we use our trucks as tools, there are a lot of reasons for leaving trucks running — such as moving through a property to pick up debris," Pearce says, adding that the company does not want to be "Big Brother" about idle time. "But we educate our crews that we don't want to see idling. Turn off the truck."

Also, 70 percent of Sebert's mower fleet runs on propane fuel. The up-front cost of propane is a bit less than gasoline, though per man-hour the fuel cost ends up being about the same because a mower will use about 1.25 gallons of propane to 1 gallon of gas. But the ability to fuel mowers on site saves time

and money, and when all Sebert branches have that capability within the next year, Pearce says propane will become "much cheaper because you are getting a bulk service."

Mainly, propane fuel supports Sebert's sustainability initiative by reducing its carbon footprint. The fuel savings is a bonus.

Ongoing fuel monitoring through data collection and supporting efforts that save fuel like utilizing GPS features and alternative fuel sources can go a long way toward minimizing this critical cost of doing business. "Those (fuel) numbers are very important to the overall forecast for our company so we can react," Pearce says.

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

CRUNCH THE NUMBERS.

Sebert Landscape tracks fuel consumption per crew, figures on an annual fuel cost increase of about 15 percent and also adds projected company growth when creating the next year's fuel budget. "Our fleet manager is responsible for purchasing and monitoring fuel," Pearce says.

TRACK IDLE TIME.

Does your GPS system monitor vehicle idle time? If so, use this information to educate crews about fuel consumption. "We trust our foremen, and we don't want them to think that we are always watching, but idle time burns fuel so it's a strong tool."

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FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

MIRROR LANDSCAPES

Zak Bittner,
maintenance division manager

LOCATION:
Dixon, Ill.

ESTABLISHED:
2001

EMPLOYEES:
5

2014 REVENUES:
\$250,000

CUSTOMERS:
60% commercial,
40% residential

SERVICES:
Design/build, maintenance,
snow

Tuning up fuel economy

This season, Mirror Landscapes invested in its first open trailer for hauling mowers and hand-held equipment – a change from the two 24-foot enclosed trailers its Ford F-350 diesel trucks usually haul. Maintenance Division Manager Zak Bittner can't measure the exact fuel savings from the lighter load just yet. "But I notice that our fuel is lasting a little bit longer each week," he says. "It's definitely helping."

Fuel is a carefully monitored operating expense at Mirror Landscapes in Dixon, Ill. "For smaller companies, if they're

not budgeting properly or don't have a grasp on their financial situation and fuel costs, it could put them under if they aren't prepared for it," Bittner says.

That's why Mirror Landscapes budgets based on a 20 percent fuel increase each year. If there's a spike in fuel prices, the company will consider increasing service prices. In 2014, the company spent \$10,000 on fuel.

"I don't think customers would have a problem paying \$5 to \$10 more per job if we had to do that," Bittner says.

But the company has not had to make an adjustment like that

so far because of careful planning. As for tracking, Bittner uses Google Maps to create tight routes for crews, then he monitors truck odometers to record mileage. He then figures in the cost per mile so jobs can be properly priced, and so the annual fuel budget can be created based on real numbers – plus that 20-percent cushion for the coming year's potential pump price increases.

A Shell fleet credit card keeps fuel costs contained and makes it easy to see exactly how much is spent on fuel each month. And Mirror Landscapes also uses a

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Bittner has noticed a difference in fuel use with the new open trailer.

performance chip on its trucks that optimizes fuel economy. The fuel economy programmer by SCT Performance optimizes a truck's engine management computer. "You can buy the chip for your year/make/model of vehicle and it can increase

your power or you can adjust settings where you focus on programming the fuel economy," Bittner says.

Bittner estimates that the 1999 Ford F-350 diesel with the chip – the vehicle used on mowing routes – gets about 15 miles per

gallon compared to 10 miles per gallon with other trucks without the fuel management tool.

The best fuel management advice Bittner can give: "Don't overlook the expense," he says. "It may seem like a small number, but it can creep up."

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

ADD FOR TRAVEL.

If Mirror Landscapes bids on a job that's outside of its usual routing area, Bittner is careful to figure in the cost of more mileage. "We figure in the price of fuel based on the miles we'll travel in case we have to charge a travel fee for a job outside of the area," he says.

TRY NEW TECHNOLOGY.

The fuel economy optimizing "chip" that Mirror Landscapes uses is improving mileage by 50 percent for the vehicle that clocks miles on maintenance routes. Plus, an open trailer is helping save gas because there's less drag on the truck's engine.

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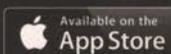




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Pumping up productivity

The gas prices were already close to \$4 per gallon, and word was they'd spike to \$4.99 during a holiday weekend a few years back. Randy Kellogg personally filled up TLC Landscape's two trucks, which generally get about 9 miles per gallon and less when they're hauling open trailers of landscape equipment.

"The fuel prices dropped 50 cents the next day," Kellogg says, adding that the lesson learned is predicting fuel prices is like forecasting weather. You think you've got a handle on what's to come — but you just never know.

That's why Kellogg tries not to get too tied up in prices at the pump. There's not a whole lot

he can do about it — but he can track the expense and make sure he accounts for it in the budget. And, managing productivity is a big part of that, he says.

Kellogg prefers to fuel up trucks himself, which is easy with a two-truck fleet. The service stations and convenience stores can be a time suck for crews. "Ten minutes inside to get a snack times four people is almost an hour of work lost," he says. "It's about productivity."

Kellogg runs gasoline-powered trucks rather than diesel. Most of the equipment is gas, too, except for a diesel tractor and skid-steer. Kellogg finds that gasoline provides the efficiency he's looking for.

As for winter fueling, snow

routes can be rigorous but Kellogg says that a truck will typically go through one tank of gas during a 10-hour workday, burning through 28 gallons of gasoline. "That's not too bad," he says.

It's not bad when you account for the cost in the budget. "We figure on the high side," Kellogg says of estimating gas prices. And he also keeps tabs on the monthly fuel bill.

As for fuel prices, no one has a crystal ball but Kellogg says he's noticed fewer spikes now that there's more domestic oil production. "We have already seen the positive outcomes of that — the influx of new oil from this country is why fuel prices have dropped," he says. **L&L**

Ten minutes inside to get a snack times four people is almost an hour of work lost. It's about productivity."

Randy Kellogg, president, TLC Landscape

TLC LANDSCAPE

Randy Kellogg, president

LOCATION:
Swansea, Ill.

ESTABLISHED:
1990

EMPLOYEES:
4

2014 REVENUES:
Not disclosed

CUSTOMERS:
80% residential,
20% commercial

SERVICES:
Landscape installation, snow

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

AVOID WEEKENDS.

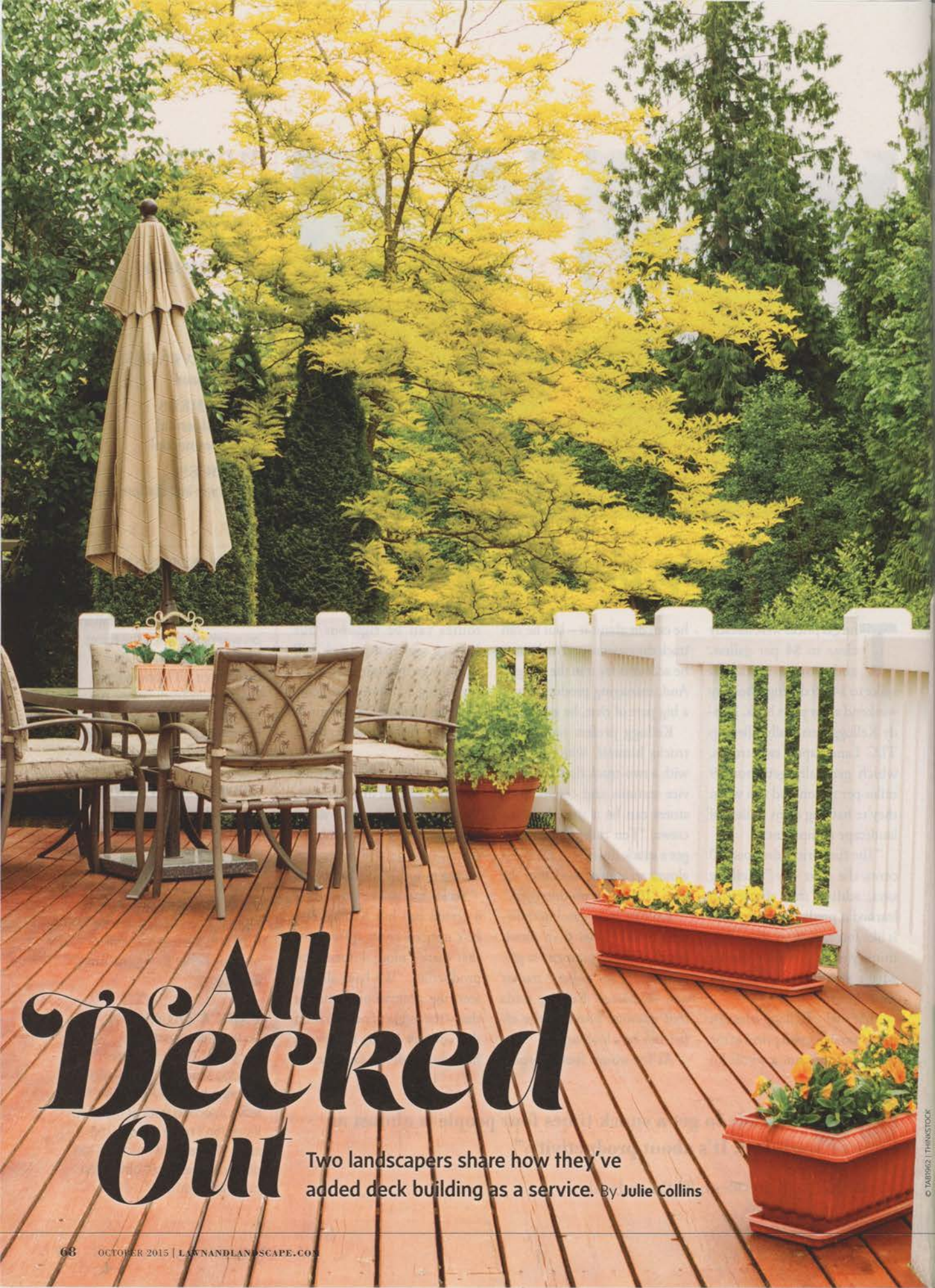
Kellogg likes to fuel the company vehicles himself if possible, and he stays away from gas stations on weekends when the prices tend to be higher. He aims for fuel-ups on Mondays and Tuesdays instead. "When my tank gets down to a quarter full, I start watching the prices," he says.

AVOID TEMPTATIONS.

Service stations can be productivity killers if grabbing a quick snack at the convenience store is part of the fuel break. Since Kellogg runs a couple of trucks, he prefers to fuel them himself if possible. That way, man-hours are spent earning revenue rather than generating an expense.

PARK A TRUCK.

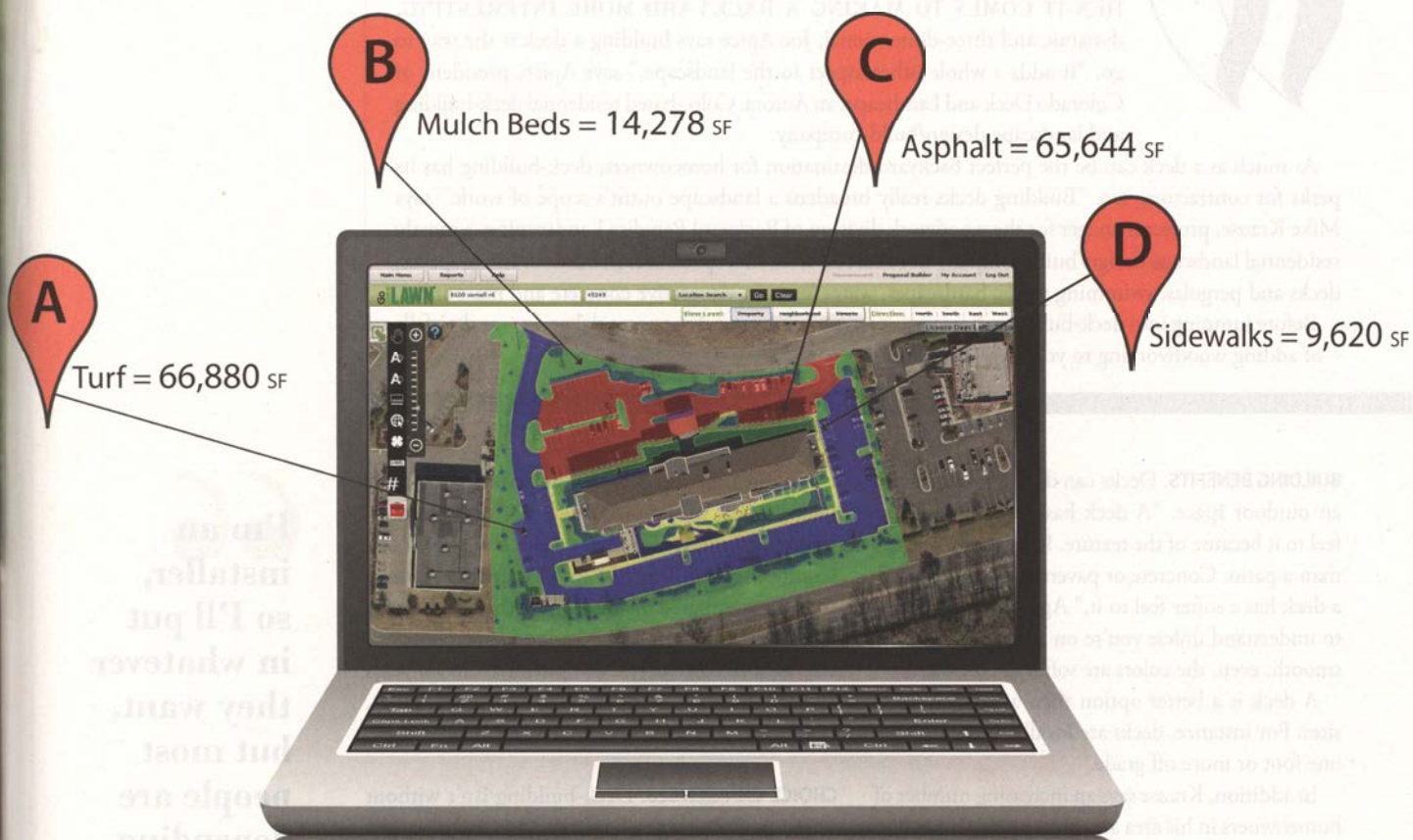
Do we really need to take the truck out? That's a question Kellogg suggests landscapers ask before hitting the road. "We'll leave a second truck at the shop if we don't really need it," he says. "There's not much we can do about fuel prices other than minimizing driving."



All Decked Out

Two landscapers share how they've added deck building as a service. By Julie Collins

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WHEN IT COMES TO MAKING A BACKYARD MORE INTERESTING, dynamic and three-dimensional, Joe Apice says building a deck is the way to go. "It adds a whole other aspect to the landscape," says Apice, president of Colorado Deck and Landscape, an Aurora, Colo.-based residential deck-building and landscape design/build company.

As much as a deck can be the perfect backyard destination for homeowners, deck-building has its perks for contractors, too. "Building decks really broadens a landscape outfit's scope of work," says Mike Krause, project manager for the woodwork division of Backyard Paradise Landscaping, a mostly residential landscape design/build company in Hudson, Wis., that specializes in outdoor living spaces, decks and pergolas, swimming pools, hardscapes, water features, decorative concrete and masonry.

Before jumping into deck-building, however, it pays to understand the potential perks – and pitfalls – of adding woodworking to your service offerings.

BUILDING BENEFITS. Decks can dramatically change an outdoor space. "A deck has a whole different feel to it because of the texture. It's actually warmer than a patio. Concrete or pavers are hard, whereas a deck has a softer feel to it," Apice says. "It's hard to understand unless you're on a deck, but they're smooth, even, the colors are soft and consistent."

A deck is a better option than a patio at some sites. For instance, decks are ideally suited for sites one foot or more off grade.

In addition, Krause says an increasing number of homeowners in his area are opting for decks to finish outdoor spaces behind two-story homes where the builders included second-floor patio doors. In such instances, Backyard Paradise Landscaping often bundles services: Krause might build a deck, then another crew from his company will add a paver patio, beside it. Or after he builds stairs, a landscaping team will add plantings at the bottom.

Apice also acknowledges the benefits of combining services. "We often incorporate a deck and a patio, especially today with fire pits, outdoor kitchens and whatnot being so popular."

Unlike with patio building, Krause says, building a deck requires minimal overhead. Although building a deck does not require a massive investment in equipment or tools, Krause acknowledges that it's important to purchase the right tools – compound miter saw, circular saws, drills, laser level. "When you get the proper tools it makes the jobs go much more efficiently," Krause says.

One of the benefits of deck-building, both Apice and Krause say, are the newer maintenance-free

composite decking options. Composites often come with 25-year warranties, which make them an attractive alternative to wood despite the added cost. Composites run from \$4 to \$5 per linear foot of decking, compared to around \$1 per linear foot for wood). "If you built it maintenance-free, that deck will look like the day it was put in 15 to 20 years later. It may be four times as expensive (as wood), but wood has a lot of maintenance," Krause says.

CHOICE CHALLENGES. Deck-building isn't without its share of challenges, however. One of the biggest is finding the right people to work on deck projects. "It's hard to get people who are skilled at deck building. It's complicated, and the materials you work with are very expensive. If you mess up a board, you've messed up a \$100 bill or more," Apice says.

With decks, Krause says screw placement is important, as is having everything look symmetrical. "A lot of people think easy, small, wood when they think decks," Krause says. "But they're very tricky. There's an efficient way of doing them and a quality way of doing them. There are a lot of ins and outs that make a quality deck."

Price can also be a barrier. "With decks there are so many variables. Is it high enough you need a railing? Low enough you don't? How many steps? How many angles? Is it square?" Apice says. All those extra considerations often come with a higher cost.

Yet there are also times when installing a deck makes more sense – and in some cases, opting for a deck can actually save homeowners money. That might be the case, Apice says, in a yard with

"I'm an installer, so I'll put in whatever they want, but most people are depending on me to educate them, so that's what I do."

Joe Apice,
president at
Colorado Deck
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a massive slope or where a deck can be used to cover up an old patio. Another example Krause cites involves two big, separate decks he recently built for a client.

Originally the client wanted a paver patio, but the ground was so sandy that Backyard Paradise convinced the client decks would offer better drainage at less expense than having to install drain tile and direct water elsewhere before putting in the patio.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS. Contractors who are contemplating adding deck-building services should take note of a few things first, both Apice and Krause stress. Chief among them is the importance of understanding local building codes, permits and licensing.

Krause says a contractor's license is generally needed when it comes to building decks, which isn't something all landscaping contractors already have. Krause has to be licensed in both Wisconsin and Minnesota because his company works in both states.

A variety of permits may be necessary when building a deck, ranging from a permit for decks of certain heights to zoning permits to ensure a deck isn't being built too close to a fence or other existing structure.

"There are so many different things that need to be followed pretty strictly that would definitely screw it up for somebody if they didn't do it right," Krause says.

Equally valuable, Krause says, is knowledge of material options and costs. Educating customers is a particularly important component of any deck-building job, Apice adds. "I'm an installer, so I'll put in whatever they want, but most people are depending on me to educate them, so that's what I do," he says.

That education has become more important as decking options have increased. "I try to keep it simple. To get a deck, it used to be pick redwood or cedar and one of three railing options. Today, it's much more complicated. There are so many choices. It can be confusing and overwhelming for homeowners," Apice says. "If I show them one or two brands with a few lines and color options, they'll find something they like. That makes life easier."

It also pays for contractors to stay updated on deck trends. Such trends vary by region, Apice says. For instance, on the East Coast he often sees railings with a rounded cap, whereas in Colorado customers often ask for a flat cap.

Krause says an increasing number of people in his area are asking for island landing stairways. "Say you have a higher 12 by 12-foot deck with stairs coming off it. It might come down eight steps, land on a small platform deck, then turn and go down the other way," Krause says.

Yet the biggest trend right now, both Krause and Apice say, continues to be an

is changing how decks are built. They're not as cool looking, unfortunately, because if you start putting a lot of stuff on them they're very expensive."

MAKING IT WORK. Regardless of whether a company has its own woodworking team or hires out, Apice and Krause see the value in offering such services to clients.

Apice says his company often is hired by other landscaping companies to build pergolas for their customers. "Whenever their customers want a pergola, they don't want to deal with it because it's a whole other skill set, so they call on me as a subcontractor."



Contractors contemplating adding deck-building services should take note of a few things first. Chief among them is the importance of understanding local building codes, permits and licensing.

interest in composite decking. "It's expensive, but I'd bet 80 percent of what I do now is maintenance-free," Krause says. In particular, Apice says many customers are interested in capped composite decking because it is more durable and more economic to manufacture.

Apice says because of the cost of composite decking, deck extras, such as built-in planters and storage containers, aren't as popular as they used to be. "In the days of redwood, almost every deck had some built on it, but with composite everything is so expensive it

tor. It makes them look more dynamic as a landscaping company," he says. Plus, if he gets a bigger landscaping job than he'd normally handle, he'll hire those same companies to assist.

Even if it doesn't make sense to add woodworking services, Apice says it is worthwhile to find a subcontractor who can come in and build decks for clients when needed. "It gives you another tool, another arrow in your quiver when you're trying to sell a job." **L&L**

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

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Stephanie Schwenke

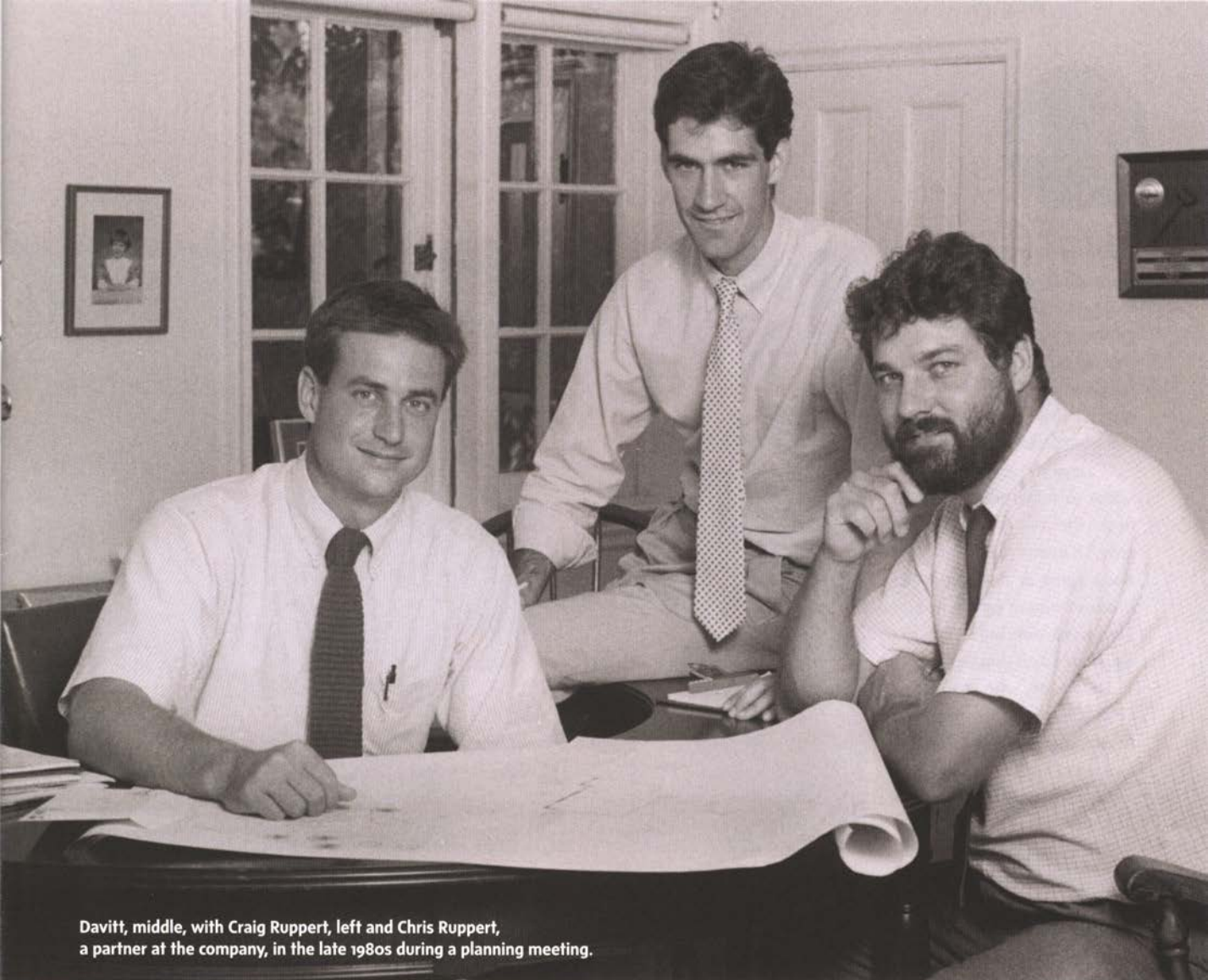
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Davitt, middle, with Craig Ruppert, left and Chris Ruppert, a partner at the company, in the late 1980s during a planning meeting.

SCHOOL OF YARD KNOCKS

CHRIS DAVITT NEVER
GRADUATED COLLEGE, BUT
HE WAS A GUIDING FORCE
BEHIND THE SUCCESS
OF RUPPERT LANDSCAPE.

BY BRIAN HORN

HE MAY HAVE JUST BEEN HITTING PUBERTY, but 12-year-old Chris Davitt had no trouble hitting his prospecting goals.

Actually, he was exceeding his goals. By a lot. The pre-teen and other neighborhood kids were tasked with handing out fliers advertising then 18-year-old Craig Ruppert's upstart lawn mowing business.

"We had, like, six of us in the back of the pickup truck," says Davitt, now 55, who retired as president from Ruppert Landscape based in Laytonsville, Md., in 2014 after 34 years with the company. "Craig would let us off on the sides of the street and then he would pick us up a few blocks later and take us to the next neighborhood."

"Well, we all had to count our fliers. And between some of these sessions, Craig would get me up in the cab and say, 'You delivered 263. The next guy delivered 180. Keep going.' And these other guys didn't know why I was running and just trying to deliver two for their every one."

But to Davitt, whose older brother was friends with Ruppert and mowed with the group, it was a no-brainer: He was in control of how well he could do something. That type of drive was something Ruppert noticed right away.

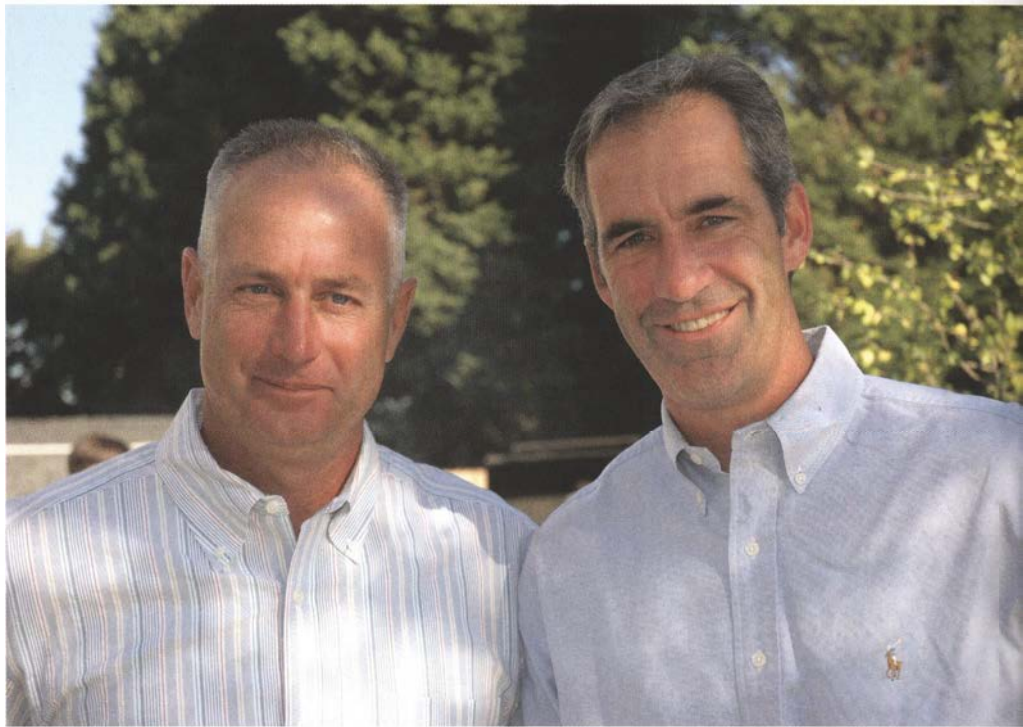
“Part of the reason I invited Chris to come was I wanted to set the base for these other guys,” Ruppert says. “So, Chris was jogging or running to get it done because he wanted it. That’s just one little early example of Chris’ hustle.”

To Davitt, who still serves as an advisor for the company, those early trips with Ruppert and the other kids set the tone for the culture that drove Ruppert to success.

“Thinking back on it, we were going to outwork everyone,” Davitt says. “That was our strategic plan, but perhaps we didn’t know what a strategic plan was. And what Craig would do is make hard work and the dirtiest of the jobs sort of honorable. If you outworked someone and you got dirtier than they did, then that was a real badge of honor.”

IF IT AIN’T BROKE. Davitt liked working for Ruppert so much he continued doing it part-time and seasonally through college where he was shooting for a degree in business administration. By his late teens and early 20s, he was managing a crew made up of 30 year-olds.

“You have to have a moxie, and a confidence and the ability to take risk to put yourself out there,” Ruppert says. “Chris demonstrated that early that he didn’t have a fear of leading,



Ruppert, left, invited a 12-year-old Davitt to work at his landscaping company decades ago. Davitt would go on to become president of Ruppert Landscape, retiring from the company in 2014 after more than 30 years.

which is often what limits us.”

While Davitt genuinely enjoyed what he was doing and was darn good at it, he intended to finish college. All nine of his siblings graduated with a degree, but with every lecture and term paper, Davitt knew higher learning wasn’t his calling.

“I was not working hard at it at all,” he says. “I realized I had to change things and it was time to do something well. And I was learning more about business and people management that the exciting things were happening at work.”

After three years at Frostburg State University and one semester at the University of Maryland, Davitt decided to focus fulltime on Ruppert. He was doing so well at the com-

pany that not even his parents could question his decision.

“By the time I committed to Ruppert, I was married, I had a kid, and I was progressing in the business and the business was growing,” he says.

BAD FIRST IMPRESSION. Bob Jones, vice president of Ruppert Companies, has a great respect and appreciation for Davitt. But that wasn’t the case the first time the two met. Or the second or third time.

Hailing from Ohio and getting his green industry start in the Buckeye state, Jones decided to take a job as a division manager at a landscaping company in Philadelphia. But after seven months, that didn’t work out, and going back to Ohio wasn’t an option.

“I’m kind of a proud person and didn’t want to go back to Ohio with my tail between my legs and ask for my job back,” he says. So he took a job at Ruppert as an assistant foreman – a job below Jones’ skill level and one with hefty payout.

Jones eventually worked his way to a promotion, but didn’t get the raise he was promised. Davitt told Jones he was getting paid more than he should, and if the promotion failed, Davitt wanted to move him back into his old role. That didn’t sit well with Jones.

“I thought, ‘Who was this guy telling me that I’m getting paid too much?’ So, for the first four years of my employment at Ruppert, I didn’t like Chris very much – maybe because I thought he was undervaluing

INVENTING ENHANCEMENTS

If you've ever used the term "enhancements" in the industry, you can thank Chris Davitt.

At least that's what Davitt, Ruppert and former Ruppert CFO, Ken Hochkeppel say. And in the mid-1980s, when they coined the term, there was no Internet or Twitter to find out if someone four states over was using it. So, when the company started using the term, they had never heard anyone else use it.

Davitt hired Hochkeppel to run a division they then called "extras" – essentially, jobs that a current client needed that didn't really warrant a maintenance or design/build manager handling, like removing a tree stump. Hochkeppel wanted a better name for it, and came to Davitt was a list of 30.

"The second thing he had on his list was the Enhancement Department. I said, 'Hoch, that's it. That describes it exactly as it is,'" Davitt says. "We are enhancing their landscape."

And the rest is history. "I had never heard it used in the industry, so I do believe we were the ones who coined the phrase," Hochkeppel says. "I guess you can say we chose it together, but he was the guy that picked it."

me and didn't appreciate what I was capable of doing," Jones says. "Chris always thought I was a field guy."

Jones says he eventually became close with Davitt when the two moved over to Ruppert Nursery in 1999 after



Davitt (front row, second from right) with his team during an early 1980s Ruppert Field Day competition.

TruGreen Landcare bought Ruppert Landscape. "We joke about it these days," Jones says. "I just didn't like him, but for the wrong reasons."

LEARNING FROM MISTAKES. But the situation Jones describes is something Davitt admits was a problem in his early days as a leader. He was quick to give up on people if they didn't fit a position perfectly.

"You see there being one way to do things, perhaps you put people into categories of this person doesn't get it because they're not approaching it the way I would," Davitt says. "I think there are people perhaps I couldn't reach earlier in my career because things were too absolute for me. And over time, you get tolerance

and you get understanding, like, 'You know, I didn't think that was going to work. And I didn't think that person had it.' And, in fact, they did."

Davitt says it was a move away from this type of management style that allowed the company to grow. The leadership team began attending Dale Carnegie management courses, and they brought on a consultant to help.

The consultant, Clyde Vadner, drilled home that communication is the responsibility of the sender. Davitt came from the perspective of "I told the person. They should have gotten it," he says. Vadner, who had a merit award named after him at Ruppert, countered that if they didn't get it, then it was Davitt's fault.

"Initially it was, 'Get out of here. I'll tell ya whose fault it is,'" Davitt says now with a laugh. In the late 1980s, the company began to track turnover, and to Davitt's surprise, people didn't always leave because they couldn't hack it.

"In the early 80s, when you were turning over people, you thought you were working hard because it meant you were setting a high standard," he says. "But in fact you're setting a high standard and you're not doing a good job as a manager if you're turning a lot of people over."

Though the company did begin to focus on systems to help guide employees, it was leadership's overall shift in managing that allowed them to jump from a company pulling in a few million dollars to one opening branches, resulting in new revenue streams.

"We couldn't have crossed that hurdle without really understanding management, trusting people, developing people, and everything that goes with that," Davitt says.

Eventually, even Jones began to see Davitt as a strong leader.

"The best managers and the people who excel the most run to conflict, run to the hard issues, versus trying to avoid them," Jones says. "If there was a tough issue, Chris was generally in the middle of it trying to figure it out."

Jones grew so close to Davitt, he even sought him out for work and life advice. "We used to call him the Ann Landers of landscaping," he says. "Chris had a great way of looking at everything and still does." ♦



WALK THE WALK

AS EXECUTIVE
DIRECTOR OF THE ALCC,
KRISTEN FEFES GOES
ABOVE AND BEYOND
TO HELP THE
GREEN INDUSTRY.

BY KATIE TUTTLE

WHEN IT COMES TO BEING A STRONG LEADER, it's not only important to give direction, but to also lead by example. That rings true for Kristen Fefes. "We preach the value of industry certification," says Becky Garber, Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC) director of communication. "Kristen, as a true professional, went out and earned the certification for people who run associations. She made the effort to do it and I think that says a lot about her and her commitment to professionalism and doing herself what we preach."

Fefes joined the ALCC in 1999 as the assistant executive director. Prior to that, she'd been working at Selz/Seabolt Communications in Washington, D.C., after she graduated from Catholic University in 1992.

After seven years there, she was ready to leave Washington and head back to her native Denver, although she wanted to stay in the trade association world.

"(The) concept of people coming together in a volunteer capacity to make an industry better and to make standards; I had really enjoyed that," she says. "I wanted to stay in that."

Although she had no previous experience in the landscape industry, she called herself "lucky" for finding the open position with the ALCC.

"I think that's one of the fun things about working for associations," she says. "Is that you quickly learn how to talk about the important things that matter. You learn the lingo of horticulture."

A year after starting, the ALCC longtime executive director resigned and Fefes became the acting director. In October of 2001, she was named Executive Director.

"The thing I've always found fascinating about Kristen," says Dean Murphy, president of Terracare Associates and past president of ALCC for 2014, "is she can do anything she wanted, she's that talented. I've always found it interesting that she chose this industry to be part of. It's because she likes it."

And it's her love of the industry that plays a role in the work she does with ALCC.

"She really gives back to the industry, and puts her heart and soul into what she does," says Sandy Munley, OLA executive director. "She's definitely one of the leaders in the



Fefes has been with ALCC since 1999, first as assistant executive director before being named executive director in 2001.

industry on the association side of things."

When asked about the best and worst advice she'd ever been given, Fefes had a list. The advice ranged from things told to her by family members and peers in the industry, and it's obvious that she follows all of them in her daily life.

ALWAYS KNOW WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF A MEETING.

"If you asked my husband what I did all day, he'd say go to meetings," Fefes says. And though she's joking, her day is packed with them. From January through May, the Colorado legislature is in session.

She's part of an umbrella organization in Colorado called GreenCO (The Green Industries of Colorado). It brings together seven green industries (landscape compa-

nies/contractors, nursery, garden center, sod growers, lawn care, landscape architects and arborists), and helps them collaborate on legislative and regulatory issues.

She's also part of ProGreen Expo, which is the largest green industry conference in the Rocky Mountain Region. It is presented by a group of organizations, including ALCC.

At each of her meetings, Fefes makes sure the focus stays on the people she represents in the association, but she also puts focus on the industry as a whole.

"It's not just about Colorado for her," Garber says. "It's about how can we throw our weight as an association into something that is impactful at a national level that does come back to our members?"

“THE THING I’VE ALWAYS FOUND FASCINATING ABOUT KRISTEN IS SHE CAN DO ANYTHING SHE WANTED, SHE’S THAT TALENTED. I’VE ALWAYS FOUND IT INTERESTING THAT SHE CHOSE THIS INDUSTRY TO BE PART OF. IT’S BECAUSE SHE LIKES IT.”

DEAN MURPHY, PRESIDENT, TERRACARE ASSOCIATES AND PAST PRESIDENT OF ALCC



Fefes travels to Washington almost every year, advocating for the industry at NALP's Legislative Day on the Hill. She also lobbies at the statehouse for things important to the industry in Colorado, including H-2B and pesticide regulations.

"It's your job to advocate for the industry and represent them," Fefes says. "You quickly learn how to talk about the important things that matter."

LISTENING IS A LEARNED SKILL, NOT AN INNATE ONE – ANYONE CAN DO IT WITH PRACTICE. "She's very reasonable about listening to someone else and their position," Murphy says. "Intellect has nothing to do with what you know, it's more based on what you ask. People who ask the best questions are the best people to deal with, and she's one of those people."

Fefes says some of the best parts of board meetings are when everyone's talking before the meeting gets started.

"That's how I learn," she says. "Open your eyes to the nuances."

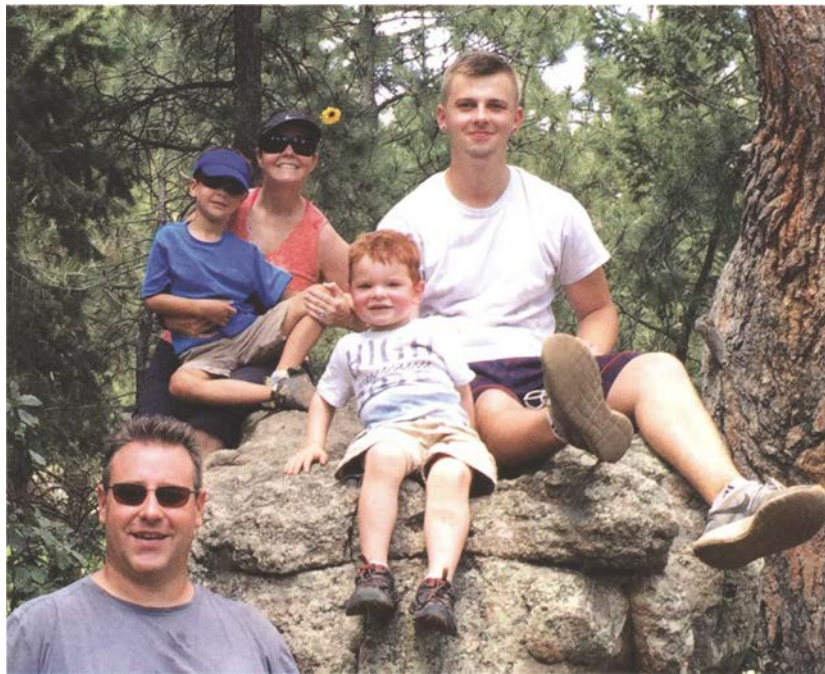
A good listener doesn't listen to the loudest talkers in the room, and Fefes is certainly a good listener.

"She's equally attentive to the leader of a huge company as she is to a young person getting started out and trying to make a place in the industry," Garber says. "I think that speaks volumes. Kristen makes time for everyone, and we're here to serve everyone."

YOU GREW BECAUSE OF SOMEONE. HELP SOMEONE GROW BECAUSE OF YOU. Fefes has done a lot to help the industry, but it's more the manner of how she's done it that affects people so much. Being available and willing to help others is what helps someone stand out in a crowd.

"I think she's just a dynamic leader who's very thoughtful and very easy to work with because she is so thoughtful and always makes sure to be very inclusive to people," says Munley.

In fact, Fefes has stood out so much, many of her industry peers feel she's helped make their jobs better.



Fefes, her husband, Dimitri, their two sons (Peter and Michael) and Fefes' stepson, Tyler, enjoy spending time outdoors where they can soak up the Colorado sunshine.

"We love Kristen. When she leaves, we may have to follow because we love working with her so much," says Garber, talking about what she and another coworker tell applicants when they ask about the association in interviews. "That's the truth and we have told countless applicants that. That's just what resonates with us: how much we admire her and appreciate her."

Murphy agrees.

"She's on my short list of people I'd trust with anything," he says. "We talk all the time about anything that happened where we lose her would be a step down."

YOU'LL BE AMAZED AT WHAT 10 MINUTES OUTSIDE EVERY DAY WILL DO FOR YOUR DISPOSITION. Living in Colorado, where there are over 300 days of sun each year, Fefes finds a lot of time to spend outdoors. When she's not in the office or at meetings, she can be found hiking or riding bikes with her husband, Dimitri, and her two sons, ages four and five.

"My five-year-old can actually ride his bike now," she says. "So that's one less

person in the Burley that I have to pull."

Fefes and her husband are both avid skiers, so her hope is to start skiing again when her sons get old enough. But even if it doesn't involve the outdoors, Fefes is almost constantly active in her free time.

"I'm an early morning exercise person," she says. "I feel like I'm in on a secret when I'm awake and the rest of the house isn't."

YOU CAN'T GOVERN WITHOUT THE WILL OF THE GOVERNED. After taking over the role of Executive Director, Fefes put an emphasis on teamwork within the association, something she feels associations should be about.

"You've got to create the two-way communication," Fefes says. "It's not about one person's agenda. Nobody in my position can do their job without the membership. Associations are so interesting because the shareholders, the customers and the workforce are all the same people. We really can't do our jobs without them, and I feel lucky that I wouldn't want to. That's what makes our work fun; what makes my work fun." ♦



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THE MORE

MARK UTENDORF HELPS THE INDUSTRY THRIVE BY GATHERING KNOWLEDGE AND SHARING IT WITH EVERYONE HE CAN. BY KATE SPIRGEN

THERE'S ALWAYS MORE TO LEARN IN THE LAWN CARE INDUSTRY, and Mark Utendorf wants to know it all.

"It's odd, even now, after doing it all these years, I'm shocked that I'm not finished," says the owner of Emerald Lawn Care in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. "I keep thinking at some point I'll get to a point where I've got it all figured out and I just never get there."

Utendorf bought Emerald eight years ago and jumped headfirst into the business.

Attending as many educational sessions and industry events as he could, he was shocked by how open and welcoming his new colleagues were. At his first conference, Utendorf met Harold Enger, director of education at Spring-Green, and even though the two are direct competitors, they talked shop.

"So many people don't think that it's necessary to go on and get education or attend these different meetings, but Mark was there right from the beginning to learn about the industry," Enger says.

ABOVE: Mark Utendorf and his team attend as many educational events in the industry as they can.



YOU KNOW

That attitude and his collaborative spirit made him stand out right away. When Enger, Bill Leuenberger of Chalet Landscape Nursery and Garden Center and Scott Roberts of TruGreen first formed the Illinois Professional Lawn Care Association, Utendorf was one of the founding members and one of the first presidents.

"I could tell right away that he was going to be great," Enger says. "He did an excellent job (as president). He was very much involved. He was really interested in how things work, talking to other lawn care companies, getting us all together. That was his main focus."



“IN HIS COMPANY, HE LEADS BY EXAMPLE, AND I THINK THAT’S WHAT MAKES HIM SO SUCCESSFUL.”

NORM KLEBER, IPLCA EDUCATION CHAIRMAN

And Utendorf is willing to give as much as he gets. He currently serves as the group’s legislative/regulation chairman, advocating for the industry. While he says that he’s a relative newbie to the industry, he’s sharing what he learns.

“He makes himself available and you don’t have to push any buttons,” says Norm Kleber, IPLCA education chairman. “He’s automatically there. If you need something, if an issue comes up, he’s right on top of it and lets our membership know. And he’s very good at networking with other individuals in the industry and I think that’s what sets him apart.”



Mark Utendorf grew Emerald Lawn Care thanks to his extensive marketing background and willingness to learn.

BEATING THE ODDS. Utendorf's career in lawn care has its roots in his childhood, when he would help his father in the yard. He was always outdoors planting and he loved to mow the lawn. He earned his gardening and forestry merit badges in Boy Scouts and when he turned 16, he started working for a nursery.

He stayed in the green industry throughout high school and college, opting then to work for Caterpillar, and then doing marketing for a couple of large public corporations. Eventually he decided he wanted to get back into the green industry and went to work selling design/build jobs for a Chicago-area landscaping and lawn care company. After a year of doing that, he decided it wasn't a good fit and went into banking for four years.

Then, in 2007, he got a call from the landscaper he used to work for and everything changed. "He asked me if I wanted to buy his lawn care business and I said, 'Absolutely' because I like that business model much better," Utendorf says. "I didn't really want to do the project end of things. I really like the annuity piece of lawn care so I jumped at the opportunity."

The deal was closed a month later and Utendorf started his first season as a lawn

care operator. Then the Great Recession hit. The business had fewer accounts than he had thought, but it grew aggressively thanks to Utendorf's marketing background.

Kleber says that background set him up well to jump into the green industry and learn all he could. "The best way to excel is to learn and he's a very educated individual. When it comes time for more education, he doesn't hinder himself or his employees to go get trained and learn more about the industry. In his company, he leads by example and I think that's what makes him so successful."

What started out as a two-man operation has grown every year, and now has six team members. Utendorf loves the business model and the process. "I feel like I'm trying to provide Nordstrom quality by implementing McDonald's process and really trying to hone the efficiency and improve our service," he says.

Utendorf says he's "a bit of a perfectionist" but sees that as a benefit in the service industry. Losing a customer will even keep him up at night as he tries to figure out what happened. "We're laser-focused on retention," he says, and Emerald keeps it in the 90 percent range. "If you can keep your retention in that ballpark, you almost can't fail." ♦

“I FEEL LIKE I'M TRYING TO PROVIDE NORDSTROM QUALITY BY IMPLEMENTING MCDONALD'S PROCESS AND REALLY TRYING TO HONE THE EFFICIENCY AND IMPROVE OUR SERVICE.”

MARK UTENDORF, EMERALD LAWN CARE

WORKING TOGETHER

Mark Utendorf recognizes that every company is having the same problems, no matter which state it's in, says Norm Kleber, education chairman for the IPLCA. Utendorf has been very involved in the neonicotinoid controversy, among other issues, going to bat for the green industry in D.C.

"I think I could see the fire in his eyes when (NALP Director of Government Affairs) Tom Delaney and a few others started pushing the issue a few years ago about the neo-nics and how our industry was getting attacked from all angles. And he just took passionately a call to arms," Kleber says.

Utendorf says the collaborative spirit of the industry is one of the things he loves most about lawn care. "I've never been in an industry that was as open as this industry and it still blows me away. It just encourages me to be that much more engaged."

When Utendorf built the website for Emerald Lawn Care, the first thing on it was information on cultural practices. Even his business card is educational, describing ideal mowing heights and tips for a beautiful lawn.

The goal is healthy turf and happy customers for all, not just Emerald Lawn Care, and that passion has really made Utendorf stand out.

"He has renewed my own faith in the industry in the sense that I see this younger guy, this upcoming person who really is excited about this industry and it's not just because he can make money at it, but because he sees the benefits," says Harold Enger, director of education at Spring-Green.



A leader in his own right, Bruce Wilson has spent four decades teaching, hiring and managing dozens of other green industry leaders.

TALK
LESS,
LISTEN
MORE

BRUCE WILSON'S FINGERPRINTS
CAN BE SEEN ON DOZENS
OF COMPANIES IN THE
LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY.

BY CHUCK BOWEN

BRUCE WILSON STARTED IN THE INDUSTRY LIKE MOST – he mowed lawns as a kid to make some extra money around his upstate New York home. One of his former clients, who'd hired Wilson to maintain his small greenhouse, recommended the budding horticulturist for a garden club scholarship. Wilson got it, and it led him to SUNY Farmingdale. He transferred to Cornell, where he graduated with a horticulture degree.

After graduating, he got a job at another tree company, climbing trees in the brutal Rye, N.Y. winters. His wife, Gail, thought that was a bit too dangerous. They decided that if his career would be in landscaping, it made sense to move somewhere where he could work full time. So Wilson answered a classified ad and was hired as a spray operator at Green Valley Landscaping in sunny San Jose, Calif.

It was 1971. He was 25 years old, and at the start of a career that would see him run the largest landscape company in the world, establish maintenance as the green industry's dominant service, and hire, train and consult with dozens of people who would become standout leaders and successful business owners in their own right.



GREEN VALLEY. Wilson started his days early – afternoon winds in the Bay area made it hard to spray – so he had a few hours to kill each afternoon at the shop before his wife picked him up after work. So he asked his boss, Joe Marsh, if he could learn more about the other work Green Valley did.

“I got to see all the jobs we did, met all the foremen and managers and got to learn the operation pretty fast,” he says.

That same year, ValleyCrest, which at the time was mainly a construction company, acquired Green Valley to start a maintenance division. Burt Sperber asked Wilson to head to Colorado to open a branch office there, and acted as the branch manager, salesperson mower operator and mechanic.

Then began a series of promotions that would ultimately make Wilson the president of Environmental Care, ValleyCrest’s maintenance division, and put him in a position to lead and teach some of the industry’s greatest luminaries.

When Wilson became president, it had just four branches – in San Diego, Las Vegas, Denver and Phoenix – plus Green Valley, doing about \$7 million. “That’s what we had, then we grew from there,” Wilson says.

“Grew it from there” is a bit of an understatement. By the time Wilson retired in 1999,



Wilson is now president of Conserve Landcare in Palm Springs, Calif. He recruited Bob Scofield, far left, another horticulturist and former ValleyCrest executive, to join the board of directors.

ValleyCrest was doing \$140 million a year and had grown to that level almost entirely organically. Wilson had made just one acquisition worth more than \$5 million – the Oyler Brothers in Florida.

“We never planned to be a \$100 million company. We just grew,” Wilson says. “We budgeted to grow every year, but we didn’t really realize the compounding effect of it. The only thing that was holding us back from growing even more was people.”

And it was with people where Wilson truly excelled. He spent most of his time out of the office, visiting with branch managers across the state and then country, listening to what their problems were and spreading knowledge of what was working elsewhere.

One of Wilson’s hires was Tom Fochtman, who would go on to run CoCal Landscape (and compete with his former boss) in the Denver market. As vice president of sales and marketing, where he would visit branches throughout California with Wilson.

“He gave me plenty of direction and a lot of autonomy,” Fochtman says. “We had a lot of quality time driving to Palm Desert. I’m confident and I have an ego – he was good at showing me how to keep that in check and how to empower people.”

CONSULTING. After growing ValleyCrest to nine-digit revenue, Wilson could have retired. But he got a call from Rich Angelo, the founder of Stay Green in Santa Clarita, Calif. He had

hired ValleyCrest to do the tree work on his own maintenance accounts, and after he’d heard that Wilson retired, asked him if he’d come consult with his company.

“I said, ‘I guess so, yeah,’” Wilson says. “I hadn’t thought about it until Rich called.”

He teamed up with Tom Oyler, who had joined ValleyCrest after the acquisition, and the two formed the Wilson-Oyler group. It was then that Wilson got involved with peer groups, facilitating meetings among similar-sized but non-competing landscapers around the country.

Wilson didn’t invent peer groups, but he started the most successful ones in the industry. He now runs eight groups, and can count among his clients some of the largest

“HE’S GOING TO GIVE YOU AN ANSWER. ... I TRUST HIM COMPLETELY. THAT’S NOT TO SAY HE’S ALWAYS RIGHT, BUT I’D BE HARD PRESSED TO TELL YOU A TIME HE WAS WRONG.”

FRANK MARIANI, MARIANI LANDSCAPE

FROM MANAGER TO ENABLER

My most influential mentor is Joe Trickett, Ph.D., the Dean of the graduate school of business at Santa Clara University. He had a student that we hired do his thesis on our company, and an attitude survey of our field employees and why they stayed with us for years doing what was – and is – perceived as a menial job.

During the process of his verifying if this was a legitimate project, he met with me regularly and we developed a bond. He took a liking to me and we got into numerous philosophical conversations about management. His area of expertise was industrial psychology. One day when he came in he asked me how things were going. We had a problem where some in the company wanted to fire a guy and some did not.

To make this a short story, it came down to what I believed: Did I believe that people got a job to screw up and get fired, or did they want to succeed in some way? I chose succeed. He asked me if I liked being managed. I didn't, but knew that was part of the deal.

He convinced me to think about instead of being a manager to be an enabler. From that point forward, I saw my role as enabling people to attain the success they wanted. It worked. I enabled many people to achieve more than their dreams. – Bruce Wilson

companies and biggest names in landscaping.

One of those clients and friends is Frank Mariani, who was a member of Wilson's first peer group, Next Level Network, and has hired him as a private consultant for Mariani Landscape. He says Wilson's best skill is his ability to manage the sometimes-inflated egos of the owners who hire him.

"I think that too many of us believe our own bullshit, excuse my French. He's not afraid to pop our bubbles. ... He'll call a spade a spade," Mariani says. "He's going to give you an answer – to me that is invaluable. You can't put a price tag on that, because I trust him completely. That's not to say he's always right, but I'd be hard pressed to tell you a time he was wrong."

As a consultant, Wilson helped Mariani improve how it ran its residential maintenance business. He analyzed everything from how crews rolled out in the morning to how the yard was organized to how job sites were set up.

"He was there as early as the earliest guy the next morning. He said, 'I don't want you to pick me up at the hotel. I want to see what's going on,'" says Fred Wacker, Mariani's president. "He was in our yard at a quarter of six, watching people. He just has an energy level that is inspiring and motivating."

Bob Grover, president at Pacific Landscape Management in Oregon, is another member of Next Level Network, and says Wilson's great skill is listening more than he talks.

"No disrespect to anybody

else, but there are some very large personalities in our industry," Grover says. "And I think he is smarter than any of those large personalities. The thing about Bruce that impresses me the most ... he listens. He is one of the best listeners I know because he's not trying to command the conversation. He truly wants to know what other people are saying and

dominate the market, especially in California. Though he never met Wilson during his time there, he knew him by reputation.

"In our industry, there's a bit of a disconnect if you've got an owner who doesn't speak Spanish and all Hispanic field guys. I was born in Cuba, and my first language is Spanish, so I've been able to relate to the



Wilson, at right, relaxes with members of Next Level Network, his first peer group, during a meeting in Oregon in 2014.

thinking and process that in his mind, and come up with a thought-provoking nugget."

STILL LEARNING. Wilson, now 68, has found time to run another landscape company.

George Gonzalez hired Wilson in 2005 as a consultant for Sierra Landscape in Palm Springs. During the recession, he was forced to shut it down.

But with Wilson's help, the two men relaunched the company as Conserve LandCare in 2011, with a stronger focus on maintenance and using technology to run more efficiently.

For years, Gonzalez had seen ValleyCrest grow and

guy from day one," Gonzalez says. "When I first met Bruce, knowing his background as president of Environmental Care and corporate structure, I thought 'This guy is just management only.'"

But he learned quickly – as everyone who meets Wilson does – that he's just as comfortable in the boardroom as he is in a box truck.

"When we stuck him out there in the middle of a foreman meeting, he did great. The guys really warmed up to him," Gonzalez says. "And you can't fake that. ... The guys pick up on it. The guy is genuine with that." ♦



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The pitch: The C232 features a Fiat Powertrain diesel four-cylinder turbocharged and after-cooled engine.

- The engines meet the Tier 4 Final emissions mandate with a maintenance-free diesel oxidation catalyst-only solution
- It features a high pressure common rail fuel system design.
- It has electronic controls and an 82 horsepower engine.

For more information: Newholland.com

▲ BOBCAT M-SERIES 600 COMPACT TRACK LOADERS

The pitch: The 74-horsepower Bobcat M-Series 600 frame-size compact track loaders provide operators with performance benefits, hydraulic power, comfort and easy serviceability.

- The engines meet Tier 4 emissions standards without a diesel particulate filter.
- The hydraulic systems have been engineered for higher standard flow and pressure, which provides increased attachment performance.
- Engine horsepower and hydraulic flow are matched to the loader's rated operating capacity, size and weight.

For more information: Bobcat.com



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◀ KUBOTA SVL SERIES COMPACT TRACK LOADERS

The pitch: The SVL75-2 and SVL90-2 are powered by 4-cylinder Kubota CRT Tier 4-compliant engines with 74.3 and 92 gross horsepower.

- The vertical lift is designed for a reach of 41.7 inches.
- The SVL75-2 has a bucket breakout force of 6,204 pounds and a lifting capacity of 4,881 pounds.
- The SVL90-2 delivers a bucket breakout force of 7,961 pounds and a lifting capacity of 5,869 pounds.

For more information: Kubota.com



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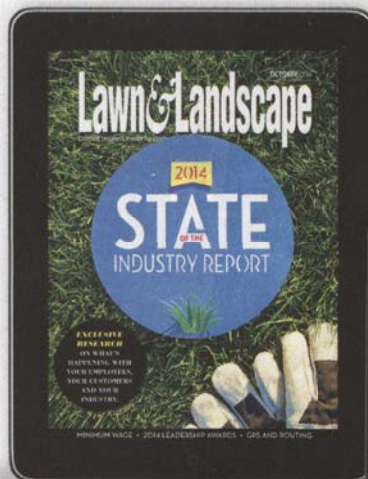
▲ JOHN DEERE 323E COMPACT TRACK LOADER

The pitch: The John Deere 323E compact track loader features a 74 horsepower, Final Tier 4 certified engine and a rated operating capacity of 2,590 pounds.

- The 323E includes low-effort electro-hydraulic controls and an option to allow the operator to switch between three popular industry control patterns: ISO, H and foot control patterns.
- Other features include connect-under-pressure auxiliary hydraulic couplers and courtesy lighting that stays on up to 90 seconds after the engine is shut down, illuminating the way for easier exits out of dark barns or after-hour jobsites.
- Optimized boom design provides improved bucket breakout performance throughout the lift path and improved reach at truck beds.

For more information: Deere.com

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SPRAY IT, DON'T SAY IT

When it comes to keeping crews efficient, your spreader/sprayer can be a game changer.

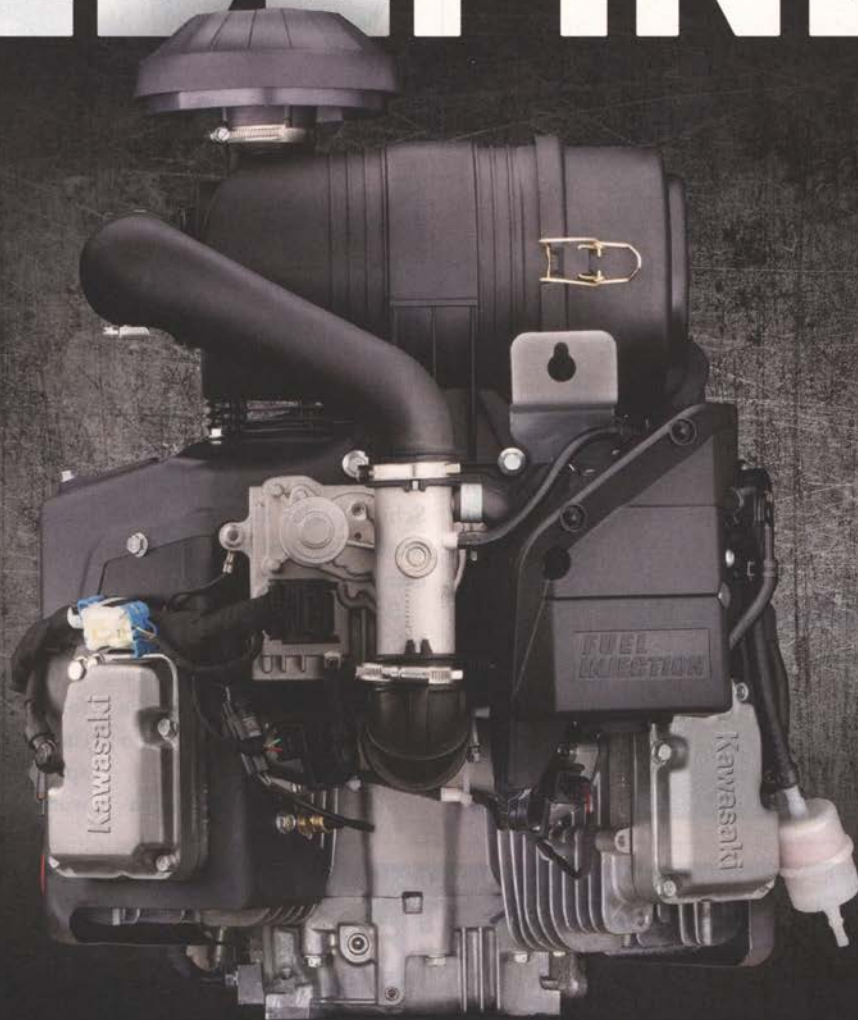
By Katie Tuttle

Whether applying fertilizer or top dressing, it's important for landscape contractors to have access to spreaders and sprayers, or machines that are a combination of both. The equipment you purchase can vary depending on the size and types of properties you maintain, but new technology is making machine options efficient across the board.

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ECOLAWN

The Eco250 and Eco150 are the company's newest generation of top dressing spreaders on the market. Along with moving all of the levers and handles to a

more convenient location by the operator's hands, the company also made the sides of the hopper steeper in order to avoid bridging of the product, which is when the bottom of the wet

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product (either sand or compost) drops down and the top remains in place.

Ecolawn also updated its spreading system from a single disc to two spinners.

"With the single spreading mechanism it tends to be a heavier spread on the one side instead of the other," says Keith Schuler, sales manager. "We went with a dual spin to get an even spread on both sides."

Ecolawn's spreaders are walk behinds so the operator can see what he's doing. However, new this year, the company took the whole system and turned it into a tow-behind.

"As you pull it, the mecha-

nism works and it spreads," Schuler says. "When you move your tractor forward, the wheels turn on your spreader and it operates our spreading system."

The company also turned the spreader into an attachment that can be put on the front of a Walker mower and a Grasshopper brand mower. The attachment hooks into the PPO and spreads in front.

One point on the Ecolawn spreaders is that they are specific to top dressing, not fertilizing.

"Our machine isn't designed for that," Schuler says. "You can do it, but it's designed to spread bulk material. They won't be happy with our ma-

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chine as a fertilizer machine because we don't have those minute, fine controls."

Ecolawn spreaders hold three to four times as much product as typical fertilizer spreaders because top dressing is dealing with bulk material, not bags. While fertilizer is used for nutrients, bulk material such as sand or soil is used to supplement the yard.

"They're doing it to promote growth; ours is to change the soil structure," Schuler says.

LT RICH

Every unit LT Rich offers is a spreader-sprayer combo, meaning operators can use them to put down both liquid herbicides and dry fertilizers at the same time.

"There's really not one time it's using a liquid or one time it's using a dry," says Tom Rich, president. "Normally they're using both."

Taking the idea from the agricultural market, LT Rich has incorporated ground metering into its spreaders/sprayers. Ground metering is when the flow is controlled given the ground speed of the unit.

"The faster the operator goes, more product is going down," Rich says. "It's a lot more consistent application. It's more environmentally friendly."

This is because you're not wasting product when the operator slows his pace. To maintain this, the company has speedometers on the units to show ground speed.

LT Rich also changed its entire lineup a year ago, resulting in units with a lower center of gravity and multiple spray tanks for putting down different products. Some of the units can carry up to four different liquid products at once.

One of the other updates LT Rich has done includes completely changing the chassis. The company went to suspension in order to soften the ride, and also made the chassis stiffer. The transmission was also changed.

"It handles the commercial application a lot better for the environment we're in," Rich says.



RITTENHOUSE

Located in Canada, where strict regulations have banned pesticide use, Rittenhouse has had to design equipment specifically for organic programs.

"We're seeing more and more sales going to the U.S.," says Mark Rittenhouse, president.

Because of iron-based treatments, the company has made their sprayers more corrosion-resistant.

"We're talking about more than the machine," Rittenhouse says. The company has had to develop a whole line of applicators, as well as spray guns. Before, they offered two spray guns; now they offer a dozen. The spray guns come with options such as a ceramic tip that's corrosion resistant.

"We removed all exposure to metal parts completely – all plastic, rubber or Teflon," he says.

They've also provided a flush out for the hose reels so the product doesn't stay there. The suction assembly had to be redesigned as well because the product can't be allowed to settle in the tank.

"What we've found is sometimes small particles are in the mix, so we've had to accommodate how we design the machines."

The benefit of this is that the same machines are now popular for applying compost tea to lawns.

Rittenhouse supplies traditional skid sprayers, but the company has been supplying more and more backpack sprayers to customers.

"The cost of the product is expensive," he says. "Instead of blanket spraying a yard, we're seeing a lot more spot treatment."

Backpacks are also handy if you're doing a quick service call with touch ups. You're able to throw the backpack in the truck and not worry about a large piece of equipment.

They've also become more consistent as technology has improved.

"Traditionally pressure is inconsistent; up and down. A very difficult thing to calculate," Rittenhouse says. "Electric is consistent pressure; very accurate."

In past years, the company only offered one electric backpack to choose. Now there's been a definite shift and the market has expanded to allow for a full selection. Rittenhouse said they're popular because you don't have to hand pump them.

TURFCO

As contractors continue to focus on growing their businesses, Turfco continues to focus on how its products can help them. One of the ways is to offer a three-in-one tank.

"Having a variety of properties is common in the business," says Scott Kinkead, executive vice president. "(And) being able to do

LAWN CARE

that wide variety of properties with one machine, instead of a bunch of machines.”

The three-in-one tank gives operators the ability to cover up to 132,000 square feet, fully loaded, while still being able to fit through a 36-inch residential gate.

This also helps with route management, because you don't need to send two crews to one location, just because one property has the small gate access and the other needs a larger piece of equipment.

Turfco's unit also features a steering wheel with hands free speed control. This allows the

operator to use his foot for speed control, keep one hand on the steering wheel and use the other to operate the sprayer/spreader.

“It frees your hands up so you're not like Edward Scissorhands, trying to operate dif-

ferent levels,” Kinkead says. “It's not artistry. You really only flip two levers and you're going.”

This also adds value in that you don't have to take a lot of time teaching new employees how to operate the equipment.

“Frankly, if the guy can't use a steering wheel and hands free, you shouldn't have him drive a truck to the property,” he says. “It's not like they have to get used to something they've never seen before.” **L&L**



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BAYER SPECTICLE TOTAL

The pitch: Specticle Total is a non-selective herbicide that kills existing weeds and prevents new ones for up to six months.

- It is rainproof in 30 minutes and uses less active ingredient, which results in less herbicide in the environment.
- It's easily mixed in a backpack sprayer and can be used in both landscapes and hardscapes, including mulched areas and around ornamental plants and grasses.
- Specticle Total gives landscape managers total control of weeds for up to six months.

For more information:
Bayercropscience.us



CIVITAS WEEDFREE BRAND CONCENTRATE

The pitch: CIVITAS WEEDfree BRAND Concentrate is a hybrid selective herbicide formulated with fewer active ingredients to kill more than 60 listed broadleaf weeds, including clover, dandelions, poison ivy and sumac.

- Its microtechnology minimizes the three-way mix active ingredients while enhancing the penetration into the plant.
- Visible injury can be seen on weeds within 12 hours.
- The white emulsion produced when sprayed identifies treated areas, reducing duplication of efforts and product waste.

For more information:
Civitaslawn.com



NUFARM LAST CALL

The pitch: Last Call provides postemergent control of crabgrass, particularly in the mid-tiller stage of growth where quinclorac-based herbicides struggle to provide consistent control.

- Last Call also controls a broad spectrum of grassy and broadleaf weeds including goosegrass, foxtail, Japanese stiltgrass, dandelion, clover and lespedeza.
- It can be used for the selective removal of Bermudagrass from zoysiagrass and cool season turf.
- Last Call can be applied to all managed turf areas including residential and commercial lawns.

For more information:
Nufarm.com



TRIATHLON BA BIOFUNGICIDE/BACTERICIDE

The pitch: A preventative biofungicide, Triathlon BA is labeled for use in both organic and non-organic production on a wide variety of fungal and bacterial diseases.

- With the active ingredient *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens*, Triathlon BA provides preventive control of many foliar and soil-borne diseases such as botrytis, powdery mildew, downy mildew, rusts, leaf spots, alternaria, pythium, phytophthora, rhizoctonia, fusarium and bacterial spot.
- The product is packaged in one-gallon containers, four to a case, 36 cases to a pallet.
- Triathlon BA features a "caution" signal word and carries a 4-hour restricted entry interval.

For more information:
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A WIN-WIN SITUATION

High-efficiency nozzles save time and money for you and your customers.

By Ken Wysocky

Here's a heads-up for landscapers who install irrigation systems: Using high-efficiency nozzles instead of traditional models provides the proverbial win-win situation for you and your customers.

On the customer side, high-efficiency nozzles can reduce water usage, decrease water bills and provide better, more consistent coverage, which translates into nicer-looking lawns and landscapes. On the contractor's side of the equation, the high-efficiency models aren't significantly more expensive and offer better watering coverage. This results in fewer profit-killing callbacks to keep readjusting inconsistent sprinkler systems.

"From my experience, our customers average about a 10 to 15 percent savings in water usage with high-efficiency nozzles," says Darren Nosseck, account manager at Jensen Landscape Services in San Jose, Calif. In fact, in one test installation for a client who owns a shopping mall and needed to meet a local mandate to reduce water usage by 30 percent, converting from older nozzles to Rain Bird 5000 series high-efficiency nozzles resulted in a 41 percent reduction in water usage.

"It was a huge success," Nosseck says. "I was quite

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IRRIGATION TECHNOLOGY

ecstatic about that and so was the client.”

A key benefit of high-efficiency nozzles is minimal misting, so less water is lost to evaporation. With traditional nozzles, Nosseck estimates that misting causes clients to lose 10 to 20 percent of their water to evaporation because the water droplets are so small they never hit the ground. Moreover, older nozzles can leak after the sprinkler system is turned off, but Rain Bird technology features check valves that create a strong, leak-proof seal after the sprinkler heads pop down, he says.

BETTER PRESSURE CONTROL. With traditional systems, the water pressure at each sprinkler head decreases incrementally the farther they're located from a water valve, and coverage consistency decreases accordingly.

“But the Rain Bird heads are pressure-compensating,” he says. “All the heads put out the same pressure and flow, so you won't have a burnt spot at the end because there's less pressure, which we used to see a lot. That's important because commercially, you can't have a dead-looking lawn. It's just not acceptable.”

Nosseck says he doesn't have to worry about different nozzle sizes to increase the pressure at the end of a row, making installation faster and adjustments fewer.

It wasn't unusual for Jensen crews to go back and spend two or three more hours making sprinkler-system adjustments on a job the company had already invoiced. “You can't invoice the customer for that time,” he says. “And the fact that you have to keep going back and forth doesn't look good to the client, either ... It makes it look like we don't know what we're doing.”

MORE EFFECTIVE COVERAGE. At TerraWorks Landscaping in Salt Lake City, owner Paul Sannar says the use of high-efficiency nozzles has become more commonplace in his market, for both new installations and upgrades.

“When we retrofit existing systems, we almost always use high-efficiency nozzles,” he says. “For new installations, about 60 percent of customers go with high-efficiency nozzles. We're in the third year of a drought, so people are realizing they need to be better stewards of water.”



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Sannar also cites less misting and more consistent and accurate spraying coverage as primary reasons to use or convert to high-efficiency nozzles. "With traditional nozzles, we often had to install more nozzles to get more coverage," he says. "But with high-efficiency nozzles, the spray patterns are more consistent – and lawns are healthier when they get the right amount of water."

Another consideration: Over-spraying or leaky valves that produce excess water runoff can damage clients' assets, such as driveways and parking lots. "Water is one of the worst things for asphalt," Nosseck says.

"If water sits in low spots before evaporating, it breaks down the asphalt and eventually destroys it.

"So when you're making a repair, do you want to replace a broken sprinkler head with another leaky head without a check valve, or replace it with one that has a check valve and a pressure-compensating feature that prevents the head from leaking onto their asphalt?" he asks.

"It's a no-brainer. If you've been over-spraying for years and not giving a client suggestions about how to fix it, and they need \$200,000 in asphalt repairs that a contractor says was caused by years of over-spraying, that can get you fired in an instant."

STILL NOT A SLAM DUNK. Despite all the benefits, high-efficiency nozzles aren't always an easier sell, Sannar says. In his market, for instance, about 80 percent of people use what's known as secondary water (unfiltered water from holding ponds) to irrigate their yards.

For about a \$50 to \$80 annual flat fee, homeowners can use as much water as they want, which diminishes the motivation to spend a little more on high-efficiency nozzles.

Nosseck says he sometimes encounters clients who don't have money budgeted for an irrigation system upgrade. So he asks them to consider including it in the next year's

budget, and emphasizes that reducing water usage will help pay for the upgrade. Moreover, manufacturers often offer a better warranty for a complete sprinkler system replacement compared to nozzle replacement, he says.

On the other hand, with more and more municipalities levying fines for excess water runoff and approving drought-induced watering restrictions, Nosseck says he's also seeing more clients upgrade their sprinkler systems even if the cost is not in their current budgets.

"Now it's all about being proactive with customers, not waiting for them to get a fine or a warning," he says.

Sannar also observes that environmental awareness and municipal water restrictions are motivating customers to make the switch.

"We've even seen some cases of 'water shaming,'" he says, in which people call a local radio station to complain about neighbors who water their lawns during the middle of a day or a day after a rainfall.

In addition, Sannar says local government agencies are offering rebates to customers who convert their sprinkler systems to more advanced technologies.

LITTLE TRAINING REQUIRED. Both Nosseck and Sannar say there's very little additional training required and no need for additional equipment in order to make the switch to high-efficiency nozzles.

In the end, lower water bills and increased eco-consciousness are paving the way for conversions, Sannar says. "Instead of over-watering, people are giving their lawns what they need, when they need it – and their water bills will be lower, too," he says.

"If we don't manage water effectively, it affects all of us. We don't want to get to the point where we're tearing out landscapes and going to xeriscaping. It's much better to just be smart about how we use our water." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Milwaukee.

"Commercially, you can't have a dead-looking lawn. It's just not acceptable."

**Darren Nosseck,
an account manager at
Jensen Landscape Services**

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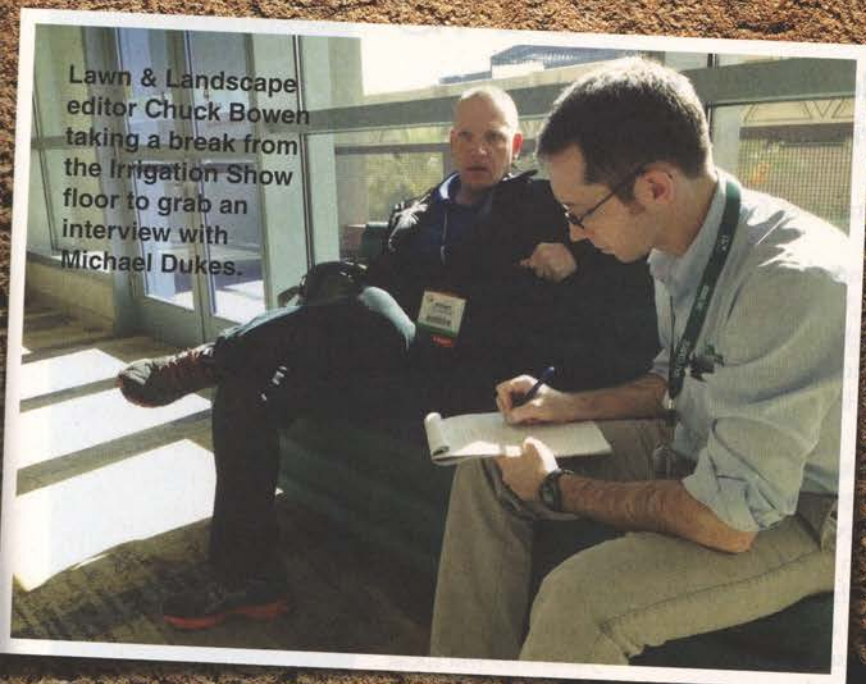
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EXPERT OPINIONS

Important issues facing the industry will be front and center at this year's Irrigation Show.

Drought is a hot topic across the country, even for those not living in an area affected by the problem.

It will also be a much-discussed topic at the Irrigation Association show taking place in Long Beach, Calif., Nov. 9-13. This year's show will feature industry leaders discussing water use during drought at IA's Drought Summit. Breakout sessions will address the West's water shortage, groundwater sustainability and infrastructure challenges. A panel of experts will debate the irrigation industry's role in finding long-term solutions for drought in the United States and around the world.

The event will also feature a research symposium, co-sponsored by the American Society of Agricultural & Biological Engineers. The 2015 Irrigation Symposium will include a poster session on the show floor and more than 60 sessions on evapotranspiration, ground-based and remote sensing, deficit irrigation, microirrigation, irrigation scheduling and more.

Along with a trade show and networking events, the event will also include classes and irrigation seminars for members of the agricultural, landscape and golf course irrigation industries.

The show's general session will feature famed artist and activist Robert Wyland who will speak on environmental awareness and conservation. Through community and education events across the globe, the non-profit Wyland Foundation has turned more than 1 million kids into passionate advocates for the world's oceans and marine life. **L&L**

To learn more and register, visit Irrigation.org/IrrigationShow

NEW EDUCATION CLASSES FOR 2015

The business of landscape irrigation contracting
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Monday, Nov. 9, 8 a.m.-5 p.m.
► Provides opportunities for students to be exposed to current business practices in strategic planning, business finances and marketing.

Landscape drainage design
Intermediate | Landscape
6 CEUs

Tuesday, Nov. 10, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.
► Improve landscape drainage design with this class for manufacturers, distributors and contractors. (Includes manual)

Hydraulic troubleshooting
Intermediate | Landscape
4 CEUs

Tuesday, Nov. 10, 8 a.m.-noon
► Review the essentials of hydraulics for landscape irrigation.

NEW IRRIGATION SEMINARS FOR 2015

Thursday, Nov. 12, 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
A new way to evaluate sprinkler performance
Speaker: Brent Mecham
Sprinkler operational efficiency is a new performance metric looking at how sprinklers distribute water when used in different spacing configurations.

Sustainable landscapes and water use efficiency
Speaker: Michael Dukas
Learn about new opportunities for irrigation professionals to become part of the solution to managing water resources.

Commissioning an irrigation system
Speaker: Ted Moriarty
This seminar will discuss the commissioning process.

Smart phone apps for irrigation management
Speaker: Kati Migliaccio
Learn about how the latest tools for managing irrigation systems can help you become a more effective water manager.

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PLAN FOR PARTS

Landscapers offer tips on how to keep your shop well stocked without overspending.

By **Lindsey Getz**

Even the best landscape company, with the most efficient crews, tightest scheduling and fanciest equipment can be ground to a halt by something as simple as a busted drive belt.

“When equipment breaks down – and it always will – you need to have parts on hand,” says Peter M. Schepis, vice president of The Greenwood Group in New Melle, Mo. “A machine is not making us any money when it is not in service. You need an established stock of parts that can get equipment back into production as quickly as possible. You also need reliable vendors that can get parts quickly for the parts we don’t normally stock.”

“Just like you wouldn’t want to run around half a day picking up plants, soil amendments and other supplies needed to install a landscape, you wouldn’t want to run around picking up parts for the equipment maintenance and repair side of your business,” says John Newman, president of Classic Landscapes, in Hampton, Ga., who says he budgets one percent of gross revenues to



“SINCE WE’RE REALLY PUTTING THE MOWERS TO WORK, IT’S EXPECTED THAT PARTS WILL FAIL.”

Josh Cameron,
facility supervisor for
The Greenwood Group

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SHOP SUPPLIES

keep extra parts stocked up. But these owners also admit that a well-stocked garage can be costly if not making wise investments in the right parts. As a result, smart planning is critical.

Peter Schepis, Jr., director of Greenwood's operations says it can be as much as 50 percent savings when buying aftermarket parts.

"There have been times we've had to buy parts last minute and that's painful," he says. "It can be anywhere from 30 to 50 percent more than what we would have paid in aftermarket parts."

OVERSEEING THE STOCK. The responsibility of stocking and

overseeing parts inventory typically falls to the mechanic, or the operations manager. David Fairburn, owner of North Point Outdoors in Windham, N.H., says his mechanic stocks the shop, but that job is overseen by the operations manager.

"It's always good to have two sets of eyes on the job," Fairburn says. "Parts can be costly and it's important that we're not over-ordering and having a lot of money sitting on the shelf. But it's even worse not to have enough parts."

Bill Trimmer, owner of Professional Grounds, based in Lorton, Va., says the company has had the same shop manager

for more than 30 years and he handles all of the ordering.

"Having had the same shop manager that long we feel lucky not to have much turnover in that area, however, we do also employ two additional mechanics," Trimmer says.

"Great landscape equipment and vehicle repairman are hard to come by so when we find a good one, we do everything we can to keep them engaged and happy in their position."

TOO MUCH OR NOT ENOUGH.

Since it's impossible to predict what parts will fail when, it's easy to over-prepare – and over-stock – especially if they're able to get a

good deal on parts. Schepis says The Greenwood Group budgets \$4,000 per month for parts. For the 40 mowers its crews run, that means more than 120 blades on hand, plus another 30 spares. The same goes for tires and belts.

Each machine size will use different belts and have different sized tires so they try to keep one or two of each in stock. Other necessities include filters, string trimmer parts, hydraulic hoses, pulleys and some switches.

"You can never have enough tires and belts," adds Josh Cameron, facility supervisor for The Greenwood Group. "I try to keep at least two of each belt for most machines but there have

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been times we've gone through three or four in a day."

Cameron says the company's machines run all day and they're being pushed to their maximum ability. In fact, The Greenwood Group operates on a seven-day-a-week mowing schedule. Every crew is mowing all week and a lot of "swapping out" occurs as machines go down.

"Since we're really putting the mowers to work, it's expected that parts will fail," Cameron says. "While stocking up on aftermarket parts can be a great way to save money, it's also possible to take it too far, says Fairburn. If you invest in a lot of parts you never use, you leave a

lot of money sitting on the shelf.

"It's important to keep a good inventory and have a good sense of what parts get the most use," he says. "It's absolutely wise to take advantage of those great discounts, you just want to make sure you're investing wisely."

Like others, Trimmer has had the most success with aftermarket tires, blades and pulleys. He purchases OEM parts for engines and hydraulic equipment.

But Trimmer says he's also aware that aftermarket parts are not always "top quality," depending where they came from.

"It's important that we pay close attention to the parts we receive and perform our own

BILL TRIMMER ON HIRING A MECHANIC

Hiring mechanics is a different ballgame because you typically won't find these people on employment sites. The one online resource that does seem to work for us is Craigslist, but networking with our vendors in almost always where we find our best mechanics. Once we find them we're not overly concerned with "ASE Certified Mechanics." The best mechanics we have are self-taught and that's been true for the 40 years we have been in business.

quality control measures when possible to ensure the parts we are getting are legitimate working pieces that are the same quality you would expect when buying non-aftermarket," Trimmer says. Ultimately, Fairburn says he believes a well-stocked shop has a good balance of both aftermarket and OEM parts.

"My advice is to save your money on aftermarket parts where it is wise to do so," Fairburn says. "A good balance of both kinds of parts will give you the best of both worlds and help you to continue operating efficiently." **L&L**

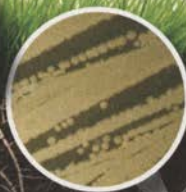
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▲ 2015 Ford Transit

Landscapers have a growing number of service vehicle options to replace heavier, pricier pick-ups. By Robert Schoenberger



◀ 2015 Ram Promaster City

Automakers are in the midst of launching dozens of new van models at a time when many fleet managers are looking to cut costs by using relatively inexpensive light vehicles instead of multi-axle trucks.

“Vans have just been blown wide open. A few years ago, you had six or seven commercial options, and now you have dozens. There seems to be more models every year,” says George Mayhew, vehicle engineering and development director for telecommunications company Verizon.

New vans on the show floor at this year’s Work Truck Show in Indianapolis included:

- Chevrolet’s City Express – Launched last year, it competes with Ford’s Transit Connect in the small van market.

- Ram Promaster City – Fiat Chrysler Automobiles’ (FCA) competitor to the Transit Connect and City Express began arriving

at dealerships in January, but supplies have been very limited.

- Ford Transit lineup – Also launched last year, Ford is replacing the aging Econoline series with the high-roofed, more fuel-efficient Transit.

- Mercedes-Benz Metris – A minivan-sized vehicle announced at the show, Mercedes calls the van the Vito in Europe, but didn’t want to deal with Godfather jokes in the U.S.

MORE NAMES, MORE VARIETY. Officials from the automakers say several trends are leading to the big increase in van options – Ford and Ram are speeding up efforts to bring

to the U.S. lighter, more fuel-efficient, European-designed vehicles from their partners overseas. Ford sold about 40,000 Transit Connects in 2013 and 2014, showing that there is a market for small vans, and demand continues to grow from fleet buyers for lower-cost options.

Ford Commercial Vehicles chief engineer John Davis says that in addition to more brands and names, automakers are offering more variants and options on their vans. Commercial fleet buyers went from having three or four layout options at the beginning of the decade to having several dozen opportunities to customize products for specific tasks.

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TRUCKS & VEHICLES

"When we went from the E-Series van to the Transit, we went from about two dozen combinations of engine, cargo box size, suspension, etc. ... to 68 combinations. We have different roof heights, different engines, different transmissions, different load-out

options," Davis says. "Even within product lines, there's a lot more diversity. And we know that we don't satisfy all of the vocations with the Transit. That's why we're still keeping the E-Series around on the cutaways."

At Ram, FCA's commercial and truck

division, brand marketing director Becky Blanchard says intense competition for commercial buyers has every automaker revamping its lineup to offer everything from micro-vans suitable for small businesses such as locksmiths, up to giant cutaway vans (unfinished large




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2015 Chevrolet City Express

LANDSCAPER'S SPECIAL

In hopes of winning more work from landscapers and similar businesses, General Motors is launching a stripped-down version of its Chevrolet Colorado small pickup. By selecting a box-delete option, buyers will get a chassis and cab with no pickup bed, effectively prepping the truck for upfitters to add unique work spaces. GM officials say they expect the option to be particularly popular with landscapers seeking inexpensive flat-bed options to carry mowers and other mobile equipment.

"The Colorado was developed with the upfitter industry in mind," says Mike Jones, product manager, mid-pickups, CNG, and LPG. "Input from body manufacturers and fleet owners helped us make the most of the optional fuel filler mounting location to suit their unique needs."

Available since April, the box-delete option, order code ZW9:

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TRUCKS & VEHICLES

vans that get sent to upfitters for conversion into ambulances, beverage delivery vehicles, or airport shuttles) for big fleet customers.

"We're really excited to see how Promaster City does in the market. We'll know a lot more about what commercial buyers are looking for

as we launch these products," Blanchard says. "There's a migration out of bigger commercial products, but there's a migration in as well. Some businesses are growing, and they need more capability, so they're looking at bigger vehicles. And some people are downsizing from

Class 5 or Class 3 products into Promaster and Promaster City vans."

MID-SIZED OPTION. While Ford, Ram, and Chevrolet fight for smaller businesses with their compact vans, Mercedes officials say they think the right commercial option for fleet customers is about the same size as consumer minivans. About the only thing separating the Metris from Toyota's Sienna or Chrysler's Town and Country are the engine and the rear doors. The Metris features a 2-liter, four-cylinder engine, while minivans tend to have bigger V-6 engines, and in back, it has armoire-style open-out doors instead of the one-piece liftgate favored by family-oriented vans.

Intense competition for commercial buyers has every automaker revamping its lineup from micro-vans up to giant cutaway vans.

Bernhard Glaser, vice president and managing director of Mercedes Vans USA, says company officials considered bringing over the Citan, a van selling in Europe that competes with the Transit Connect and versions of the Promaster City and City Express. But after much deliberation, he and others decided that the mid-sized Metris made more sense.

"In Europe, we have a smaller option, but for North America, we think the larger Metris makes more sense. The smaller vans are often too small for commercial purposes," Glaser explains.

He adds that Mercedes' Sprinter line – vehicles that compete directly with Transit – has helped the company grow its commercial business in North America. Having established itself as a player in the bigger end of the commercial van world, Glaser says Mercedes is inching its way down with a mid-sized offering, rather than jumping all the way to compacts. **L&L**

The author is editor of Today's Motor Vehicles, a sister publication of Lawn & Landscape. Email him at rschoenberger@gie.net.

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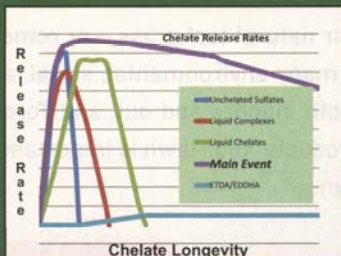
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EFCO MT 6500

The pitch: The MT 6500 is designed for uses such as felling medium to large trees and frequent firewood cutting.

- It includes a separate one-piece handle section to reduce vibrations and increase operator comfort.
- The 63.4-cc engine delivers 4.7 horsepower, giving the user a high power-to-weight ratio on a professional saw that only weighs 14.8 pounds.
- The lateral chain tensioner simplifies adjustments, avoiding any contact with the chain, and an adjustable oil pump that activates automatically when the chain starts moving.

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STIHL MS 261 C-MQ CHAINSAW

The pitch: The MS 261 C-MQ has all the same features as the MS 261, with the addition of the STIHL M-Tronic engine management system.

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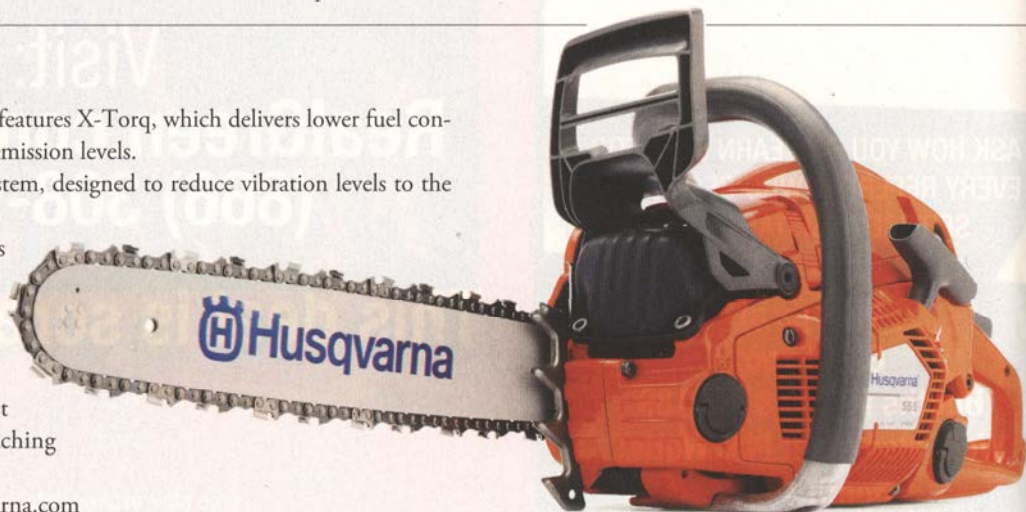
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NO MAGIC PILL

There's no surefire way to build and retain a quality team,
but there are a number of ways to make the process easier.

By Catherine Pomiecko



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ASK ANY LANDSCAPE BUSINESS OWNER

what has helped them become successful and they all will likely say the same thing – having great people. But for many contractors, the challenge is getting those good people to work for their company.

“You have to do a little bit of everything, whether it’s referrals or advertising or just being the best place to work. That’s what it boils down to,” says Brian Steers, regional franchise adviser for U.S. Lawns. “Hiring is just like sales. You never stop. I would say we have good retention rates once we get the guys. It’s going through 10 guys to get to one that is the challenge.”

Steers suggests contractors formulate a written hiring process and follow it the same way every time. The process should include a phone screening piece to narrow down candidates before bringing them in for face-to-face interviews. Contractors should also ask the same questions in every interview so that they can see patterns of answers and spot differences easily.

“It’s all about streamlining and being as efficient as possible, because (hiring) is a huge commitment of time, and making sure you make a good hire so you don’t have to go through it all over again,” Steers says.

Know what you want.

For David Tucker, owner of CLIP Landscaping in Frederick, Md., a good hire is someone whose values align with those of the company. He’s not looking for workaholics; he wants well-rounded em-

ployees with a sense of humor. “I am looking for people who are intensely interested in win, win, win across the board. I want someone who says ‘I want to work for this company so I can give value to the company, I can give value to the customers and I can give value to my own family.’”

“I don’t want to take you away from something else. We should be able to do everything together,” he says.

Internal recruiters.

Most contractors find that hiring from referrals is more successful for their businesses than hiring someone off the street. The referring employee passes on the expectations and the reality of the job so there are no surprises, says Michael Danley, owner of D-Lite Lawn Maintenance in Fort Wayne, Ind.

“If one of my people recommends someone, I trust their

“My goal in life is to become completely useless. I don’t want any part of any one of my businesses to depend on me. I am an entrepreneur. I like to start businesses and find good people that can run them, and sit back and be useless.”

David Tucker, owner of CLIP Landscaping in Frederick, Md.

judgment because they wouldn’t be with me for the last 10 years if they didn’t believe in what we were doing,” he says. “If you’re looking for a common laborer, there are a million of those guys out there. Anybody can do that. But if you need someone who is going to have some skill when it comes to hardscape or irrigation or fertilizing, it’s a little harder to find.”

Another set of eyes.

Typically, Brad Hayes, CEO of Greenbee Landscape in Palmdale, Cali., tries to hire from within or use referrals, but as his business is expanding, he is beginning to look outside of his workforce for new hires.

“That’s one place where we are lacking – people qualified to step up into management roles,” Hayes says. “In the past, we have hired people who have really good skills and talents and then we’ve created a position for that person based on their abilities. But that’s really not the way we want to do it in the future.”

Hayes is currently working with an independent business consultant to set up organizational management charts, an employee manual, an operations manual, incentive programs and other tools that will help keep employees satisfied and make all areas of his business more efficient.

“We want to develop an organization where you are able to plug people in and out of positions and allow them to move up the chain. That’s where we have gone wrong in the past,” he says. Many of Hayes’ manage-



AWN & LANDSCAPE surveyed nearly 500 contractors

about their experiences with staffing. Nearly 16 percent of respondents said they are the only fulltime staff member in their operation and 38 percent have fewer than five fulltime employees. More than 75 percent have 1-5 part-time employees. Referrals were the most popular way to find new employees by far, but only 36 percent of contractors say they offer incentives for referrals.

What is your company's overall gross revenue for 2014?



Less than \$200,000



\$200,000 - \$499,000



\$500,000 - \$749,000



\$750,000 - \$999,000



\$1-\$6.9 million



\$7 million or more

How many non-seasonal employees do you have?



Just me



1-5



6-10



11-15



16-20



21-25



More than 25

ment-level employees have been with the company for many years. While they are very loyal and productive, Hayes sees that they are somewhat resistant to change.

"When you're trying to implement new policies and a new business plan so that you can expand, their natural tendency is to be afraid," he says. "Trying to integrate a foreign leadership member into a core group of people is difficult."

Hayes found that having a business consultant has been helpful when implementing new policies because the ideas are coming from a neutral, outside voice who has been hired to make each employee's life better.

The consultant interviewed every employee and spent time on jobs with them to find out what their biggest challenges

were, and will be working with the company until the goals are met.

"We want to remove road blocks for our employees and remove any bottlenecks in the way that we are organized and the way we process things," he says. "We want to give everyone the information and tools that they need to be successful."

The reward attraction.

Another area Hayes' consultant is focusing on is developing an incentive program to reward his existing employees for finishing projects on time and make them feel appreciated.

"There's nothing more valuable than a loyal employee who is honest and dedicated. You can't buy equipment to replace that," he says.

In most cases, it will take

more than competitive wages to attract employees and to keep them working for you, Steers says. "Take care of your people. We're all offering competitive wages, so it's the little things that will add up to a good work environment."

Danley makes sure to focus on those little things to make his employees feel appreciated. He has been known to give employees holiday gifts and give their families baby shower and graduation gifts, and has even cosigned on vehicles and loaned money to employees in need.

"You have to show people you care about them. If you do, they will do anything for you. If you expect it, you're not going to get the results you want," he says.

Hayes tries to keep lines of communication open and clear between management and employees for the same reason.

If employees at all levels are working toward a shared goal, everyone will feel fulfilled in achieving those goals.

"I know that's where we've failed in the past," he says. "It's critical that the people running the jobs are on the exact same page as the owners."

More responsibility, better retention.

Besides bonuses and monetary incentives, the most effective retention factor is often just being a good place to work. For Tucker, that means delegating.

"Contractors are constantly complaining, saying 'I can't find good people,' but at the same time, they are micromanaging people. They don't allow them to make their mistakes and they don't allow them to be responsible. They haven't put in pay

structures that reward people for being good," he says. "So the good people, if they do even get hired to begin with, end up leaving because they can't fill their need there."

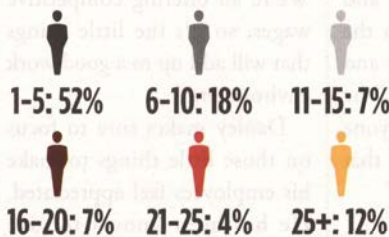
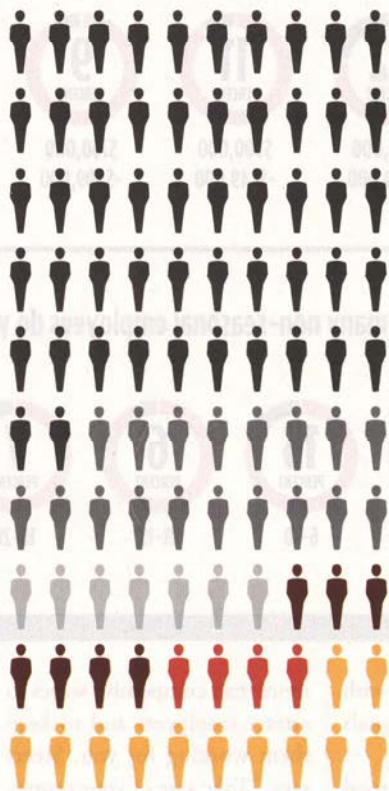
Tucker encourages contractors to step out of the roles they had when starting out in their businesses, when they were doing everything from mowing the grass to data entry to marketing decisions, and trust their employees with those tasks. Tucker's top manager gets 10 percent of profits at the end of the year, which allows Tucker to trust her with any decisions she makes in regard to spending money.

"I spend about two weeks a year managing that company," he says. "Otherwise, it manages itself. All I have to do is get out of the way. To me, that is a beautiful business. My goal in life is to become completely useless. I don't want any part of any one of my businesses to depend on me. I am an entrepreneur. I like to start businesses and find good people that can run them, and sit back and be useless."

That relationship between Tucker and his managers is more valuable to him than a few dollars lost. For example, the aforementioned manager wanted to spend money this year on radio advertising. Even though Tucker knew that it hadn't worked for them years ago, he let her try it. It didn't work out, but Tucker believes the shared monetary loss was much less valuable than the amount gained by trusting.

"If I had squashed that right off the bat, then I would have been squashing attitude, and that was key to me," he says. "They will do the wrong thing

How many seasonal employees do you have?



and there will be some losses, but the amount that you will gain by being able to just watch your business from afar is going to be so much better than what you lost."

Hayes has also found that giving his crew leaders responsibility has paid off in high retention rates for his company. Each crew operates like its own business,

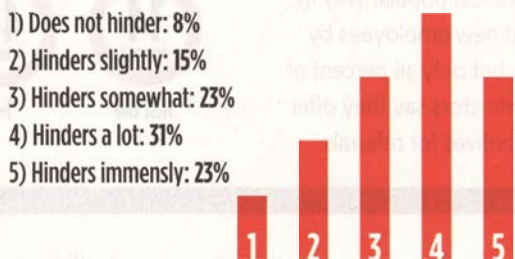
seeing a project through from beginning to end. The crew leaders are given expense cards to buy the materials they need, which gives them a sense of ownership of the project.

Furthermore, Hayes looks to his crew leaders to help find solutions to problems that come up. Including them in the process makes them feel like they

Have you had to turn down jobs due to difficulties with hiring and retention in the last three years?



How much does a lack of quality employees hinder your company's growth?



Do you use the H-2B program?



can really make a difference. "Our employees have come up with some of our best ideas," he says. "Listening to them and letting them experiment – giving them a chance to fail sometimes with a new system or procedure has been very good because it gives them an opportunity." L&L

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



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THEY ASK, YOU ANSWER

Stop chasing customers and get them to come to you.

By Chris Heiler

As consumers, we have grown more and more impatient as we search for information online. I'm cursing at a company if I have to wait more than five seconds for their website to load.

We've been conditioned to believe we can find the answer to any question or problem we may have simply by entering a string of words into a search engine. Got a question? Just Google it. We know we'll find the answer somewhere online as long as we look hard enough. That's our expectation today.

A CULTURE OF LISTENERS AND TEACHERS. This need and expectation we have to quickly find the answers we're searching for is the essence of inbound marketing: Attracting qualified prospects to you when they are actually searching for an answer to their question or a solution to their problem.

How often do you get asked about the best time to fertilize a lawn? Or when to prune back trees? Or how to get flowers to grow in this shady spot over here?

How many of these questions are answered in a comprehensive way on your website? If you're like most companies, the answer is "not many" or "none at all."

Wait. We know people rely on search engines like Google to find answers to their questions. After all, we do it ourselves. So why do companies overlook or flat-out ignore this reality and not directly address the most frequently asked questions their prospects and customers have in a transparent way on their websites?

If you want to be successful marketing and selling your landscaping and lawn care services today, you need to create a culture of listening and teaching within your com-

To attract more customers you need to start educating your prospects.

It isn't how many people you employ.
It's the equipment you deploy.



Chris Shipp, Owner

Shipp Shape Lawn Service | Sylvester, Ga.

If you want to increase your profitability, you've basically got two choices: cut costs or increase the productivity of the people you've got. For my company, choosing the right equipment made it possible to do both. Which is why I rely on my fleet of eight Grasshopper diesel mowers. Where we used to need more machines to keep up, we're actually running fewer now and doing the same amount of work because of the extra power diesel provides. And that extra power delivers a better quality cut, which keeps our customers happy. Of course, the fuel savings with diesel don't hurt, either. We're saving more than \$13,000 a year compared to gas. And when you combine that with less maintenance and less downtime, it means you can do a lot more profitable work and keep overhead to a minimum. Thanks to our Grasshoppers, we're doing and earning more than ever.

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CONTENT MARKETING

pany. You need to make a simple choice. Do you want to attract prospects or chase them? To attract more customers you need to start educating your prospects, not send more postcards or bang on more doors.

The most effective way to do this is with content marketing. More specifically, you should have a blog on your website where you address the questions and problems you know your prospects and customers have and are online searching for answers to.

ATTRACTING BUYERS. The goal is to attract buyers to your website. This requires a very purposeful

and deliberate approach to content marketing, creating content that resonates with visitors at various stages of the “buyer’s journey.”

As we plan the content strategy and develop editorial calendars for our clients at Landscape Leadership, we utilize a simple framework to determine topics in a purposeful way. The goal is to create content (blog posts, case studies, videos, etc.) that will appeal to visitors who are in three basic stages of the buyer’s journey: awareness, consideration and intent.

- Awareness: Visitors in the awareness stage are just starting

Buyer’s Content



on their journey, typically by doing some basic research. For instance, a homeowner with a

lawn full of dandelions may be researching the problem with the intent to fix it herself.

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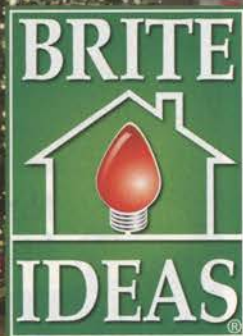
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decorating

• **Consideration:** Visitors in the consideration stage are further into their buying journey. At this point the homeowner mentioned above may now be debating between handling the problem herself or hiring a professional.

• **Intent:** A homeowner in the intent stage will actively research companies and pricing with her eye on hiring a professional in the very near future.

Your content strategy should cover a range of topics in each of these three stages. It should attract visitors at the top of the funnel who are just beginning their research and also attract

those folks who are serious about taking action in the near term.

THE BIG 5. Now let's go a little deeper into how to select topics to write about. There are five big categories that fit this buyer's content framework. These categories are based on how people really search online.

1. How much does it cost? How do you think visitors on your website feel when they can't find the pricing and cost-related information that they seek? We know people have questions related to pricing. Own the conversation.

I've heard every excuse from

business owners as to why they shouldn't address price and cost on their websites. Let me be blunt: They are all BS and don't hold up to the reality of today's marketplace. Remember: The buyer is in control today, not you. Give them the information they seek. Otherwise your competitors will.

Want some proof showing how well this approach can work? Consider River Pools and Spas in Richmond Va. They wrote an article (bit.ly/llriver) on their blog in 2009 titled "How Much Does a Fiberglass Pool Cost?" This single article, which analyzes the dollars and cents of a pool project – generates hundreds of

leads for the company each year and has directly attributed to over \$2.5 million in sales.

Not bad, eh? All because they had the guts to address the topic head-on when their competitors were too busy making excuses as to why they shouldn't.

2. What are the problems? If you've had elective surgery, I would bet that you conducted some extensive research online related to the problems and risks associated with the surgery. This is what we do as consumers. We want to know the good and bad in everything and be aware of potential problems. It's all a natural part of the buying process. As a busi-

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CONTENT MARKETING

ness, you need to address potential problems head on. In doing so you build trust and eliminate fear and buyer's remorse.

River Pools tackled some of the issues fiberglass pools can have by penning a blog post (bit.ly/llfiber) titled "The Top 5 Fiberglass Pool Problems and Solutions." This article generates hundreds of leads each year for the company.

Neave Group Outdoor Solutions (a client of mine) in New York tackled the problems associated with organic lawn care in a blog post (bit.ly/llglass) titled "The Pros and Cons of Organic Lawn Care for Com-

Page	Author	Date	Views	Keywords
The Best Landscaping Blogs of 2014 (Review) http://www.landscapeleadership.com/landscaping-blogs-2014-review	Chris Heller	Jan 7 2015 6:30 AM	3,706	6
The Best Ways to Advertise a Landscaping Business in the Digital Age http://www.landscapeleadership.com/ways-to-advertise-a-landscaping-business-in-the-digital-age	Chris Heller	Mar 18 2015 6:30 AM	1,763	96
The 5 Best Landscaping Logos (According to Us, Anyway) http://www.landscapeleadership.com/landscaping-logos	Chris Heller	May 6 2015 8:16 AM	1,647	9

Writing "best of" blogs can generate thousands of page views for a site or blog and is a great way to attract customers.

mercial Properties."

3. Versus and comparisons.
Which is best: seeding or sod-

ding a lawn? What's the difference between aeration and dethatching? How does the price

compare among concrete, pavers and natural stone?

This is another common way we search for information online. I would bet when you were comparing GPS software or fleet management software for your company this is one way you did your research.

Creating content comparing products, services or techniques is a great way to attract prospects in the awareness stage of the buyer's journey.

Neave Group wrote a blog post (bit.ly/llgunite), "Gunite Pools vs. Vinyl Liner Pools: What's the Best Type of In-ground Pool."

IMAGE COURTESY OF CHRIS HELLER

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Sebert Landscaping (another client) in Chicago published a post (bit.ly/llicemelt) titled "What is the Best Ice Melt Product? Calcium Chloride vs. Sodium Chloride."

Neither of these is a very sexy topic. But they are helpful to your potential customers.

4. The best. We love asking best-based questions online, usually unaware that we are even doing it. What's the best Italian restaurant in Cleveland? What's the best way to dice a tomato? When is the best time to fertilize a lawn?

River Pools has directly attributed over \$500,000 in pool sales to a

blog post they wrote, "Who are the Best Pool Builders in Richmond Virginia?" (bit.ly/lpoolbuild) in 2012. And they didn't even mention their own name.

We've taken this same approach on the Landscape Leadership blog and have written three best-based articles this year, which have received over 7,000 combined views to date. (See screenshot on page 136.)

5. Reviews and awards. People like to read reviews online. Take advantage of this habit in your approach to content marketing.

We've done this with our article "The Best Landscaping Blogs

of 2014" in which we reviewed our favorite landscaping blogs and created an annual award.

Here are three more examples from our clients:

- A review of the Best Memphis Irrigation Companies (bit.ly/memirr) by Michael Hatcher & Associates, Memphis, Tenn.
- The Best Residential Sprinkler Heads for Your Property (bit.ly/loutback) by Outback Landscape, Idaho Falls, Idaho.
- Swimming Pool Lighting: LED Pool Lighting Reviews (bit.ly/lswimpool) by Structure Studios.

The essence of inbound marketing is to attract qualified prospects to you when they are actually searching for an answer to their question or a solution to their problem.

Don't underestimate the extraordinary value in creating content on your website that answers questions and solves problems for potential customers.

It's time to create a culture of listeners and teachers in our companies. **L&L**

Chris Heiler is the founder and CEO of Landscape Leadership, a sales and marketing agency for lawn and landscape industry companies. He is a regular contributor to Lawn & Landscape magazine.



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A large industrial salt storage bin with a yellow excavator bucket dumping salt. The bin is filled with a large pile of white salt. The excavator is positioned on the right side of the bin, and its bucket is tilted, dumping salt into the pile. The background shows the curved, ribbed structure of the bin's interior.

2015-16

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FICTION: The Sectional is too hard to use!

FACT: The Sectional's unique drop-and-go technology allows your operator to set the pusher down and start plowing. Floating side plates, poly-suspended mold boards and Slip Hitch™ connection allows the plow to stay level and flat to the ground everytime!

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FACT: The Sectional has the best cost justification of any plow on the market! Reduction in salt usage, reduction in fuel, reduction in labor. No snow pusher adds value to your business like the Sectional!

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A SNAPSHOT OF WHERE THE INDUSTRY IS AT ADDRESSING ITS SALT AND DEICING NEEDS FOR THE UPCOMING WINTER.

By Mike Zawacki

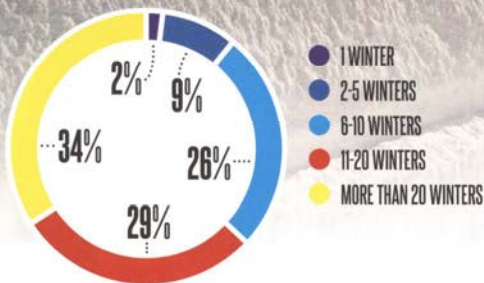
Salt has been a hot topic among snow and ice management professionals since the conclusion of the 2014-15 snow season. Last winter's unprecedented tenacity for many regions of the snow industry – we're talking about you, New England – left many commercial snow and ice management professionals scrambling for available salt or counting their change to meet rising prices.

To better gauge how snow fighters are addressing the winter 2015-16 salt and deicing needs, our sister publication, Snow Magazine, in partnership with Arctic Sno Pushers, surveyed readers from throughout North America in late summer via the internet research portal SurveyMonkey. Here are some of the results to better benchmark the salt and deicing needs of your winter operations against.

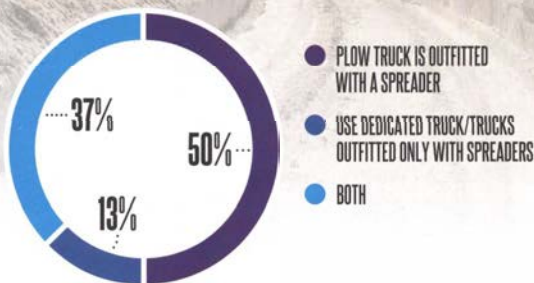
THE RUN DOWN

A snapshot of how the average snow fighter integrates salt and deicing services into their overall winter operations.

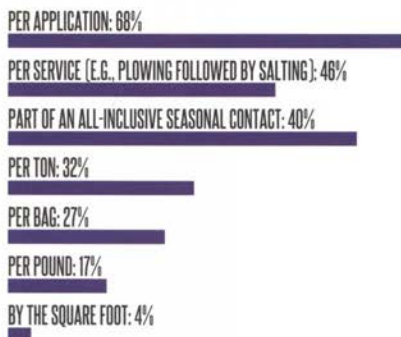
NUMBER OF WINTERS YOU'VE OFFERED SALT & DEICING SERVICES



HOW DO YOU DISPATCH YOUR SALT & DEICING SERVICES?



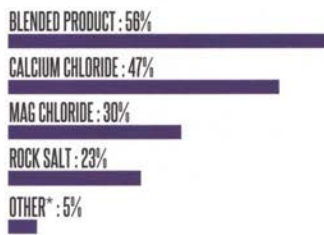
HOW DO YOU BILL FOR SALT AND DEICING SERVICES?



GROSS PROFIT MARGIN FOR SALT AND DEICING SERVICES



HOW DO YOU TREAT SIDEWALKS AND WALKWAYS?



EDITOR'S NOTE: "Other" responses included: liquid deicer; and powerbrooms.

PURCHASING

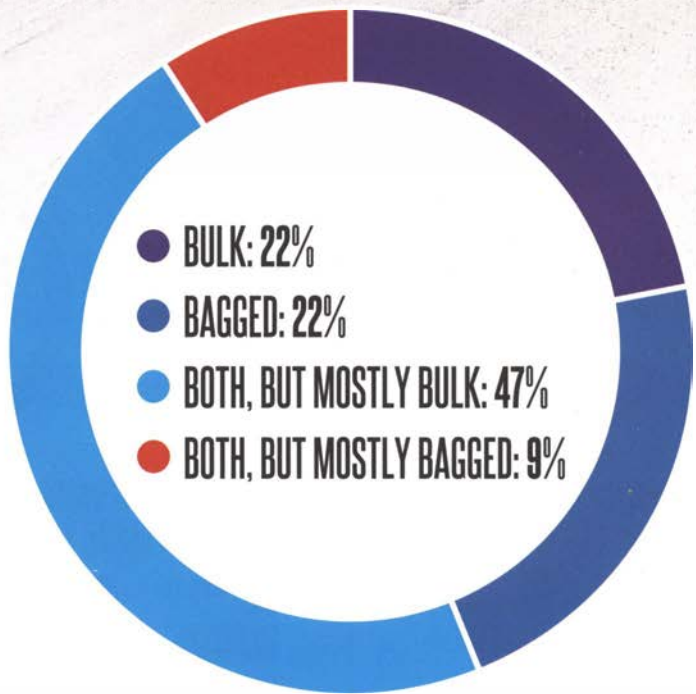
“**W**here am I going to get my salt?” It’s a common question heard around the industry when winter is at its worst.

According to respondents, contractors prefer to purchase both bagged and in bulk, typically from a supplier they’ve been using for some time. In fact, only 35% indicated they’ve changed suppliers recently.

However, contractors continue to hedge their bets on winter’s severity and are nearly evenly split as to how much salt they’ll secure before winter begins, with only 27% committing to the full amount.

And despite last season’s severity, more than half (52%) plan to purchase the same amount as last season, and nearly half (47%) expect to pay around the same price.

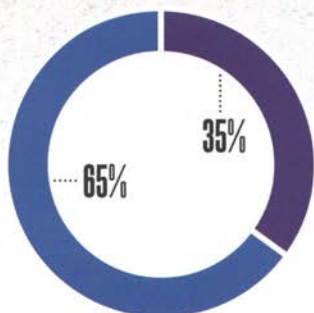
HOW DO YOU PURCHASE YOUR DEICING PRODUCTS?



SALT PRICE: EXPECT TO PAY THE SAME
2014 VS. 2015 **47%**

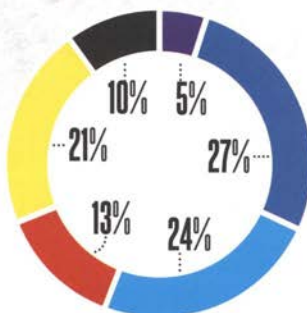


HAVE YOU SWITCHED YOUR PRIMARY SUPPLIER WITHIN THE LAST THREE YEARS?



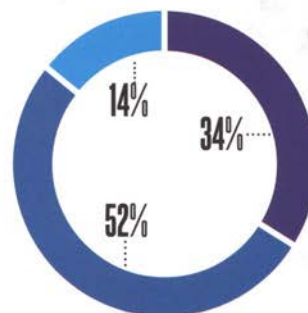
- YES
- NO

HOW MUCH SALT WILL YOU SECURE PRIOR TO THE START OF WINTER 2015-16?



- NONE
- THE FULL AMOUNT
- MORE THAN HALF, BUT NOT FULL AMOUNT
- HALF
- LESS THAN HALF, BUT MORE THAN QUARTER
- LESS THAN A QUARTER

DO YOU ANTICIPATE PURCHASING MORE OR LESS SALT THAN LAST WINTER?



- MORE SALT THAN LAST WINTER
- THE SAME AMOUNT SALT
- LESS SALT THAN LAST WINTER

EXPECT TO PAY LESS PER TON

27%

EXPECT TO PAY MORE PER TON

26%

DEFICIENCY

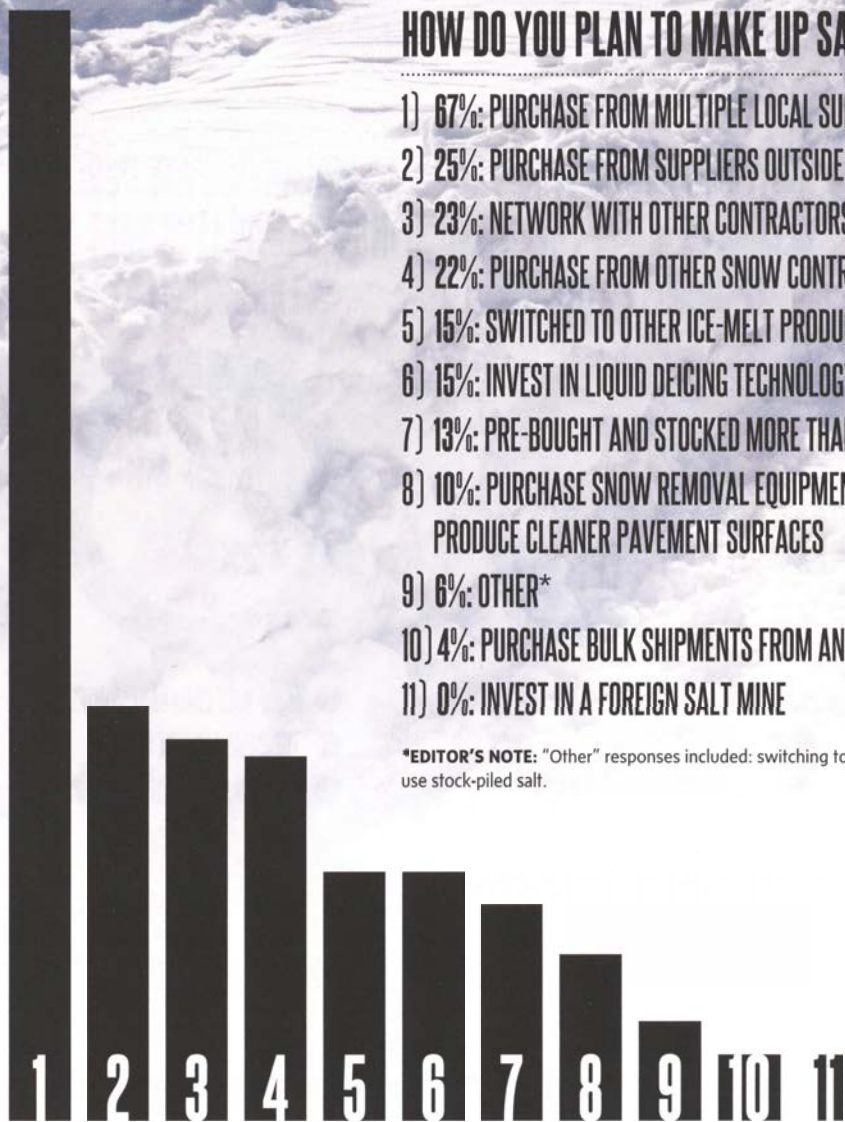
When the going gets tough, the tough purchase from multiple suppliers, at least when it comes to securing winter salt for the majority (67%) of respondents.

In addition to buying from multiple sources, respondents indicated they will also purchase salt from outside their home state (25%); network with other contractors to bulk purchase (23%); and even purchase from other contractors (22%).

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO MAKE UP SALT DEFICIENCIES?

- 1) 67%: PURCHASE FROM MULTIPLE LOCAL SUPPLIERS
- 2) 25%: PURCHASE FROM SUPPLIERS OUTSIDE YOUR HOME STATE
- 3) 23%: NETWORK WITH OTHER CONTRACTORS TO PURCHASE BULK AMOUNTS OF SALT
- 4) 22%: PURCHASE FROM OTHER SNOW CONTRACTORS
- 5) 15%: SWITCHED TO OTHER ICE-MELT PRODUCTS
- 6) 15%: INVEST IN LIQUID DEICING TECHNOLOGY
- 7) 13%: PRE-BOUGHT AND STOCKED MORE THAN NORMAL
- 8) 10%: PURCHASE SNOW REMOVAL EQUIPMENT (PLOWS, POWERBROOMS, ETC) THAT PRODUCE CLEANER PAVEMENT SURFACES
- 9) 6%: OTHER*
- 10) 4%: PURCHASE BULK SHIPMENTS FROM AN OVERSEAS SUPPLIER
- 11) 0%: INVEST IN A FOREIGN SALT MINE

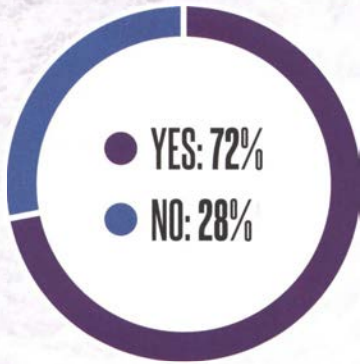
*EDITOR'S NOTE: "Other" responses included: switching to liquid deicer; purchasing from "big box" stores; and use stock-piled salt.



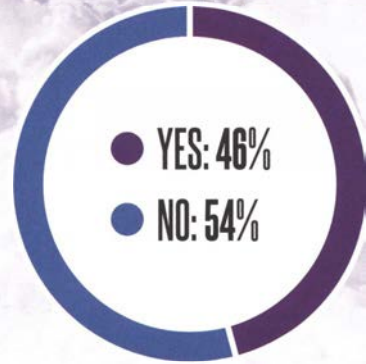
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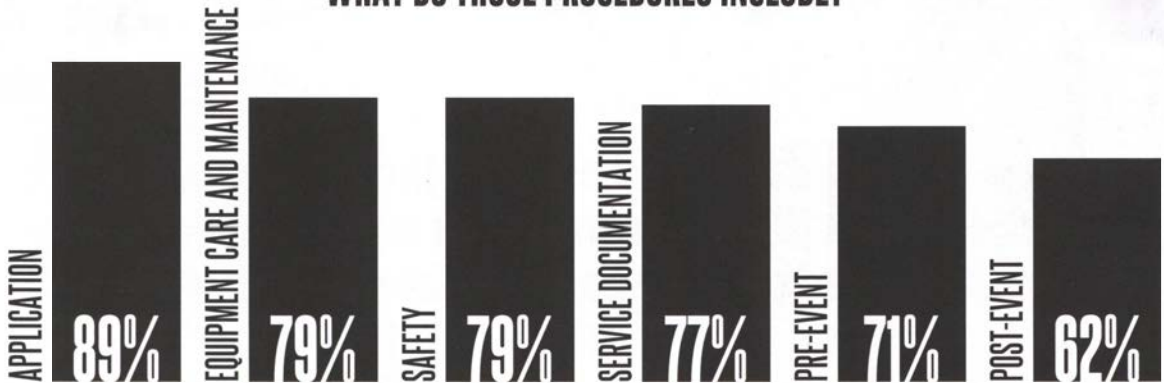
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“She had all the IDs and passwords on complete lockdown.”

Jodi Petrilli,
Majestic Lawn
& Landscape Service

When the bookkeeper went on vacation, Holland brought in the daughter of a close friend. She was an accountant and offered to do research on the finances in the company.

“She found a lot of theft instantly,” Holland says.

When the bookkeeper returned from vacation, Holland fired her and hired his friend’s daughter to help get them back on the right track.

A few years later, the company was still having financial problems, which the new employee blamed on the previous bookkeeper’s damage. However, when Holland asked his girlfriend, Jodi Petrilli (an accountant), to come in and help with the office, the employee got defensive.

“She had a fit and said she was insulted that Joe had sent his girlfriend in,” Petrilli says. “I said to Joe, ‘I don’t want to give the girl a hard time. I’m not gonna get involved.’”

When the bookkeeper was out of the office for extended health reasons, Holland asked Petrilli to come in and take over the job short term. It was immediately apparent that this employee had also been stealing from the company.

“I looked at her as a niece, and the whole while she was stabbing me in the back,” Holland says.

“She came in and said she was saving the day,” Petrilli says. “She gave him a false sense of security and trust.”

LONG-TERM IMPACT. But it’s not just about the money. It also impacts your credit, which

Watch your back

Your office employees could be robbing you blind. Here’s what you can do to prevent it.

By **Katie Tuttle**

LOST TOOLS. MISSING CASH. CREWS DOING SIDE JOBS. Theft takes many forms, and a landscape business offers many temptations to would-be thieves. But what if those thieves are on the payroll?

Joseph Holland, president of Majestic Lawn & Landscape Service, has experienced the worst case scenario: theft from two past employees, both resulting in the loss of thousands of dollars of company money.

THE BACKGROUND. The first situation started with Majestic’s bookkeeper/office manager. Although business was building back up following the 2009 recession, and gross profit margin was high, the company still seemed unable to pay its bills, something the employee blamed on the results of the crash. She said catching up with payments was having a negative impact, something Holland says he didn’t understand.

“I was on top of analyzing job costs and profitability on every project,” Holland says. “My percentages were where they should be in order to turn a profit.”

THEFT

can affect future purchases. As a result of the two thefts, Holland's credit score dropped from above 800 to 0.003. Over time, he's been able to slowly build it back up, but it still has a ways to go.

"Thankfully I have a good reputation in the community that I work at," Holland says. "We're just now starting to be able to buy new things again."

The company is going to need a new truck, and Holland is counting on his 20-year relationship with his Ford dealer because his credit may not be good enough for the purchase.

"It'll be another year before I

get up past 700, and banks won't even look at you if it's under 700," he says.

Holland and Petrilli have a few suggestions on how landscapers can prevent office theft.

MAIL. Never allow the bookkeeper to get the mail, Petrilli says. "She's the person that has the easiest way to steal." Another employee should get the mail and deliver it directly to you. If you're not there, the mail shouldn't be left on your desk for anyone to go through. It should be put in a locked drawer or safe. This way you are aware of every letter that comes in.

BANK STATEMENTS. Whether you get electronic copies or monthly paper statements, don't leave them to your bookkeeper to review. You should examine each statement and question anything that doesn't make sense. This also helps because it lets your bookkeeper know you're on top of your accounts.

It's also important to check in with the bank as often as possible, just in case anything is going on that you're not aware of.

"If anything funky is going on, it'll be spoken about," Petrilli says. "Just keep the line of communication open."

In Holland's case, checks

were bouncing, but because the bank knew him, no one said anything to him and kept paying the checks and charging him an overdraft fee, which he wasn't aware of since bank statements went to the bookkeeper's email address. Now, he makes sure to stop by on a regular basis, just to say hello to the manager and check up on any issues.

CERTIFIED MAIL. The second bookkeeper never paid the company's taxes, didn't pay workman's compensation fees and didn't send any of the checks Holland wrote to pay his distributors. If any of these situations happen and they

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receive no response from you, they will usually send a letter via certified mail.

"We found a box of certified letters hidden because she didn't want Joe to know she

hadn't paid them," Petrilli says. She also had a box of checks signed by Joe that she hadn't sent out. "She was preparing the checks, having him sign them, then not sending them."

CASH RECEIPTS. The first bookkeeper was stealing cash from jobs and rental properties Holland runs through the business. When the cash was received, she would take it to deposit, and never go to the bank. Majestic now uses a two- to three-person deposit process. The first person logs the cash and gives it to the bookkeeper. Both then initial on the deposit slip that they agree with the amount being deposited. The bookkeeper deposits the money and then gives the slip to the first person, who verifies the amount before giving it to Holland to file.

EMPLOYEE CONTRACT. Holland suggests making a job description for each position in your office and writing up a contract for the employee to sign, stating that no personal purchases will be made with the company card. The first employee's name was on the card and she used it for personal purchases. You can also get employee dishonesty insurance through your insurance carrier and credit card company.

If an employee is stealing from you, you can apply for a claim, provide proof of the theft, and the insurance will cover a specified amount.

USERNAMES AND PASSWORDS. When the second bookkeeper was out of the office and Petrilli had to step in, it was discovered that none of the usernames and passwords listed in the designated book were accurate. "She had control of everything," Petrilli says. "She had all the IDs and passwords on complete lockdown."

Holland and Petrilli suggest keeping a list of all employee login credentials for their company computer accounts. You should also make sure you have administrator rights to every computer your company owns, so you can access them if need be.

THIRD-PARTY AUDIT. Once a year, be sure to have your books examined by a licensed accountant to verify everything is above board. **L&L**

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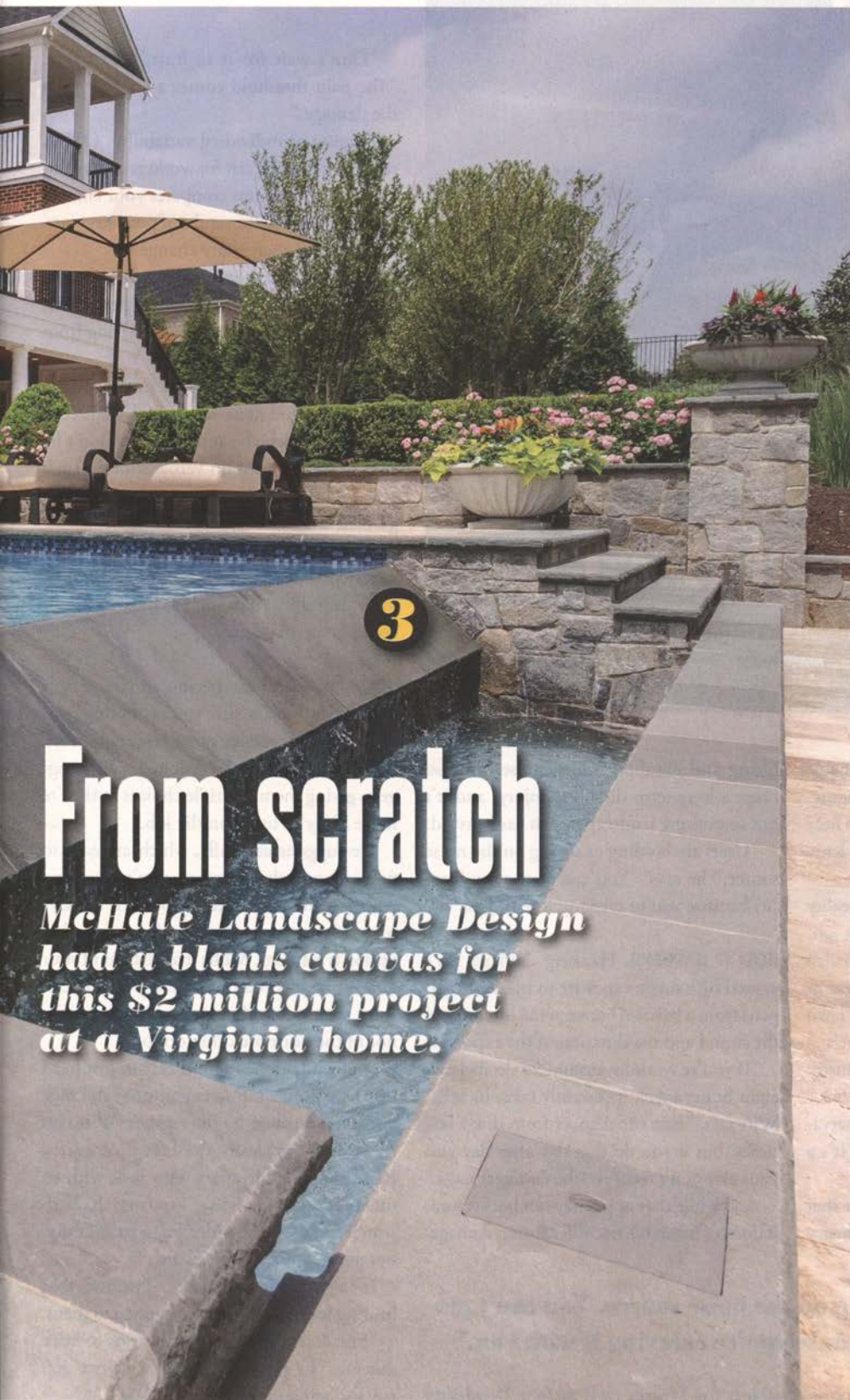
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AFTER NO. 1

PHOTO: JIMMY J.



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MCHALE'S DESIGNER DANIEL ROBEY

worked on this property renovation project in Vienna, Va., that included numerous structures, water features, outdoor living spaces and expansive plantings.

1

An architectural deck was added to the rear façade to better connect the main interior living spaces with the exterior.

2

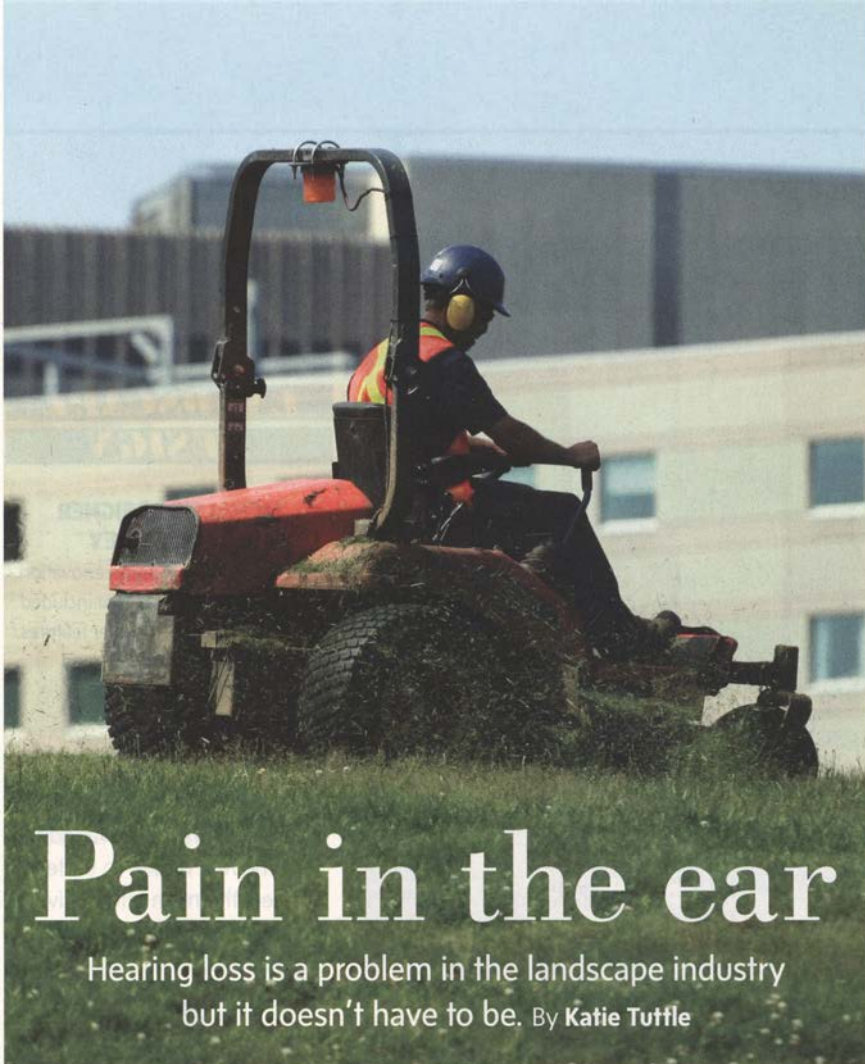
The Pennsylvania bluestone pool coping and stair treads complement the quarried stone walls, and contrast against the pool deck's walnut travertine.

3

The cool blue pool space takes advantage of a sun shelf and vanishing edge that doubles as a water feature to the pavilion beyond.

SHOW YOUR STUFF

If you have a design/build project you are proud of, email Managing Editor Brian Horn (bhorn@gie.net) information about the job and photos, and you could be featured in a future issue of *Lawn & Landscape*.



Pain in the ear

Hearing loss is a problem in the landscape industry but it doesn't have to be. By Katie Tuffle

Imagine lying in bed at night, unable to sleep because your ears are ringing. Or what about not being able to hear people say S or T sounds? Suddenly the word “stop” sounds a lot different.

These two scenarios can become a reality if you don't wear ear protection on the job.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration defines hazardous noise as starting around 85 decibels. Standard lawn mowers are between 90 and 100 decibels.

“Noise exposure in the landscape industry certainly falls in that category of hazardous,” says Brad Witt, director of hearing conservation for Honeywell Safety Products. “It's a tricky occupational hazard.”

An important thing to remember is that noise is an on-the-job injury. Just like heavy

lifting and climbing stairs, noise can also cause a long term disabling injury, and it's not something landscapers can easily avoid.

“Users are holding or sitting on the noise source,” he says. “You can't get away from (it) because you're carrying it with you.”

HOW IT HAPPENS. Hearing damage isn't caused by a single exposure to noise. It happens from a balance between the intensity of the sound and the duration of the exposure.

“If you're working around 90 decibels for eight hours a day, it certainly takes its toll,” Witt says. “Ears can recover from that a few times, but if you do that day after day and your ears don't recover, (the damage) stays.”

And while that noise may not bother you, it doesn't mean it's not still causing damage.

“Don't wait for it to hurt,” Witt says. “The pain threshold comes a lot later than the damage.”

Because of individual variability, OSHA requires a hearing test for workers exposed to loud noises. The test compares your current hearing results to the results of previous years' tests to see if there's any change.

“It would take months and years before we lose that hearing,” Witt says. “It is permanent hearing loss, so when you lose hearing from loud noise, it's gone for good.”

Hearing loss doesn't just mean sounds get softer. Loud noise causes high frequency hearing loss, which means you wouldn't be able to pick up certain verbal sounds, such as the T or S. That causes words to become garbled and hard to understand.

As far as the ringing in your ears, everyone experiences it for a few seconds and it goes away. But if you have serious hearing loss, it could be permanent.

YOUR CREW. As the person in charge, it's important to make sure you're offering your workers good personal protective equipment. You can't force them to wear it, but Witt suggests giving them multiple choices so they're more likely to use it on the job.

He suggests earmuffs, which are easy to put on and take off when you're working with intermittent noise. However, he says it's hard to wear muffs with a hat, so another option is earplugs. Muffs that go behind your neck or banded/corded earplugs so you can leave them around your neck when you're not in the noise are other options.

And while it may sound easy to just head up to the home improvement store and pick out some earplugs by the register, Witt says those aren't typically the best options for professional landscapers who deal with so much continuous noise. You may have to search for them, or order them specifically, but your crew's safety is worth it.

It's also important to remind workers that hearing loss doesn't have to happen to them.

“You don't have to give up hearing to work this job,” he says. “That's not the price you pay for being in this industry.” **L&L**

“Users are holding or sitting on the noise source. You can't get away from (the noise) because you're carrying it with you.”

Brad Witt, director of hearing conservation for Honeywell Safety Products

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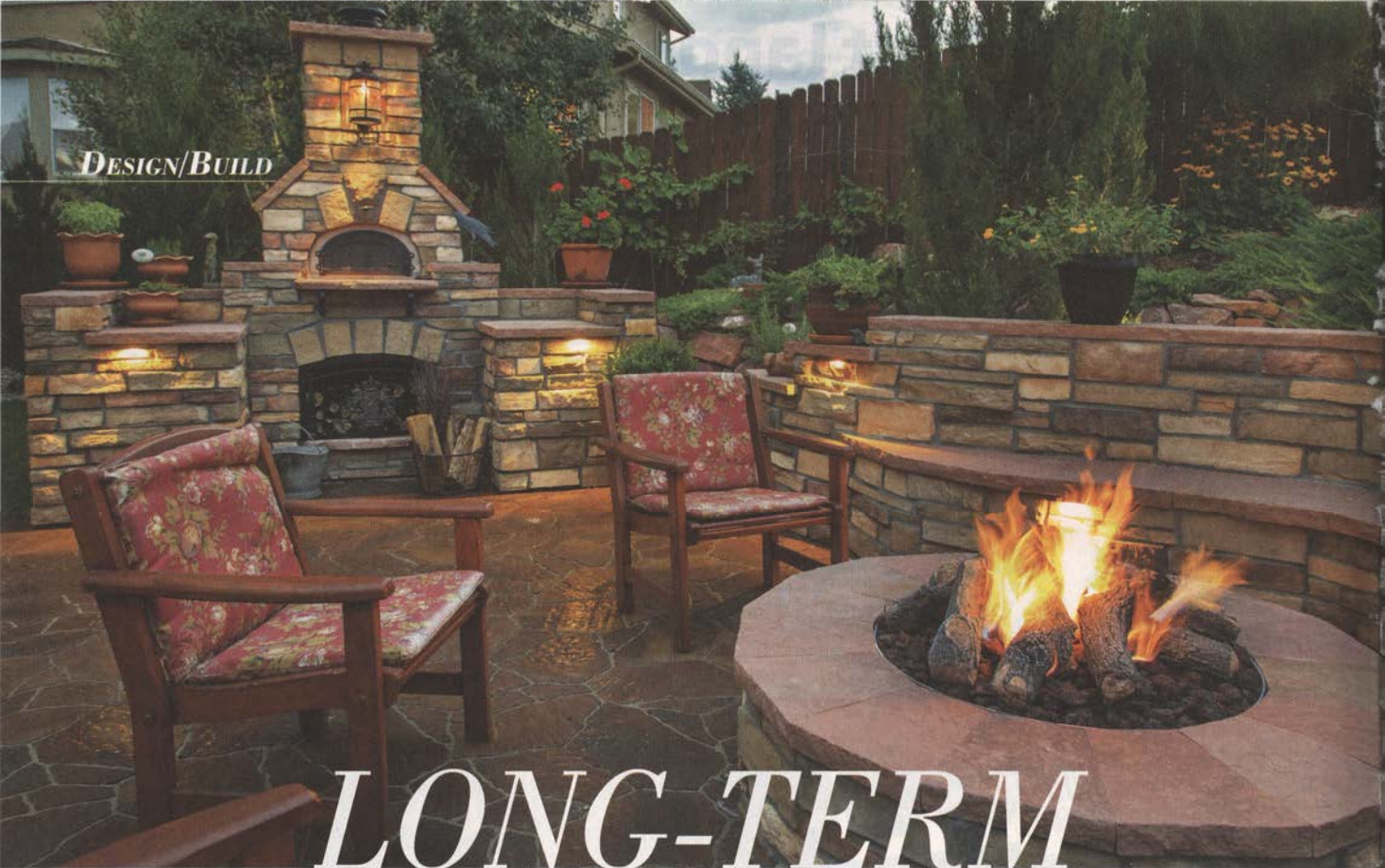
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LONG-TERM LANDSCAPE

Make your designs – and your company – more valuable to your customers by building adaptable landscapes. By **Katie Tuttle**

Transitional landscapes are created with the idea that people are staying in their homes longer, so their landscapes should be adaptive. Customer's needs and wants will change over time, and creating a landscape design that takes this all into account can make your services more valuable to the client.

"In my opinion, to truly gain an understanding of a transitional landscape or whether or not it needs to be transitional, know the lifestyle of your folks and how that lifestyle may or may not change over the course of time they're at that home," says Roger Hupfer, a landscape architect with Cooperative Design Resource in Centennial, Colo. "When I sit down in front of a client, my conversation tends to be more about their lifestyle and how they presently plan on using their landscape and poten-

tially what they might be looking for in 10 years or 20 years."

Hupfer says customers' needs can change for a variety of reasons, and some of them require a change in landscape.

KNOWING WHAT YOU WANT

IF YOU HAVE A CUSTOMER who is considering a transitional landscape for their property, here are a few questions to ask them prior to the design process. And make sure to specify wants and needs.

- What do you need/want in your yard now?
- What do you need/want in your yard that doesn't fit your current budget?
- Do you have children? (if so, what age?)
- How long do you expect to live here?
- What do you think you'll need/want in your yard 10 years from now?

"Do they have the same time to spend on their landscape now, as opposed to 10 years from now?" he says. "Will they have the physical ability and desire to do that 10 years from now? If I walk in and they've got a couple of puppies and a 4-year-old and an 8-year-old and one of their first comments is, 'We plan on being here for 10 to 15 years,' I know right away we are already talking about something that should be considered a transitional landscape."

Hupfer says the client's lifestyle is important because a family may want a kid-friendly yard now, but in 10 years when those kids are grown up, they'll want a more adult-centered yard, with less playground equipment and more entertainment elements.

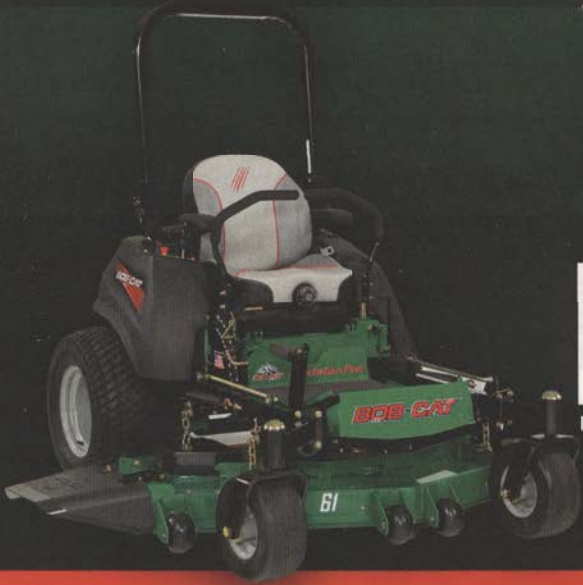


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"Find out more about the user," he says. "Likes, dislikes, hobbies. Take a look on a much larger scale."

Another thing for clients to consider is entertaining. Are they planning on entertaining in their yard, and if so how many people are they expecting over? Will the entertaining be once a year or once a month? Or do they have a job now that doesn't require entertaining, but after a few promotions there's a chance that could change?

THINKING IN THE LONG TERM. Tom Trench, a partner with Cooperative Design Resource in Centennial, Colo., says the first thing he does with clients is create a wish list.

"We walk out in the backyard to do design work and I say, 'This is the time for your wish list. Tell me all the things you think you might want to have in the backyard so



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3. A circular island within the driveway will eventually house a large elk sculpture. Planting was designed to reflect this. In addition, irrigation had to be designed so as not to spray the sculpture.
4. An access path front to back was placed to allow for future expansion of the backyard landscape and also act as service path for maintenance equipment.
5. A flagstone path at the deck was incorporated to serve as future access to a suite in the basement.

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we can take it into consideration and we can plan for it,” Trench says. “Get the client thinking about the long term.”

Once you know what your client wants, look at each element of your design. Consider how important it is and how it will fit into the vision 10 or 20 years down the road.

For example, if you’re putting in a patio for a customer and they plan to install a fire pit in a few years, it’s important to take that into consideration.

“I don’t want to go out there and build a 200 square foot patio when they need a 500 square foot patio,” Trench says.

“If it’s, for instance, somewhat

important but not critical, and five years from now becomes even less important, it’s certainly not something that’s going to take center stage in the design,” Hupfer says. “I wouldn’t design around it.”

If the element you’re looking at isn’t critical to the design in the future, it’s important to make it something that can be changed pretty easily into something else, or taken away from the design completely.

“You allow space for something to happen,” Trench says. “If I think in 15 years I’m going to put an addition on here, I wouldn’t put a swimming pool here.”

Whether or not something is expected to change in 10 years, it’s still important to make it part of the current design, because there’s always a chance the project will fall through.

NOT JUST ABOUT THE CLIENT.

Another important thing to consider when designing transitional landscapes is resources.

“Where I do my business in Colorado, years and years ago water was not an issue. We had all we needed,” Hupfer says.

He says water is an important example of something to consider. With the drought going on, the cost of water is continuing to go up, and as people stay

in their homes and potentially start to retire, their income may decrease and they may not be able to afford the design originally discussed years prior.

For a designer, Hupfer says designing a transitional landscape should be nothing new. He says everything considered for the design are things you should be thinking about anyway.

“It’s a wonderful tool to walk a homeowner through ‘Here’s what it’s going to look like when it’s done, however when your children grow out of this playset, this is what I envision this space becoming,’” he says. “I think it’s a good way to lobby for using design as a very effective tool.” L&L

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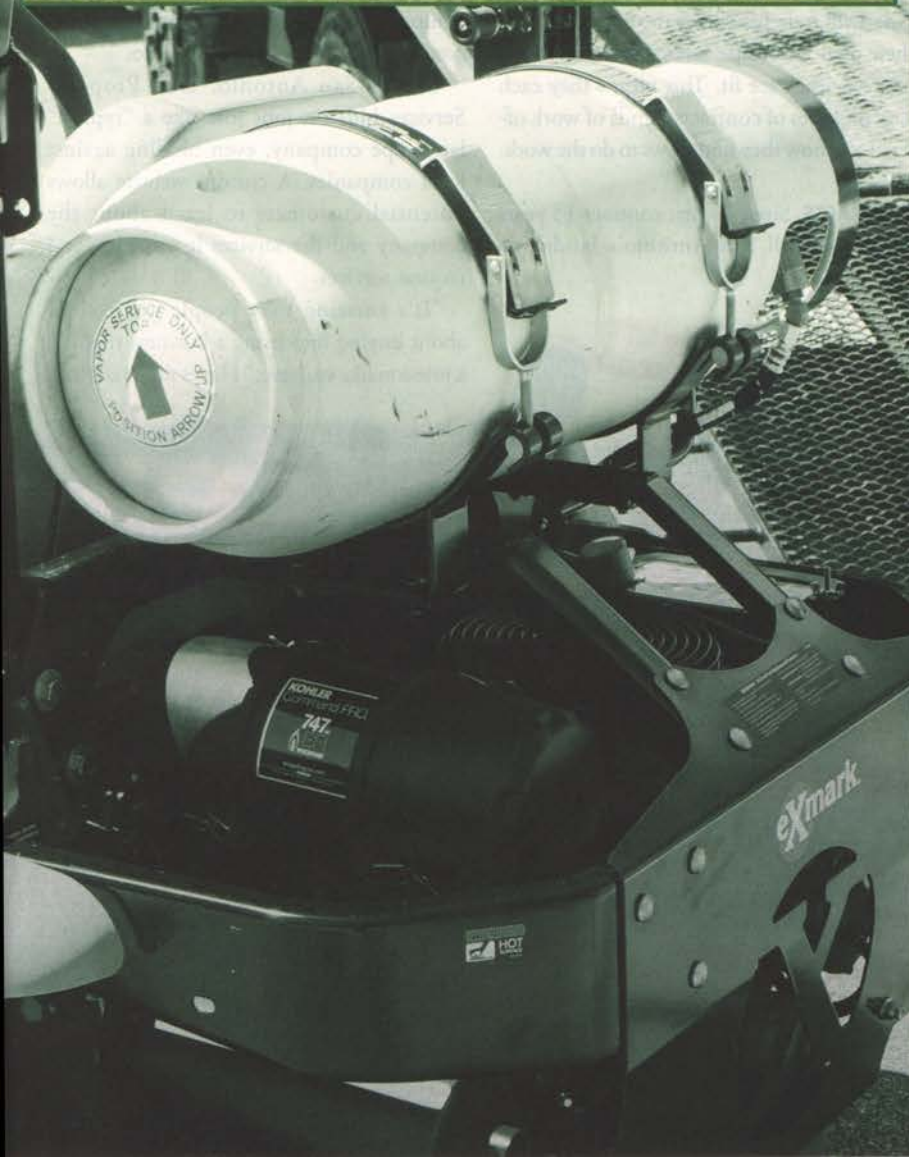
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Helping hands

Goodwill franchises across the country are offering landscape services to help individuals with employment barriers. By Katie Tuttle

While widely known for its clothing stores and accepting donations, Goodwill Industries International also provides landscaping and lawn care services.

"When you think of Goodwill, you don't really think of landscape services," says Terry Hayes, president and CEO, Goodwill of the Olympics and Rainier Region, which offers commercial and residential landscape services through Go2 Property Services, the branch's landscaping company. "Sometimes folks think Goodwill is all about stores and donations."

In reality, Goodwill is about helping people in the community who need to work to get their lives back on track.

"Our stores and the Go2 Property Services

do two things for us," Hayes says. "They provide us jobs for people to go to work, and then we use profits from those businesses to provide training to help more."

The landscape services are run somewhat independently from the Goodwill stores. Goodwill franchises have the option to start their own landscape service and run it the best way they see fit. This means they each vary on types of contracts, kinds of work offered and how they find crews to do the work.

CONTRACTS. Since its first contract 15 years ago, Goodwill San Antonio's landscape

program has grown to two facilities, doing about 3,000 acres of landscape maintenance.

"We do about \$5 million a year in landscape maintenance on our federal contracts," says Mark Ramirez, director of contract services for Goodwill San Antonio. The company also started contracts with some commercial clients in San Antonio.

Unlike San Antonio, Go2 Property Services bids on jobs just like a "typical" landscape company, even bidding against local companies. A custom website allows potential customers to learn about the company and the services it provides, and request services.

"It's amazing how people get excited about buying into using a business that has a mission like we have," Hayes says, referring

Goodwill franchise landscaping services range from routine maintenance to tree care and chemical applications.



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Chuck Bowen,
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GOODWILL

to Goodwill's mission to help people in need reach their full potential through learning and the power of work. The company maintains 21 of its own Goodwill facilities, along with 71 commercial and residential customers. In Ohio, Goodwill of Erie, Huron, Ottawa and Sandusky Counties does the mowing and maintenance for the city of Sandusky.

The company set up a meeting with the city manager to discuss Goodwill helping maintain city properties that were overgrown.

After the city manager approved the deal, Goodwill received grants and help from

private foundations to purchase \$17,000 worth of equipment.

Now, the company has branched out and does local cemeteries, border control offices and another municipality in the area. This year to date, the company has done 73 city properties. Last year it did more than 150.

It also maintains rental properties in the area. "A lot of the properties we have here (in Sandusky) are very high rental-based," says Eric Kochendoerfer, president and CEO of the branch. "The landlords aren't around and the people move out and the properties are not taken care of."

SERVICES OFFERED. Although the company started off doing just landscape maintenance, Goodwill San Antonio now offers irrigation and gardening. They have certified arborists to do tree care work and certified technicians to apply herbicides. The company is also looking to get into landscape architecture.

The organization also recently received a contract from the San Antonio housing authority. In the proposal, Goodwill said it would utilize a percentage of the people living in the housing community in order to help those individuals obtain an income and be able to transi-

tion from subsidized housing to something more permanent.

Goodwill of Erie, Huron, Ottawa and Sandusky Counties in Ohio focuses on maintenance.

They also don't deal with any chemicals, and if a job came along that needed chemical treatments, the group would subcontract it out.

Since Goodwill is a nonprofit, the organization doesn't bid jobs at a profit. Instead, it focuses on what the group of workers will get out of job, such as job training, good public relations and being a good neighbor to the city. Go2 Property Services offers five different lines of busi-

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ness to customers: landscaping services, custodial services, concrete polishing services, facilities maintenance and painting.

Some of the organization's larger customers are local YMCA facilities, which means the crews are maintaining manicured fields as well as mowing and normal maintenance.

Go2 Property Services also has two unique projects under its belt.

The first is a green wall at the Goodwill of Seattle headquarters. It features around 100 varieties of plants native to Washington and Oregon, and the landscape crew maintains it.



Go2 Property Services maintains the 100 native plants featured on the green wall at the headquarters for Goodwill of Seattle.

The other project was installing a grant-funded playground at the Lakewood YMCA. The crews converted the area in preparation for the elaborate playground,

including hiring a subcontractor for concrete curbing.

CREWS. For Goodwill of Seattle, Go2 Property Services hires

individuals who need employment help to get their lives back on track. The organization gives them training (including GED programs) and all employees are professionally licensed and certified.

The landscape department is a member of the Washington Association of Landscape Professionals, and all lead employees are USDA certified pesticide applicators.

"A lot of people have that first initial question of 'Who am I expecting when I hire Go2? Are these volunteers, are these individuals getting job training on my property?'" Morrison says.

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"That's not the case. By the time someone is with Go2, they are a skilled employee."

Prior to hiring the individuals, Go2 Property Services does a background check, drug screen and interview process. Depending on the position they're applying for, they may also need one to five years of experience in the landscape industry.

Morrison says it's important for the crews to have previous experience because all of their customers pay for services, so it's important to make sure they're getting the best quality product they can.

The employees are divided

up into five different crews, and each crew will focus on a different trade associated with the landscaping. The crews stay the same each day and they go to the jobs where that particular service is needed.

Goodwill San Antonio works with the Ability One Program, a federal program designed to assist people with disabilities gain employment. Goodwill bids on a project with the government and if it's selected, people with disabilities are employed to work on those contracts. Seventy-five percent of the hours worked on a contract have to be performed by someone with a disability.

"They are provided with case management and assessed every 90 days," Ramirez says. "They have to meet certain criteria to work on it for their hours to be counted."

Most of the crew members don't have experience in landscaping prior to joining.

"They may have cut their grass," Ramirez says. "They may understand, but to the degree that we do it, I would say 75 percent of them have not had that experience."

When someone new is hired, they go through a one week training course, featuring videos provided by manufacturers of

the equipment the crews use. They are also briefed by the project manager and an environmental specialist. They also go through Occupational Safety & Health Administration training, and during the off season, all crew members have a refresher training course. They also have monthly safety meetings and training.

After training is complete, individuals are put on established crews, and crew leaders are required to have at least five years of landscaping experience before getting promoted.

"There is a lot of team work to make sure the team is success-



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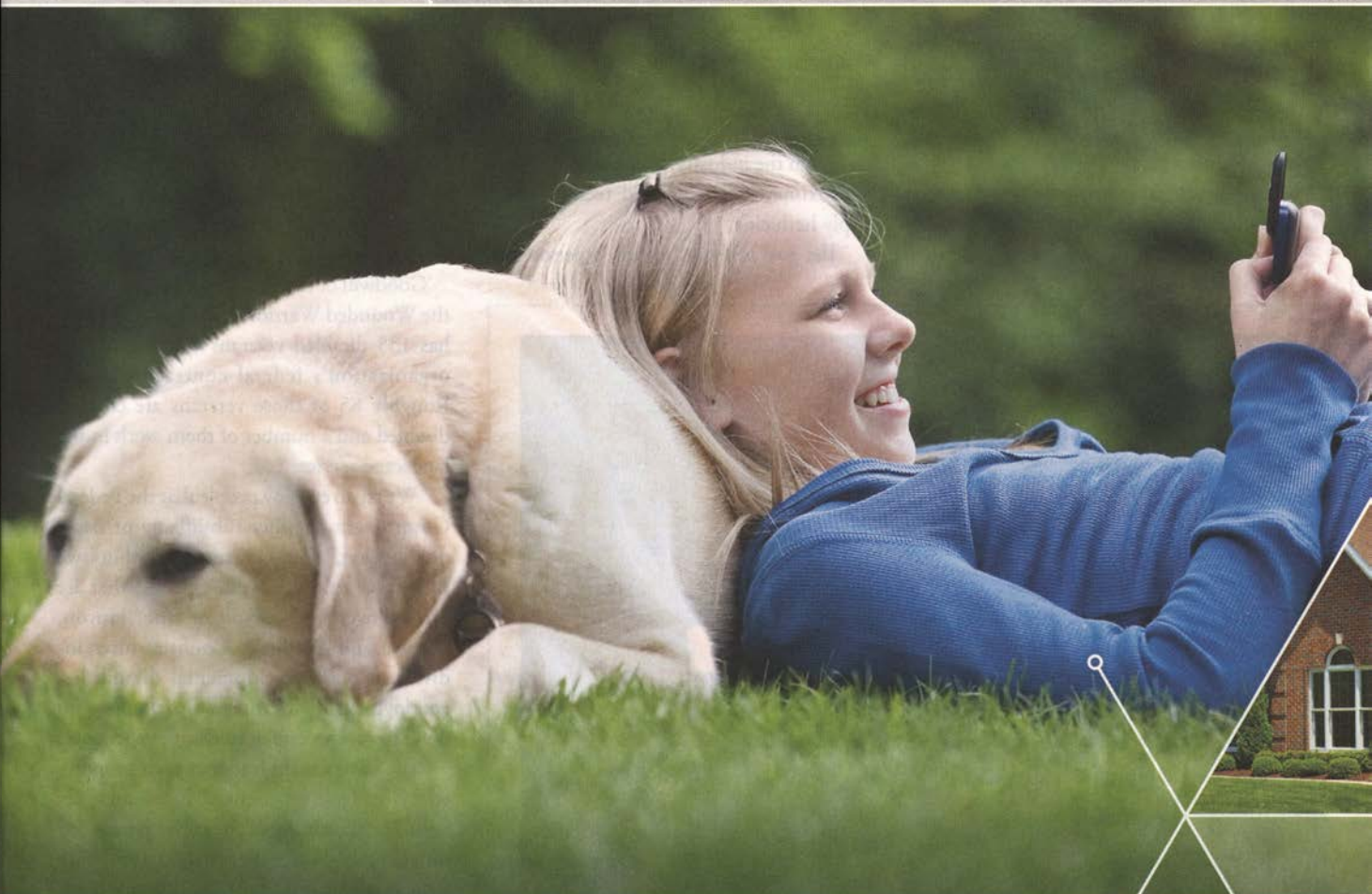
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GOODWILL

ful," Ramirez says.

The organization helps the crew members get training and any certification they may need in order to help them advance their

careers in the industry. Currently, they have approximately 10 certified technicians to apply herbicide.

"The goal is always to help a person with

barriers to employment in the commercial world to gain some experience and training and knowledge so he can reenter the workforce without the need for support," Ramirez says.

Goodwill of San Antonio also works with the Wounded Warrior Project and currently has 135 disabled veterans working on the organization's federal contract services. Roughly 85 of those veterans are combat disabled and a number of them work in the landscape service.

"We try to employ people that the Federal Government is either subsidizing or has a disablement," Ramirez says. "We think we should try to employ those people that are unemployed." Goodwill of Erie, Huron, Ottawa and Sandusky Counties hires individuals with developmental disabilities, employment disadvantages or felonies who don't have lawn care or landscape experience.

"We have a team leader at each property who does have experience," Kochendoerfer says. The remaining of the crews get trained on the job. Since the organization only focuses on maintenance, their crews don't need as much experience as a crew that offers multiple services.

Each year, the organization tries to bring back the same individuals. A raise is offered and typically the crews are similar year-to-year. They also get a fair amount of internal applicants for open positions.

"We're a pretty unique Goodwill in the aspect that only 50 percent of our revenue is generated from retail," Link says. The organization has two actual factories where employees do assembly and manufacturing for other companies. Sometimes these individuals will then apply for open jobs in the lawn care section. If they have skills that fit, and will be able to handle the functions of the job, they are hired to fill openings.

"We're in it for the job training aspects," Kochendoerfer says. "That's really what brought us into this particular service: trying to help the city save money and remove the blight while fulfilling our mission by providing job training to individuals with disabilities or disadvantaging conditions. It's been a great program; it's been a win-win." **L&L**



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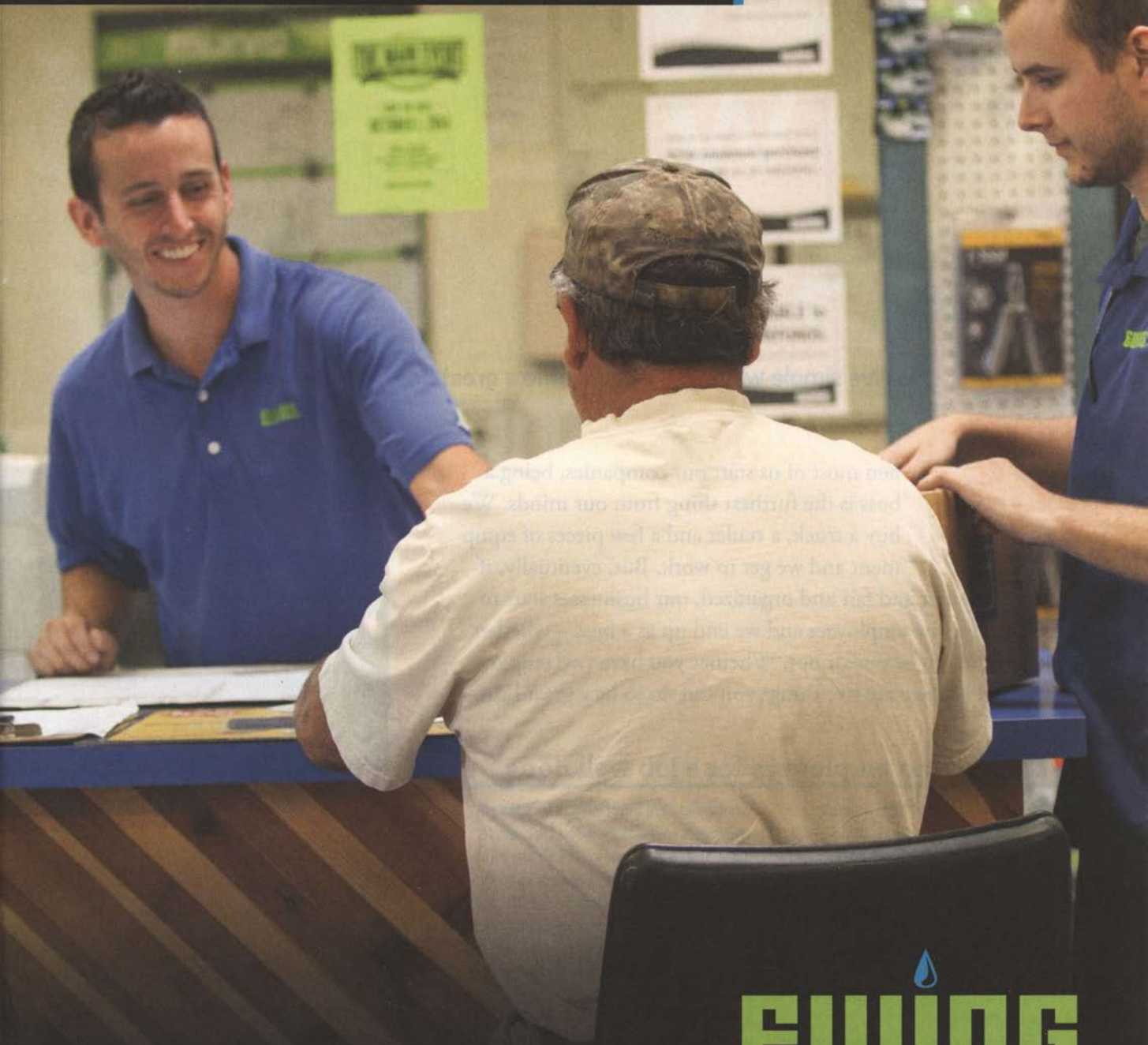
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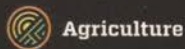
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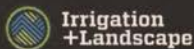



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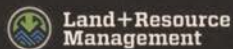
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FROM MOWING TO MANAGING

Five simple ways you can become a great boss. By Leslie Allebach

When most of us start our companies, being a boss is the furthest thing from our minds. We buy a truck, a trailer and a few pieces of equipment and we get to work. But, eventually, if we are honest and fair and organized, our businesses start to grow. We hire employees and we end up as a boss – whether we wanted to be one or not. Whether you have two employees or 200, here are five things you can do to be a great boss.

1. Thank your employees for a job well done.

Much good comes from a simple expression of gratitude. Employees feel important and cared for when their bosses take notice of their hard work. If they do something well, take the time to thank them for it. It could be as simple as faithfully arriving on time every morning, or as complex as designing a large project. Don't take anything for granted, but instead, be sure to say thank you.

In our company, we say thanks in a variety of ways. First of all, we try to say the actual

words often. We never want any of our 30 employees to feel like we don't appreciate them. Our managers also choose one of our field crew members to be Employee of the Month and they are awarded a \$50 Wal-Mart gift card. For our office staff, who are not part of this, we sometimes will just surprise them with a gift card to a restaurant or department store. Another way we say thanks is by having a big wheel with our employees' names on it. We spin it at every monthly meeting and give a \$25 gas card to the winner.

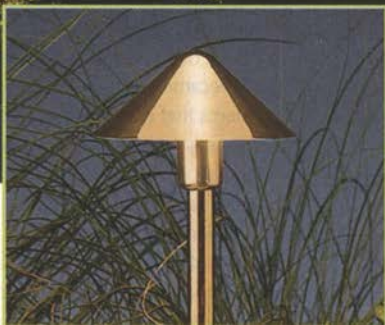


Right: Use opportunities like morning rollout or safety inspections to connect with your team. This is a chance to check in and be approachable if things need to be addressed.

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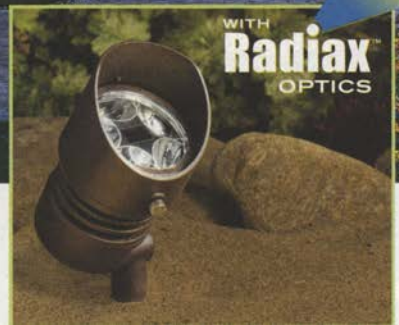
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LEADERSHIP TIPS

2. Be willing to do some of the unappealing or tedious jobs yourself

Of course, bosses are busy running the company and generally don't have to do the grunt work. But if you want to gain the respect and admiration of your employee force, pick up a shovel or get behind a mower once in a while. Join a crew occasionally, and help them. When you get to a job site,

don't be too proud to do the worst task there. This could mean helping your office staff file or type estimates. The key is to not be too good for any task. By doing this, you will show that you consider yourself no better than they are. This also shows them that you know how to work hard and that you respect their diligent efforts.

3. Communicate expectations and resolve problems immediately.

Develop detailed job descriptions and then meet with each employee to discuss them. How can we be upset with an employee who was never given clear expectations? This is probably one of the hardest things for bosses to accomplish. At The Greenskeeper, we functioned without a policy and procedures manual and job descriptions for many years. When problems arose, we really had nothing to fall back on. All of our expectations were in our heads and there was a big lack of communication. About fifteen years ago, we put a policy and procedures manual in place, which our employees sign every year. We also put together very specific job descriptions and make sure each employee has a copy. These are updated every few years as job responsibilities seem to change on a regular basis.

When problems arise, address them with a calm voice and develop a reasonable plan for resolution. If you want to have a company that runs smoothly and where you are respected, troublesome situations need to be addressed in a consistent manner. Most of us hate conflict and

really try to avoid it.

Occasionally, a plan of resolution doesn't work for an employee and, for the benefit of the company and your employees, the person needs to be fired. Several years ago, we had three employees who were causing pretty serious problems within our company. Up until that point we had rarely fired anyone. But it became pretty clear that the problems that were a result of these employees and their attitudes were not going away. Within a year, each of them had given us just cause to fire them and, this time, we chose to do just that. Our company culture improved immensely and we were back to a more peaceful working environment for the rest of our work staff.

Just remember that being a great boss means that firing must always be done for valid reasons. It should be our last resort, after we have tried a specific plan of resolution. And in the process of all this, keep your employees' respect by staying calm and kind. Angry fits and temper tantrums have no place in the life of an excellent boss. Resolve problems and, if necessary, fire employees, but do so with great care and kindness.

“Employees feel important and cared for when their bosses take notice of their hard work.”



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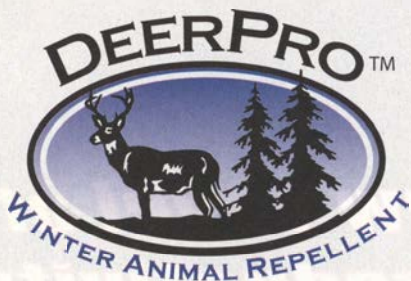
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LEADERSHIP TIPS

4. Be approachable.

How do we do this? First, let's list a few of the many ways we make ourselves unapproachable. We do this by our moodiness, our defensive and angry responses or our lack of interest in what our employees are sharing with us. Instead of responding in these ways, the next time an employee asks you to talk, take them to your office or to a quiet place, look them in the eye and listen – really listen – to what

they have to share. Be very careful to keep your demeanor and responses free of arrogance or condescension. Even if the employee is dead wrong and you know it, respect him or her enough to hear them out and then take the time to explain in a calm voice why you don't agree with him. And never dismiss the option that you actually may be wrong. Be open to suggested changes. Be willing to humbly apologize, if necessary.

5. Be genuinely concerned about your employees' welfare.

If something exciting is going on in their lives, be sure to ask them about it. Always remember that their lives are filled with families and friends who are important to them. Work is not their life. Be interested in them personally. Consider buying wedding and baby gifts. Be as generous as you can afford to be. In our company, we have a wonderful secretary who

took it upon herself to make each employees' favorite snack for their birthdays, as well as wrap up a little gift for them from the company. Our employees love this! It makes them feel special and shows them we care. We believe this is money well-spent. We want them to know that they are important to us and that we couldn't run the company successfully without them.

CONCLUSION. In our company, we are always working on these things. We certainly have not arrived and we make many mistakes. But we don't give up trying to be the best bosses we can be. We have learned much over the years and continue to work at improving our relationships with our employees.

These five things could really be summarized into one main point: Be humble. So often, as bosses, we tend to get the idea that we are really important and indispensable (and many times, we actually are,) but when we communicate that we are the most important person in the company, we also often imply that everyone else is



**Leslie
ALLEBACH**

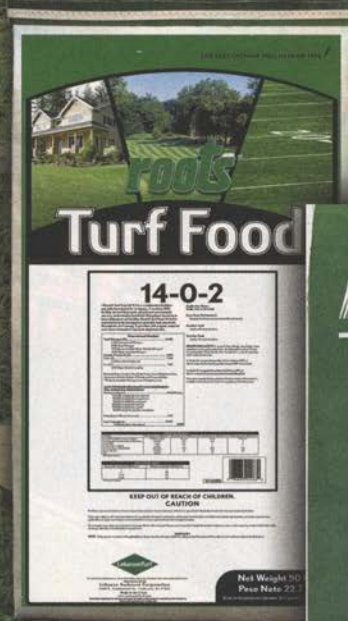
not. When we treat our employees as we would want to be treated, we can't go wrong. Before making any decision, always ask, "How would I feel if I were the employee in this situation?"

Asking this simple question regularly and putting into practice the five things listed above will invariably turn us into the wonderful boss that we have the potential of being. **L&L**

The author is vice president of The Greenskeeper, a full-service landscape firm based in Palmyra, Pa

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Landscapers use time-and-motion studies to boost productivity and profits.

By Lindsey Getz



HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE YOUR CREWS TO ROLL OUT in the morning? How many minutes do they spend mowing a lawn? How many man-hours does it take to plant six two-inch trees? Knowing this data is key to developing profitable bids, and keeping employees motivated.

“You need to make sure you’re operating at an efficient level and maximizing your profit,” says Joe Gonzalez, CEO of ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance and Design in Venice, Fla. “That’s especially important for a business like ours that is so labor intensive. Labor cost represents well more than 50 percent of our total cost of doing business. We need to ensure we’re being as efficient as possible. If you haven’t done time and motion studies and don’t have a good sense of your efficiencies, you’re bidding jobs mindlessly.”

Without time and motion studies – or at least some form of testing efficiencies – it’s virtually impossible to truly know if your job bid is going to be profitable, says Bill Arman, a consultant with the Harvest Group who works on time studies with his clients.

“The core element of an estimate involves knowing what it costs you to do something,” Arman says. “That includes knowing how many hours it will take. A lot of guys leave that purely to experience. They feel they can make a knowledgeable guesstimate based on the fact that they’ve been doing this a long time. Many do come up with a good guesstimate. But the ones

“I know at all times how we’re doing. That even helps me forecast and change my game plan as I look to the future.”

Chris Speen, Twin Oaks Landscape

who are bringing it to the next level are those that have done time and motion studies and know exactly how long it takes to perform a task.”

It’s that competition that drives Mark Borst, owner of Borst Landscape & Design in Allendale, N.J., to track his crews and review the numbers with them each week.

He says once the crew is aware of where things stand, they can

work on ways to save time.

“If you’re not analyzing your hours, you can’t improve upon the unknown,” Borst says. “You can tell your crew to work faster but if you haven’t given them goals to aim for, it’s not going to help.”

BATHROOM BREAKS. Gonzalez says writing a smart bid requires a combination of historic numbers and experience.

“You have a human element you have to account for that can change your timing,” Gonzalez says. “Did the crew stop for a snack? Or take a bathroom break? You also have to account for the weather. Is it windy and is that going to slow the crew down? Even the client is a variable. You show up to the job site and they’re waiting with a list of new projects. Each of these things can change the amount of time it may take you to do a job and you have to factor that into your bid. That is where experience helps.”

Jeffrey Johns, president of Coastal Greenery, in Brunswick, Ga., says for the past 14 years he’s been going into the

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Yards provide a safe place for families to gather and for children and pets to play. But did you know these managed landscapes, including your lawn, also provide a host of environmental benefits?

“Having a lawn and being a good environment steward are not mutually exclusive. Grass is a vital part of our living landscapes that contribute to our communities, our families and our health.”

Kris Kiser,
President and CEO of the
Outdoor Power Equipment
Institute (OPEI)

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A LAWN?



FILTERS AND CAPTURES RUNOFF

Hardscapes, parking lots, driveways and roads turn rainwater into fast-moving, storm water runoff. Grass slows down and absorbs runoff, while also cleansing water of impurities and dust. Rainwater filtered through a healthy lawn can be 10 times less acidic than water running off a hard surface.¹



REDUCES HEAT

Grass dissipates the heat island effect caused by asphalt, concrete and other hardscapes. Lawns can be 31 degrees cooler than asphalt and 20 degrees cooler than bare soil.



IMPROVES AIR QUALITY

Grass also plays a vital role in capturing dust, smoke particles and other pollutants.² Without grass, these pollutants will remain in the air we breathe, resulting in more “code red” air quality days.



SEQUESTERS CARBON DIOXIDE

Lawns are the largest carbon sink in the U.S. They suck up and remove greenhouse gas carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Grass sequesters carbon so well, that it outweighs the carbon used for maintaining the lawn by as much as seven-fold.³



GENERATES OXYGEN

A turf area of 50' x 50' produces enough oxygen to meet the daily needs of a family of 4.⁴



SUPPORTS BIODIVERSITY

Grass, trees, shrubs and other plants provide food and habitat for birds and small mammals. Insects, spiders and worms live among the grass blades and below the surface, supporting wildlife.



CONTROLS SOIL EROSION

Grass controls erosion through its natural, dense and fibrous root system. Without grass, soil erodes into streams and lakes, muddying the waters and limits how sunlight penetrates the water. The nutrients and chemicals carried with soil can cause algae blooms, which steal oxygen from the water and kill fish.⁵

LAWN OR NO LAWN IS NOT THE QUESTION.

So how do we maintain a living landscape – even under drought conditions?

- 1 Choose the right grass** for your climate zone and lifestyle. Some – such as buffalo and Bermuda grass – require very little water and survive foot traffic, children’s play and pets well.
- 2 Don’t overwater.** Less water makes grass work harder so roots grow deeper in search of moisture. It then does a better job of trapping carbon and releasing oxygen.
- 3 Go brown.** With less water, grass slows down, goes dormant and turns golden brown. It will “green up” again when the rains return.
- 4 Diversify.** Incorporate native plants with adaptive plants and grasses. Add pollinator plants for local bees, butterflies, hummingbirds and other animals and insects.

For more information, go to: www.opei.org/stewardship/

Sources: 1. The Lawn Institute, <http://www.thelawninstitute.org/pdfs/ceiwvsnwnt/benefits-of-lawns-grass-purifies-water/>; 2. The Lawn Institute, <http://www.thelawninstitute.org/pdfs/ceiwvsnwnt/benefits-of-lawns-air-quality-and-fertilizer/>; 3. U.S. Department of Agriculture, <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wfd/ghp/projects/soilsc/022045-evaluation-of-turfgrass-for-drought-tolerant-in-irrigated-soils-environment.html>; 4. The Lawn Institute, <http://www.scenrlf.com/growing-great-lawns-lawns-and-the-air-that-we-breathe/>; 5. Kansas Green Yards, <http://www.kansasgreenyards.org/pubs/raled-05>





TURFMUTT Barks for LIVING LANDSCAPES

Many families and communities are being told to rip out their lawns due to drought and replace them with rocks, mulch, cacti and artificial grass. But these changes could do more harm than good! Grown-ups, kids and pets can enjoy their backyard during a drought—and be good environmental stewards. Find the right grass for your climate.

Don't remove your lawn and let the bad guys move in.



DUST DEMON
hurls dirt, pollutants and other particles into the air, taking precious soil to places it doesn't need to go.



DR. RUNOFF
stalks rainstorms, pushing rainwater from cement, pavement and other hard surfaces into streams, picking up nasty chemicals and pollutants along the way.



HEAT FREAK
bakes areas like patches of pavement that don't have the luxury of cool tree shade and grass to cool them.



CARBON CREEP
is the single-biggest cause of climate change. He struts around the atmosphere, puffing up his chest and increasing the greenhouse effect with every breath.

Never fear... TurfMutt is here!

TurfMutt and the Outdoor Powers know living landscapes matter. Drought-tolerant grass, trees and other plants help fight evil forces that attack our environment. They also provide a safe place for kids and pets to play.



GREEN RANGER
reminds you that planting the right grass for your climate helps defeat Dr. Runoff, slow soil erosion, remove Carbon Creep from the atmosphere, and cool Heat Freak.



LUCKY the TURFMUTT
wants you to remember that the outdoors starts in your own backyard! Help him and the Outdoor Powers eliminate the Environmental Villains by being a backyard superhero.

PROFESSOR BOTANY
instructs you to plant grass, trees, shrubs and other living landscapes to provide food and habitat for backyard wildlife.



BIG ROOTY
wants you to plant trees that grow strong roots to keep soil in place and big leafy tops to topple Heat Freak.



WATER WARRIOR
warns you not to overwater! Be sure to capture his rainfall with living landscapes.

Will you help TurfMutt by being a backyard superhero and taking care of your living landscapes? Nature starts at your backdoor.



The TurfMutt program, created in conjunction with Scholastic, the global children's publishing, education and media company, includes lesson plans for teachers, take home sheets and learning activities for families, a website and blog, interactive games and a digital storybook.



TIME MANAGEMENT

field with a stopwatch to time his crew doing various tasks – without them knowing, so that they're performing tasks at their typical speed. Johns says he's accumulated a lot of data over the last 14 years – how long it takes to install a three-gallon, seven-gallon, and 15-gallon plant, for instance – but he continues to go out each year and check on those numbers.

"You have to make sure your numbers are still accurate," Johns says. "Things can change with different crew members, weather conditions and new job sites."

While being as efficient as possible is the name of the game,

Ryan Scoggins, co-owner and operator of Top Notch Turf in Houston, says failing to account for "quality time" is a mistake. "If you give a guy nine hours for a job, including 8.5 hours of labor time and a half-hour of driving time, you're not allowing for any quality time," Scoggins says. "We account for three-minutes of quality time per stop in our estimates so that our crew has enough time to interact with customers when the opportunity arises."

ORGANIZING DATA. Many of the companies that track this data also utilize spreadsheets and/or software to organize and digitize

For sample square footage maintenance estimating guidelines, a landscape maintenance field estimate sheet and a field hours verification helper, visit LAWNANDLANDSCAPE.COM and search "On the clock."

the information. This can simplify things as Arman says the information on a new job can just be "plugged in" and costs can be automatically generated.

Chris Speen, general manager of Twin Oaks Landscape in Ann Arbor, Mich., says in 2006 he developed a cost book that incorporates all of the materials purchased. He also developed gross profit margin job sheets. All of this was incorporated with the company's software system. Having all this data at the tap of a fingertip with the ability to plug in information and receive updated data has helped the company improve efficiencies.

But Speen says it was a lot of work to get to that point.

"This took years to develop, and it can be a lot of work to stay on top of your hours. The crew doesn't always love it but they do always know how many hours they have on a job each day and that's critical to our profitability."

And Speen says that by staying so on top of hours, he knows exactly where the company's profitability stands at all times.

"I know at all times how we're doing. That even helps me forecast and change my game plan as I look to the future." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.



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SUBCONTRACTOR SOLUTIONS

Speedcutters Outdoor Maintenance
uses subs for most snow plowing
instead of paying for equipment. | PG. 186

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Training employees

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Plow shown with optional equipment.



Schooling your employees

BY MIKE CALLAHAN

Appropriately training a team of snow removal experts regarding standard operating procedures is the central component to business success. You are only as strong as your weakest link; therefore, standardized training is crucial.

At Callahan's we provide a three-pronged training approach: a pre-season preparation program, on-the-job embedded training and continuous quality control training. These training programs consist of online videos as well as physical training to ensure the company's standard workflow procedures are being adhered to.

PRESEASON TRAINING. At Callahan's, pre-season training for new and returning employees begins with reviewing the company rules and the employee's job description. This includes reviewing their roles and responsibilities, expectations surrounding availability during snow and ice events, work to be completed, how to record work completed and repercussions for failure to follow through on their commitments.

Next, all employees begin the online video training series. The series begins with a segment on properly staking a driveway or a parking lot. The second segment documents the proper plowing technique that is to be utilized, including how to back drag, plow open areas and curb lines correctly, and includes proper snow stacking techniques.

Residential experts are also trained on proper placement of snow piles for safety and compliance with local laws. In the final step of pre-season training, new team members have the opportunity to practice operating equipment so they are comfortable when the snow flies.

All members of the team are trained in pre-season operations including sidewalk crews, truck, loader and skid-steer operators.

The use of the online training series throughout our training process has been instrumental in our success each winter. These training videos, which can be viewed by clicking bit.ly/callahanvid, have helped Callahan's overcome the obstacle many companies face of having to wait until the first

snow and ice event to begin training employees. The online training series guarantees that each of our employees receives some formal training prior to hitting the road during the first snow and ice event.

IN-SEASON TRAINING. Once the snow flies and the ice accumulates it's all systems go. New employees are now paired up with veteran drivers until they are competent enough to work on their own.

We are required, due to more sensitive trigger points, to plow commercial properties prior to residential properties. This allows our new employees the opportunity to be cross-trained. First, they ride along with our commercial plow operators and then train on residential properties without the stress of clearing large amounts of snow and pressing deadlines. Just like our plowing crews, we pair our new salt truck operators with veteran operators to ensure they are loading the hopper correctly and applying salt appropriately for the conditions.

But even the most experienced operators will tend to deviate from the standard workflow procedures at times. We, as managers and company owners, must continually train and encourage our staff to follow the set plan. Diligence in the areas of training and quality control during mid-season and end-of-season will deliver predictable results and desired production rate producing profits every winter.

Finally, maintaining control over documentation of work completed at this point in the season is essential. Without proper documentation of completed work, it becomes impossible to produce invoices and production rates and job costing will suffer.

Lack of documentation of work could also leave your company and your customer open to liability in the event of a slip and fall. These three simple steps to building a team of snow plow experts will save you time, money and lots of headaches during the snow and ice season. **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.



SUBCONTRACTOR SOLUTIONS

Speedcutters Outdoor Maintenance uses subs for most snow plowing instead of paying for equipment. **BY HOLLY HAMMERSMITH**

Unlike most industry peers who entered the snow removal business after starting a lawn care business, the owners of Speedcutters Outdoor Maintenance did the opposite, adding the green side of the business after plowing snow for a season.

Co-owners Tom Langlais and John Lane started in late 2004 with one truck, a plow and a contract with a national homebuilder in the northern suburbs of the Minneapolis/St. Paul market.

“It was our goal always to provide lawn services as part of it,” Langlais says. “Obviously starting this kind of a business in Minnesota in August, the odds of you landing very many accounts for lawn services are going to be pretty slim. In order to continue generating revenue on a 12-month basis you’ve got to kind of be in both areas at once.”

They expanded into lawn and outdoor services the following spring. Annual

revenue for the company was \$650,000 in 2014. The majority of that revenue still comes from snow removal work. The remaining 40 percent comes from lawn care and other outdoors services.

“Our main focus in the summer is lawn care, both mowing and chemical applications, but there’s not really an outdoor service that we don’t provide,” he says.

Clients of Speedcutters are primarily commercial and include townhome



John Lane



Tom Langlais

associations, strip malls, corporate complexes, warehouses and industrial buildings. Only about 5 percent of clients are residential, he says.

The company is based in Elk River, Minn., and clients are primarily based in the Northwest suburbs of Minneapolis. Contracts for snow removal work typically run Nov. 1 through March 31.

NO EQUIPMENT NEEDED. Prep for the winter season begins mid-September to early October, but Speedcutters has minimal equipment in house. The company owns three trucks that can handle plows, a handful of snow blowers and shovels.

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FICTION: The Sectional is too hard to use!

FACT: The Sectional's unique drop-and-go technology allows your operator to set the pusher down and start plowing. Floating side plates, poly-suspended mold boards and Slip Hitch™ connection allows the plow to stay level and flat to the ground everytime!

FICTION: The Sectional is too expensive!

FACT: The Sectional has the best cost justification of any plow on the market! Reduction in salt usage, reduction in fuel, reduction in labor. No snow pusher adds value to your business like the Sectional!

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The staff at Speedcutters is small, but multi-functional. The company employs about 10 individuals year-round. Most are part-time snow shoveling staff who work in the winter and transition to full-time lawn care employees during the summer.

Langlais and his partner are both full-time and they have a full-time crew leader. Subcontractors make up the bulk of the remaining manpower at Speedcutters. Langlais says the idea to subcontract came about three years into the business, when the two partners realized how much money could be tied up in expensive equipment.

"If we were to do it all in-house

ourselves, it would require us to have a fleet of Bobcats, as well as probably half a dozen more trucks. We don't need the trucks in the summertime, and we don't need the Bobcats in the summertime," he says.

So instead, reliable subcontractors are hired and trained specifically on how snow removal work should be done at each jobsite and with what type of equipment. They have their own equipment and open availability during the winter. For example, one is a landscaper who plows for Speedcutters in the winter. Another runs an excavating company during the summer and needs winter work, Langlais says.

Subcontractors are rotated and typically not asked to work more than an eight-hour shift at a time. They typically return every season and will be assigned to the same properties because they already know what to do from previous training, he adds.

WORKING THE REFERRAL CHAIN.

New customers at Speedcutters are gained primarily through referrals from current customers. About 15 percent of business comes from cold calling.

"A lot of times it just takes getting our foot in the door and going through one or two or three years or contract cycles before we get a call from somebody," he says.

Social media has also been used a little bit, but Langlais says the results so far have been intangible.

"We're not discounting it at all because I think it still can be valuable, but we just haven't figured out quite how to make it work for us yet," he says.

The company's only other advertising comes from logos on their trucks and business cards. Almost all clients are on both lawn care and snow removal contracts.

CHARGING TOP DOLLAR. What allows Speedcutters to charge a bit more than its competition?

"It's attention to detail and

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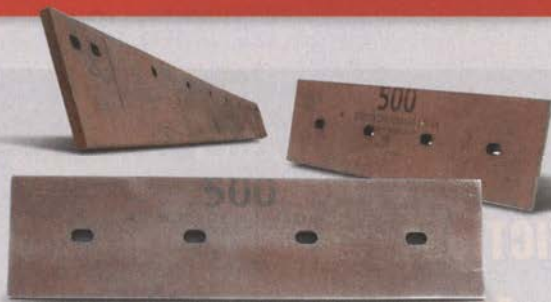
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COMPANY PROFILE

common sense work when we're on a jobsite," Langlais says.

Teams plan for future snowfall, he adds. Some companies will pile snow in the same area starting in November and by February they run out of room to pile snow. At Speedcutters, crews will often pile snow further back at the beginning of the season in preparation.

Keeping open lines of communication with customers is also paramount. That contact is typically made via mass email.

"We'll let them know there's a big snow event coming up and here's what we plan on doing," he says. **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Cleveland.

MOVING MELT

Speedcutters will add a new service to their already robust line of snow and ice control services – ice melt delivery. Many businesses have on-site crews to ensure sidewalks are clear, says Tom Langlais, co-owner.

"They spread ice melt on their sidewalks, and they do it as an internal function of their company," he says. "But they have to get that ice melt from somewhere, so we will bring ice melt to you and make sure those containers are filled on a regular basis."

In addition to this new ice melt delivery service, Speedcutters already offers power brooming,

which is used to move massive amounts of snow from sidewalks, such as at outlet malls. The snow is then plowed away.

"From a time savings and efficiency standpoint, it's much easier to broom off a sidewalk and sweep off a sidewalk than it is to shovel it," he says.

Other clients use a service where Speedcutters hauls snow off site. This is typically implemented when, despite advanced planning, there simply is no room left to move snow anymore on a property, Langlais says.

Snow is moved off site with a dump truck and placed on open

land owned by area cities.

"Cities a lot of times will have dedicated places that you can dump snow. Because it contains salt and things, they need to be aware of the sites that they pick for that so that there's no contamination of ground water," he says. Dump fees usually range from \$15 to \$25 per load.

Ice and snow site monitoring is another service offered to customers who would rather pay a company to monitor a portion of a property for safety, and then quickly remove snow or ice when there becomes an issue, rather than do that in-house, Langlais says.

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For more information: Honda.com



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The pitch: The REIST 2000 series snow thrower features a single-stage system that can generate the power to throw snow efficiently.

- The units come with a carbon-fibre cutting edge that's set on an angle, plus carbon fibre feet to help it glide over sidewalk cracks.
- With a 42-inch wide option, the thrower can fit on smaller sidewalks, replacing the need to shovel by hand.
- Optional kits include a hydraulic hood turner kit, a hydraulic hood deflector kit and a hydraulic drive kit available on all series, as well as an adapter plate for 3PH to universal skid steer quick hitch.

For more information:
Reistindustries.com



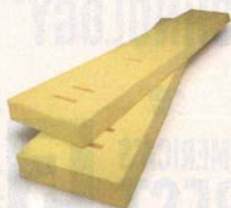
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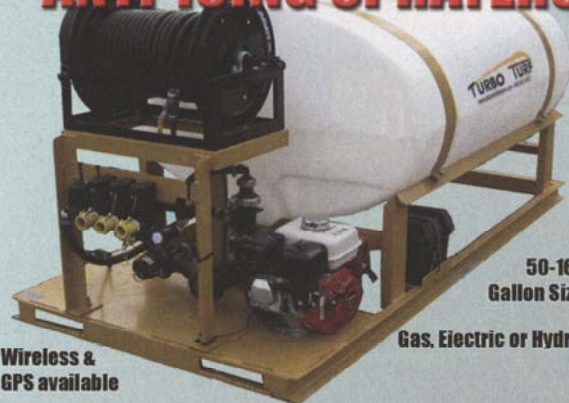


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SNOWEX MINI PRO 575

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

- It comes standard with a receiver hitch mount. Optional mounting kits include a utility mount and three-point mount for tractors.
- Mounted in a weather-tight enclosure, the direct-drive system includes a 12-volt DC motor and maximum torque transmission.
- 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, 1/2-ton pickups, small-to mid-size tractors and skid steer loaders.

For more information: Snowexproducts.com



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The pitch: TrucBrush can solve the challenge of snow accumulation on fleet rooftops without making unsafe conditions for your employees.

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For more information: Trucbrush.com

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TOP OF THE SNOW MOUNTAIN

Lawn & Landscape's sister publication, Snow Magazine, recently named its 2015 Leadership Award winners. The following pages are snippets about a few of the award winners. For full coverage, check out Snow's September issue, or visit bit.ly/llsnowaward to read it online.

BUYING A BUSINESS IS A BIG ENOUGH CHALLENGE ON ITS OWN. Throw in having a child the same year, and you have quite a task on your hands. That's what Jeannie Schenderline was facing 1990 when she and her then husband welcomed their son Damen Koso into the world and bought Jeffco Grounds Maintenance, a snow management and landscaping company in Anchorage, Alaska. Jeffco was already established with a reputation in the Anchorage area, and the project looked like a solid investment.

But what she couldn't account for at the time was her and her husband separating in 1992, leaving her at the head of the company, alone. A commercial fisherman, he died not long after while king crab fishing. Schenderline was on her own with a toddler to care for and a company to lead.

"When you're a parent and you're in that type of situation, what are you going to do?

What are you going to do with your child when they don't have another parent?" she says. "I walked into it. Right from the get-go, it was 'I have to make this work.'"

The first step to doing that was finding out just how to run a grounds

maintenance company. She had spent most of her career in the office working in accounting, but if she and Koso were going to survive, she had to face that challenge. "I was scared," she laughs.

But Schenderline persevered and has been at the head of Jeffco for as long as Koso, who grew up working alongside his mother, can remember. It meant a lot of sacrifice, and it was a different family life than he saw others living, but it was theirs. "It wasn't easy making friends and keeping up with school with a plow schedule to work around. But some of those things "get thrown out the door when you have to put food on the table, and you have other staff who have to put food on the table to make sure their families are taken care of too," he says.



JEANNIE SCHENDERLINE
JEFFCO GROUNDS MAINTENANCE
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA



CHAD OBERSON
OBERSON'S SNOW
AND ICE MANAGEMENT
CINCINNATI, OHIO

week," he says. "I love my job and I love what I do almost to the point where it doesn't seem like work because I have such a good staff. It does take time away from my wife and family. My wife is wonderful and helps run the business as well as

our household. I am not the dad who takes their kids everywhere or the dad you see at school functions because I simply don't get to do that. It's just not going to happen with the type of business and workforce I have."

YOU'RE NEVER GOING TO FIND A BEER CAN in the garbage can at Oberson's Snow and Ice Management in Cincinnati. Owner Chad Oberson has established a culture of professionalism and pride at his \$7-million snow and landscape business.

"In 99 percent of landscape companies, when they're done at the end of the day, they get together and have a beer," Oberson says. "That's the atmosphere a lot of these companies portray, and that's fine, but we just don't let that go on at our company."

He says most of his laborers have been working for his company for 11 years.

"They love it and try to get their acquaintances to come work for us," he says. "We have a very different culture than most companies in our industry in that it's very structured and safety conscious. Our industry is very blue collar, but we have a lot of policies and procedures in place regarding safety, alcohol, smoking and tobacco."

Oberson leads by example, being present at the shop at 6:15 a.m. every morning, seven days a week and putting in 10-hour days. He visits with all of his employees, making sure everyone is happy and supplied with what they need.

"A lot of times, all the interaction happens between 6 and 9 p.m. when guys are rolling in," Oberson says. "I'll see a truck pull into the nursery and I'll hop in my golf cart and run down there to see how the guys are doing and how their day went to make sure everything is good."

"That's what I do. I want them to know I am part of every part of the business and want to make sure they succeed. I will take care of whatever they need."

And it's easy for Oberson to check in with his crews in person that late because his main location is also his home, as well as the home of his H2B workforce. Being so dedicated to the job and having work so close to home has led to having to make a lot of sacrifices, but Oberson doesn't mind a bit.

"I'm 39, and I'm going to work seven days a



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STEVE SUMMER

ABOUT TIME SNOW
HUNTINGTON VALLEY,
PENNSYLVANIA

STEVEN SUMMER REMEMBERS the first time he felt like he couldn't do his job properly. It was around when his company, About Time Snow in Huntington Valley, Pa., hit \$300,000 in gross sales, and Summer began to feel tremendous pressure.

"So I went out to look to hire

someone who was in the landscape industry who also managed snow," he says. "After I hired them, they did a really good job at it, and then we hired more people through the years. I think it forced me, as we grew, to go out and try to get some of that responsibility off to other people. That process of continual growth and not being able to get

a handle on the books and run the business and do sales and do operations – it really pushes you out."

Now, Summer is in a completely different phase of his business where he is intentionally trying to transition out of the day-to-day operations so that he doesn't necessarily have to be at his business every day.

"My management style is really a hands-off approach now," he says. "When I manage people, I do it from a global perspective or big picture view. I don't like to give a lot of details. If I'm pressed, I will get into details, but then everybody rolls their eyes and I talk for hours.

"So I like to stay away from the details and stay near the bigger

picture and let other people figure out the details. But I do like people to follow up with me, and that's the type of person I'm looking for. So if you're working in our business and directly under me, I will be completely hands off but you should update me on where you're at with your project."

The company's COO, Jenn Bubba, says Summer recently overhauled the business and put in a different management team.

"I come with a strong management style and he comes with a strong knowledge of the snow industry and how to make things work," Bubba says. "He knows where to put people in place when it is something he can't do."

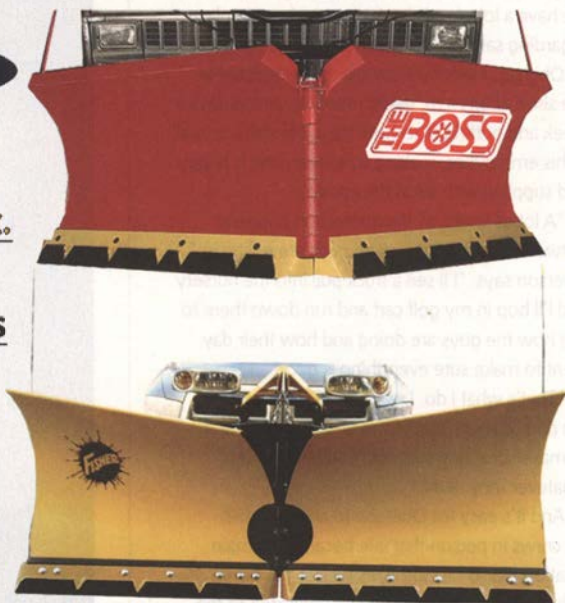
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MICHAEL WEISS
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B **EING SURROUNDED BY FAMILY** is important to Michael Weiss and treating his employees like family is another important priority to him. Some employees have been with Weiss Commercial Service Properties, which also provides landscaping services, for more than 20 years, so it's hard to not consider

them as family. "I'm out on the truck with the guys. I'm there before, I'm there afterward. I'm not an absentee boss," Weiss says. "I got into it because I like doing it. I still like doing it. I believe that when I'm out

"I'M OUT ON THE TRUCK WITH THE GUYS ... I'M NOT AN ABSENTEE BOSS."

there working with them or beside them, we are working together so we can all achieve the same goal. I do set a time to sleep. I don't think I've ever been woken up by my guys. I've been woken up by friends and they're like, 'Hey, what are you doing? Look at the snow.' They're good guys. They just take care of it."

Besides being family orientated and a hands-on boss, Weiss is passionate about his customers. John Allin, a consultant of Weiss's, knows that Weiss's clients come first. "He is customer oriented, not to a fault, but he is obsessed with customer satisfaction," Allin says. "And he passes that

on to the troops. It permeates down through everyone's psyche. His culture is one that the customer needs to be taken care of. It is probably the biggest reason for his success. Once he gets a customer, it is very rare that they leave."

Allin, who has done business with Weiss for five years, attests that Weiss's singular way of running his business has made him stand out.

"Michael is a very private individual, however, people that know him and know how his company operates try to mimic him and espouse to be like him," Allin says.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMIT

Networking

Event planners at the 2015 ASCA Executive Summit made sure 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.

► For more photos and a complete run down of the Executive Summit, check out next month's L&L Snow and Ice Report.



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What you may have missed

BY KEVIN GILBRIDE

We recently closed the books on the 2015 Executive Summit, a nearly one-year labor of love that goes from concept to event in what seems like the blink of an eye. Along the way, my team, who are much smarter and a lot more efficient than me, make sure all of the I's are dotted and the T's are crossed before we reach the event site. And, if I do say so myself, they put together one heck of an event this year.

Nearly 200 of your peers joined the ASCA team out in beautiful Stowe, Vt., for three days of high-end education and networking. But ask anyone to sum it all up, and there's a good chance they'll say those three days were just a lot of fun.

ASCA's Executive Summit continues to grow and expand, and that was evident by the large number of new faces among this year's attendees. When we first started the Executive Summit conference, I made a silent pledge to myself to shake hands with and talk to each attendee. This year, with the evolution of the event as it is, that was a difficult task. I tried my best, and I apologize if I missed anyone. If I did, feel free to contact me because I'd love to hear your story.

BIG WINNERS. As we've done in years past, we paired Executive Summit with our Leadership Awards event. Every year we honor three to four snow profes-

sionals for the leadership they've displayed in their companies, in the industry and within the communities they live and work in. This year we honored four outstanding individuals: Mike Weiss, Jeannie Schenderline, Chad Oberson and Stephen Summer.

You can read about the winners on page 196. During the awards presentation we shared their compelling stories with attendees. However, it was their own personal words as they addressed the audience that left the most profound impression on us all.

We also recognized the outgoing members of the ASCA's first advisory panel – Kyle Rose, John Allin, Peter Smolka and Jeff Herold. Troy Clogg and Matt Peterson have agreed to serve another four-year term. Each should be commended for his contributions and tireless efforts over the last four years. It's their work that helped shape the ASCA's direction during its critical formative years and their keen guidance transpired into establishing the Industry Standards, ASCA-C, ISO 9001/SN 9000, a snow industry insurance program, and much of our legislative initiatives at the state and federal levels.

All of these things were firsts for the professional snow and ice management industry. We also had the opportunity to welcome our new board members David

“WHEN WE FIRST STARTED THE EXECUTIVE SUMMIT CONFERENCE, I MADE A SILENT PLEDGE TO MYSELF TO SHAKE HANDS WITH AND TALK TO EACH ATTENDEE.”

J. Frank, Matt Boelman and Mike Jones, who join Troy and Matt as well as current board members Dick Churchill and Ken Hutcheson. We are excited about this group shaping the future of the ASCA and the snow and ice management industry.

NEW PROGRAM. And what's an Executive Summit without some

sort of major announcement? I had the pleasure of unveiling to attendees the association's new ASCA Action Network (AAN) program. 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.

It is the association's intention that AAN will help rally support and influence your legislative officials. Stay tuned for more details on the AAN program.

Lastly, it was at an Executive Summit in Cleveland where attendees said there was a need for a group to take a leadership role and address the needs – primarily insurance and high-end contractor education – of the professional snow and ice management industry.

The rest, as they say, is history.

Thank you to all of those over the last few years who have contributed to the ASCA's growth. Now it's time for other individuals to pick up the mantle of leadership and work to grow and improve the professional snow and ice management industry. **L&L**

The author is executive director of the ASCA.



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**ANNIVERSARY
SUPPLEMENT**

**CELEBRATING A QUARTER-CENTURY
OF INDUSTRY ADVOCACY**

CONGRATULATIONS TO RISE ON ITS SILVER ANNIVERSARY

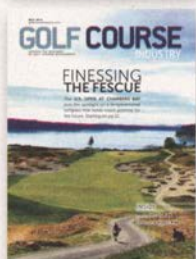
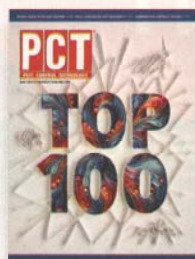


Celebrating a quarter-century of industry advocacy on behalf of manufacturers, formulators, distributors and other industry stakeholders involved with specialty pesticide and fertilizer products.

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Before you read our special section honoring the 25th anniversary of RISE, just take a minute to do this:

Imagine trying to do your job without the thoroughly tested, rigorously approved and carefully applied chemical tools you have today. How would you effectively control harmful, damaging pests? How could you successfully maintain America's much-needed greenspaces or keep bugs out of family homes? How would your business survive without the benefits those scientifically sound tools provide?

If you're like most of GIE Media's 150,000+ readers in the turf, horticulture and pest control markets, a world without proven control solutions would be a bleaker place. And you might very well be in a very different business.

But, thanks to a quarter century of remarkable work by the leadership, volunteers and staff of RISE, the unimaginable has yet to happen. For that, we should all be very grateful.

I'm particularly grateful for RISE's track record of fighting for common-sense solutions despite the nonsense we sometimes face from activists and the uninformed. It's tough to play defense against a team that doesn't follow the rules, but RISE has done an admirable job.

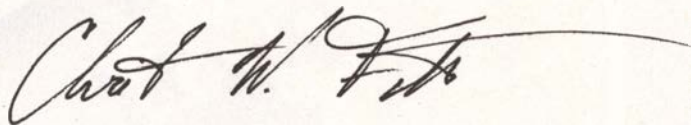
I'm also grateful to be part of a uniquely volunteer-driven association. We work with dozens and dozens of non-profits in the many markets our company serves, but none relies on the talents and dedication of individual members more than RISE. I learned early on that serving on a RISE committee is a real and important commitment. RISE volunteers are engaged and active, something nearly every other association would envy.

But, as I think back on 25 years of our company's deep involvement with RISE, it's the people and the passion for which I'm most grateful. I have made and kept many wonderful friends that I met at annual meetings. I treasure those relationships not just because RISE members are supporters of our publications but because they are truly passionate about helping their companies and customers survive and thrive. They may compete like warriors against each other every day, but RISE brings all of them together as allies for a common and very important cause. The association unifies us as a community in a very special way.

Finally, I'm grateful to RISE members who have been important partners of ours in the lawn, pest control, golf, nursery, greenhouse and garden center markets. Their investment in advertising and sponsorships allows us to deliver great business education to you and tens of thousands more people like you who keep our nation healthy, beautiful and clean.

As a small way of saying "thanks" to RISE and its members, we are publishing this tribute to the association's 25th anniversary in all of our industry publications without sponsorship. We're grateful for all the association has done for you, our readers, and we will always continue to be proud supporters of RISE. ●●○

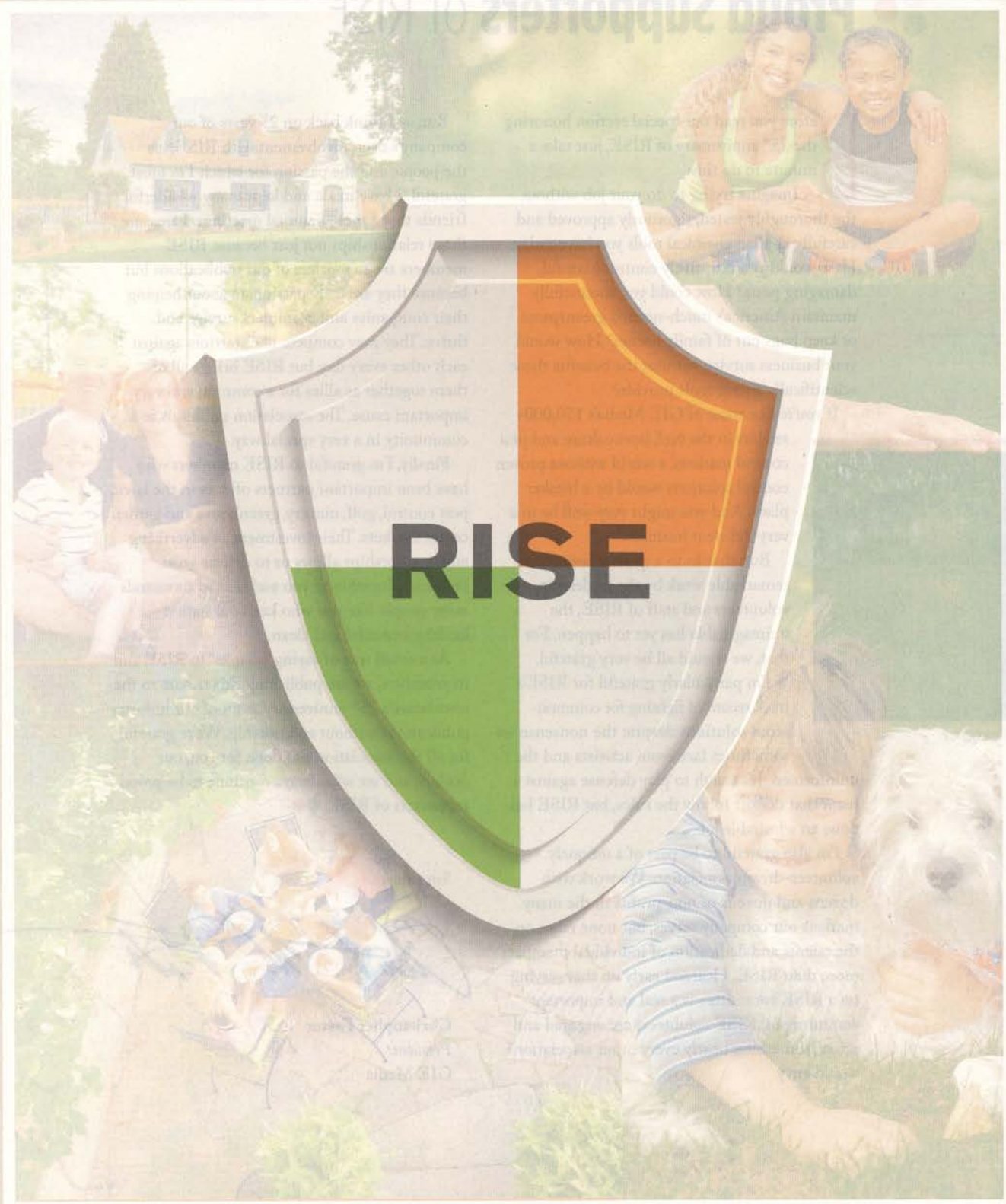
Sincerely,



Christopher Foster
President
GIE Media



Foster



Defending Specialty Pesticides for 25 Years

You may not realize it but **every time** you reach for an active ingredient **you can thank RISE** for its availability.

by **Anne Nagro**

When members of RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) gathered for their annual meeting in September, they had a major milestone to celebrate: 25 years of successfully defending specialty pesticides.

That's significant for industry professionals serving a number of specialty markets.

"Our job is to make sure the chemistry and the tools in their toolbox are always there for them to use," said Aaron Hobbs, president of RISE.

RISE helps shape the regulatory playing field so "there are more options and more freedom for the pest control operator and green industry professional to make decisions that are best for particular pest conditions," explained Josh Weeks, who led Bayer

CropScience's North American professional products division and also was the association's governing board chair. It would be very hard for them to do their jobs if they didn't have that toolbox, Weeks noted.

Preserving tools and use patterns so industry professionals can deliver value to customers "is the center of what RISE brings to the table," added Dave Morris, former global business leader for Dow AgroSciences and RISE governing board chair. The association does this at the local, state and federal levels of government.

While groups like the National Pest Management Association (NPMA), National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) represent users of specialty pesticides,

RISE History & Milestones

As RISE celebrates its silver anniversary as the national trade association representing manufacturers, formulators, distributors and other industry leaders involved with specialty pesticide and fertilizer products, we look at the history and milestones that made the 25-year-old organization what it is today.

U.S. Senators Harry Reid (D-NV) and Joseph Lieberman (D-CT), hold hearings to examine possible health problems associated with lawn pesticides; exploratory meetings are held by industry representatives to discuss the possibility of establishing a new national trade association representing manufacturers, formulators and distributors involved with specialty pesticide products.

In January 1991, the steering committee, along with NACA's Jay Vroom (now CropLife America's president and CEO), interviews job candidates who will serve as the specialty pesticide association's first executive director. **Allen James** is hired and begins work on Feb. 1, the official birth date of RISE. Twelve founding members were there to welcome James to the new association that was established to address the critical needs of the specialty pesticide industry.

In cooperation with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, National School Board Association, National Pest Management Association and Professional Lawn Care Association of America, RISE develops an "IPM in Schools" kit, mailed to more than 16,000 school districts. RISE hires consultants **David Crow**, founder of D.C. Legislative & Regulatory Services, and Angela Bendorf Jamison, a PR specialist and owner of Communicopia Marketing Services.

The Food Quality Protection Act (FQPA) is passed unanimously by Congress and signed into law by President Clinton. It fundamentally changes the way pesticides are scientifically evaluated by the Environmental Protection Agency. Pestfacts.org, the new RISE website, is launched providing facts about pests, tips on how to use pesticides responsibly and links to member company websites.

Funding from RISE helps establish the Environmental Sensitivities Research Institute to support sound scientific and media research as it relates to environmental intolerance issues (multiple chemical sensitivity), and to compile and disseminate information on such issues.

The organization begins to reach out to the consumer media, sending letters and Rolodex cards with RISE contact information on them to "inside-the-Beltway" media contacts. A series of syndicated news releases are written and distributed to mid- and small-sized newspapers across the country.

1990

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GET INVOLVED!

GET INVOLVED

"RISE is a great place to do networking, to gain a different experience and some broader perspective" on issues, said Dan Stahl, current governing board chair of RISE and vice president of marketing and business development at OHP Inc. He encouraged professionals to get involved and to give back. "You can't underestimate the importance of the volunteer workforce that we're able to employ effectively within the RISE association," he said.

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RISE advocates on behalf of 220 manufacturers, formulators and distributors of these products, which are used in structural pest control and lawn care, but also nursery and greenhouse use, aquatic weed control, vector mosquito control, forestry and consumer markets.

"We are unmatched in our ability to have a positive influence on public policy; there is no one that does the work that we do" or has made the long-term investments in community building, said Hobbs.

Strong partnerships play a key role.

Over the years, RISE and NPMA have "accomplished a lot because we were able to work together," said NPMA CEO Bob Rosenberg. RISE is NPMA's "closest ally in Washington" and the two groups hold a weekly call to coordinate efforts; on the rare occasion they don't agree on an issue, they "respect each other's charges," said Rosenberg.

"It's been a great relationship" with NPMA and is one that's "vital to our continued ability to be successful," said Hobbs. In October, RISE will host its third breakfast at NPMA's annual PestWorld conference to build member unity and thank PMPs for their grassroots support.

Working with groups like NPMA, GCSAA and NALP, RISE has built a stronger industry. Most notable is getting state pesticide preemption laws passed in 41 states in the late 1990s. These laws established FIFRA, which regulates the in-

dustry at the federal level, as the law of the land and made state regulatory agencies the rule makers at the state level. This prevents local governments from passing their own pesticide regulations on private property.

Preemption gives industry professionals certainty. If every locale could set its own rules on pesticide use, it'd be "total chaos" from a business operations perspective, said Morris. With anti-pesticide groups constantly trying to erode preemption, the issue will be a major focus of RISE going forward, said Hobbs.

Even the pollinator issue isn't just about pollinators. It "generally is being used as a tool to attack preemption," Hobbs noted.

Being proactive helps RISE take the lead on these and other issues.

It all stems from a fundamental shift in strategy eight years ago. Back then, RISE was more defensive; it relied mainly on traditional advocacy and responding to the activist agenda. RISE tracked issues and got involved once they were burning. "We were fire fighters," explained Morris.

Today, the association is "involved early in the conversation" so it can "build up good will" for how specialty products solve problems and for the local professionals who apply them, said Dan Stahl, RISE governing board chair and vice president of marketing and business development at OHP Inc.

RISE convenes a Children's Health Task Force to create "Pest Threats: A Resource for Decision Makers." The Pest Threat educational materials are distributed nationally with the support of the Annapolis Center to all school superintendents, public health officials and their associations, school nurses and their associations, allergy and asthma associations, and all members of Congress.

The Children's Health Act of 2000 reaffirms the FQPA definition of IPM. The law states that "Integrated Pest Management" means an approach to the management of pests in public facilities that combines biological, cultural, physical and chemical tools in a way that minimizes economic, health and environmental risks."

A RISE staff position is added to focus on fertilizers and plant health issues as formulator members who produce combination products for the consumer market are impacted by regulations and restrictions on fertilizer use.

RISE undertakes a campaign to pass state fertilizer preemption. Six states adopt fertilizer preemption as a result of these advocacy efforts. The Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association names RISE's Allen James the Environmental Communicator of the Year. Canadian activists begin using the term "cosmetic use," defining it as using pesticides for "non-essential or cosmetic purposes," calling for bans on lawn and garden products.



The California West Nile Virus Grassroots Mobilization Plan is implemented by RISE, its California members, state alliance groups and other interested stakeholders who want to protect public health and minimize the threat of WNV through the safe and responsible use of mosquito control products.

The associations begins its long relationship with Dr. Jerome Goddard, who speaks about the "Impact of Pests on Human Health" during a Termite Media Tour in New Orleans. Dr. Goddard will lend his expertise to later campaigns for West Nile virus and children's health.



RISE has become “much more flexible and nimble in our work,” explained Hobbs. It uses social media to track hot topics in real time, pinpoint the localities where they’re heating up, and identify where not to get involved — where doing so will only lend credibility to anti-pesticide efforts.

The association has developed an extensive grassroots network, which lets it “quickly reach out and ask for help if we’ve got a local issue or state issue,” said Stahl. This empowers volunteers — “really smart, passionate people in the industry” — to advocate for their business and the industry, he said. These messages are received much better from local business people than folks from Washington, D.C. “That local

voice with a positive message makes a huge difference,” said Morris.

Plus, it lets RISE be more visible in more places. Earlier this year, 450 local pest and lawn management professionals attended two meetings in Montgomery County, Md., to oppose a proposed ban on turf pesticides for private property. Not many associations can claim to have achieved that level of grassroots support, said Hobbs.

As such, the association has forced environmental activists in Maryland to “work very hard these past two years,” said Hobbs. In Connecticut, grassroots efforts helped RISE defeat legislation for five straight years, he noted.

No surprise, it is one of the four pillars of RISE’s new strategic plan. “If there’s been one game-changer for this association, it’s the addition of grassroots to our toolbox,” said Hobbs.

The national, state and regional scope of RISE provides immeasurable support, said Terry Higgins, general manager at OHP, whose company specializes in products for the nursery and greenhouse production market.

“You can’t put a price on the value of a group like RISE. Being based in

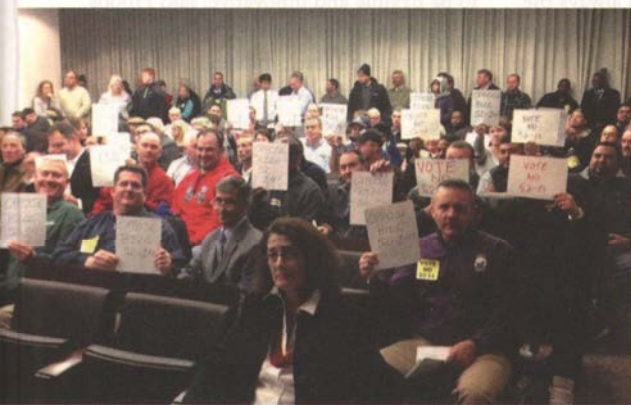
D.C., they can look out for our industry’s needs on a national level, but they’re just as effective when it comes to local challenges,” Higgins said. “RISE is able to cut through the noise of an issue and promote the benefits our products provide society.”

RISE provides impartial support, no matter the chemical specialty of the company they represent, said Arden Bull, national greenhouse/nursery accounts manager at Nufarm.

“All of the chemical companies are on a level playing field when it comes to working with RISE,” he said. “They’re an advocate to our industry, and they do a superb job of addressing the public when it comes to the safety and necessity of our products. They use scientific reasoning to address the products being used and being introduced in the marketplace.”

Still, challenges will continue. Issues like pollinators and clean water rules, especially on local levels, will remain hot topics. “It would be silly to expect that those people that want to put our industry out of business are just going to fold up their tents and go home,” said Hobbs. “We will continue to be in those conversations wherever they may happen.”

The decidedly green attitudes of Millennials, who now make up the largest share of the U.S. workforce, will influence these issues, said Weeks. So will pressures from abroad. Montgomery County’s proposed legislation



RISE members have been pro-active throughout the organization’s history, becoming engaged locally when the industry is threatened by onerous regulations.

The first RISE Issues Breakfast is held at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America conference and trade show in Orlando, Florida. Superintendents are invited to the early-morning breakfast.

Specialty pesticide use regulations are proposed by non-government organizations in U.S. communities as well as at the state level, emboldened by such bans in Canada. RISE promotes the benefits of maintaining healthy turf, flowers and trees and the public’s personal rights to do so.

As a way to remind consumers to select the right products and use them properly, RISE implements the Choose Right—Use Right Consumer Campaign using educational signage at point-of-selection. RISE creates a set of English and Spanish educational pieces for consumers and works for two years with large format retailers, independent hardware stores and nurseries to place the pieces.

RISE creates its first 30-second television ad and 60-second radio spot that air on garden shows in the greater Washington, D.C. and Baltimore areas, reaching an audience of more than 35 million people. Titled “Just Two Minutes,” the ads explain it only takes two minutes to read the directions on products used to control weeds and pests.

The RISE Governing Board begins discussion and investment to transform how the association manages issues and communicates with policy makers and consumers. They vote unanimously to fund a research-based and targeted outreach program.



Debug the Myths, which transformed the association’s advocacy model to positive and proactive, is launched as the industry faces an ever-increasing number of policy and regulatory challenges and opportunities.



Direct action at the grassroots level by its members has been critical to the success of RISE in representing the interests of the specialty chemicals industry.

“is right out the Canadian playbook, and a bit out of the European playbook,” said Weeks. What happens in those countries is a “harbinger of future trends,” he said.

“We fill our space perfectly today and we’re doing an outstanding job representing our members and supporting our customers,” said Hobbs. “But we need to grow to address those challenges in the future.”

To do this, RISE is expanding its staff to six professionals by year end, is re-evaluating its brand, and creating more opportunities for member engagement. The more people engaged, the greater the voice, the bigger reach, Hobbs explained. This also will help the association “assimilate future leaders and participants” as senior Baby Boomer leaders phase out, said Weeks. “A constant education process” is required to bring them up to speed on “the history (of RISE) and the importance of advocacy,” he said.

Today the specialty products industry is mature — when RISE was founded in 1991 it was just emerging — and that brings additional considerations. “When you’re a mature industry, there’s always the concern for resources,” and as the business climate changes opportunities may open up for some products and markets but not for others, said Karen Reardon, vice-president, public affairs, RISE.

That makes preserving industry unity job number one. It might appear that an issue affects only one segment of the specialty products industry but “we know that is a very short-term view of the challenge,” said Hobbs. The anti-pesticide lobby doesn’t dislike one use pattern over another, “they dislike them all,” he reminded. These groups constantly look for chinks in the armor. One year a bill may target

the golf industry; the next year the same bill may have structural pest control in the cross-hairs.

“By having the industry unified, speaking for the most part with one voice about the safety and appropriateness of the development, supply and use of products, has meant everything to the continued success of the industry,” said Allen James, former president of RISE (now retired).

Because of this, the association is respected at federal agencies like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and at state and local levels, he said.

“We are very successful in the work that we do due to the great investment that our members make in the association, the support that they give us,” which allows RISE to be flexible and innovative, said Hobbs.

There is no issue too big or too significant that RISE can’t influence, he noted.

Working with “very smart, thoughtful leaders” — some who’ve been involved since RISE’s founding — makes for “an exciting time” and will help RISE prepare for what lies ahead, Hobbs said. ●●○



PDF

To view a full timeline of RISE’s history visit:
www.giemedia.com/RISE.html

In June, Aaron Hobbs is named president of RISE, taking over the association’s leadership position following the retirement of Allen James. Hobbs served as the association’s president-elect from May 1 - Aug. 31, and was the RISE director of legislative affairs and grassroots outreach since March 2009. The E. Allen James Leadership Award is established.



The Debug the Myths Road Show moves west to California with activities in Fresno, Modesto and Sacramento.

The Pesticide Registration Improvement Act (PRIA 3) of 2012 becomes law, reauthorizing PRIA, creating a pesticide registration tracking system, additional resources for registration information technology improvements, and other process changes intended to reduce due date renegotiations.



Karen Reardon becomes the first to hold the newly created position of vice president at RISE, becoming vice president of public affairs. RISE completes the work of fully integrating the tools of public relations into all aspects of its advocacy.



The RISE Governing Board and Strategic Oversight Council create a new mission and vision for the association along with a five-year 2020 strategic plan.

2010

2011

2012

2013

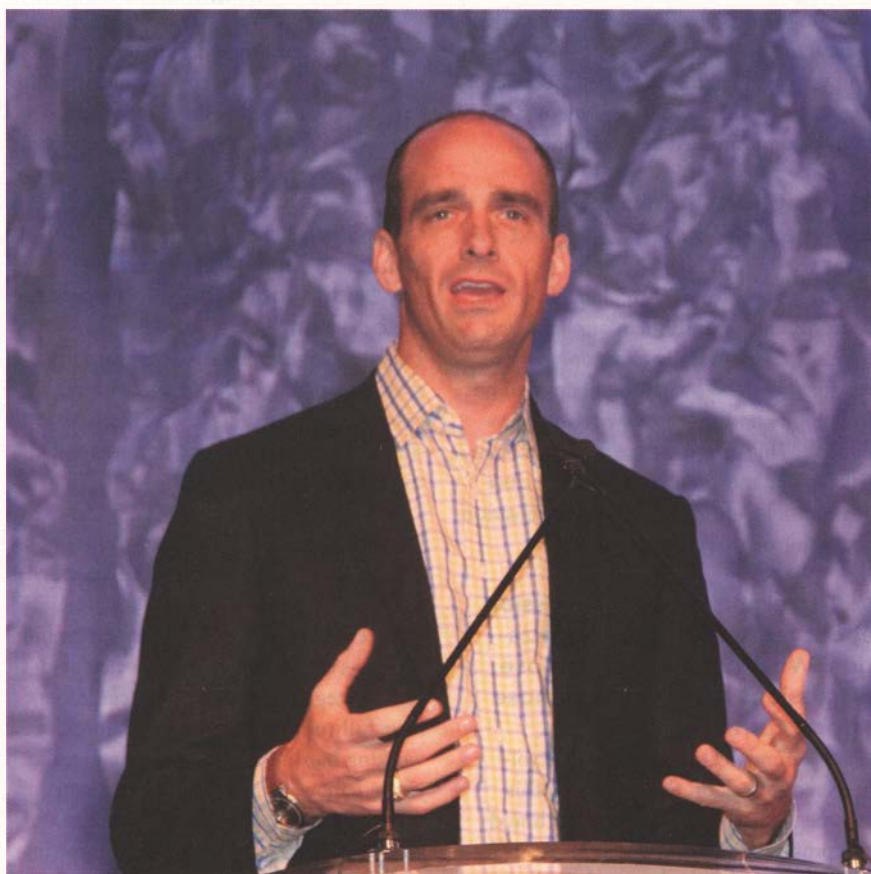
2014

2015

Q & A

With

Aaron Hobbs



RISE President Aaron Hobbs is a passionate advocate for the specialty pesticide and fertilizer industry, serving as Director of Legislative Affairs and Grassroots Outreach before being named President of the organization in 2010.

Q: What specific factors/market conditions prompted a committed group of industry leaders to create RISE 25 years ago?

RISE was created in 1991 to address the critical needs of the specialty pesticide industry. At that time the most critical need was addressing attacks at the federal level on the lawn and turf uses of pesticides and on federal preemption.

Q: How has the organization's mission evolved over time?

We have stayed true to the RISE mission, which has always been to protect our industry's ability to operate and to provide effective pest management and plant health solutions to the marketplace. We have and will always represent all sectors of the specialty industry — both pesticides and fertilizers. Over time we have become very flexible, which allows us to shift our focus to meet the needs of our members and their customers in the current environment. We have been strategic about expanding our capabilities to become the only association defending preemption at the state and local levels.

Q: On a day-to-day basis, how does RISE protect/advance the interests of the specialty pesticide and fertilizer industry?

Everything we do supports our advoca-

cy. We work across all channels, mainly through engagement with EPA, policy makers, members, members' customers, allies, consumers, and media. Our engagement includes old fashioned face-to-face dialogue and collaboration, along with social and traditional media and grassroots.

Q: What are some of the key issues being addressed by RISE today? How are those issues different/similar to issues of the past?

Maintaining federal and state preemption is job one and a job we continue to do very well. I believe this issue will always need our leadership to promote and defend it. Pollinator health now forms a big part of the preemption issue, and has changed relatively quickly from being something new into simply a different tactic to attack preemption — both EPA's regulatory authority and policy at the state level.

The expansion of the Clean Water Act is another issue that has evolved over our history. We've worked state and local issues related to nutrients and most recently worked to oppose expansion of the Clean Water Act at the federal level. Overall, our issues remain somewhat constant, but evolve with time as does our approach to them.

Q: In your opinion, what has been RISE's most significant accomplishment since becoming an association?

Building our grassroots advocacy capacity has been one of our most important strategic activities and began virtually from the day the doors opened at RISE. Also, our work to defend preemption is the other defining activity of the association.

Q: What has been the organization's most significant disappointment?

“We have stayed true to the **RISE mission, which has always been to **protect** our industry's ability to operate and to provide effective pest management and plant health **solutions** to the marketplace.”**

— RISE President Aaron Hobbs

Ongoing efforts to dilute and weaken the federal definition of IPM are something we find very challenging to address because of the range of stakeholders and many definitions being promoted and published.

Q: What is RISE doing currently to remain relevant for the next 25 years?

We are always asking, listening, observing, learning, and are flexible in our approach to our issues. We really focus on being successful as defined by our members, and not by being bound to “the way we've always done it.” This means we are willing to take risks in our approach to issues, in the use of new tools, and being in any conversation about our industry anywhere.

Q: There's been some discussion about rebranding the organization. What has prompted those discussions and where do those efforts currently stand?

Our Communications Committee volunteered to kick off the discussion this summer. The discussion about our brand was prompted by good questions from our members about what our brand is delivering for us at the 25-year mark, especially given all of the new communication channels available to us. We know there are some challenges communicating who we are to certain audiences. Our goal is to

be as accessible as possible to all of our stakeholders, so the Communications Committee's look at our brand is timely and relevant.

Q: What are your hopes/aspirations for RISE members in the years ahead?

My aspiration for our members is that they continue to be innovative leaders and that they expect the same from their association. Our goal is to deliver value every day in an innovative

way. Also, I want members to continue to expect us to be leaders for the industry and to make the necessary investment in the association for it to grow and become even more effective with a broader reach.

Q: At the end of your career, what would you like RISE members to say about your tenure leading the association?

I would like them to say we learned, we grew, we tried new things and we were successful. We weren't afraid to take risks to be successful and we listened and responded to the industry's needs.

Q: Is there anything we haven't asked that you would like to comment on?

We are just wrapping up a very successful first year executing against our new five-year strategic plan. Our volunteer leaders have fully embraced the new plan and are working hard to achieve our mission. I'm excited about the future of our industry and association as we work to achieve our vision: an industry free to create inspiring and healthy places where we live, work and play. With the continued leadership of our governing board and all of our member volunteers, I know we will have many more successes to discuss over the next 25 years. ●●○

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Out for Issues
Affecting Your
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your services and the products you use. Keep up-to-date on policy and regulations running the gamut from private and public pesticide property bans to specific restrictions on sales, use and display of fertilizers and pesticides. RISE is a national trade association of pesticide and fertilizer suppliers serving as a resource to help you keep these products in your toolbox and you out of the woods.

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2010
2005
2000
1995
1990

2015 ○ ● ●

Looking Back: The Rise of RISE

by Anne Nagro

At the risk of sounding simple, RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) started with a single phone call.

“It was Joe Lieberman making noise that initiated the conversation,” recalled Bill Culpepper, president of life sciences company SePRO and a founder of RISE. He woke one morning in 1989 to the former U.S. Senator questioning the use of pesticides and herbicides on turfgrass and lawns.

Activist groups had begun arguing these products — used in public spaces like golf courses, athletic fields and parks — were harmful to people, pets and the environment. Manufacturers, they claimed, were selling unsafe products; state and federal pressure increased.

Eventually Senator Lieberman’s concerns blossomed into Capitol Hill hearings with Senator Harry Reid. The hearings were “horrible” and “staged in an era when staging wasn’t so common,” recalled Bob Rosenberg, CEO of the National Pest Management Association. It was “a black

eye for the lawn care industry but it spilled over to the pest control industry,” he said.

For Culpepper, it was a wake-up call in more ways than one. With “no industry organization whatsoever” for the emerging turf and lawn care business, attacks like this were likely to happen again and perhaps with greater intensity, and “we were not prepared to have a discussion to defend ourselves,” he said.

Culpepper, who at the time was director of non-agricultural products at Elanco Products, phoned his counterpart at Ciba-Geigy (now Syngenta). The two agreed to call colleagues at other green industry companies; the group met at the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America meeting that year in Anaheim, Calif. “Not everybody was as passionate or concerned as we were,” but “most had been impacted to some extent and were beginning to ask the question, what do we do as an industry,” recalled Culpepper.

Over the next two years the group hammered out the association’s mission

and structure and formed a partnership with CropLife America (then the National Agricultural Chemicals Association). This let RISE operate as a separate entity but tap existing legal and administrative support functions. The alliance made sense as many manufacturers made active ingredients for both agricultural and specialty product markets. RISE also was fundamentally inclusive: Beside manufacturers, its membership included product formulators and distributors.

With 12 member companies, RISE officially started in 1991, hiring Allen James, its first president, that February. James was charged with building the association, speaking for the industry, and working with other groups like the NPMA, GCSAA and NALP (formerly PLANET) to build an ally base.

Finally, industry people didn't have to "throw somebody else under the bus to take the pressure off of themselves," recalled Dave Morris, a former RISE governing board chair and global business leader for Dow AgroSciences who now leads the company's seeds affiliates business. "We didn't want anybody to be the problem, because that meant there was a problem." RISE "really made sense because you could pool your resources and have a unified voice on an issue," he said.

Preemption Challenges Heat Up.

And it was just in time. On June 21, 1991, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in Wisconsin Public Intervenor v. Mortier that local governments had the power under the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) to regulate pesticides in their own jurisdictions. For decades prior, FIFRA was viewed as preempting state and local regulations. The ruling was a game-changer with the potential for 83,000 local units of government to enact their own pesticide laws.

RISE, along with CropLife America and a host of other organizations, led the initiative to pass state pesticide preemption laws. Within a few years, the coalition had successfully passed laws in 41 states.

"There's probably not much of anything

WHAT IS JAMES UP TO THESE DAYS? A LOT!

Allen James was RISE president through the association's formative years. He retired in 2010 after 20 years. But "retired" is a relative term.



Today James does "a lot of volunteer work." He is president of the North Carolina Agricultural and Life Sciences Research Foundation, which helps North Carolina State University researchers find funding and bring the individual chemicals they have developed to the marketplace. "There's always a challenge of getting products from the bench to commercialization," and the foundation aims to streamline this process, he said. James makes good use of his industry contacts, especially those in Research Triangle Park, N.C., and encourages colleagues to serve on the foundation with him.

James is involved in other volunteer groups at N.C. State, is an alumni advisor for his college fraternity (he once served as national executive director) and travels with his wife. He's also an avid college sports fan, attending as many baseball, basketball and football games as he can. Go Wolfpack!

today that you could write and get enacted into law in 40 states, particularly something that's limiting municipalities' ability to regulate pesticides," said Rosenberg. "It was an enormous accomplishment" and it would be a "very different" industry today without those laws in place, he said.

In the fall of 1991, RISE won a local battle in Missoula, Mont., that secured

its future. The city had proposed a ban on pesticide use for lawn care. It was the association's first chance to "prove we had some value to the industry," recalled James. Through advocacy and media and education campaigns, RISE defeated the referendum.

"That was an early and very important challenge" that had national implications,

MEMBER

↑ RISE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK 2015 - 2020

A five-year plan that gives clarity to RISE members/volunteers/staff and promotes the continued growth of the association.

said James. "Our industry began to believe in what we could do. Membership recruitment became quite easy after that." By year's end, RISE had nearly 100 members, within two years it had well-surpassed the 100-member mark. Today, RISE has 220 member companies — representing 95 percent of the manufacturers, formulators and distributors of specialty pesticides and fertilizers.

"Allen, through his tenure, was able to bring most every industry player into RISE as a member, which I think was a tremendous accomplishment," said Culpepper. "It was a ripe scenario where conflict could have existed but I think Allen's demeanor and the way he approached things and his goal of getting the industry together worked out very well," he said.

RISE brought groups together "across markets, across artificial boundary lines," and "as a result, the industry has gotten stronger," said James, who retired in October 2010 after 20 years leading the association. Aaron Hobbs, current RISE president, joined the organization in 2009.

Over the years, RISE became a respected voice of the industry, working closely with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture and other federal agencies, as well as state and local regulatory bodies. James and Rosenberg even testified together before Congress. "We were successful in that no negative legislation has ever really passed Congress during the 25 years that RISE has existed, that I'm aware of, that would have restricted the development of these products," said James.

Adding Capabilities. RISE upped its game in 2008 when it made the strategic shift to be more proactive. "You have to realize you're moving an entire organization with a variety of member companies and a variety of perspectives, and this was going to cost money," recalled Joshua Weeks, the RISE governing board chair who worked with James to develop the plan and led the two-year transition.

Following significant research, testing

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AUDIENCE OUR FOCUS

- RISE member companies
- Federal, state and local public policy makers
- Regulatory agencies

and assessments, members were presented the findings and individually told at the association's annual meeting how adding the new capability would raise their dues. "It's not often people vote themselves a dues increase, but that's what they did," recalled Weeks, an industry consultant who then led Bayer CropScience's North American professional products division.

"For me, it was a moment," he said. "It was an overwhelming kind of support and a validation of what RISE means to the people who understand it and participate in it. They voted with their wallets. It was sort of a turning point in the organization," Weeks explained.

Led by RISE Public Affairs Vice President Karen Reardon, the proactive component "has been a huge success" and complements the "very good traditional advocacy work that goes on at RISE," said Weeks.

What's happened over the last decade

is "pretty dramatic," added Dan Stahl, current governing board chair of RISE and vice president of marketing and business development at OHP Inc. Through focus groups, RISE learned that talk of LD₅₀s and scientific studies "wasn't resonating with the general public," he said. It became clear that the public recognized the value of the industry but RISE had to communicate this value differently. "That was a huge shift," he said.

Bringing "the conversation down to a personal level" like how pesticides control ants in the kitchen and help prevent Lyme disease, has had a big impact, said Culpepper. So has building grassroots support and using social media.

RISE is aiming high for the next 25 years. "We have in place an organization that can deal with issues as well as improve the industry, itself," said Culpepper. ●●○

RISE MEMBERS

2015

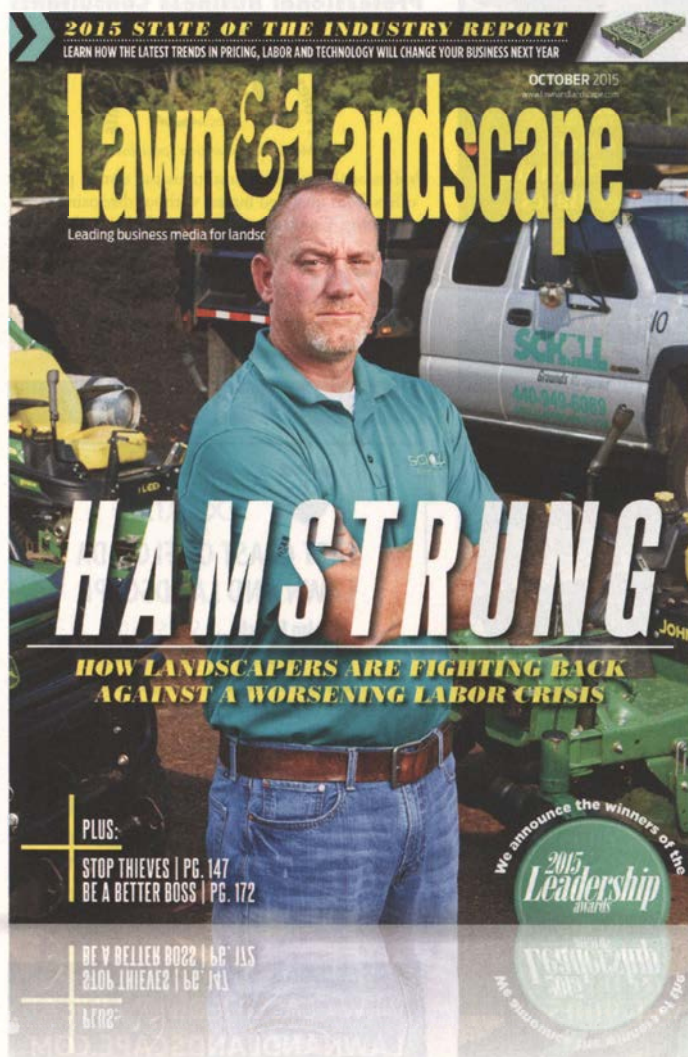
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LETTERS to the EDITOR

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 **Chuck Bowen** at 216-393-0227 or cbowen@gie.net.

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BRIAN LEMMERMANN

// OWNER, SOMERSET LANDSCAPE & MAINTENANCE

Landscaping was kind of a way to pay for college.

I was playing football at a community college.

Then when I was going

to transition from the community college to

a full, four-year school

— there was a chance of getting a scholarship

in Nevada. I'm a real

numbers guy, and I ran the numbers on how many hours you had to practice and

how much the scholarship was worth, and I realized it was about \$2.50 an hour. I decided

I was going to do something else.

Our first expansion was from Phoenix to

Dallas. We thought we were actually buying a small company in Dallas. We started winning contracts out there with a 60- or a 90-day start, and the deal fell through. The week it

LOCATION

Chandler, Ariz.

TOP 100 RANKING

58

2014 REVENUE

\$25.6 million

was supposed to close, the guy wanted to be a teacher, and didn't realize until we were about to close that he needed a teaching license to be a teacher.

We said, "OK, we already signed up to do this contract," so we just

sent some people out with some equipment, and we moved them out to Texas, and we finally got started. Once you start doing the work, it's hard to focus on sales because we have a budget for the company, and the majority of the focus is getting put on getting work done. You're not established, so people don't know who you are. We were passed over on some jobs because they just said we didn't have the experience rating over there.

I think one big thing that we're dealing with, and the whole industry's going to deal with — or is dealing with — is labor. The labor market is pretty difficult right now. There's construction coming back. There are a lot of high-paying, low-skill jobs out there right now, and so we spend a lot of time training guys.

We had a guy that was working for us. He worked for probably a week. He was really not a good worker, not good at all, but we were paying him probably more than we should have because we needed guys at the time. He didn't show up the next Monday. On my way home from work, I saw him holding a stop sign at a construction site. And I said, "Hey, what are you doing?" He said, "They're paying me \$15 an hour to turn the sign back and forth, from go to stop." I said, "Good for you, man. I don't know what to say. I can't pay you \$15 an hour to do that."

If we did an acquisition that would make a revenue jump — there's been a couple times in the past, as we were growing from \$3 million to \$5 million or \$6 million to \$9 million in a year, that we had to catch our breath. We were really a cash-based company. If we were buying equipment, we didn't finance it. I know that's not the typical way, but that's just how I was always comfortable growing.

Then I met with the bank, and I said, "I'd like to look at doing a loan on equipment going forward." And they said, "Well, we don't like your finances because you don't cash flow as much." And I said, "I don't have any debt." And they said, "Well, we would rather you have debt and cash flow more money than have no debt and not show big profits." I said, "OK, well, that doesn't make a lot of sense, but OK."

I've changed my outlook. I understand more what they're looking for and why they're looking for that, and we've made a transition into more of a long-term financing and banking relationship. **L&L**

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