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DECEMBER 2016
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COVER STORY

OWN IT

HOW YELLOWSTONE LANDSCAPE COMBINED SOLID SOUTHERN BRANDS AND THEIR OWNERS INTO ONE THRIVING COMPANY | 36

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"You have to be really in touch with leaders that are reporting to you in your organization."

DID YOU KNOW?

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ONLINE CONTENTS

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



IN FIGHTING SHAPE

The most important part of any successful business is the equipment it uses to operate. Learn how to build a fight-ready fleet that meets all of your winter needs.

EQUIPMENT FAILURE CAN LEAD to catastrophic results for your bottom line. The secret is simple: Be prepared by standardizing your fleet.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS. Think of your local dealerships as strategic partners in the endeavor to acquire equipment. Before purchasing ask yourself: Does the manufacturer of the equipment I am purchasing have replacement parts available locally? Do they sell and repair these parts locally? Do they have the ability to respond to my needs?

The best piece of equipment is only the best if you have a local dealer with a responsive service department that stocks all the parts you'll need. This partner must also have flexible hours to assist with recovery when unexpected breakdowns occur during snow and ice events.

Always do your due diligence in this area and nurture these relationships. Keeping close ties and current accounts

with your local dealership will ensure a quick response when you need it.

BUY OR TO LEASE? Never assume you have to own all of your equipment outright to be successful through the season. In fact, I recommend leasing any piece of equipment that will be used less than 200 hours per season. It's been my experience, in considering the cost of leasing and the cost of acquisition in an overhead recovery model, it's cheaper to lease equipment as it keeps your overhead recovery rate lower.

When making this decision, it is important to consider cash flow and tax implications for the year. Leasing allows you the option to buy the equipment at the end of the lease term. Leasing usually has lower monthly payments, which will increase cash flow and allow for newer equipment still under warranty.

Read the full story at bit.ly/winterfleet.



THE 2016 SOI REPORT

Every year, Lawn & Landscape releases its State of the Industry report, highlighting trends and the financial health of the industry. This year's report was included in our October issue, and featured five stories looking at industry data, the industry's steady growth, the new overtime rule, hiring challenges and upcoming pesticide bans.

Head over to bit.ly/2016LLSOI to download a copy of the full report.

GIE+EXPO? WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED

IF YOU MISSED OUR COVERAGE OF THIS YEAR'S GIE+EXPO in Louisville, Kentucky, don't worry. Head over to bit.ly/GIEEXPOcover to check out all of the educational sessions, new products and important information we reported on from the show floor. You can also turn to page 54 for some of our coverage.

New this year, we highlighted a few speakers and events via video. Wondering what industry trends people saw for 2016? Curious to hear what the Leadership Award winners had to say? Visit bit.ly/L-videos to see the three videos. Whether you attended the show, or just want to see what it looked like, these videos will give you an inside look.

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EDITOR'S INSIGHT

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

In memoriam

You never met Helen Duerr, but you've held her work in your hands. She was production director for *Lawn & Landscape* and the dozens of other titles that GIE Media publishes.

That means she made sure all the stories that we wrote and designed, and all the ads our sales team sold, made it safely down to the printing press in Kentucky in the right order, and then got mailed out to our thousands of subscribers all over the country.

Beyond that, Helen was a great editor. Each month, we'd give her a stack of print-outs for her to send to the press, and go back to our desks feeling pretty proud of ourselves. Then, about five minutes later, she would bring down one of those pages (usually my column) and point out that I'd missed a misspelled word, or I'd written something that didn't make sense.

She was curious about all our markets (she did this with the other editors, too) and cared enough about each magazine to give it one more close read.

Helen had worked for GIE for 28 years, and was one of the first people hired into



Helen **DUERR**

the company. Since she started in 1987, GIE has moved offices, embraced digital publishing and grown to more than 100 employees. On a masthead that has shifted greatly in my decade at this company, Helen was a constant.

Helen died last month. She was 56. She and her husband, Mick, were hit by a car going the wrong way on the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

We write a lot about profits and growth and ambition and all that. But this month, I want to instead recommend that you stop for just a minute and tell those who are important to you that you care about them.

At the close of the year, we step back and think about the past 12 months, and about what has changed. We think about the happy times, and think also about those we've lost.

This life can be unfair. It can be short. It can be confusing. The good ones seem to be taken from us far too soon.

I won't pretend to say that I understand any of it. I don't have any insight into why these things happen. That's far beyond my pay grade. But I know that we're not here



On a masthead that has shifted greatly in my decade at this company, Helen was a constant.

long — some of us shorter than others. And I also know it's important to spend that time helping one another, and letting those who are important to us know.

Helen, we'll miss you. — *Chuck Bowen*

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2016 Leadership class honored

Lawn & Landscape recognized the inductees for their contributions to the industry.

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – Lawn & Landscape welcomed four industry leaders to its 2016 Leadership Awards class.

The Lawn & Landscape Leadership Awards, sponsored exclusively by Syngenta, are given annually to business owners, educators and others allied to the green industry who have gone above and beyond in their dedication to their field.

The awards were presented in late October at the Ice House in Louisville, Kentucky.

"This industry and profession would not be successful without leaders like those we honored last night," said Stephanie Schwenke, turf market manager at Syngenta.

"They set a great example for the rest of us to continue to strive

for excellence in our work. Syngenta is proud to partner with Lawn & Landscape to honor these industry leaders and their impact on the lawn and landscape profession."

This year's winners are:

- **Paul Fields, Lambert's Landscape**
- **Zachary Johnson, Colorado State University**
- **Larry Ryan, Ryan Lawn & Tree**
- **Larry Wilson, Lawrence Landscape Design**

"We are so lucky to share the stories of this year's Leadership Award winners," said Lawn & Landscape Editor and Associate Publisher Chuck Bowen. "They are living examples of what makes the landscape industry great."

ABOVE (from left): Leadership Award winners Larry Wilson, Zachary Johnson, Paul Fields, Stephanie Schwenke, turf market manager at Syngenta, Larry Ryan and Chuck Bowen, editor and associate publisher of L&L, pose following the awards ceremony, held in Louisville, Kentucky, in October.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Vehicle inspection, driver training and installation ratios

Q: Our admin just asked me a question about the daily vehicle inspection reports. We currently fill out a single form for each vehicle for each day that it is used. It appears these forms are really stacking up. How long are we required to store these forms? Is there a DOT or OSHA requirement?

A: Depending on the size of the vehicle (I would assume commercial trucks), you may need to comply with both federal and/or state department of transportation requirements.

If your firm does not have larger commercial trucks, then

you would not need to be concerned with the Federal Motor Carrier regulations. These refer to large trucks like over-the-road semis used in interstate commerce. I worked for a landscape firm many years ago that owned three large tractor-plus-trailer rigs that hauled sod and ornamental plants from state to state and obviously had to comply with interstate regulations from the feds. These regulations have become more stringent with time and inspection reports must be filed and maintained for up to 12 months.

However, if your firm's



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commercial vehicles are trucks like stake-body or pick-up truck types, and your drivers are required to fill out daily inspection reports, the consensus appears to be to maintain the reports for six months. The final say would obviously come from your state DOT, so you may want to forward an online question on record maintenance to their website.

Sam Steel
NALP Safety Advisor

Q: Would you be able to help me find any available information on driver training and driver safety? I am working on revamping our driver training to make it more systematized and thorough with specific requirements that each new driver must complete before being authorized to drive a company vehicle (e.g. drug test and DOT card, drive with a supervisor on the road for a total of 24 hours, back the truck and trailer into a parking spot, complete a circle check, etc.) A guideline would be helpful.

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A: One option for you and the firm would be to check with the National Safety Council on their defensive driving programs.

There are various programs customized to the type of vehicle fleet your business utilizes.

The National Safety Council's website (bit.ly/defensedrive) should have a complete description of the various programs and a listing of available trainers in your region.

Your approach with ride time of 24 hours minimum with a supervisor is a very good idea as long as the supervisor is well trained, perhaps the driver training supervisors could be enrolled in a formal driver training program and then provide the ride time supervision of new drivers for the firm.

Some regions are high-traffic areas and vehicle fleets use interstates and a multitude of congested highways to reach jobsites. Please keep in mind that your drivers (and crew members) may be parking along roadways where they need to be visible to passing vehicles. Under these conditions, I would suggest training on safety vests and traffic cones to clearly mark and identify the work areas where your employees are present. OSHA has recommendations on their website about this topic.

And if your firm performs snow removal during the winter months, you should consider specialized training for your plow, sanding and salting vehicles.

Sam Steel
NALP Safety Advisor

Q: Where can I find industry installation ratios? I am looking for ratios for how long it would take to install a tree of certain dimension.

A: Production numbers are very important to track. I recommend tracking all jobs with actual hours vs. budgeted hours. Then after each job, determine if your hours were on target or not and why. Was it bid too low? Did you run into rock underground? There are so many variables that change from job to job. You will then want to get an average of the actuals for each task for future bidding.

The Illinois Landscape Contractors Association used to offer a book full of installation cost studies with production numbers. Also, look into Frank Ross's book, "Pricing for the Green Industry." This will help you make sure you know your cost of doing business and what to charge and why. The book is available on the NALP website.

It isn't always easy to find industry data, so tracking your own is a good start. You can also ask other companies that you network with, peer groups or other places.

Adam Linnemann, Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping, NALP Trailblazer

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

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BRIGHTVIEW NAMES NEW PRESIDENT AND CEO

PLYMOUTH MEETING, Pa. – BrightView Landscapes named Andrew Masterman president and CEO of the company.

Masterman, who will also join the company's board of directors, succeeds Pat Velasco, who served as interim CEO since July when Andrew Kerin resigned. Velasco will remain on BrightView's board of directors.

"On behalf of the board, we are pleased to welcome Andrew to the team," said Paul E.

Raether, chairman of the board of directors. "He has a proven track record of delivering strong operational results and we feel strongly that he will continue that record of leadership at BrightView."

Masterman said, "I am thrilled to join the team at BrightView. This is a tremendous opportunity to work with a passionate



Andrew MASTERMAN

and talented team to grow the premier commercial landscaping company by continuing to deliver best-in-class landscape services across the nation to our valued clients."

Masterman is joining BrightView after serving as executive vice president at Precision Castparts, a Berkshire Hathaway company that spe-

cializes in manufacturing structural investment castings, forged components and airfoil castings for aircraft engines and industrial gas turbines. At Precision Castparts, Masterman served as president of the Wyman Gordon and Structural Casting segments, two segments within the Investment Cast Products and Forged Products segments.

Masterman will be working out of BrightView's Plymouth Meeting location.



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KICHLER

CLEVELAND – For families of deployed military personnel and post-9/11 veterans with a service-connected disability, clearing driveways and sidewalks of snow and ice can be a real challenge.

To overcome that challenge, Project EverGreen, in partnership with BOSS Snowplow, established the SnowCare for Troops initiative in 2010 to provide complimentary snow and ice removal services to these deserving individuals who are our nation's heroes.

From Nov. 13 to 20, Project EverGreen recognized National SnowCare for Troops Awareness Week to raise the profile of the program and spotlight the efforts of the initiative's volunteers, military families and the wounded and disabled veterans it serves.

Now in its seventh year, SnowCare for Troops has seen more than 5,000 military families and 1,500 snow removal contractor volunteers across the country registered to either receive or provide services.

"SnowCare for Troops provides military families with peace of mind and lifts a significant burden from their plate," said Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen.

"We're very grateful for the commitment of our dedicated volunteers and the continued support from BOSS Snowplow. The leadership they have demonstrated in support of military families goes above and beyond the call of duty."

More volunteers are always needed for SnowCare for Troops.

In particular, Fort Drum, New York, and Groton, Connecticut, are two high-demand service areas.

Snow removal contractors, able-bodied veterans or anyone with a shovel are encouraged to volunteer.

Visit ProjectEverGreen.org for more information on how to volunteer or sign up for Project EverGreen's SnowCare for Troops.

SITEONE ACQUIRES KANSAS CITY NURSERY BUSINESS

ROSWELL, Ga. – SiteOne Landscape Supply has announced the acquisition of the distribution business of Loma Vista Nursery.

Loma Vista has two distribution locations in the Kansas City area and distributes nursery and hardscape products to landscape professionals.

The acquisition provides SiteOne with its first nursery locations in the area.

“Loma Vista is a strong leader in the market and their nursery and hardscape business is a perfect complement to our existing business in agronomics, irrigation and outdoor lighting,” said Doug Black, CEO of SiteOne Landscape Supply.

“Joining forces with the Loma Vista team allows us to continue to expand our reach in the Kansas City area to better serve our customers with a full suite of product offerings.”

LANDOPT APPOINTS NEW PRESIDENT

PITTSBURGH – LandOpt has appointed Don Evans as its new president.

Evans holds a bachelor's degree in international affairs/economics from George Washington University and a Juris Doctorate from the University of Virginia.

While he began his business life as a corporate lawyer, Evans has spent most his career in customer-facing and solutions-focused roles.

According to a press release, Evans “looks forward to learning more about the challenges of landscape contracting and finding pragmatic and effective solutions to serve each member of the LandOpt network.”

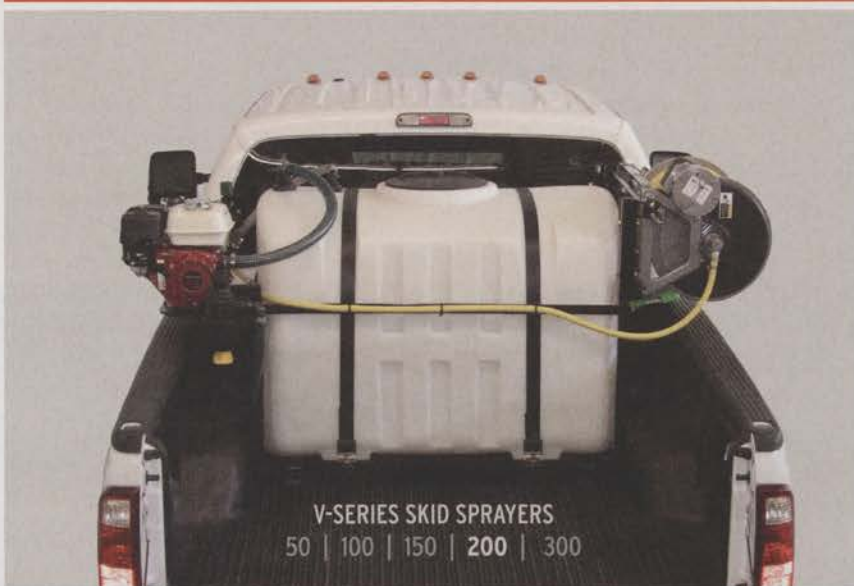


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L&L ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF THE 2017 TURNAROUND TOUR

CLEVELAND – Lawn & Landscape magazine and the Harvest Group have chosen three winners of the inaugural Turnaround Tour.

“Bill and I have been coaching landscape business owners for 15 years and we can’t wait to get started helping these three companies,” said Head Harvester Ed Laflamme. “These folks are talented and driven and ambitious. We just need to help them focus and make some



adjustments, and they’ll be able to really harvest their potential.”

A panel of experts sorted through nearly 50 applications and conducted several rounds

of interviews to choose the three winners of the program.

“We’ll work closely with all three companies throughout the year, touring their facilities, regular phone calls and help them develop what we call a Playbook,” says Head Harvester Bill Arman. “At the end of the next 12 months, if they follow our advice, they’ll see healthy growth and a true change in their operations.”

The winners are:

- Jeremy and Heather Dirksen of Freedom Lawn & Landscapes in Piedmont, Oklahoma
- William Gruccio, Michael D’Orazio and Jordan Gartner of Vineland Landscaping in Vineland, New Jersey
- Ira and Deborah Wade, of Wade’s Lawn Service in Goodlettsville, Tennessee

The three winning companies will receive a year’s worth of consulting, including onsite

A close-up photograph of a Kubota engine. A white oil can with the Kubota logo is tilted, pouring oil into the engine. A black oil bottle is also visible in the foreground. The background is dark and out of focus.

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KICHLER

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visits, phone calls and a customized plan for operations, growth and profitability from the Harvest Group, a \$25,000 value. The entire process will be chronicled by Lawn & Landscape starting with the February 2017 issue.

The Harvest Group also decided to give everyone who entered three months of free access to their Harvest Academy program.

"We had a tremendous response to our

inaugural Turnaround Tour program. Nearly 50 companies from across the country applied, and all of them had a great story. It was difficult to choose just three," says Chuck Bowen, editor and associate publisher of Lawn & Landscape. "But I can't wait to share their stories and how they work to overcome the challenges they're facing. It will really help a lot of our readers."

HEATING UP FOR 2017

There were a few engine-related news items at the GIE+EXPO in late October. For more news from the industry's largest trade show, turn to page 54.

Briggs & Stratton

After four years of development, Briggs & Stratton is releasing a new oil system that reduces downtime and maintenance costs. Initially, the new technology will be available on Ferris mowers.

The oil tank is further from the engine to keep it cooler and it's larger at a 6-quart capacity. "So you've got more oil doing less work," said Jim Cross, commercial marketing manager.

The system keeps oil 6 to 18 degrees cooler than traditional systems, which reduces thermal breakdown. It features a dry sump engine, meaning the oil isn't maintained in the cylinder, but instead in a separate reservoir. So, 1 quart of oil remains in the engine with 5 in the reservoir rather than the typical 2 or 2.5 quarts in the engine. This increases the life of the oil, said Ben Miller, product manager.

The cap and the dipstick are located at the top of the system, making them easily accessible for faster oil changes. There are three configurations in two engines: the Vanguard Big Block and the Vanguard 810 EFI.

"We wanted to extend oil change intervals from 100 to 500 hours. Why 500 hours? That's a typical cutting season," Cross said.



Cross said that means a 60 percent net cost savings, not including the money owners will save with less downtime and more time for mowers to be at work.

The tool-less oil change design means oil can be drained in less than five minutes.

Kawasaki

Kawasaki's new 29.5-horsepower FX850V-EFI engine is the latest member of its engines division, using the most technologically advanced EFI system ever built by the company. It incorporates a fully integrated electronic governor (e-Gov) and an advanced ECU that instantly matches power to cutting load and ground speed.

Developed specifically with the commercial market in mind, the Kawasaki EFI system is available on select models of FX Series and FS Series engines, with plans to incorporate it in additional models. The FX850V-EFI joins two other units that currently employ the EFI system: FX730V-EFI, and FS730V-EFI.

Helping to avoid typical hillside mowing slowdowns, the load-matching e-Gov system keeps drive wheels and cutting blades working at peak productivity.

The EFI is matched by a PC or tablet plug-in diagnostic system for troubleshooting and service, and helps minimize downtime. The EFI engines feature SAE Certified Critical Power, ensuring that engines deliver a minimum of 98 percent of rated horsepower for the needed productivity commercial users can count on.



Tillotson

Tillotson, a carburetor manufacturer, introduced its first lawn mower engines: the Diamond Standard Vertical engines. The engines are powered by the Tillotson TCT fuel system, which can reduce emissions by up to 40 percent.

“The Tillotson name and reputation has been a powerhouse in the lawn and garden industry for more than 100 years. Now we’ve taken all of our engineering expertise and a century of industry knowledge to create one of the most powerful lawn mower engines in this space,” said Tillotson President Charles Demirjian. “Our design provides more power and torque along with greater stability and lower emissions.

Tillotson is introducing three engine sizes to the U.S. market: 140cc, 173cc and 196cc. All of the engines feature Tillotson’s new TCT fuel system technology, that is designed to provide more power and more torque under heavy loads.

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VERIZON COMPLETES ACQUISITION OF FLEETMATICS

NEW YORK – Verizon Communications completed its \$2.4 billion acquisition of Fleetmatics Group PLC for \$60.00 per share in cash.

As a result, Fleetmatics shares will no longer be traded on the New York Stock Exchange.

As a Verizon company, Fleetmatics, headquartered in Dublin, Ireland, with North American headquarters in Waltham, Massachusetts, is now part of the Verizon Telematics business.

“We are very excited to join Verizon. Together, we’ll accelerate global market leadership, and empower more business with mobile workforces to find new ways to grow, get more done and delight their customers.”

Jim Travers, Fleetmatics CEO

Fleetmatics brings to Verizon more than 42,000 customers, approximately 826,000 subscribers, a broad portfolio of industry products, and a team of 1,200 employees that serve

businesses that deploy mobile workforces.

The transaction was first announced on August 1.

“We are very excited to join Verizon,” said Jim Travers, Fleetmatics CEO and chairman of the board.

“Together, we’ll accelerate global market leadership, and empower more businesses with mobile workforces to find new ways to grow, get more done, and delight their customers.” L&L

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



THE BUSINESS OF DECISION MAKING

ON ANY GIVEN DAY, we're all faced with a slew of decisions to make. Some of them are relatively easy, like choosing where we're going to order lunch from. Others are much more difficult, their consequences much more serious for our businesses. These are the ones that can make or break us. This month I want to share with you the wisdom two of my mentors have shared with me about decision-making.

Clay Mathile took the lams pet food company from \$500,000 a year in sales to \$1 billion before selling it to Procter & Gamble for \$2.3 billion in 1999. Today Clay is chair of Aileron, a non-profit organization he founded to help small business owners succeed. Painted on the walls of Aileron, you'll find Clay's philosophy for decision-making summed up in this quote: "Never make a decision before you have to." For Clay, it's practically a mantra.

What does it mean? It means



ONLINE: You can now view Marty's video series "60 Seconds for Success," where Marty will give you quick tips on how to better run your business. Download the Layar app, then use your mobile device to scan this page. The video will then play on your mobile device. This month, Marty show you how his company stays organized.



never rush into a significant decision. Plan. Weigh all your options. Leave time and room for changing your

mind while you still can. With more time and more room come more information, better information, better data. Let's take the purchasing of equipment. Deciding what to buy and when is crucial – and costly – for a landscaping business.

Now the smart landscaping company assesses its needs and has a plan in place for what it will purchase in the year ahead and when. That way when the U.S. government suddenly announces in the last week of December that it will allow small businesses to take the Section 179 tax deduction, you're not left to make split-second decisions like many were last year. Some companies I know had no real plan in place, or ignored the one they did have, and rushed out to buy big-ticket items they didn't need.

At Grunder Landscaping Co., we had no plan to purchase any more equipment in 2015. When the announcement was made in December, we took another look at

our plan and decided to stick with it. That was the right decision for us, right when we needed to make it, and today I'm not the indebted owner of a \$100,000 piece of equipment I don't need.

Another great piece of advice on the business of decision-making comes from Nido Quebein, an accomplished entrepreneur and president of High Point University in North Carolina where he oversees some 300 faculty members and 4,500 students. Nido says every significant decision has three outcome scenarios: the best case, the worst case and the most likely to happen.

Spend the least time thinking about the best case. Why? Because we can pretty much all handle the best outcome, right? If I buy a \$100,000 piece of equipment and it doubles my profits, I can handle that. It's also very unlikely to happen.

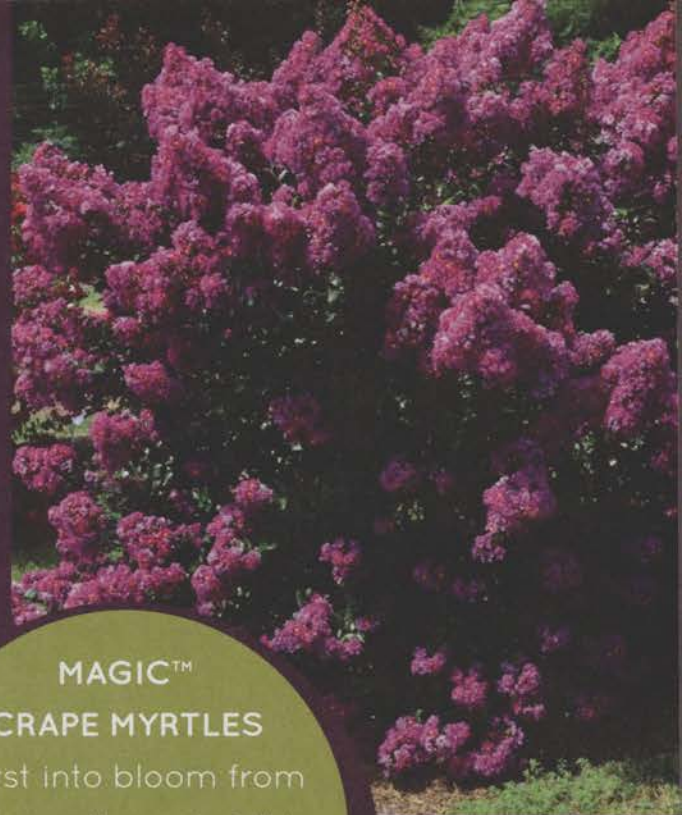
Instead, I spend my time carefully considering the worst-case and most-likely-to-happen scenarios. The worst case can very well put you right out of business. The Wall Street Journal is filled every day with companies closing or struggling mightily to stay afloat after a bad decision.

Don't let this be you. Before you make a major decision, consider the worst that could happen. Weigh the potential risks against the potential benefits; which way do the scales tip? Consider the most likely outcome and see if you come out ahead. Think about the opportunity costs. What might you be losing out on? Scenario-planning like this has helped me over and over again to minimize risk and limit my financial exposure, and it can do the same for you.

So, the next time you're faced with a big decision to make, remember Clay's and Nido's advice. **L&L**

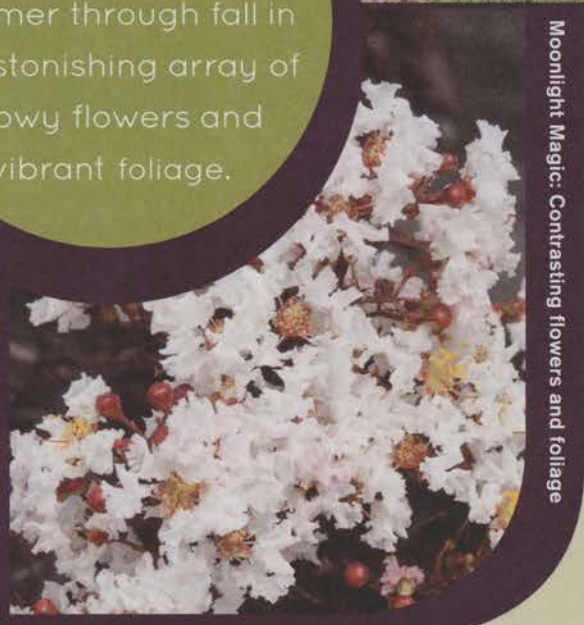


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TRAVELS WITH JIM



GROWTH THROUGH CORPORATE DNA

IN THE LAST ISSUE, I discussed the D.A.D. (delegate and disappear) principle and the first three of five levels that a green industry entrepreneur passes through on the way to achieving \$5 million in annual revenue. Now, I'll explain the fourth and fifth levels.

HOW IT WORKS. A client doing \$2.5 to \$3 million a year had trouble growing his company beyond that level. Part of his problem was intellectual. He didn't understand the systems and the team members that needed to be in place to propel him and his company to the next level. However, some of his challenge was his corporate DNA, so to speak.

My client was similar to someone like Babe Ruth who was a great

baseball player but could never evolve into being a great manager. The combination of all that he was (his corporate DNA) lacked something that would not allow him to reach the next level in his career.

Figuring out the right intellectual combination is the easy part. It's changing one's corporate DNA that presents the biggest challenge. Fortunately, changing one's corporate DNA is not impossible.

THE FOURTH LEVEL. For an entrepreneur to get from the third to the fourth level (approximately \$1 to \$3.5 million) you need strong divisional managers. You also need financials broken down to the division level for direct costs (materials, field labor, labor burden,

equipment, rental equipment and subcontractor costs). This provides the division manager and the CEO with a report card for that division. It's at the fourth level that you might hire a general manager and/or an operations manager.

THE FIFTH LEVEL. To reach the fifth level (\$3.5 to \$5 million-plus), an entrepreneur needs to make a very important hire: the controller. You could also call this position that of a chief financial officer or a comptroller. This person is much more than just an accountant or a bookkeeper.

Often this person is a certified public accountant, and has to be very organized, excellent with numbers and able to manage the accounting system and a staff.

This position quite often oversees all of the information technology and human resource functions of the company. It's very important that this person not be a static thinker.

Static thinkers tend to put the business, its people and its functions into a straightjacket of sorts. Because they cannot adapt and keep up with

the fluid demands of the enterprise, they often compensate by placing unrealistic demands upon others.

In addition, the person holding this position should be able to master the company's accounting system to provide the data and reports needed by the division managers. These reports should be produced on a timely and accurate basis.

CONCLUSION. In order for an entrepreneur to build his or her company beyond the \$1-million mark, he or she needs to transition from being very hands-on to building a team of high-performance division managers who handle all of the details.

However, the entrepreneur needs to ensure that these division managers have the right scoreboards (report cards) that provide accurate and timely performance information.

This is where my client mentioned earlier went wrong. He had weak division managers and an information system that did not provide timely accurate feedback.

Finally, in regards to the direct operational needs of the company is the need to hire a controller. The primary responsibility of the person filling this position is to provide timely, accurate feedback (scoreboards and report cards) to division managers and owners.

They need to be able to slice and dice all of the data (in other words; bend, spindle and mutilate the bureaucracy) in the company and condense it into meaningful reports for everyone.

Peter Drucker frames it best, I think, in his timeless best seller, "The Effective Executive." The purpose of managers is to ensure that things get done right. The purpose of leaders is to ensure that the right things get done. It's all about perspective. **L&L**

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BY JUAN TORRES

HIRE POWER is a monthly column designed to help you recruit, hire and retain the best talent for your company. We've got a rotating panel of columnists ready to give you practical, tactical advice on solving your labor problems. Email Chuck Bowen at cbowen@gie.net with topic ideas.

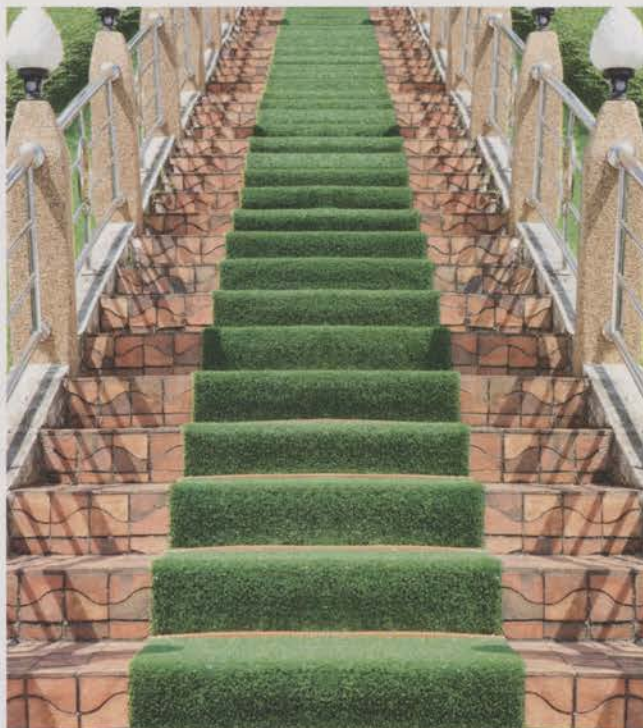
IN ANY INDUSTRY, the potential for upward mobility keeps us driven and enthusiastic about performing our tasks to our best abilities. We are more willing to put in extra effort if we feel appreciated and respected. This is a mutual feeling across society, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, creed, etc.

In an industry such as ours, where there is a vast Hispanic workforce, there tend to exist strong cultural and linguistic barriers that can keep us from being able to offer some of our best talent opportunities to climb the ladder. By fostering relationships with site workers that encourage a productive and positive work environment, we can help our businesses build a strong core team that consistently delivers quality results.

In many cases, a Spanish-speaking workforce creates demand for Spanish-speaking supervisors who can better communicate, train and retain those laborers with the same cultural and linguistic background, increasing profitability and decreasing turnover.

In order for Hispanic talent to take on higher roles and added responsibilities, they need the right tools and resources to learn new skills and prepare for their next big step.

JOIN ASSOCIATIONS. Hispanic laborers are willing and looking to learn but may not know where to begin. Associations such as the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance focus on educating Hispanic Americans in the industry and growing leadership. They often provide materials in Spanish for members and offer networking opportunities with other more experienced members who can share tips for betterment, set an example and prove that growth is attainable.



DEVELOPING YOUR LATINO LEADERSHIP

TRAINING PROGRAMS. There are great training programs and workshops available, even some specifically tailored to capacitating the Hispanic workforce. Train the Trainer is an example of a program that focuses on the development of the Latino workforce, led by Ellen Ely who is a nationally recognized leader in this space. Another useful resource is 7 of 7 Best Business and Life Strategies, a guiding hand on the processes for managing a successful business.

MENTORSHIP. Bring in other successful Latino leaders and owners. Along your own path, having mentors served as an inspiration. Listening to successful individuals share personal trajectories and development processes is encouraging.

LANGUAGE COURSES. Offering staff the opportunity and an incentive to learn English more proficiently allows them to more effectively communicate with other supervisors, administration and clients. Lo-

cal colleges offer Spanish-language courses for non-English speakers. High schools also offer English as a Second Language courses for adults, many free of charge. You can also provide resources in house.

LICENSING EXAMINATIONS. Encourage your laborers to become certified in specific skills. Sometimes what prevents Spanish-speaking laborers from becoming certified is the linguistic barrier itself and a lack of understanding of the test-taking process. In some states, local organizations and universities have partnered to create Spanish prep courses for certification exams.

ATTEND CONFERENCES. There are a great deal of Latino conferences throughout the country that are highly recommended.

- Association of Latino Professionals for America offers 400 combined events a year focusing on future Latino leaders.
- Associations such as the National Association of Landscape Professionals offer great industry resources and value.
- United Way's Latino Leadership program provides Latinos the opportunity to enhance their professional and personal skills as business and community leaders.

ON A FINAL NOTE. The most important thing to consider is to offer yourselves as resources. As someone with experience and stature, make sure that you are personable and make yourself relatable to your workforce. Maintain a welcoming atmosphere and consider your colleagues and staff a family. Make your business a place where your employees look forward to being and feel appreciated. **L&L**

I drive a pickup to work, not a hybrid.

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

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



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Partners Paul Fraynd, left, and Hugh Morten merged companies in 2012 to become Sun Valley Landscaping.



SET IN STONE

Sun Valley Landscaping focuses on design/build, but the company has its roots in a stone yard.

By Katie Tuttle



ALL HARDSCAPE COMPANIES START SOMEWHERE, and for Sun Valley Landscaping, it was a stone yard.

Hugh Morten and his late partner, Don Schrack, met in 1994 when Morten went to an empty lot to dump grass clippings and found Schrack sitting in a construction trailer with 50 pine tree seedlings and 20 perennials in pots, ready to sell.



Sun Valley's average job is \$8,000 to \$10,000, but the company doesn't have a minimum.

“Hugh asked Don what he was doing and Don said, ‘I’m not really sure yet,’” says Paul Fraynd, CEO and partner of the company. When a job of Morten’s didn’t work out 10 months later, he went back to the trailer, found Schrack, and the two got together to sell natural stone to landscape suppliers on the same lot where they met.

Eventually, the operation grew to include two installation crews and in 2012, Fraynd’s maintenance company merged with Morten’s to become Sun Valley.

The reason for the merger was a shared passion for the industry. Fraynd and Morten had known each other for 10 years before combining companies. Sun Valley was a supplier of Fraynd’s company, and Fraynd remembers his first trip to the supply yard vividly. “I was young and didn’t know much,” he says.

He stopped in to buy soil and Morten came out to ask what he was working on. “We started to talk and, next thing I knew, Hugh spent 20 minutes with me, teaching me how to estimate jobs, how to do the work properly and how to manage my newfound employees. He was a great mentor and spent so much time to teach me how to do things right.”

The two stayed close, with Morten acting as a snow subcontractor for Fraynd’s accounts.

“He was my best contractor. He had my trust and always did what he said he would do,” Fraynd says. “When Hugh asked me if I would consider joining forces a few years later, I knew it would be a great partnership.

“We had some big goals about creating a very unique company

that people could thrive in as far as our employees go, but it could be considered something special in Omaha,” Fraynd says. “The nice thing is it worked. We’ve doubled in size and now we’re like a full-service company.”

BUMPY ROAD. Unfortunately, the merger didn’t go as smoothly as they thought it would. “We didn’t know where the guys were going to park. They all had different T-shirts,” Fraynd says. “We were two different companies that shared one roof, so we had to rebrand it to something that was new.”

To do this, the entire company sat down and finished the statement “In 12 years, this is what the company’s going to look like ...” They wrote a magazine article from the future, describing the company and filling in that blank.

The article, along with funny team photos and other memorabilia from that year, were put in a time capsule that the team buried in the employee garden. Fraynd describes it as a bonding experience for the group. The plan is to dig up the capsule in 2024 and hope that the magazine article is relevant to how much the company has grown.

“Now it’s kind of like a battle cry,” he says. “It’s this shared goal that we all work after, so we refer to it often.”

BABY STEPS. In an attempt to prevent being overenthusiastic and falling short, smaller goals are set each year with the eventual goal being the end result.

“One of our big strengths is we dream big, but we also have a good strategic process,” Fraynd says. “Every year is different because you make strides each

year. We’ve made it a process of continual improvement.”

He says this plan is important because it’s easy to feel like you’re not going anywhere, but if you sit back and look at where you were a year ago, you’re able to recognize the steps you’ve taken.

“I think a lot of that comes from this big far-off dream,” he says. “It’s one thing to have annual goals, but it’s nice to have somewhere you want to go in 10 years that seems almost impossible, but it keeps motivating you every day.”

BUILDING FRESH. Prior to that day in 1995 when he approached Schrack, Morten had been working for a large local competitor. He was a landscape architect fresh out of college and after a year, he decided the company wasn’t for him. He wanted to be in charge of his own company.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF SUN VALLEY LANDSCAPING

SUPPLY YARD

Seventeen years later, Fraynd signed on.

"He'd kind of gotten to the max of what he could do," he says. "So that's why he wanted me to come along and make it into something bigger."

The company now has five crews and a lot of the work they do has to do with Morten. "The type of leads and clients we get are mainly from Hugh's reputation and a lot from his designs," Fraynd says.

While other companies are busy using up-to-date technology and computer programs to create a design the client wants, Morten does it the old fashioned way with a piece of paper, something Fraynd says makes the designs unique. They stand out from the competition.

ALL IN A DAY'S WORK. While the company does like to focus on the unique projects, the crews at Sun Valley Landscaping do all kinds of jobs, ranging in cost and size.

Fraynd says the average job is \$8,000 to \$10,000, but the company doesn't have a minimum, especially for current clients. In 2016, the company even completed a handful of jobs in the \$150,000 to \$175,000 range.

The company does primarily residential projects, giving Morten a chance to make each project unique to the homeowners.

"His style is simple," Fraynd says. "It's more about what you take out than what you put in. He always talks about letting a design breath – letting the elements shine."

The company's designs take open areas, such as large stone

Although Sun Valley Landscaping has grown and expanded its service offerings, the company will always remember its roots as a stone yard. "I think they go together," says Paul Fraynd, CEO and partner of the company. "We want to make the supply yard a tangible extension of our brand."

Now sitting on about 5 acres, the company carries mostly natural stone products, including products like street paver bricks, which have been used on actual roads. "We'll buy that section of street and truck over the bricks and cobblestone that they tore out," Fraynd says. "Reusing lots of that stuff is where we get a lot of it from."

The company also offers quarry and flagstone commercially, which they source from all over the country. "We get the products from all over so having a unique set of things to sell defines it," he says.

The supply yard isn't just limited to stones, however. The company stocks anything that can be reused, including plant materials. "We have juniper roots here a local guy cut down and now they're kind of a work of art," Fraynd says.

The supply yard supplies products for other contractors as well as local do-it-your-

selves, but Sun Valley Landscaping is its biggest client. It currently brings in 23.5 percent of the company's total revenue, which is just shy of a million. Sun Valley has also recently started a nursery that Fraynd is hoping will complement the supply yard.

"We want to have the same mindset," he says, referring to how the business is run. "We'll supply ourselves and contractors, and maybe the general public as well."

Along with offering products, the company has created a unique outdoor space in the supply yard that the employees can enjoy. They hold barbecues in the area, which showcases an outdoor kitchen and several patios.

"We're building a bell tower in memorial for Don," Fraynd says.

Fraynd and Sun Valley's hopes are that the supply yard and company will grow to be something special in the next 10 years.

"We want to make the supply yard like a tangible extension of our brand," he says. "We've made a place here for our employees to enjoy. Just things that we're thinking about that are growing this into something that will be special in 10 years. It being a destination place, the supply yard here, but also our company being a destination company."

patios, and balances them against big, powerful statements, like waterfalls, a bulk planting area or a natural stone wall. The elements are there, but the design isn't layered and there's no feeling of every inch being covered and designed.

"It tends to make them feel bigger than they are, more grand than they are, and you appreciate each piece more when you keep it simple," Fraynd says.

Because of the company's location in rural Idaho, Fraynd says they're about five years behind other parts of the country

when it comes to design trends. Outdoor living is big and right now Fraynd says having outdoor kitchens as an extension of the home is what a lot of customers want, although he says that's a pretty common request across the country.

Bio-retention and rain gardens are also a current trend in the area. "It's a very hot topic right now on what to do with ground runoff," he says.

They're also seeing a lot of customers wanting to return to natural landscaping. "We're doing a lot more native planting

and things like prairies," Fraynd says. "People are wanting to bring that back to what it used to be, what the landscape used to be here locally."








He's also seeing a lot of natural stone, as opposed to precast. "Using natural elements is pretty hot right now," he says.

The third most common trend allows Morten to create one-of-a-kind designs with the client's existing art. "Hugh will find a unique element and stick it somewhere and let it shine," Fraynd says. "It's another way to make a garden your own." **L&L**

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OWN IT

How Yellowstone Landscape combined solid southern brands and their owners into one thriving company

Story by Kristen Hampshire

Photo by Alex Shelver

TWO WORDS CUT TO THE HEART

of operations at Yellowstone Landscape Group, one of the country's largest firms that has expanded gradually and intentionally through acquiring solid southern brands: Own it.

In essence, Yellowstone is a company of owner-operators who agreed to bring their businesses into the fold, but didn't give up the keys when they sold. They saw opportunity to grow and, in some cases, become a better, larger version of what they were before.

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Jim Herth, vice president, business development; Brian Martin, regional vice president, south; Jim Sivils, regional vice president, Texas region; Tim Portland, CEO; Bill Dellecker, executive vice president; Brian Wester, regional vice president, southeast; Al LaLonde, CFO; Elise Johnson, vice president, human resources

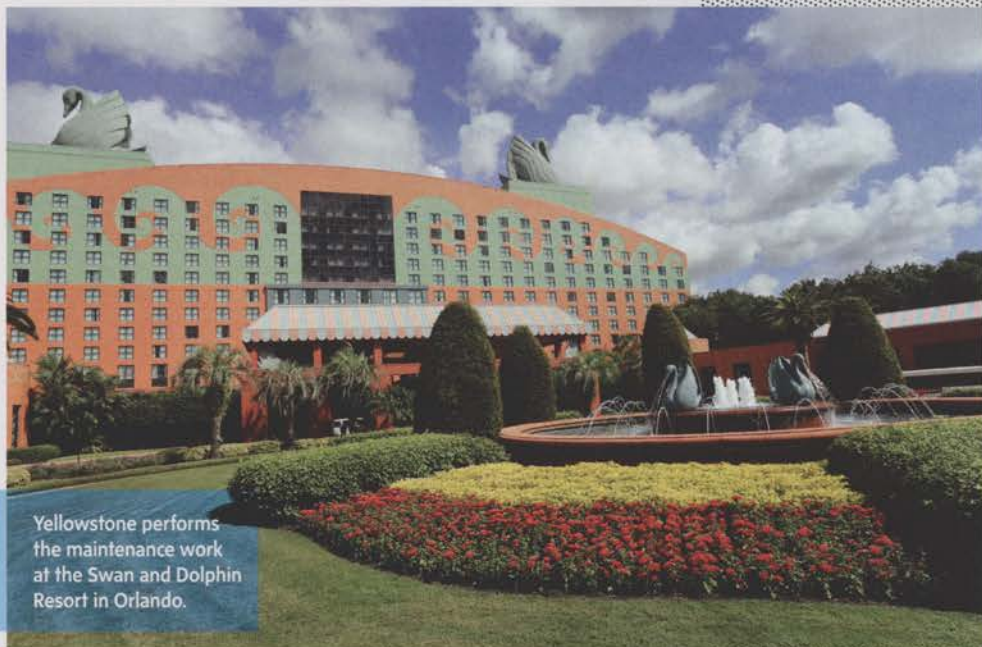
"You can sell your company and then it becomes something else entirely, or you can become part of something bigger, and that's the way we approach it," says Bill Dellecker, who ran Florida's Austin Outdoor, a platform company of today's totally integrated Yellowstone Landscape.

Dellecker was at the helm of Austin Outdoor when the company was making less than \$10 million in revenue. The company had a well-working infrastructure in place, but Dellecker wanted to see it do more.

"We grew dramatically from 2002 to 2007," he says, noting that he saw an opportunity to reach higher-level clients.

In 2008, Austin Outdoor, along with BIO Landscape & Maintenance in Houston and Piedmont Landscape Contractors in Atlanta, became part of Yellowstone Landscape Group, which was then a holding company. (Piedmont was placed under the Austin name because of crossover customers)

When you ask people at Yellowstone what makes this company different than other conglomerates, they say it's how each former owner is an integral



Yellowstone performs the maintenance work at the Swan and Dolphin Resort in Orlando.

part of the growth. "The fact that former owners have a voice, have an ability to share ideas and information – their voice is respected and their ideas are embraced ... that makes a difference," Dellecker says.

What has been a rather complex family tree to explain to customers and others is now a much simpler conversation with Yellowstone's official rebranding in 2016. "It allows us to

finally be that one name, that one voice – and it was the last step in the integration process," Dellecker says.

All the heavy lifting that includes meshing cultures, aligning visions, creating and rolling out infrastructure was capped off in 2014.

Yellowstone's decision to retire the Austin Outdoor and BIO brands, and unify under the corporate name is, perhaps, the

recent headline. But the story is about a business of owners who see a future of growth.

"With our mix of former owner-operators and folks who have teamed up throughout the company, they're all getting an opportunity to shine," says Tim Portland, CEO.

TRACING THE TREE. When Yellowstone started in 2008, it was basically a holding company with

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MARKING TIME

A snapshot of Yellowstone Landscape's evolution during the last decade, marking major acquisitions that today are one, big family.

1982: BIO Landscape & Maintenance is founded in Houston.

1994: Austin Outdoor is founded in Central Florida in 1994.

2008: Gridiron Capital acquires Piedmont Landscape Contracting in Atlanta, Austin Outdoor in Florida and BIO in Houston, Texas. Piedmont is rebranded as Austin Outdoor because of crossover client relationships, while BIO retained its brand name. Austin and BIO are known as "Yellowstone Landscape Group companies."

JAN. 2010: BIO acquires Texas Services.

FEB. 2012: Austin Outdoor acquires Cornerstone Solutions Group Landscape Maintenance Operations.

JAN. 2015: Gridiron Capital, LLC sells Yellowstone Landscape Group to private equity firm CIVC Partners, the former investor in the Brickman Group. Yellowstone's 2014 revenues were \$95.7 million.

JUNE 2015: Acquisition of the Atlanta operations of Perimeter Landscape Management, a \$4-million firm founded in 1995

SEPT. 2015: Acquisition of Ackman Bros. Landscaping based in Orlando, Florida

AUG. 2015: Rollout of Yellowstone Landscape unified brand



two platform companies: Austin Outdoor and BIO. That meant a strong presence in Texas and Florida, and a whole lot of geography in between to fill.

So Yellowstone was the namesake and root of the family tree, and the two major brands formed a trunk for adding more branches. BIO and Austin Outdoor retained their names, adding the "a Yellowstone Landscape Group Company" tag to recognize the parent.

Then, over the years, came additional acquisitions and more branching out. Austin Outdoor bought Cornerstone Solutions Group in Florida and Perimeter Landscape in Atlanta. BIO acquired Texas Services in Houston and both brands continued to make smaller acquisitions.

The Yellowstone family tree grew, each new brand adding "a Yellowstone Landscape Group Company" to its name. By 2014,

revenues were \$95.7 million and financing partner Gridiron Capital sold Yellowstone to private equity firm CIVC Partners, a former investor in the Brickman Group.

Expansion was driven by finding partners who sought opportunity – owners who wanted to join the team, who were invested in helping to write the next chapters and who wanted to find place for their own people to continue growing careers.

"When you are talking about owners who nurtured and grew their businesses to a certain size, they are very worried about what happens with their people," Dellecker says.

"Our interest is having an owner who is engaged in the process of making sure that their clients they have cared for continue to stay happy and that their employees and team have opportunities that might not

ABOVE: Yellowstone's main service is maintenance, while also providing, lawn care, installation and irrigation.

have existed before."

That was the case for Dellecker, who went from running Austin Outdoor as an independent to now overseeing all of Yellowstone's operations, with a focus on recruiting. And, the same is true for Jim Sivils, who owned Texas Services when it was acquired by BIO in 2010. In 2012, he became regional vice president of Yellowstone's Texas business.

"As a business owner, everyone should be able to do what they're good at," Sivils says. "Some guys are good in the field. Some are good behind the desk. Others are good in front of customers. I was the guy in the field, and I was better out in front of customers making sure

we were doing what we said we'd do and taking care of employees and equipment."

Texas Services had the sales and customer retention. "Yellowstone had better systems and processes," Sivils says. "That gives you the ability to know your business and it's a huge driving point. We were good at selling the work and performing it, but when it came to tracking, accounting and sharing data with account managers, we were a little soft."

BIO was a larger Houston company than Texas Services, and Sivils saw an opening for his whole team to grow.

Overall, Sivils says the "fallout of key employees has been minimal" among all companies acquired by Yellowstone. "That has to do with the people who have passion to run their businesses," he says. "The reason we have been able to grow and sustain the business is because our people are all in. They stay on board after acquisitions."

By the time an acquisition deal was complete, both parties were fully invested in the future, Portland says. "You get to know the owner of the company you're acquiring because you spend so much time with that person before you agree to do the deal and during negotiations," he says.

Integration during the close and transition involves lots of reassuring clients and employees.

"Many folks don't know about the transaction and the process, and they are trying to figure out, 'Is this going to be good for me?'"

The owners and employees who stay are passionate about their work. Owners who stay on board and commit to the next chapters are less focused on being the entrepreneur and more excited about the opportunities of aligning with a well-resourced corporation.

"We measure everything, so if we have former owners who are used to making every decision based on gut and have an intuition, we don't want them to lose that," Portland says. "But they do have to put our processes in place and get accurate information into our systems, and some can get a bit frustrated."

The owners who do not thrive feel pressured and perhaps over-managed by the systems. The owners that succeed and move up into the Yellowstone ranks – as many do – embrace how systems give them real-time information and data they could not capture previously.

Sivils says a number of his Texas Services team members are now managing business lines for Yellowstone. "We have been able to retain those guys and treat them like they should be treated," Sivils says.

"That is what makes Yellowstone successful in Houston and

“As a business owner, everyone should be able to do what they're good at. Some guys are good in the field. Some are good behind the desk.”

Jim Sivils, vice president

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TRACK LIKE THE BIG DOGS

You don't need customized software or a proprietary enterprise system to know your numbers. Smaller landscape firms can track, compare and improve progress by keeping an eye on certain targets. Yellowstone CEO Tim Portland shares tips that can be used in companies of all sizes.

GET A FAIR PRICE.

"Don't sell yourself short," Portland says. "So many companies give away the great work they do. That undermines everyone." Act like a significant player by valuing your services and putting some hard math behind your job costing process.

TRACK HOURS.

Estimate your performance on every aspect of the job. You don't need a fancy system. Track hours by customer or by job. "This will help you get a good handle on revenue per hour that you are making by customer," Portland says.

KNOW YOUR OVERHEAD.

Identify all of your overhead expenses. Understand what it truly costs to do a single job. (Check out our Benchmarking Your Business report for details at bit.ly/lawn2016benchmark.)

FIGURE OUT YOUR BREAKEVEN.

"You can use that information to help you price work and also to look back on performance," Portland says.

REVIEW PROGRESS REGULARLY.

"With some way of estimating, either by contract, by job or by property, determine how you are performing each month," Portland says. The more carefully you track, the more control you have over your profitability.



Yellowstone has provided maintenance services for the AAA national headquarters in Orlando, Florida, since 2011.

across the organization. We retain people and let them act like owners."

Portland says Yellowstone cares about five things: safety, customer quality, customer relationships, customer retention

and profitability.

Talking safety with clients has been a competitive advantage for the firm.

"Safety is not the first thing on customers' radars," Portland says. "But whenever we bring it up they

appreciate that we are focused on keeping our employees safe, and keeping their people or residents safe while we are working."

ALIGNING INFRASTRUCTURE.

There are about 1,800 em-

ployees across 18 branches in Florida, Texas, Georgia and South Carolina. The attitude is one of—here's your branch, here are the systems, here are core values by which Yellowstone measures success.

"Branch managers act as the CEOs of their branches," Portland says. "Branch managers act as the CEOs of their branches," Portland says. "We have crystalized around a very small number of values that we think are important, and we tied our system together to support that, and we drive the heck out of those (goals)."

A company of owners needs rules and systems to succeed at reaching those goals. A more formal way of saying it is, "alignment around shared priorities."

That translates to infrastructure, and getting a full dashboard in place has been the focus for Yellowstone during

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ABOVE: The company's landscape installation work at Jim W. Henderson Administration and Welcome Center at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, was completed in 2013.

the last five years, prior to the "final touch," of rebranding.

"With the growth we were having, we had to put in place really effective information systems and have the ability to capture information and put tools in place to allow branches to operate and make good decisions, and for the company centrally to monitor and manage based on that information," Dellecker says.

That meant rolling out an enterprise management system for collecting and measuring data.

"Otherwise, you end up with a lot of scattered business units, not a lot of cohesion in the way things are done, in the language of the business, the culture," Dellecker says. "Information systems became a big deal."

Were there problems? Not big ones, but the growth was demanding greater structure. "We don't want any branch to be on an island and not feel con-

“You can sell your company and then it becomes something else entirely, or you can become part of something bigger, and that’s the way we approach it.”

Bill Dellecker,
executive vice president

nected,” Dellecker says.

With a company-wide information sharing system in place, branch managers can see how other branches handle issues. "They also have opportunities to come together at our annual leadership forum," Dellecker says.

Because branches can tap into what is basically a company information bank, they can share best practices and measure their location's success.

They can pass that information along to their teams so everyone realizes what they're working toward.

And a defined mission clearly answers that question, "What's the point here?"

Creating and integrating systems at Yellowstone began in late 2012 and continued the first nine months of 2013. Then, systems were implemented and went live in early 2014 across all markets.

So, do any former owners

groan at the systems? Is it really that easy to go from autonomy to systems and infrastructure?

"For former owner-operators who have great business instincts and great guts, but have been operating without solid systems, once they see the information they can have it generally doesn't take much convincing and they understand that (aligning) is all worthwhile," Portland says.

Of course, putting processes in place comes with headaches. Like when a branch learns that its equipment might not meet the safety requirements, and must invest in newer machines.

"But when folks are brought in, they know what we measure," he says. "And, we also say, 'Here are some things that you are doing really well that we love and are going to keep on doing, and we want you to teach us how to do that and deliver that,'" Portland says. **L&L**



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Greenwise Organic Lawn Care employs 50 people and only provides organic lawn services.

An alternative approach

The market for organic services is based on education and customer service.

By Kate Spirgen

ORGANIC LAWN CARE COMPANIES believe in what they do, and their customers do too. Rather than spending time and money on marketing, these businesses rely on referrals, good customer service and well-educated clients to make up their customer base.

“What I find is that most people already understand the harmful effects of herbicides and chemical fertilizers,” says Marc Wise, founder and owner of Greenwise Organic Lawn Care in Evanston, Illinois. They want reassurance the program is safe and non-toxic. “They’re already coming to me because they don’t want chemicals on their lawns.”

Greenwise is a strictly organic lawn care service with about 50 employees that drew \$3 million in revenue last year. Wise says the company decided to go that route for health and safety, as well as environmental reasons.

SELLING THEM ON SERVICE. Much of Greenwise’s business comes from referrals, and it’s the same for Purelawn, a mainly residential organic lawn care company. Since the company, which brought in about \$450,000 last year, relies on word of mouth and online reviews, owner Matt Maurer says personalized service is the biggest selling point.

“That’s the biggest part. We’re going to be there if they

need something," he says. His employees give customized lawn quotes based on each individual property, taking the time to give deliver them in person. And it's working. The company won the Angie's List Super Service Award for the last four years running.

Purelawn makes sure all nine team members take pride in the service they provide to more than 1,500 customers in the Dayton and Cincinnati, Ohio, areas.

Some larger companies in the area provide production bonuses to employees based on revenue or number of lawns serviced. Purelawn doesn't because Maurer wants crewmembers to take their time.

"Our selling point is that we're a customer service business that does lawn care," he says. "We're all about the service side. We don't have a big marketing budget. We need our customers to be happy and tell their neighbors or relatives for their family members."

Although customers may be educated about why they want organic lawn care, Purelawn takes extra steps to teach them best practices to keep lawns looking lush.

The company provides watering and mowing tips through newsletters, index cards, invoice bags and tips on the invoices themselves. "It's a process so that's what we try to educate them on," Maurer says. "This isn't that we come in and spray one time, put down fertilizer and your lawn looks like the one that's been treated for 10 years."

PRICE POINTS. Purelawn crews spend the extra time to spot-treat for weeds and put down a high-quality, custom-blended fertilizer made from vegetable byproducts,

so employees are spending more time on each lawn than many other crews. That means prices are about 10 percent higher than much of the competition.

"I like to say to potential clients that if you're buying organic fruits and vegetables, you're paying a little bit extra for it," he says. "Why would you do that and have somebody come in and spray chemicals all over your lawn? It's well worth paying 10 percent more to at least reduce the amount or even eliminate the amount."

Greenwise's program works a little differently, so there isn't always an increase in price, Wise says. While the organic product cost is higher, there aren't always more labor costs, so the price increase depends on the size of the property.

WHY ORGANIC? Both Maurer and Wise say they chose to offer organic services because they don't like the idea of adding more chemicals to the environment.

At first, Maurer saw organics as a niche, but after some research, he decided to get away from traditional lawn care. Purelawn offers a bridge program with some spot herbicide treatment. Maurer says he doesn't think chemicals are all bad, but he doesn't think they're as safe as most people believe.

"I think there's a lot of unnecessary chemicals being applied and that's what we're trying to get away from," he says.

For Wise, the potential impacts, are the reason he's sticking to organic. "I think I've learned quite a bit after doing this for the eight years that we've been doing it and I think that, essentially, chemical herbicides and pesticides are just toxic," he says. **L&L**

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Branching out

Instead of waiting for employees to come to the tree care industry, Brigitte Orrick is travelling to tree care hubs to develop a better labor pool for the arboriculture industry. **Interviewed by Brian Horn**

LABOR ISN'T ONLY A PROBLEM ON THE TURF SIDE of the industry; it's also a hurdle in the tree care segment. That's where Brigitte Orrick steps in. She was hired in January of 2015 by the Tree Care Industry Association as its workforce development director. She's tasked with developing sector partnerships in local communities to increase the labor pool for tree care companies.

"When a group of employers identify a shortage of skilled workers, a sector partnership engages those employers with workforce development entities, community and technical colleges and other nonprofits that are interested in developing a skilled workforce within the community," she says. "It's a grassroots-type model that engages a bigger group into a conversation where you can begin looking at local opportunities to change the landscape for businesses."

L&L spoke with Orrick about the process and how it can help grow the tree care industry.



Brigitte ORRICK

Lawn & Landscape: How does this process work?

Brigitte Orrick: I act kind of like a facilitator. We establish a meeting location and we establish who the partners are. Being

the trade association, I know who the employers are going to be. But we have to have some initial conversations with workforce development entities within the city or region, with some of the community and technical colleges.

We're looking for responsiveness from those other partners before we begin positioning the location for where that training would take place.

L&L: When you say "partners," do you mean schools or tree care companies?

Orrick: Both. Then the third partner would be the local workforce development board.

In some locations, we're finding other nonprofit organizations are helpful, too. We're working in the state of Georgia and we've also partnered with United Way of Atlanta. We've partnered with the Urban Conservation Corps and we've partnered with the Georgia Arborist Association.

We look for some strategic partnerships because each one of those different groups or organizations has connections to different pots of money and different resources to leverage within their local region.

The conversation starts with the employers and the educators, workforce development board. Then, if we learn that we need to really invite this group over here, we bring them into the conversation.

I facilitate a strategic plan on how to communicate the skills for arborists to the college to build the training program, and then also work with some of those other entities to build a pipeline of individuals to take the training program.

Then, we make the connection back to employment.

L&L: Are you trying to get high school kids or are these going to be college-aged kids?



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Orrick: In a similar way that businesses don't recruit just from one school or one age demographic, we're building a pipeline that has multiple avenues associated with it.

In one particular community, the employers may determine, "OK, we want to have short-term training that we partner with the Conservation Corps on. We also want

to deliver an apprenticeship program, and we also want to build an associate degree at a local community and technical college."

Those are three different avenues that could be built within one community and it just depends on what the employers really want. Those avenues are going to be attractive to different populations of people, so some of them are high school students, some of them are veterans, some of them are career changers and adult learners.

But it really just depends on what the employers are looking for, and then there's a multifaceted approach. To help us with that, we've hired a marketing firm that is helping us to develop materials and resources and information for people from all those different demographics.

L&L: How are these programs funded?

Orrick: The cost gets passed on to either a student, an employer or a workforce development agency.

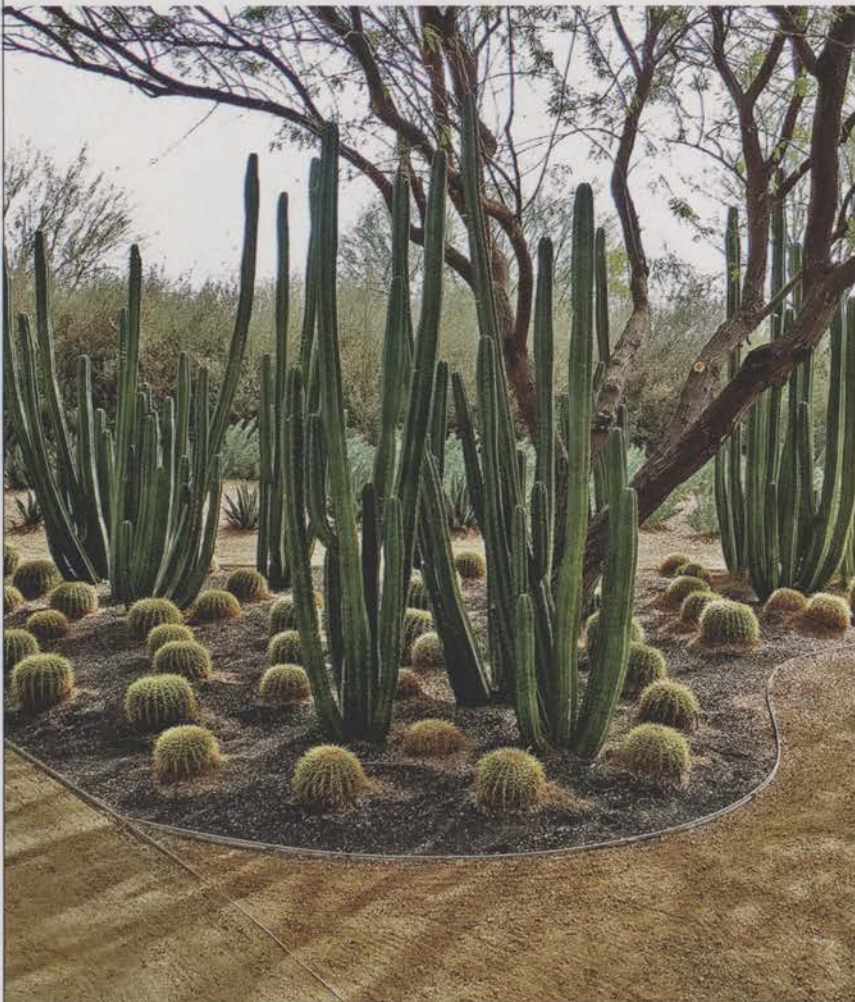
L&L: How did you select the locations you wanted to target?

Orrick: We looked for communities where there already was a critical number of employers and where there was some energy already moving forward.

L&L: By employers, do you mean tree care companies?

Orrick: Tree care companies and utility line companies. Metropolitan areas are kind of hubs for tree care businesses. If an employer came to me tomorrow and said, "Hey, can you come help us? We're located in the middle of North Dakota," I would probably say, "You know, we really need to have eight to 12 employers within your community to make a workforce development initiative work."

So that very quickly filters down which cities and communities we work in. In terms of a workforce development initiative, we pick cities like Atlanta, Georgia, where there are eight to 12 major employers within a couple counties' distance of each other. There's a number of businesses that are in that location, and they've already



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had some preliminary conversations. Maybe some of the individuals have been working with the community and technical college to try to get a new program built and nothing has come out of that.

I come in and facilitate a conversation and reengage everyone back in those conversations that were had previously, or put more fuel behind it.

L&L: What is required of the tree care companies to get this going?

Orrick: It starts out with, "Well, we want to invite you into a strategic planning process," within a region. They decide they want to

develop an apprenticeship program and we start talking about where there are different pots of money within the state government and the federal government, and maybe where we can leverage grant resources locally.

At that point, maybe that local community then needs some matching funds from an employer. Then we would ask, but not up front. We need to get going down the path first of determining, "How are we going to fill the workforce shortage?" before we ask for money, because in some places, we may not need it. In some places, we may be able to find enough local grant funds to build something and

then we just need the employers to participate in the development of the training program and hiring people on the back end.

L&L: Would the employer teach the class?

Orrick: They would probably help identify a trainer. The businesses would probably help. They may know of a person that they think would be a really great teacher.

L&L: Is there anything else you want to add?

Orrick: Yes, there's another piece to this that we have to be aware. In the landscape of different job opportunities that exist today,

the tree care industry and the horticulture industry – we are competing against manufacturing, IT, health care, transportation and construction. Those industry sectors have their act together and have access to tons of federal and state financial resources to build their workforce.

We're competing against them in terms of creating a desirable occupational field. We have to communicate that not only is this a rewarding career path, but there's financial incentive for you to pursue it. You're going to have a great job. You're going to be able to support your family if you pursue this as your career path. **L&L**

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From education to new products, GIE+EXPO has something for all landscape contractors.

By **Chuck Bowen, Brian Horn, Kate Spirgen and Katie Tuttle**

IT WAS AN ACTION-PACKED THREE DAYS for the green industry in Louisville, Kentucky, from Oct. 19-21. Not only does the Green Industry and Equipment Expo fill up the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center with educational opportunities and tons of new equipment, but the National Association of Landscape Professionals' LANDSCAPES 2016 and the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute's Hardscape North America also hosted events with learning opportunities, new products and hands-on demonstrations.

More than 22,000 people from around the world represented a 12 percent increase in registration over last year, according to show organizer, Sellers Expositions. Thirty-three percent of dealer and 44 percent of landscaper attendees were first timers.

We've compiled some of our coverage from the event and some of the new products unveiled over the next several pages. For more coverage, visit bit.ly/GIEEXPOcover.

YOUTUBE YOUR NEXT HARDSCAPE PROJECT

Tom Gardocki, co-owner of the Interstate Landscape Company, presented on how to begin using YouTube with your hardscaping projects.

Gardocki has been in the industry for 19 years, and started producing, filming and editing videos of jobsites seven years ago.

His YouTube channel, Dirt Ninja, now has more than 30,000 followers over various social media platforms, including Facebook and Instagram.

During his session, he said he thinks YouTube is the forgotten social media.

"I think it's one of the most powerful social media sites out there," he said. "It's highly integrated with the other social medias you hear about all the time."

By investing a little time and money, he said you can use YouTube to help make sales and get potential customers.

What this will take is a Go Pro, an external hard drive for more storage and any additional accessories you feel are necessary for your specific project and video goal.

The total investment will amount to \$600-\$1,000, which isn't a lot when it could mean the creation of additional jobs.

HOW TO POST. Gardocki said the best type of video for making a sale is a time-lapse video of a project. For his company, he tries to have a time lapse that highlights every type of job they do. It not only shows the poten-

tial customer what your team is capable of, it also shows them what all goes into each project.

That way, they comprehend what is involved so they understand the bid price. You're also able to bring an iPad to the initial meeting and show them the videos in person.

One type of video to avoid is a photo slideshow.

"You will get no views," Gardocki said. "Believe me, I've done it. YouTube is not to show pictures. That's what your portfolio is for on your website or Facebook page."

He also said you shouldn't start out your video with before

and after pictures, even if those are the only photo slides in it, because people will assume it's just a slideshow and won't watch the whole thing.

MONEY OUTSIDE OF THE JOB.

When your video is edited and uploaded, Gardocki always recommends saving the file forever. He said you never know when someone could contact you after seeing the video on YouTube, and ask to buy the unedited files.

He said he was contacted by the Discovery Channel and recently sold six videos to them for \$100 each. An attendee in the audience added that he was contacted by ESPN regarding a video he'd posted on YouTube, and because he didn't have the original file, he lost out on a lot of money.

Gardocki added that if you get up enough subscribers (at least 1,000) and enough views (more than 1 million), you can become a YouTube partner. He became one in 2012 and currently makes around \$600 a month from his videos.

If you're wary about starting to post videos, and not sure if it's worth it, Gardocki said to try anyway.

"The worst that will happen is nobody's going to watch," he said.

He said to take the time to go out there, and make a video that represents you and your company.

"It's just like creating a hardscape; make it your own," he said. "If a picture is worth a thousand words, how much is a video like that worth?"



At GIE+EXPO, attendees had the opportunity to test drive new equipment in the demo area, which was expanded to 20 acres this year.



Consultant Jason Cupp stressed the importance of giving clients excellent customer service during his presentation at LANDSCAPES 2016.

GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE IS ALWAYS RIGHT

Even if your business mows lawns, you're not in the business of mowing lawns. You're in the business of delivering client expectations.

In his presentation, *Delivering Over the Top Service Excellence*, at LANDSCAPES, Jason Cupp stressed the importance of giving clients what they want, ask for and pay for.

The former business owner and now growth consultant said the question you need to ask yourself is: Is your company focused on the client every single day?

"I'm convinced one of the largest differentiators between companies who are successful

and not successful, both in market share and in sales profitability, would be a focus on laser-like, client-centric customer service and retention," he said.

Cupp told the story of a doctor who called him after losing a patient and driving home, where Cupp had recently renovated the landscape. The doctor explained how he felt that he had arrived at an oasis, and that's when Cupp realized he was selling a feeling, not a service.

That's why he gave his staff a certain amount of money to use to make an unsatisfied client into a happy one with no authorization required.

"If we're selling feelings and

emotion, we can't let the emotion go to the other side," he said.

GO THE EXTRA MILE. Cupp said customer service is so crucial because of the way people shop and the way they make their purchasing decisions.

- Clients want to know and be known.
- They are sick of just being "another number" especially a dollar sign.
- They are more informed, and even more discriminating, than ever before.
- They can find out virtually anything about your company online.
- Value is not only an element of price, but of feeling.
- Clients will not settle for mediocrity.

Here's one thing you can do immediately to start your interac-

“If a client takes the time to call us, we want to make sure that we're there to answer that call. And if you answer your phone abruptly, that's not setting you up for success.”

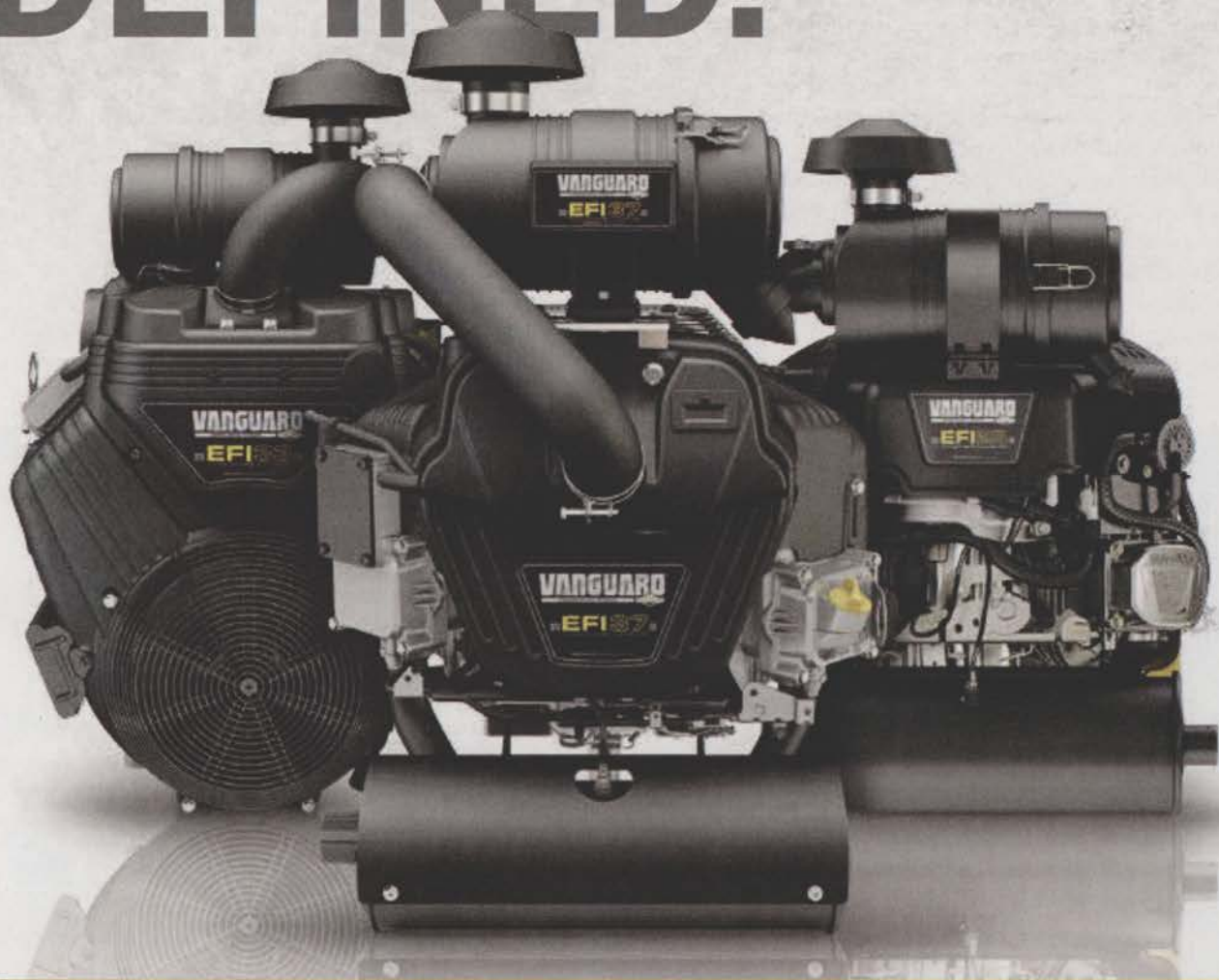
Jason Cupp, consultant

tions with your customers on the right foot: Answer the phone the right way.

Cupp said that many companies don't even bother to answer the phone. "If a client takes the time to call us, we want to make sure that we're there to answer



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that call," he said. "And if you answer your phone abruptly, that's not setting you up for success."

So instead of saying "ABC Landscaping," say "Good morning, thank you for calling ABC Landscape. This is Jason. How may I help you?"

That way the client will feel that their call matters to the company.

Do it quickly but do it right. "It doesn't matter how big or small your company is, your clients care about how fast you are," he said.

That's what people want now, whether it's answering the phone, getting an estimate or getting it done.

He used the example of Amazon, which has been wildly successful because it will send customers what they need right when they need it.

But you must make sure that you're doing the job the right way to ensure customer satisfaction as well. So, how do you do it?

Cupp said that every single person in the company needs to be involved in customer service.

"The best way to do that is to ingrain it in the company culture," he said.

"It has to be executed by every member of the team." Start by developing a focus group of your key clients across all demograph-

ics – not just the ones who have been with you for years.

"Call that client you think you're a day away from being fired from. It's risky and they might yell at you but it's worth it," Cupp said.

Once you speak with them, you have a collaborative discussion with your team, which gets them on board from the start. Figure out what your gold standard is and write it down.

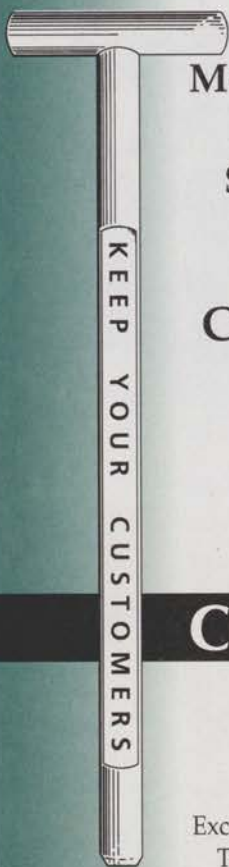
Then let everyone know about it by putting it on contracts, your website, social media or press releases. And remember that you don't have to do it all at once.

You can take it "one bite at a time," Cupp said.

3 KEYS TO MANAGING MILLENNIALS

In a keynote address during Dealer Day at GIE+EXPO, Jason Dorsey explained that Millennials don't have to be a mystery. They can actually be a great asset to your company.

"When it comes to the workforce today, manual labor jobs are not something that many (Millennials) thought they'd have to do or want to do," said Dorsey, founder of the Center for Generational Kinetics, a Texas-based research firm.



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"Many don't enter the landscaping business thinking that it's going to be a career. It's a job or stopover. But that doesn't mean they won't stay."

Here's his advice for landscapers and dealers managing Millennials:

They have less experience. The average 22- to 24-year-old enters the professional

workforce with two fewer jobs and three years less work experience than the previous generation. "This creates all kinds of problems because you have people managing a younger generation, and owners going, 'Why don't you know better?'" Dorsey said. "It's not that they can't be great employees, they just don't know what doing a good job looks like, especially to you."

Set clear performance expectations. Starting with the job interview, be clear on what the position entails and what you expect from them, Dorsey said. And then follow up during their first week or month with more training. "Provide specific examples of the performance that you expect – visual examples of the outcome," Dorsey said. "This generation are visual learners ... show me what it should look like, then tell me how to get there."

Understand that they're the future. The average landscape business owner is in their mid-50s, and many don't have clear succession plans. Dorsey said savvy contractors will look to their Millennials employees as a talent pool for the next phase of their company. "More progressive owners start grooming talent now and tell them they have a place," Dorsey said.



Landscapers, dealers and hardscapers all had the chance to learn from experts during GIE+EXPO.

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NEW PRODUCTS

For more new products from GIE+EXPO, head to lawnandlandscape.com



MEAN GREEN

Mean Green Mowers introduced the new electric Nemesis NXR mower with zero gas emission, no gas, low noise and little maintenance.

- The all-aluminum mower is available with a 48- or 52-inch deck. The 48-volt battery gives 24 horsepower at its peak. It comes with an LEM 4880 and LEM 48140, which have a 2,000 to 3,500 mowing-hour capacity.
- The mower has a top speed of 8.5 mph and weighs 590 to 650 pounds. A light system shows operators how much power is left as they mow. The battery takes three to six hours to recharge.
- Another innovation is the optional solar-assisted mower canopy on the CXR that will charge the battery while crewmembers mow. The canopy may qualify owners for a 30 percent federal solar tax credit.

For more information: meangreenproducts.com

ALTOZ

The TRX, a tracked zero-turn mower, provides technology for commercial use on sloped, wet and rough terrain.

- Equipped with rear-mounted tracks and torsional suspension system, the TRX allows contractors, utility companies and municipalities to maintain places they simply can't effectively or safely cut with a traditional zero-turn mower.
- TorqFlex front suspension and rear torsional track suspension provide a smooth ride by bridging uneven terrain and reducing operator fatigue.
- TRX's commercial-grade track and flat-free front tires eliminate potential tire damage caused by sharp rocks, glass or debris commonly encountered in vacant lots, roadside ditches and spaces bordering high traffic areas.
- The TRX will include the option of 61-inch or 66-inch finish cut or rough cut mower decks, Kohler Command Pro EFI 33 horsepower or Vanguard EFI 37 horsepower engines.
- The TRX will ship to Altoz dealers in the early Spring of 2017.

For more information: Altoz.com



STIHL

Celebrating its 90th anniversary, STIHL introduced more new products at GIE+EXPO than it ever has before. "In 2017, customers will be able to pick your power like never before," said Bjoern Fischer, president of STIHL. Here's some of what's on tap for Spring 2017:

STIHL Lightning Battery Systems Technology

- The Advanced STIHL Lithium-Ion battery technology offers users an option to reduce their impact on the environment and provides an alternative to gasoline-powered equipment.
- No battery memory limitation and no gradual drop in power means high performance. It runs at full speed until the battery is depleted.
- STIHL lithium-ion batteries have indicator lights to indicate battery status/level of charge.



STIHL BGA 45 handheld blower

- Lightweight at 4.4 pounds including the integrated lithium-ion battery
- On a single charge, it clears up to 13 parking spaces with a blowing speed of 85 mph and air volume of 235 cfm.
- An activation key prevent accidental use of the machine.



STIHL HSA 45 hedge trimmer

- Lightweight at 5.1 pounds for enhanced portability
- On a single charge, the HSA 45 can trim a hedge up to 20 inches wide and a length longer than a football field
- High cutting speeds of 2,500 strokes per minute

For more information: Stihl.com

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Isuzu NPR HD 4 Door with 19' Dovetail Landscaper Body
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Brake, AM/FM CD Player, A/C, P/S, Power Windows & Locks,
Tilt Wheel (Other Options And 12,000 lb. GVWR Gas Available)



Isuzu NPR HD with 12' Dump Body
297 HP Gas Engine, Automatic Transmission, 14,500 lb. GVWR, 19.5 Tires,
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Tow Package & Brake Control, (Other Options And GVW Ratings Available)



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Isuzu NPR with 19' Custom Irrigation Body
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TORO

To improve productivity, Toro's Titan HD zero-turn mower series features tool-mounting brackets, allowing contractors to transport tools, including string trimmers, 5-gallon buckets and other yard tools.

- The new models have deluxe suspension seats, an isolated floor pan design, deck step guide, easy side and front mower access, and a 12-volt outlet accompanied by deep storage pockets.
- Commercial-grade hydraulics minimize maintenance requirements.
- Titan HD mowers can be equipped with engines from Toro, Kohler and Kawasaki.
- The TITAN HD Series reaches top ground speeds of up to 10 mph with deck widths up to 60 inches.

For more information: toro.com



OREGON

The new Kinetic Log Splitter eliminates hydraulics by using two, precision-balanced 70-pound flywheels spinning at 325 RPMs to create and store kinetic energy. A pinion gear system applies that stored energy from the flywheels and drives the log through the wedge in roughly 2-3 seconds with minimal to no kickback.

- The splitter can be easily moved around the worksite with welded table-mounted handles. It can also be towed on the highway with its 2-inch ball coupler and safety chains, while the stow-away retractable tongue makes loading and unloading easy.
- The work surface is smooth and aligned with the beam, which means fewer snags when bringing a log back for re-splitting. The splitter's wide slots reduce build-up that can jam the push plate assembly in other splitters. The 32-inch wide work table allows easy access to rounds and re-splits from either side.
- The handle design is designed to eliminate kickback by using torsion springs that absorb energy when a stall occurs.
- Powered by a Kohler SH265 engine, the splitter features a 6-inch wedge and the entire machine sits on 4x8-inch road towable tires rated at 45 mph.

For more information: OregonSplitters.com

HONDA

Honda Power Equipment is expanding its lineup of commercial lawn mowers with the HRC216K3HDA lawn mower.

- Users can start the engine while standing behind the mower and the flywheel brake safety system stops the engine and blades when the user lets go of the brake lever on the handle.
- The Honda GXV160 engine maintains consistent speed across all mowing conditions. The mower's hydrostatic transmission includes a heavy-duty automotive style shaft drive that eliminates the belt that can slip or wear out.
- The exclusive Honda MicroCut Twin Blade System offers four cutting surfaces to produce finer clippings, and the mower can be adjusted to eight different heights.
- The outside of the Honda HRC216K3HDA features a 21-inch steel deck with front axle and bumper protection for additional structural stability and durability. Completing the package are ergonomic heavy-duty steel piped reinforced handles designed for strength and operator comfort.
- The mower's dry weight is 117 pounds while the operating weight is 121 pounds.

For more information: powerequipment.honda.com





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EXPLAINED

It's not alphabet soup. It's a no-fluff number that tells the story of what your company is really worth.

By Kristen Hampshire



HAT'S YOUR BUSINESS REALLY WORTH?

This is a question every owner should ask, whether or not selling is the plan. The operation you dedicate your time, resources and energy to growing is likely the greatest asset in your life. But how "great" is it, really, when you're talking dollars and cents?

Fact is, there's a significant value gap between a business that funds a comfortable lifestyle and one that can fetch a favorable price at the deal table. "A business should be built to sell," says Tom Fochtman, president of Ceibass Venture Partners. "Whether or not you want to sell, let's have it be the best operating company that it can."

Enter a financial term that helps you get to the bottom of that value question: EBITDA, or earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization. If this is the first you've heard of EBITDA, you're not alone in the industry.

EBITDA is used to compare companies' profitability because it takes out financing and accounting decisions. It removes debt, capital and tax effects by adding back interest and tax to earnings. Sound confusing? Basically, EBITDA is a measure of a company's operating performance.

Most importantly, EBITDA is the basis of many M&A transactions, and understanding your adjusted EBITDA (removing from the equation owner "add-backs" like a spouse's vehicle or an exorbitant owner's salary) provides a true picture of how a company is actually doing and what its earning potential could be.

"As a small business, there are so many things you can take on as expenses that are not 'operational expenses' critical to running the business," says Jim Huston, president of J.R. Huston Consulting. "When a consultant goes in to evaluate the business, they take into account these 'adds' and 'deducts.' The EBITDA is basically looking at a financial statement and P&L and making adjustments to bring it in line with fair market value, or legitimate operating costs."

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FINANCES

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Even if you're not selling, you should treat your business like it's on the market. You'll operate more efficiently and profitably. So what can a landscape company do to increase its value and cash out in a better position? Here are some pointers:

1. INCREASE CASH FLOW.

EBITDA is earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortization – and that's cash in the business. Increase cash in the business by watching expenses. Do you have cash tied up in inventory or aging accounts receivables? Are there ways to reduce your overhead expenses? Rake through that budget and see how savings can drive more cash into the business.

2. DRIVE RECURRING REVENUE.

Lawn care and maintenance businesses hold value in part because the buyer is purchasing a contract book of business. This limits the risk for buyers, therefore increasing the value of your business. Recurring revenue includes maintenance contracts, snow removal services, lawn care, irrigation maintenance and other "repeat" services that feed the cash flow on a consistent basis.

3. PRICE SERVICES PROPERLY.

This goes back to Huston's advice: "Price it right, produce it right and produce enough of it." If you're barely making money on services, then cash flow and profit margins suffer. So focus on ensuring that industry benchmark of at least 10 percent profit margin (and more is always better), and take into account labor, materials and other expenses.

So why should you know your EBITDA? In many ways, it's the "get real" number. EBITDA takes out the fluff – the extras that a buyer wouldn't pay for – and leaves you with a number that can be used as a platform for growth. Once you know your EBITDA, you can see how reducing spending and improving efficiency can improve the value of your business. It shows how a company that's operating with a value-minded approach can ultimately walk away with a lot more cash than one that uses the business as a vehicle for funding life's expenses.

EBITDA AT WORK. Let's play out an EBITDA scenario here. A company does \$1 million in sales and the net profit is 10 percent before tax, depreciation and amortization. You con-

sider "adds" and "deducts." For example, the owner's salary is \$200,000 when it should be closer to \$60,000 (what a buyer would pay for), and the spouse's car is \$5,000 a year – another add-in.

After those extras are "normalized," you get a number – say, \$150,000 of EBITDA.

Next, you apply the EBITDA multiple. This metric is used to measure a company's cash return on investment. The ratio is a modification of operating and non-operating profits compared to market value of a company's equity plus its debt. So, if we apply a five-times multiple to \$150,000 EBITDA, the company's value to a buyer is about \$750,000. (Landscape multiples range from four on the low end to seven on the high end.)

Value varies significantly depending on

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- Learn how to get your entire team to strive for success
- In addition to Marty and Team Grunder, learn from industry giants: Scott Jamieson, Frank Mariani, Jim McCutcheon, Todd Pugh and Mike Rorie
- Get the firepower you need to grow your business in 2017
- Find out what it means to be "Grunder-Struck"

"Within the first hour it was apparent that GROW! was different than other industry events and it was obvious that I would be receiving a huge return on my investment. Marty and his team are experts at ensuring their audience is engaged throughout the event. I had the opportunity to have numerous one on one conversations and made invaluable connections with leaders in the industry."

— Loriena Harrington,
Beautiful Blooms
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how a company performs. Fochtman illustrates this example: A company with \$8.5 million in revenue has a five-year track record of 23 percent annual profit and renewal rates of 95 percent and higher. Its EBITDA is \$2.4 million with a 6.1 multiple. That business is under contract for \$14 million. (That's a significant gain for the owner.)

"Companies are selling for four to seven multiples, which means if you have an EBITDA of \$1 million you will get \$4 to \$7 million for it," Fochtman says. "But, that depends on how good your company is."

EBITDA in the landscape in-

“As a small business, there are so many things you can take on as expenses that are not ‘operational expenses’ critical to running the business.”

Jim Huston, president of J.R. Huston Consulting

dustry is driven by high renewal rates, low workers' compensation modification rates, a strong management team and those operational efficiencies that increase revenue and profitability. "All of these things cause a company to sell for a higher multiple of EBITDA," Fochtman says.

TEASING OUT THE EXTRAS. All of the add-ins a company pools into its financial picture can make all the difference in its value at the time of sale. "Adjusted EBITDA takes into account all of the owner add-backs, and all owners have them at some level," Fochtman says.

Typical add-backs include: a large owner's salary and year-end bonus, lawsuits and insurance claims, one-time professional fees, excessive inventory (parts, materials), family members' wages and benefits when they do not play an active role in the business, repairs and maintenance. Consider all of those extras (and then some). Like, how about the week of vacation added to a two-day business conference?

If a buyer comes to the table, he or she will not place value on these expenditures.

So consider what expenses exist because you yourself own



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the business. Those are the expenses that must be normalized. "Things like funding an owner's retirement plan will go away when you sell, and a new owner will not pay for a \$75,000 pickup truck rather than a \$45,000 truck," Fochtman says. "If you're paying yourself \$300,000 a year when you'd hire someone else to do your job for \$150,000, you have to normalize the \$150,000. All of this goes back on top of that EBITDA number."

Some good news for owners in the landscape industry is that depreciation is put back into EBITDA. "Depreciation is a

non-cash event that helps you," Fochtman says. "It lowers your profit number, which in turn lowers the tax you will pay. This is a big deal in the landscape industry because we have lots of trucks, trailers and equipment. So, depreciation can be your friend."

WHAT DRIVES MULTIPLES. The type of landscape company you're running plays into what multiple your company can get. A service-based landscape company with recurring revenue through maintenance accounts will be valued higher than a construction-based firm where

sales are tied to the owner, Huston points out.

Fochtman says another reason that design/build firms tend to not hold value like other types of landscape businesses is because accounts are largely residential. "Then, it becomes, how much will a buyer pay for residential install backlog?" he says.

On average, a maintenance company is worth roughly \$0.35 for every dollar of sales, Huston says. That means a \$1-million company is valued at about \$350,000 plus hard assets like equipment and inventory. However, some companies do sell for \$0.50 to \$1 of revenue – and

more. Fochtman refers back to the example of the \$18.5-million company under contract for \$14 million, and another \$8-million firm he's representing that is under contract for \$13.7 million. "Landscape maintenance companies of any size are being sold for (various multiples) of adjusted EBITDA," he says.

Huston notes that lawn care companies generally sell for 1-to-1, so a business with \$1 million in sales will often sell for \$1 million. "Irrigation service companies are usually worth \$0.50 on the dollar, plus or minus any equipment," Huston says. **L&L**

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Sharing positive comments shows the value of your work. **By Chad Diller**

IF YOU'RE A REMARKABLE COMPANY, your clients are going to sing your praises from time to time. Positive comments will make their way into your inbox, mailbox and voicemail throughout the year. Does your company have a process to maximize the power of these comments?

If someone has something valuable to say about your team or company, don't be afraid to use it. Get every ounce of worth out of those comments. At Tomlinson Bomberger, we learned over the years that the kind words of a happy

client are an opportunity to inspire our team and validate our brand claims in a marketplace flooded with competitors.

GATHER FEEDBACK. Does your company struggle to gain positive feedback? After taking a hard look at your operation, you may realize that you need to be proactive to get positive client feedback. Clients are far more likely to communicate dissatisfaction than to sing your praises. The key to getting that kind of feedback is to deliberately ask for it in the right place at the right time.

Editor's note: Chad Diller wrote this when he was marketing coordinator for Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care, Landscape & Pest Control. He is now account manager with Landscape Leadership, a sales and marketing agency for the green industry. This article pertains to his time at Tomlinson Bomberger.

One of the processes Tomlinson Bomberger put in place is to survey clients after certain projects are completed.

We send postage-paid survey cards with a space for the client to add specific comments. In addition to mail correspondence, one of our team members calls

to ask questions about their satisfaction. Our company also uses a prominent Net Promoter Score inquiry on all invoices and statements. The question asks the client, "On a scale of 1-10, how likely are you to recommend our company to your family or friends?" Many times the client will also write a comment.

There are also many times clients send positive comments via email or tell one of our team members over the phone.

Our team knows that when a client tells us they're happy, it's time to spread the word. Emails are forwarded, invoices are copied and online reviews are passed along to those involved.

PROMOTE THE FEEDBACK. Don't be afraid to get maximum usage of client feedback. When a comment comes into our organization, we make a point to share it with our whole team.

Unique comments are displayed on a monitor in our crew room. Emails and notes are read aloud at company meetings.

The feedback gets filed into the client's record in our database, and a copy goes in the personnel file of the team members responsible. A team member that inspires regular positive customer feedback is worth rewarding.

Be proud enough of positive feedback to share it publicly. Become known as an organiza-

tion that celebrates the successes of a team that makes each client feel like a rarity instead of a commodity.

Anonymize the client in the review and post it online, mentioning your team members by name, even tagging them on social media when possible.

It's amazing to see how followers will react to these kinds of posts. Just be sure to make the focus on praising your team and thanking your client.

Whether using it online or in printed materials, sharing client feedback can help your community see how you feel about having a team that focuses on amazing clients. **L&L**

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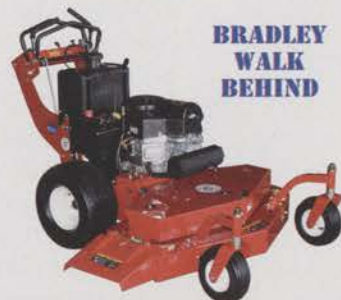
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Handpicked for You

A new collaboration by growers and garden centers aims to make plant selection less confusing for you and your customers.

By Matt McClellan



THE INDUSTRY CONTINUES TO CHURN OUT NEW PLANTS

like clockwork, often before the nuances of last year's introductions are completely understood. Even seasoned growers find themselves daunted by the sheer amount of new varieties.

If a dedicated plantsman has trouble staying on top of all the new genetics, it's understandable that landscapers would be intimidated. A plant neophyte who enters a garden center for the first time is likely to be overwhelmed by the choices.

We might be suffering from new plant fatigue, but consider where the industry might be without Knock Out roses, Endless Summer hydrangeas or the countless other smash hit introductions that pumped a shot of vitality into the market.

New genetics are the adrenaline of our industry, says Ed Overdeest, president of Overdeest Nurseries. Reducing consumer choice is not the way forward.

"We see the ever-increasing supply of new varieties as an opportunity – if processed properly," he says.

Overdeest is part of a collaboration of growers, new plant introducers and retailers that is trying to solve this problem. The group has one major factor in common: a dedication to the independent garden center. The group was announced last year and its goal is to provide better choices to the consumer by improving the plant pipeline process. Not every new choice is a better choice. Retailers try to help landscapers and consumers, but the fear of failure is a major impediment.

And when a plant fails, the consumer feels that fear was justified. By filtering the myriad new varieties, "rush to market" failures can be avoided.

"By thoroughly trialing in all settings: production, landscape and retail, we expect to narrow the field of selections down to the truly outstanding," Overdeest says. "That way, retailers, and ultimately consumers, can have confidence in the merit of these introductions."

“Based on all the interest, we expect (the number of plants) to increase substantially with each year.”

Ed Overdeest,
president,
Overdeest Nurseries

IN THE BEGINNING. In 2014, the Syn-RG group commissioned Kip Creel's StandPoint Marketing to survey consumers about their gardening concerns. What stood out loud and clear among all age groups was a desire for plants to be "tested to succeed in my area" and accessing those "grown specifically for my area."

Similar to the way "trust-marks" such as the "Good Housekeeping" seal of approval have provided helpful reassurance to consumers for decades, the wording for a new plant certification program clearly emerged from this research. The group consulted with its collaborators, and the "Handpicked for You" trust-mark was born.

More than 1,400 logo designs were submitted as part of an online crowdsourcing project.



ABOVE: After a year of grower trials, several varieties will move on to retail trials this spring.

This collaboration with IGCs is a vital part of the Syn-RG group's DNA. The growers involved all understand the value of reinforcing IGCs as trusted plant experts.

"We're competitors, but we realize how much we can benefit from working together because we are aligned with the same values and marketing strategies of making IGCs successful," says Mark Sellev, president of Prides Corner Farms.

"We want them to be involved in trialing as much as we are as growers, so we can foster a partnership with them, and also know that these plants aren't going to run off to a box store."

RETAILERS' ROLE. Independent garden centers have been unofficially involved in Syn-RG since its early days, as growers called upon a cross-section of their retail customers to weigh in on the StandPoint surveys, Overdevest says. Garden centers also provided input during focus group sessions, which helped shape the Handpicked for You program.

Syn-RG is still developing its network of independent garden centers that will sell Handpicked for You plants, he says.

"During the lead up to spring,

each Syn-RG grower will be reaching out to interested garden center customers to be a part of our Handpicked for You certification network," he says. "Actual 'membership' involves the original group of five Syn-RG growers.

These companies are providing all the investment capital for the Handpicked for You program. Retail participation is open to all garden centers purchasing the regional brands offered by the member growers."

The initial plant focus will be shrubs and perennials, but Overdevest says that it is likely that trees and annuals will be added as the program matures.

Sheridan Nurseries, which runs both robust growing and retail operations, is already gearing up for a soft launch at retail in 2017, says Rob Naraj, vice president of nursery sales for Sheridan Nurseries.

They are trialing 150 new plant varieties that are not available in the marketplace from several different breeders and propagators, Naraj says.

"I can tell you right now that there is a very large number that will be ripped out of the garden by spring of next year," he says. "We already know that they're not cutting the mustard."

The plants aren't fed fertilizer and only get watered about once

PLANT PURCHASING

a week to test their strength in conditions that a typical consumer would provide, Naraj says.

Overdevest says that in 2017, roughly 20 plants out of the initial varieties trialed will be introduced in a soft launch-like introduction of the Handpicked For You program.

“Based on all the interest, we expect (the number of plants) to increase substantially with each year,” Overdevest says.

As the initial stream of new selections gets narrowed down from a production and landscape perspective, IGCs provide valued input on appearance and performance. Those that ultimately get the thumbs up are certified as Handpicked for You and marketed through each participating grower’s regional brand and network of IGC customers.

Handpicked for You is not intended to be another brand. The founding growers believe there are already enough good national brands in the market.

The certification will be added as an overlay to the Syn-RG growers’ own regional brands—by virtue of an additional tag—and marketed only through IGCs. Although new genetics from national brands will be trialed on an early access basis at the grower level for better mutual evaluation purposes, the release of these new plants is not currently authorized to be part of the Handpicked for You certification, distribution and marketing process.

Naraj says the main goal throughout the trialing process is to test plants over a long period of time and within a variety of conditions and areas to pinpoint plants that will thrive locally. They are also still



The Syn-RG group of growers and retailers is working to ensure new plants are tested to thrive where they’re installed.

hammering out a marketing and advertising plan to figure out how to communicate to consumers that these plants have been thoroughly vetted by a group of growers and retailers.

The overall goal is simple for Naraj. He hopes Handpicked for You allows “the retailer to sell it in confidence, and, more importantly, the consumer to purchase it with confidence.”

Overdevest says he’s excited to collaborate with garden centers, and to “be able to partner with local garden centers in a way that respects their opinions and values their input—with the end result being a strengthened future for the independent channel.”

TRIAL BY FIRE. The regional trials are a key part of the process. Throughout 2016, the first year of access to promising new varieties, Syn-RG growers have collected data on production capability and landscape performance in their specific climatic region. During 2017, which will be year two of the process, the growers and their IGC partners will trial

for hardiness, drought-tolerance, production performance, landscape value, disease and insect resistance, invasive tendencies and duration of interest.

Retailers can use these samples for planting in their own trial areas or as displays in their sales yard to gather consumer reactions. If a variety receives a consensus positive opinion, the Handpicked for You certification will be awarded, and initial production will be targeted for sale at partnering IGCs during the third year, 2018.

Some new varieties will emerge from “Year 2” trialing for certification in 2017. But there is a strong possibility consumers might see the Handpicked for You logo as soon as this spring on select varieties.

“Interestingly, we have been encouraged by IGCs in the meantime to extend this certification to existing outstanding performers that have already proven themselves in the market,” Overdevest says. “We have this under serious consideration for this coming spring.”

Certain plants may receive the Handpicked for You certification in some states, but not others. For instance, while a crape myrtle may meet the standards in Virginia, it might not in Connecticut. The respective region will be reflected on the tag.

“That’s the magic of our regional network,” Sellev says. “Each of us will have a different mix. We have Ohio, New Jersey, Virginia, Ontario and Connecticut. We all made a promise that we were going to trial these not just in the container but in the garden to ensure it doesn’t just have good container performance, but also good garden performance.”

Earlier access to plant material is another lynchpin to the process. For that, the Syn-RG growers needed to get the new plant producers on board. Luckily, that was an easy sell.

“We have a group of similarly minded growers who share the same goals as independent retailers and new plant introducers,” Overdevest says.

(continued on page 81)

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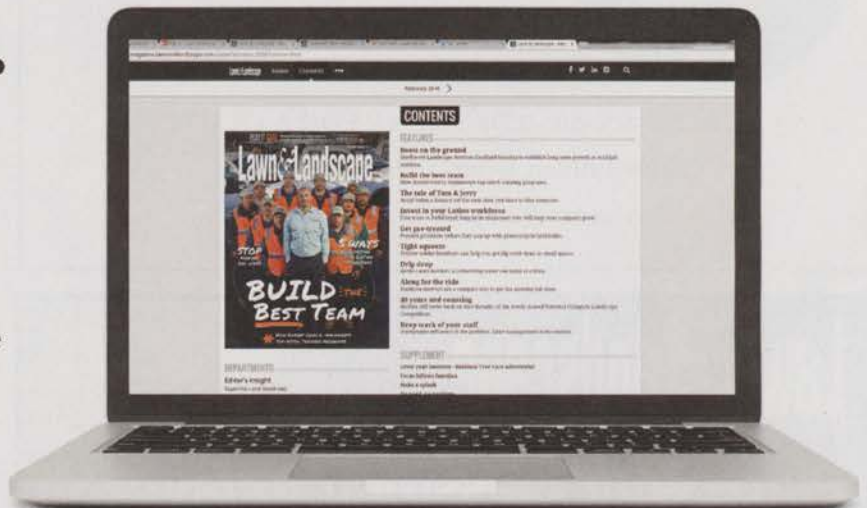
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HANDPICKED FOR YOU

(continued from page 76)

THE PLANT PIPELINE. The Syn-RG group is currently trialing several significant new selections. Among the highlights include boxwood selections from Saunders Brothers nursery. As one of the top boxwood producers in the U.S., Saunders has been actively studying new selections for blight resistance. Trialing of these varieties has been extended to the rest of the Syn-RG growers – with retailer input being sought in the coming years.

Tom Saunders, container nursery manager at Saunders Brothers, used Kelly Ivors' research into boxwood blight as a starting point. Ivors, currently of Cal Poly's Horticulture & Crop Science department, was previously at North Carolina State University, where she researched which varieties are more susceptible to boxwood blight and which are more resistant. That, along with his own research into leaf miner resistance, helps him determine what to grow long term.

"Our goal is to release a couple varieties that are less prone to boxwood blight and not as susceptible to leaf miner injury, as well," Saunders says.

Outside of boxwood blight, Saunders says leaf miners are the second-biggest threat to boxwood, because of how they change the aesthetic appeal of the plant.

Syn-RG also will be the exclusive marketing entity for a collection of virtually sterile barberries developed at the University of Connecticut by Mark Brand. Many current varieties of Berberis are on the hit list in several states because of their invasive nature. This collection represents the only barberries currently allowed to be sold in "barberry banning" states like New York.

Licensed propagation began in 2015. Grower trialing took place throughout 2016, and retailer samples will be available for testing in 2017. Handpicked for You certification for the barberry will be evaluated at the end of 2017 – with retail sales commencing in 2018.

There is also a series of five reblooming daylily varieties, and a Bambini series dwarf Phlox paniculata in the program. Both are existing performers and potential "fast-track" candidates for a 2017 certification.

Overall, the group is optimistic about the collaboration, and its faith in the capability of its partners and its new executive director, Emily Bibens Chung. The vice president of Woody Bibens & Associates joined the Syn-RG venture in late August.

"We're in it for the long haul," Sellow says. "All our businesses have been successful because of our consistency and perseverance. I'm excited to be in this group because we're not looking for a home run today. We're looking for sustainability and success over a long period of time." **L&L**

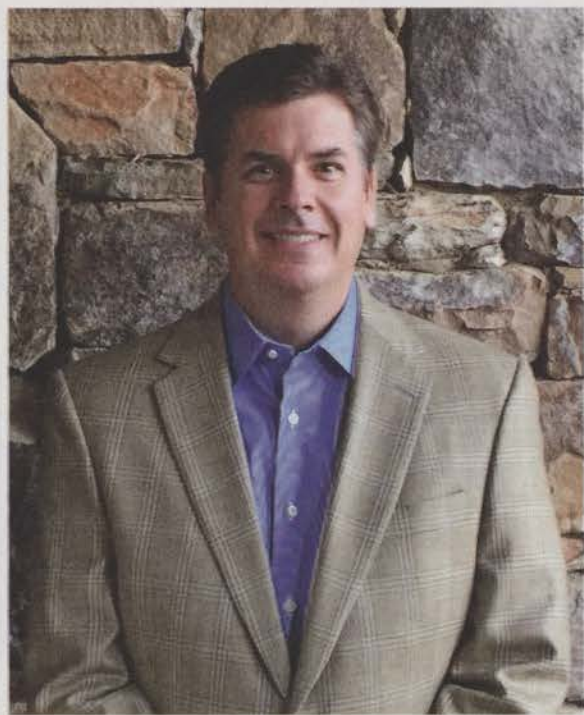
The author is managing editor of Nursery Management magazine, a sister publication of Lawn & Landscape. Michelle Simakis, editor of Garden Center magazine, another sister publication, contributed to this article.



TIPS FROM THE TOP

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PETER COPSES

// VICE PRESIDENT, GIBBS LANDSCAPE CO.

PETER COPSES, VICE PRESIDENT OF GIBBS LANDSCAPE CO., says

one of the most important lessons he's learned in the industry is to let his leaders lead, but not let long periods of time go by without checking in with them.

"I found when you do that, you become out of touch with maybe some things that are going on day to day," he says. "Usually that will pop up to where something big will come back to get you."

Lawn & Landscape spoke with Copses about how to give managers room to do their jobs, but also stay tuned in to what is happening.

LOCATION

Smyrna, Georgia

TOP 100 RANKING

74

2015 REVENUE

\$23.2 million

L&L: How do you keep your leaders from getting to disconnected from you?

PC: You have to be really in touch with leaders that are reporting to you in your organization, and to me it's basically in touch multiple times a week.

You need to make sure they're not afraid of you, number one. They need to be able to come to you and let you know when there are issues that pop up because you certainly want to put your input into it, or you have somebody else making a decision that could really affect you that you're not having input on.

I think that also with those types of leaders, you need to make sure that when you're

meeting with them, you have to focus on them too. You have to make sure that those people know that you're a caring person and you need to talk to them about themselves, what's going on in their lives. Everything just can't be about business or something negative that's going on.

And then the flip side of that is that there's so many positive things that go on in our organization, for sure, that you want to make sure you're re-sharing that with them and giving them the credit that's due to them when we have positive situations like that go on.

L&L: So stay away from the no-news-is-good-news approach? You want to focus on both the good and the bad?

PC: Absolutely, you've got to. We had a design/build job that we just completed a couple weeks ago. This was about a \$30,000 job. The client had already had some hardscape work done about a year ago on their property, and with this hardscape work, there were several gas lines that were running to different things like a fire pit, an outdoor fireplace, etc.

And while we were there doing our work, we mark utilities; we talk to the client about if they have anything out there that they're aware of. But when you have people out there digging and planting large trees and putting in a large planting landscape, you're digging and you can hit things if they're not marked.

In this particular instance, we did hit in a couple different areas – some gas lines that went to this new outdoor fire pit.

And in that particular situation, we had somebody say, "OK, we're going to take care of it internally." Luckily, I happened to hear about it because I was having a lunch with my team and it was brought up to me. At least I was able to address that with the person that was managing the job, and in the end, we went back to the client and they were totally understanding, and they agreed to pay for 75 percent of the cost of that.

You've got to be in touch day to day because if not, you have somebody making a decision, which could really affect your company. **L&L**



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