Supplement: 181's 2016 LEADERSHIP AWARD WINNERS

OCTOBER 2016

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2016

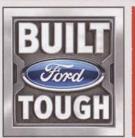
REPORT

4 your Office is a thess [P6.194]

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POISED FOR (EVEN MORE) GROWTH

Dig into our data to find out what's going on in the industry. BLUE SKIES AHEAD

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PUNCH THE CLOCK New rules

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A BURDEN OF A BAN

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OCTOBER 2016

A GIE MEDIA PUBLICATION VOLUME 37, NUMBER 10

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- Our number of vehicle incidents decreased substantially."



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Priority on parts

66 An organized shop can mean quicker turnaround with busted equipment, which results in more money to your bottom line.



SNOW.



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

BRING IN THE BACKUP

Finding temporary workers can alleviate the pressures of the big storms.

By Kate Spirgen

ou can't always be staffed for the huge snow events that can hit states like Minnesota. So what do you do when you need some extra help? We talked to Tom Hougnon, owner and chief operational officer at Reliable Property Services, which also has locations in Wisconsin and lowa, where an 18-inch storm means bulking up the shoveling crews.

L&L: How do you find good people?

Hougnon: It's the foremen that know the people. It's really important to have those good foremen.

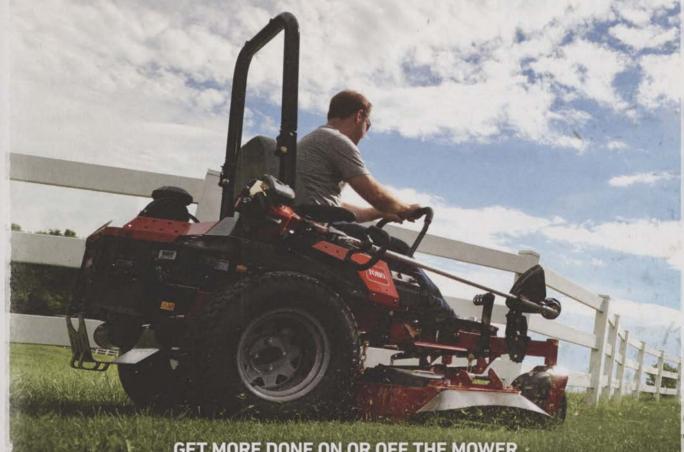
We tend to shy away from just going to the temp service and saying, "Send us 35 guys." If we do that we want to work with a temp service and say, "We need 10 guys every event and we want the same 10 people."

For the full story on hiring temporary staff, head to bit.ly/Snowbackup.



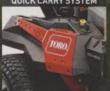


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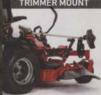
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Glad to be back, ready for more

ell, after four and a half months away on sabbatical, I'm back. I spent about a week processing a bunch of emails, reading through a giant stack of magazines and tracking down a new office chair, and I've settled back into the routine of editing and writing.

I'm truly grateful to have had the chance to take a sabbatical this summer. I did many of the things I set out to do: planted a garden, rode my bike, spent time with my family.

But mainly, I used this summer to slow down and step back from the stress and frantic lifestyle that can come from publishing a monthly magazine, and I couldn't have done it without the full support of my team here at Lawn & Landscape and GIE Media.

If you look at this page, my column rests on all the people listed in the masthead below. That's not an accident of design: They support me and are the foundation of this fine publication. I'm just lucky to get to have my mugshot up here and prattle on for 400 words every month.

Every year in our State of the Industry Report, we ask landscapers about their stress level, and it consistently ranks near the top of the list of their major concerns. No surprise

there, but what can you do about it? The average landscaper can't take the summer off, but what about a week's vacation? A long weekend? Even just a day where you stop worrying about everything and just unplug and recharge. A short respite from the constant stress of running your business, your branch or your crew can make you a better leader in the long run.

It is counterintuitive, I think, that slowing down allows us to speed up. But some time away from the grindstone helps us see where we are, and gives us some perspective on what we're doing. It gives us the energy to make the changes necessary to improve for the future.

Working on and in your business is fun - at least I hope you enjoy it - but it can be very easy to get lost in the weeds of day-to-day management and operations and to lose sight of why you're busting your butt every day.

Whether it's your family, your bank account or something else, there's a reason you get out of bed every day, fire up your truck and head out into the world. My time away helped me see all my own reasons more clearly. I knew them before, sure, but I didn't always see them.



There's a reason you get out of bed every day, fire up your truck and head out into the world.

I'm excited to be back, and I'm looking forward to the next few months. We've got some very cool stuff coming down the pike this fall and in 2017, and I can't wait to show vou. - Chuck Bowen

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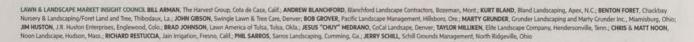
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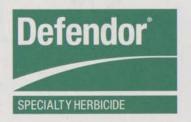






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The best of the

Orange County California contractors received prestigious honors for commercial and residential properties that span the entire area.

he Orange County chapter of the California Landscape Contractors Association 2016 Beautification Awards honored 18 local landscape contractors for excellence in landscape installation and maintenance, and demonstrating the best quality, construction, originality and attention to detail on projects completed within the last year.

A total of 55 awards were presented in 29 categories, culled from 90 entries which encompassed residential and commercial landscape construction, maintenance and renovation, along with water features, outdoor lighting and water-saving California-friendly landscaping.



DMA Greencare won the Robert Wade Presidents Award for this project in Villa Park.

The four top award winners are:

- Allen Chariton Memorial Judges Award for the best landscape maintenance to Marina Landscape for the Citadel Outlets project in Los Angeles.
- Sweepstakes Award for the best overall entry from all categories to Richard Cohen Landscape of the McLean Residence Project in Villa Park.
- Bill Vandergeest Excelsior Award given to a contractor who has been a member of CLCA for less than a year to Solscapes for the Lascari-Placentia project in Placentia.
- Robert Wade Memorial Presidents Award for best landscape installation, landscape renovation, or water conservation to DMA Greencare Contracting for the Kreutzinger Residence in Villa Park.

Multiple award winners included (each received two to eight awards):

- · DMA Greencare Contracting
- · Glen's Landscape
- Gothic Landscape
- Land Mechanics
- Marina Landscape
- · Mission Landscape Companies
- · Richard Cohen Landscape
- · Roger's Gardens Landscape
- SoCal Concepts
- Solena Landscape
- · Tropical Plaza
- Visionscape
- · Wm. Vandergeest Landscape Care

Companies receiving a single award include:

- Bemus Landscape
- BrightView Landscape Services
- California Landcare
- Eureka Landscape Services
- Solscapes



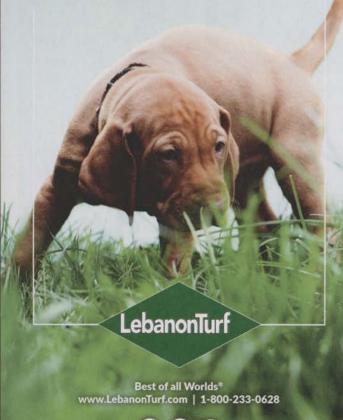
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ASK THE EXPERTS

Yes to GPS?

Q. I have been thinking about getting a GPS tracking system for my trucks but I don't know if the employees will like it, so I am not sure if it is worth it.

A. GPS tools have helped our industry to see improved efficiency in many areas: crew routing, fuel consumption and even asset recovery, to name a few; but they are really helpful for accountability and fleet safety.

I look at the investment most importantly in terms of driver and vehicle safety, which have to be priorities every day. We have an obligation to the communities where we work to provide maintained vehicles and competent, responsible operators. It is also our legal obligation. We

Have a question for Ask the Experts? Send it to llexperts@gie.net



have an obligation to our crews to provide a safe work environment.

If this is the first time your employees are using GPS tracking, it is true that you may have to battle and overcome the gossip of Big Brother is watching everyone. While this is a valid point, use the introduction of this tool as a teaching moment. These systems are used to benefit the whole team, from the billing office to the mechanics, to the driver's themselves. The drivers, really? Yes, the drivers benefit by becoming more accountable, in real time, for their driving behavior.

The correction of bad habits will carry over to their personal vehicle use. Also, there



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Work through some GPS demo instructions and ask if you can visit with a firm using a system before purchasing a GPS product.

are advantages of this constant behind-the-scenes monitoring to support and defend your drivers from accusations on the road.

Within six months of our new system coming online, one of our drivers was cleared in minutes after being accused of causing a minor crash. The data showed that the truck was at a complete stop and had not moved just prior to or after the impact. Just one example, of how Big Brother can be a friend.

Research the options available and ask your insurance

company's loss prevention specialist their opinion on what actions they would like you to monitor. List the priorities and objectives you would like to accomplish with your fleet management solution. Work through some demo instructions, check references in our industry and ask if you can visit a firm using the system live. See how the information and feedback are provided.

Reports, emails and text alerts should be able to be set up and delivered to the right member of your team. Is driver behavior going to be monitored





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by one manager or a supervisor, or set up to include the safety director? Do you want alerts or reports going directly to the driver? (Caution here: Remember real time text or email may sound great, however, you may be distracting a driver already violating some operating standard.)

Some systems actually offer red, yellow and green dashboard mounted lights to show the drivers how they are performing compared to their coworkers.

Here are some features offered by GPS Fleet Management Systems which were considered If this is the first time your employees are using GPS tracking, it is true that you may have to battle and overcome the gossip of Big Brother is watching everyone.

during our due diligence:

- 1) Speeding: This can be monitored by setting company policy thresholds/speed limits or for violations of posted limits. Tolerances for generating alerts can be adjusted.
- 2) Hard breaking/quick acceleration: These items often have adjustable thresholds. Viewed by many as an important item to monitor to adjust driver behavior. Both tailgating and race-like starting line takeoffs from a red light will show up here.
- Cab-mounted cameras:See bad behavior or distracted

driving as it happens.

- 4) Odd or after hour alerts: If the staff is allowed to use the vehicles for their commute to and from work, this feature allows for instant notification of any after hour activity. Insurance carriers like to know that this type of use is monitored, cutting down on excess mileage and therefore their risk.
- 5) Geo-fencing: This feature allows you to confine a vehicle's use to an area or to flag locations where your vehicles and staff are prohibited from going.
- **6) Driver key fobs:** Do other drivers operate a vehicle





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from time to time or are they swapped out for supply runs, maintenance, etc.? Are you content to only monitor by truck or do you want clear driver accountability? These fobs can be swiped to enable the vehicles' ignition or just as part of your policy, allowing operation if the fob is forgotten.

7) Diagnostic alerts: Engine and computer codes from your fleet as they are generated.

Know of a possible breakdown before it causes an accident or down time.

8) Routine maintenance reminders and alerts: Preventa-

We have an obligation to the communities where we work to provide maintained vehicles and competent, responsible operators. It is also our legal obligation.

tive and scheduled maintenance helps to keep your team safe. Roadside repairs are a dangerous place to correct missed maintenance items.

When asked about GPS as a safety tool, my insurance agent gave me the top four reasons GPS tracking lowers commercial auto insurance rates:

- 1) Lower chance of claims due to vehicle theft
- 2) Improved driver behavior
- 3) Discourages misuse of vehicles
- 4) Proper maintenance prevents accidents In our company, the fear of

Big Brother was out-weighted by the benefits. If you introduce the benefits to your team, they will probably agree, too.

Joe Ehrenreich, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, NALP Safety Committee general manager, Young's Landscape Management ASCA-C Snow Professional

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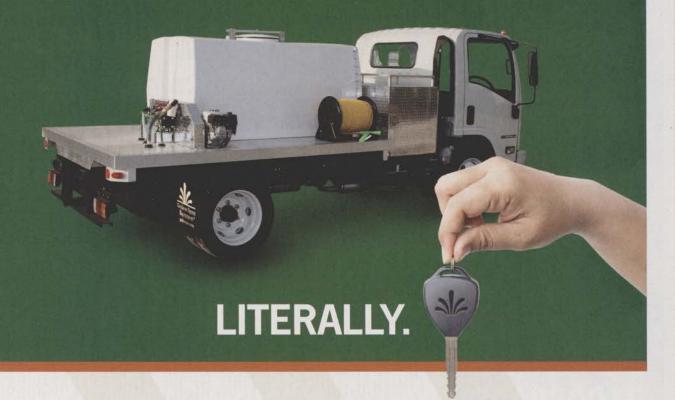
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A FIX FOR HIRING PROBLEMS

WAS READING THE LATEST ISSUE of Lawn & Landscape and came across your article relating to hiring issues.

We are a small engine repair facility located in South Florida for over 30 years. One of our top struggles is the ability to attract and retain experienced small engine mechanics.

There are no schools offering a small engine training program other than Vatterrott that I am aware of. I have contacted the local area schools in the area and the state as well with no results.

This is a very difficult issue to address as

the recruiting agencies typically do not have much in the supply of these types of resumes. The manufacturing companies do offer training programs, but I believe they should do more to promote this field through high schools, colleges etc.

The GIE+EXPO is soon approaching and it would be wonderful to see if there are any companies interested in sponsoring this type of recruiting activity.

CONNIE DURAND, office manager, Bitter Blue Lawn & Garden, Pembroke Pines, Florida

CONTRACTORS GET A LOOK INSIDE MARIANI LANDSCAPE

ndustry veteran and Lawn & Landscape columnist Marty Grunder, in conjunction with the National Association of Landscape Professionals, conducted a two-day trip to the Chicago suburbs in August for seminars at the Marriott Lincolnshire Resort.

Attendees also visited Mariani Landscape's Lake Bluff, Illinois, headquarters for a series of guided tours to each business operation throughout the facility including briefings from financial, operational, purchasing, sales, HR, production, construction and IT leaders at Mariani.

The first day for the 150 attendees included a full program of seminars including a presentation by Mariani Landscape Vice President of Operations Ron Fiocchi, who gave the group a presentation of the many different vehicle and trailer configurations used by Mariani Landscape.

Mariani Vice President of Design/Build Lee Keenan and Director of Client Care Ed I always wanted to be the boss and I thought everyone was like me."

Frank Mariani, NALP board member and Mariani Landscape CEO

Furner also gave a comprehensive presentation on selling the "Mariani way."

The final speech was provided by company CEO Frank Mariani. Speaking of his labor force, he talked about creating a career path for associates at Mariani.

"I always wanted to be the boss and I thought everyone was like me," he said.

"But that wasn't their dream and each individual has a different perspective on how far and which path they want to pursue. But ultimately helping each associate map out their career path, wherever it may lead, is a fantastic tool to retain people."

LAWNAMERICA MERGES WITH SWINGLE

DENVER – LawnAmerica has merged with Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care located in Denver. The merger results in Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care owning the majority of the assets of LawnAmerica, an Oklahoma-based lawn care business. LawnAmerica has been in business since 1999, employs approximately 60 people and is located in Tulsa, Oklahoma City and portions of the North Carolina and South Carolina markets. It is also a Christmas décor franchise.

"Swingle has been in business for nearly 70 years, and are well respected in their market and nationally," said Brad Johnson, founder and former majority owner of LawnAmerica. "After lengthy discussions with many industry advisors, I've decided Swingle is the best fit for the next steps for LawnAmerica."

Both companies will continue to operate as independent businesses, and each company remains committed to providing their respective customers with industry-leading services, while also exploring new ways to combine resources, experience and sharing of best practices to improve efficiencies where possible.

"A 20-year industry friendship between Brad Johnson and myself has provided the foundation for this excellent opportunity," said Thomas R. Tolkacz, CEO of Swingle and new majority owner of LawnAmerica. "Combining our businesses provides an opportunity to grow stronger as multi-regional businesses, providing additional opportunities for team members and expanded service offerings to customers."







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BAYER ACQUIRES MONSANTO

LEVERKUSEN / ST. LOUIS – Bayer acquired Monsanto for \$128 per share in an all-cash transaction. Monsanto's board of directors, Bayer's board of management and Bayer's supervisory board have unanimously approved the agreement. Based on Monsanto's closing share price on May 9, 2016, the day before Bayer's first written proposal, the offer represents a premium of 44 percent to that price.

According to CNNMoney,

the \$66 billion deal was the biggest takeover this year, as of late September.

"We are pleased to announce the combination of our two great organizations. This represents a major step forward for our crop science business and reinforces Bayer's leadership position as a global innovation driven life science company with leadership positions in its core segments, delivering substantial value to shareholders,



Baumann, left, CEO of Bayer AG, with Grant, CEO of Monsanto

our customers, employees and society at large," said Werner Baumann, CEO of Bayer AG.

Bloomberg.com reported

Bayer is considering dropping the Monsanto name, and the purchase isn't likely to be completed until late 2017.



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JOE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR, SO HE

STARTED HIS OWN LAWN MAINTENANCE BUSINESS.

FINALLY!

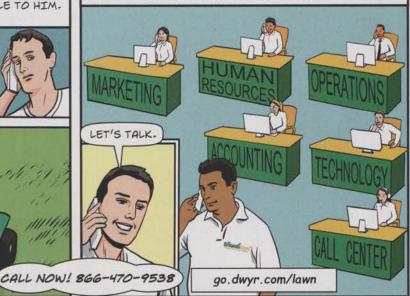
I'M MY OWN BOSS-



GEORGE RECEIVES GREAT TRAINING TO GET MORE RESIDENTIAL AND COMMERCIAL ACCOUNTS, AND HAS MARKETING AND OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE TO HIM-AND HE ENJOYS TIME WITH HIS FAMILY.



JOE CALLS THE GROUNDS GUYS TO LEARN HOW HE CAN HAVE THE BUSINESS HE'S ALWAYS WANTED.





Pickela HOPTO IT Group

BY BROOKE N. BATES

MIKE PICKEL BROUGHT a "Bunny" on board to keep his landscape crews focused on production. Bunny, in this case, is his father, Maurice, who acts as a "gofer" at Pickel Landscape Group in Landen, Pennsylvania, to pick up and deliver materials, transport equipment and much more.

"Anything that can keep our production team on a jobsite, he does that," Pickel, 35, says of Bunny, 68, who got his nickname from a baby blanket years ago.

"It's the little stuff that happens when you own a business that the business owner, manager and team leader shouldn't have "THE KEY IS understanding that your production people are more valuable in the field installing plants or building patios than they are making deliveries."

Mike Pickel, owner, Pickel Landscape Group

to worry about because they need to focus on getting work done. He helps our team by letting them do their jobs." Bunny started working for Pickel as a fertilizer technician in 2010. But in 2012, when Pickel started outsourcing applications and moved into a new facility, he realized that his dad could add more value as fleet and facilities manager.

In this role, Bunny keeps the facility clean, in addition to jockeying equipment and materials to and from the field.

The position, which also includes the responsibilities of chief safety reminder: inspecting crews and jobsites for required safety gear, is part-time, four days a week – a great opportunity for a semi-retired worker at the company.

"Some people might look at this position for a company that just does a little over \$1 million in revenue as a big overhead expense, but it allows us to be way more productive," Pickel says. "The key is understanding that your production people are more valuable in the field installing plants or building patios than they are making deliveries."

Pickel learned the hard way that the downside of Bunny's position is abuse by forgetful crews. Pickel was shocked to hear how often team leaders called Bunny to bring materials, safety gear and tools they should always have on hand.

So last year, Bunny started getting a daily agenda (that he can adjust for legitimate requests), and creating a daily time report to monitor his activity. At spring orientation, he explained to crews what he would – and would not – do for them.

"You need to put parameters in place so the position doesn't get abused ... and so you don't get upset because he spent half a day taking plastic edging for a paver patio that the guys should have brought days ago," Pickel says. "We've learned to set up parameters so we can be hard on those parameters, not the person." 181

INFA #1

Let crews concentrate on production by creating a "gofer" role to deliver materials and equipment to the field.

INFA #9

▶ Put parameters around the position and monitor activity to ensure crews don't take advantage of the "gofer."

IDEA #3

Description Communicate the value this position adds. A "gofer" is much more than just a trash man or delivery boy.



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COMMERCIAL VEHICLES



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

THE SELF-ASSURED LEADER

HE OPPOSITE OF COURAGE is not cowardice, it's conformity. Even a dead fish can go with the flow."

– Jim Hightower

One of the qualities I admire most, both in a leader and in a business, is confidence. I love to work with confident people and businesses — with those who know what they're doing and show it, with those who challenge the status quo and are driven to keep getting better. Let me give you some examples.

My right-hand man at Grunder Landscaping Co. is Paul Stoll. Paul knows plants. Paul knows what grows where and what won't. He knows finance. He knows people. He knows how to deal with the challenges that arise all the time at a landscaping company.

I can't tell you how many times
I thought a plant or a tree was dead
and Paul said to me with absolute
certainty, "Nope, it'll be fine." And
he's always right. He knows more
about landscaping than anyone else
I've ever met. The reason we're able
to do awesome work at Grunder
Landscaping is due in no small part



ONLINE: You can now view Marty's new 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 explains how to show appreciation for customers.

to what he's taught me and my team in the 19 years he's been with us. He knows what he's doing, and it shows. He's confident, but not cocky.

And he's a brilliant teacher. I love working with him and so does my team. Never content with the

status quo, Paul is always finding ways to improve our business, and his example pushes us all – myself included – to do the same.

My right-hand at home is my wife, Lisa. She knows how to run a house-hold. She knows how to parent – her years of teaching and her study of childhood development have practically made her a pro at raising kids. And she can cook like you wouldn't believe. Like Paul, she's confident in what she does. She wants the best for us and she drives me to set an example for my kids to follow. She pushes herself and our whole family to always do better.

Paul and Lisa are confident in their expertise, and their confidence enables me to succeed. Businesses that are confident often succeed, too. Here's a couple I've encountered.

Recently we started working with a concrete subcontractor whose confidence impresses me. Initially they told me they didn't like working with contractors like us and they might not be a good fit for us. When I asked why, they said they

had so much direct work with clients that they didn't really need any subcontract projects. They've also had problems getting paid for subcontract work and with getting stuck in the middle of disputes between customers and their contractors.

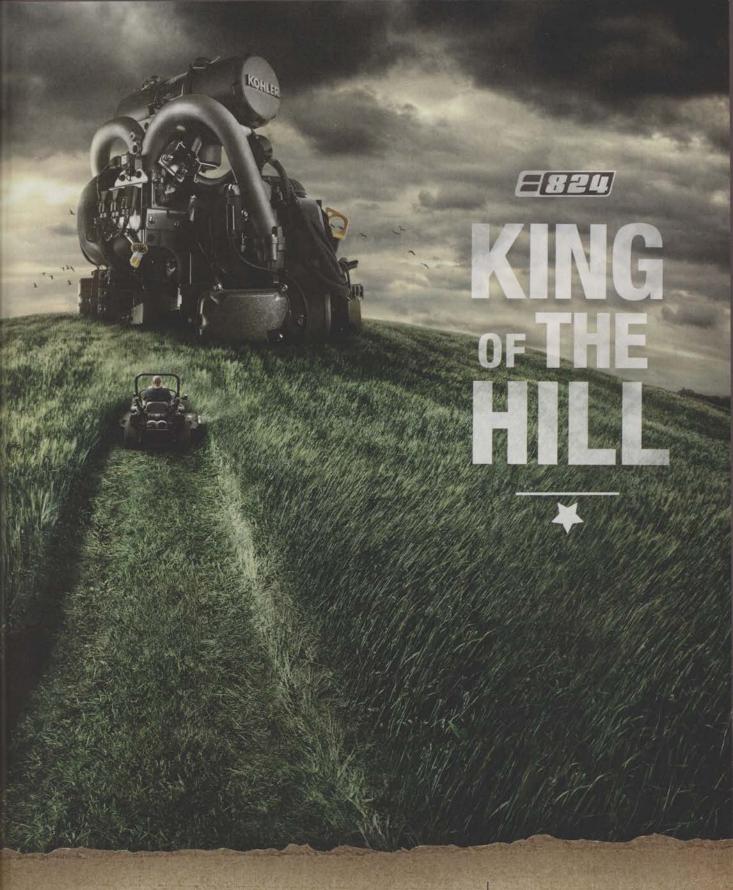
But they had heard of Grunder Landscaping and were willing to sit down and speak with us. We had a great meeting and we liked what we saw – a sub that has beautiful equipment, great processes, detailed proposals, deep knowledge of concrete, and ideas for making projects better. And they're responsive. They insisted on a deposit and signed our subcontractor agreement, and then, like clockwork, they started our first jobs on time.

But first they made us wait 90 days, insisting it wouldn't be fair to their other clients to jump our jobs before the ones they had already sold. I must admit I didn't like waiting, but I also admired their refusal to break, even for someone who can send them a lot of work. Now that's confidence. And that confidence makes me want to find more opportunities to work with them.

Here's the lesson if you haven't gotten it yet. Too many entrepreneurs and their businesses aren't confident. They don't know who they are, and they don't try to get better. They just go with the flow. They say yes to everything and that only puts them farther and farther behind the confident leaders who know when to say no and have the confidence to say it.

So know who you are and hire confident experts for your team. Don't apologize for your price or your approach, and don't be afraid to walk away from prospects and clients who don't trust you to do the job you know how to do. Let





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JIM HUSTON runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm. www.jrhuston.biz; jhuston@giemedia.com

PUT YOUR NUMBERS TO USE

ENCHMARKS, STANDARDS AND CRITICAL NUMBERS can help you understand your business better and run it more effectively if you know how to use them. They not only can provide you with some measuring sticks, to help you measure what's important but they also can provide you with context as you compare your business with others both within your market and outside. Here are some suggestions for using them.

STUDY (DO YOUR HOMEWORK).

I was once told that the only place where "success" precedes "work" is in the dictionary. Many people fail in this industry because they refuse to put in the time and really work at their business. Don't just go into business, grow into business. You need to prepare to own a business. I've seen hundreds of business owners who lack the discipline and refuse to study their business as they attempt to master it. You need to seriously study your business and all that it has to teach you. If you do, the rewards, both financially and personally, can be significant.

BENCHMARKS, STANDARDS (PRODUCTION RATES), CRITICAL NUMBERS AND VITAL SIGNS.

Benchmarks and standards are somewhat synonymous. They are industry averages of certain activities, ratios or functions. Production rates (e.g., the number of man-hours required to plant a 2" caliper tree) are also

sometimes referred to as standards. Not all benchmarks are created equal. Some are more important to some people than others. Financial ratios are usually more important to bankers, financiers and vendors than they are to contractors. Profitability ratios are usually more important to contractors than they are to bankers, financiers and vendors. Vital signs are to a medical doctor what critical numbers are to a contractor. If vital signs exceed a certain viable range, you're probably dead - literally. In business, if certain critical numbers exceed a certain viable range, you may also be dead - figuratively.

ANALYTICAL AND OBJECTIVE VS.
INTUITIVE BENCHMARKS. Intuitive
benchmarks are benchmarks that
you personally know by direct experience. You know if you're happy
or not. You know if your chosen
career is fulfilling or frustrating You
don't need a calculator to measure
such things. Analytical or objective benchmarks are ones that are
measurable and quantifiable. For
these, you do use a calculator to determine them.
Financial ratios are a

POINT OF REFERENCE AND POINT OF DEPARTURE. By this I mean that a particular benchmark is a starting point – a number to use that may or may not be close to reality. But one has to start somewhere, and it's as good a place to start as any.

DEFINITIONS. Individual benchmarks need to be clearly defined. I spend a lot of time defining things like general and administrative (G&A) overhead, labor burden, direct costs, indirect costs, account managers vs. project managers, etc. Study these definitions as you analyze your business.

QUANTIFYING DATA. In business as in sports, you have to measure the dynamic of what is taking place. You need to know if you are winning or losing. In sports, if you don't measure things, you're merely exercising. It's no more than "sweating to the oldies" or Jazzercise. In

business, if you don't pay attention to the numbers, it's commonly referred to as "going broke."

FORMATTING DATA. I'll bet that you didn't go into business to measure things and format data. It's working outdoors, designing and creating beautiful landscapes, maintaining a beautiful property, fine gardening, installing an efficient sprinkler system, etc., that turns your crank. Unfortunately, you have to understand the numbers. To do so, you have to format data properly so that it makes sense and is operationally meaningful to you and your staff. So get used to it!

LOOKING FORWARD. The study of benchmarks, standards and critical numbers is a study of past performance for the purpose of improving future performance. Once they are understood, one can project into the future more accurately and confidently. For instance, if you study and understand the historical data in your profit and loss statement, you can then project your growth and profitability for the upcoming year with much greater accuracy. LEL



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HODY

Tnakita



BY BILL ARMAN

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.

GET OFF TO A GOOD START

HAVE NOT WITNESSED MANY good employee orientations or on-boarding processes in the landscape industry. The usual process has the new person look at videos, fill out paper work and take a drug test. Then after three to four hours they are sent out to the field to fend for themselves, never to be seen again until they quit, get fired, beg for a raise or worse, get injured.

I would highly recommend you take another look at your orientation/on-boarding system and see how it can have a positive effect on your new team members. I'm not suggesting this process only last 90 days, as it really should be for several months until they are literally on board with the culture.

At minimum this should include a clear explanation of the company's values, culture, dos and don'ts, what are the success behaviors expected, as well as a review of the employee manual and safety rules. Here are 10 action items to improve your on-boarding process.

1. Have all materials and assigned items ready. Anything a new employee should have will be ready and waiting for their arrival or at very least in short order. Get them gear — a uniform, hat, PPEs, employee manual, etc., before they get there. Depending on the position, other items such as credit cards, assigned vehicles, a computer, or an email address may need to be ready, too.

2. Take a photo and display

it. Take a picture of the new team member and have it on a nice space where everyone can see it and say welcome! Send the local paper a press release about your new addition if appropriate.

3. Cover basics before entering the field. Have a sit down review of the safety program, the company vision, mission and core values, along with the employee manual. Cover all of the legal required areas including Equal Opportunity Employer, sexual harassment, FMLA, etc.

Have leadership or owner involvement. Leadership should be

involved in your orientation or onboarding process. Always remember people are watching the leaders and where they spend their time. The general manager of the Ritz-Carlton, who is the highest-ranking person at the facility, is personally involved with every orientation. They actually give a portion of the presentation on the history of the Ritz-Carlton chain and how the logo came about. Just think what an impact it would be to have the owner of the company spend a little time with all new employees.

5. Have a mini-boot camp or training crew entry point. Here is where it's critical to take the time and host a hands-on mini boot camp with two to four hours of training exercises. Have designated crews equipped to handle a new employee with very specific areas to teach them, and have very specific fundamentals clearly spelled out along with a certification-verification process that assures the skills were learned.

6. Give regular and specific feedback. If for any reason the new hire is not performing to your standards or expectations, they will receive a sit down coaching session before the end of the 90-day on-boarding period. Make it clear what is expected of them and what will need to be worked on to remain an employee.

7. Identify training objectives.

They will receive the appropriate training that comes along with the position during the on-boarding period. Review their basic training expectation and make certain these skills are learned during their first 90 days. The foreman/ supervisor will assist the new hire with the training needed to learn these skills. They should be required to demonstrate these skills on their own with a certification process.

8. Place an emphasis on safety. They won't be asked to do things they're not qualified to do. If they're asked to do something and don't feel comfortable doing it, have them contact their supervisor. Have them always wear the appropriate personal protective equipment.

9. Get feedback/input from the new team member. The new hire will be able to give the company some feedback through a confidential survey. Have them fill out a survey and also allow for feedback during their weekly "touch base."

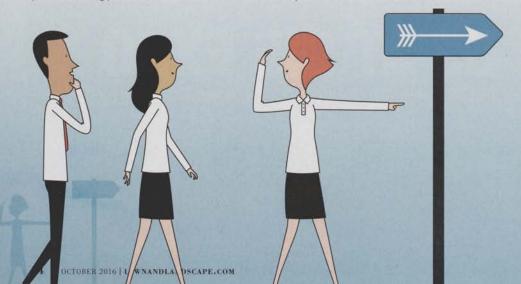
no. Assign a coach or buddy.
Assign a coach or buddy to help
them become a successful safe
and productive team member. The
coach will touch base with them
weekly until they have got their feet

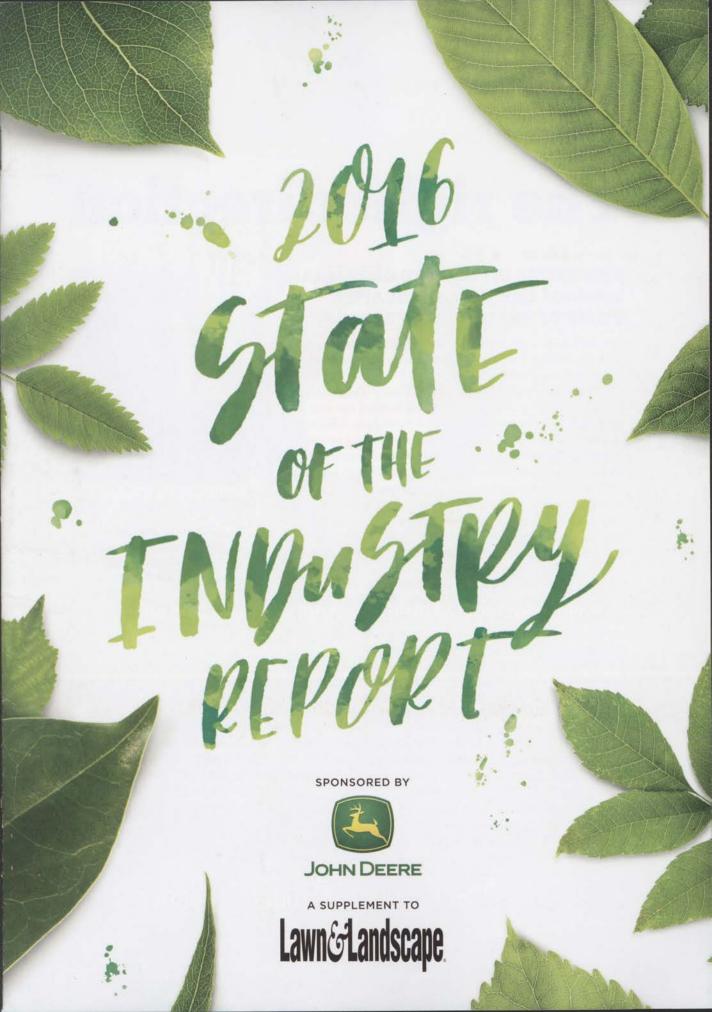
on the ground or around 90 days.

After that there will be a monthly

"touch base." L&L

The author is co-founder of The Harvest Group.







The right direction

JOHN DEERE IS PROUD TO ONCE AGAIN SPONSOR LAWN & LANDSCAPE'S STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT.

Each year this report helps us to better understand our industry by sharing trends, identifying concerns and allowing us to see what is on the horizon for the landscape industry.

2016 proved to be a significant year, with many changes across the industry. Landscape contractors are more confident than ever, with many expecting increased profit and growth. This is completely different from just a few years ago in 2011, when 20 percent of respondents reported they were not confident the industry would grow. What a difference a few years can make! But this also illustrates how quickly our industry can change.

While the outlook is positive, there are still many challenges landscape contractors continue to face as they navigate the tricky business waters. Labor and wages continue to be a concern for business owners, and as regulations change, it is going to be vital for business owners and managers to stay on top of the rules and adjust their businesses accordingly.

Because of these challenges, landscape contractors need to understand their true costs of operation. Fully examine your business, review all of your expenses and determine where change is needed. Research new technology and industry offerings. Also, identify manufacturer initiatives, including John Deere's NeverStop program, which can help your business stay up and running, getting the most out of your equipment.

Also consider professional associations, like the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) and the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance (NHLA). These organizations are dedicated to promoting the landscape industry and advocate for policies and laws that protect the future success of landscape professionals.

At John Deere, we are also dedicated to supporting the landscape industry, as well as you, the professional landscape contractor. We are continuing to expand and improve our equipment, offering a full line of solutions. Additionally, our extensive dealer network is a dedicated partner for your business, ensuring that you are supported from purchasing to maintaining your equipment after the sale.

Through business solutions like NeverStop, and customized financing through John Deere Financial, John Deere can help you and your business grow and prosper. We are committed to offering the best equipment, programs and dealer support in the industry, and we welcome the opportunity to earn your business.

We hope you have a safe and prosperous year! .



KEN TAYLOR, CLP

General Manager John Deere Corporate Business Division



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National

Savings²

Savings^z : \$**300** Total Savings

\$1,000

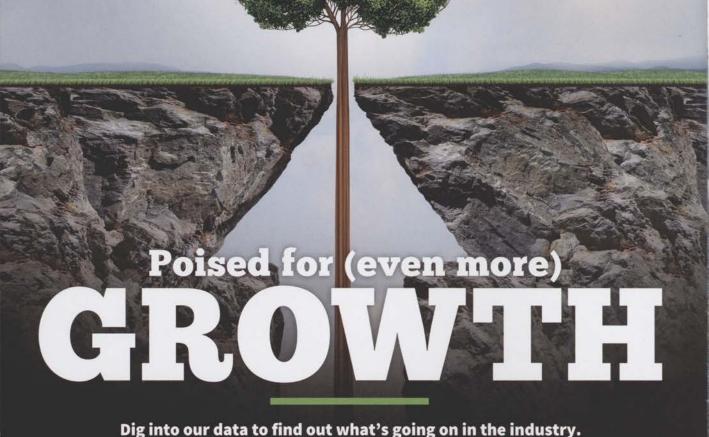




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²⁵¹⁰⁰⁰ off offer includes the 5300 Z920M national offer plus 5700 off with Platinum 3 GreenFleet Member discount. GreenFleet discount offer expires October 28, 2016 GreenFleet level savings are based on total units purchased. A member's per unit discount for an eligible sale will be based on the highest accumulated qualifying equipment purchased at the time of an eligible sale. See terms and conditions at JohnDeere.com/GreenFleet for details.



in the green industry, but there is always uncertainty. That's what we've gathered from this year's State of the Industry report. Contractors continue to express greater confidence in growing revenue and turning a profit compared to last year.

Lack of quality labor, health insurance costs, weather and government regulations can keep optimism from getting too high, but contractors like where they stand.

Contractors continue to have trouble finding workers and with questions surrounding new overtime/salary rules from the Department of Labor, contractors may now have issues with how to pay current employees. The average landscape company pays its salaried employees less than \$47,476, and these positions will become hourly and eligible for overtime when the new rules are implemented.

Maintenance continues to be the fastest growing service, while design/build continues to get a big boost as consumers spend on hardscapes and outdoor living features. Lawn care is third and irrigation is fourth.

Finding quality labor is once again the top concern (45 percent) while health insurance, worker's comp costs, personal stress and lowball competitors round out the top five.

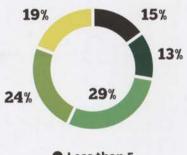
– Brian Horn

NOTE: Not all percentages will equal 100% due to rounding/non-responses. Not all answer options are listed here.



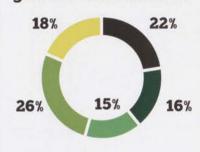
WHO ARE YOU?

How many years has your company location been in business?



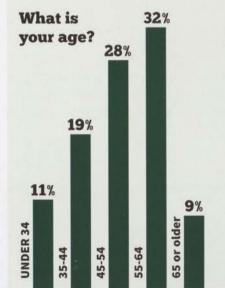
- Less than 5
- **9** 5 9
- **10 19**
- 0 20 29
- 30 or more

Approximately what was your location's gross revenue in 2015?



- More than \$1 million
- \$999,999-\$500,000
- \$499,999-\$200,000
- **\$199,999-\$50,000**
- Less than \$49,999

to get older as the 55-64 demographic has a larger percentage of respondents this year compared to the 45-54 age range last year taking the largest percentage. Last year, 55-64 made up 27 percent of the response rate while 45-54 was 33 percent.



Which of the following services does your location offer? (Listed in percentages)



Lawn care/ chemical application



Landscape maintenance



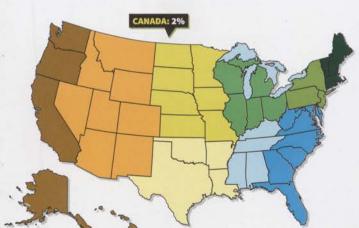
Landscape design/



Irrigation



Trees & ornamental



Where is your company located?

NORTHEAST

MIDWEST

SOUTH

WEST



FEELING GOOD

they were last year, and much more confident than 5 years ago. In 2015, 84 percent said they turned a profit, compared to 78 percent in 2014. In 2011, 20 percent said they were not confident at all that the industry would grow in 2012, while just 2 percent said the same about 2017. And 77 percent are confident or very confident their location will grow in revenue compared to 71 percent last year.

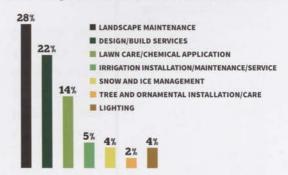
What percentage of your location's 2015 gross revenue came from each of the following services?

Landscape and mowing maintenance	42%
Landscape design/construction	20%
Lawn care/chemical application	12%
Snow and ice management	6%
Irrigation installation/maintenance/service	6%
Trees & ornamental	3%
Other	10%

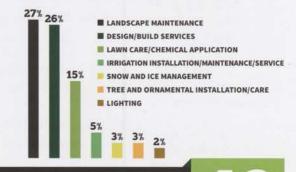
What was the MOST PROFITABLE service your location offered in 2015?

Landscape maintenance (mowing, edging/trimming, pruning) 30%
Design/build services	21%
Lawn care/chemical application	15%
Snow and ice management	9%
Irrigation installation/maintenance/service	6%
Tree and ornamental installation/care	4%

What was the FASTEST GROWING service for your location in revenue in 2015?



What do you predict will be the FASTEST GROWING service for your location in revenue in 2016?





MONEY MAKERS

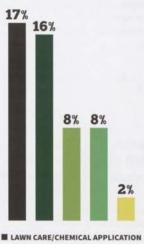
when it comes to gross revenue at 42 percent, down from 43 percent last year. Single-family residential continues to dominate the properties you serve, though it makes up the smallest percentage of property to

though it makes up the smallest percentage of property types serviced by companies with more than \$1 million in revenue. Maintenance also maintained its lead for fastest growing service, but design/build is catching up. In last year's report, 36 percent said maintenance was the fastest growing service, but in this year's report it was only 28 percent, while design build went from 15 percent in last year's report to 22 percent in this year's.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

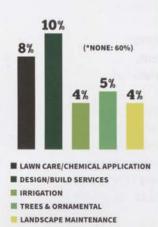
The survey sample of 8,627 was selected in systematic fashion by Lawn & Landscape and Readex Research. The sample represented 17,253 recipients (or 25 percent of Lawn & Landscape's entire circulation of 70,800) at the time of sample selection. The survey ran from July 18-25, and the margin of error for percentages based on 330 usable responses is ±5.3 percentage points at a 95 percent confidence level.

Which of the following NEW services does your location plan to offer next year?



- DESIGN/BUILD SERVICES
- DESIGN/BUILD SERVICES
- IRRIGATION
- TREES & ORNAMENTAL
- LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

What services has your location STOPPED offering in the past THREE YEARS?*



WHAT'S WORRYING YOU

WHILE QUALITY LABOR IS STILL THE TOP CONCERN
WITH 45 PERCENT SAYING SO (the same percentage as it was last year), low-ball competitors, a top three concern last year with 44 percent, dropped to 37 percent. The other big changes in this year's numbers were high fuel prices, which received 41 percent of the vote, dropped to 32 percent this year and difficulty raising prices for work dropped from 39 percent to 32 percent.



Which one of these issues would you rate as a top concern for your business in the next three years? (Listed in percentages)



QUALITY LABOR SHORTAGE



HIGH HEALTH INSURANCE COSTS



HIGH WORKERS' COMPENSATION COSTS



PERSONAL STRESS



LOW-BALL COMPETITORS



DIFFICULTY RAISING PRICES FOR WORK



HIGH FUEL PRICES



LOWER MARGINS ON WORK



REGULATION OF OR BAN ON WATER/ IRRIGATION



REGULATION OF OR BAN ON PESTICIDE/ FERTILIZER USE

What percentage of your location's 2015 sales came from each of the following property types? SINGLE-FAMILY RESIDENTIAL

COMMERCIAL/INDUSTRIAL

OTHER

62%

24%

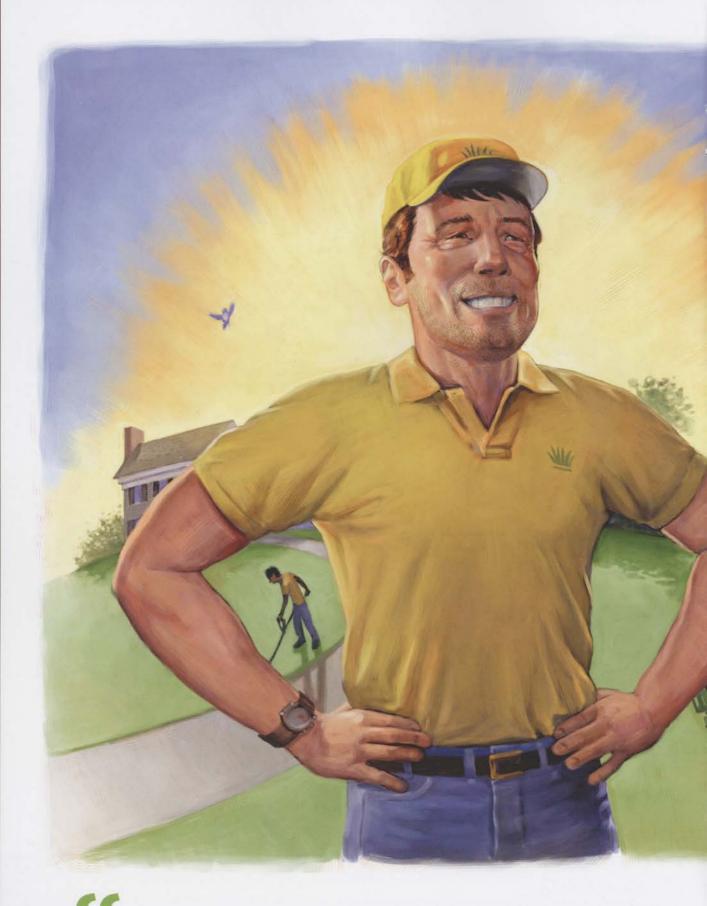
18

% 4%

% 2

MULTI-FAMILY STRUCTURES

GOVERNMENT/INSTITUTIONAL



We've seen an uptick of younger people asking us to maintain their property,





Blue skies AHEAD

Contractors forecast steady growth for the industry heading into next year. By Katie Tuttle

CONFIDENCE IN THE INDUSTRY IS HIGH.

In our State of the Industry survey, we asked respondents how confident they were that the green industry will grow in 2017. When we asked the same question back in 2011, 20 percent of respondents said they were not confident in the industry at all. This year, that number dropped and only 2 percent said they had no confidence in the industry's growth.

"I know the industry is going to grow," says Daniel L. McCurry, branch manager of Father Nature Landscapes in Birmingham, Alabama.

"People are craving what we have and it could be because the labor force sucks so bad, people are having a tough time finding companies that really care about the details because the laborers don't really care much about the details."

whereas before they'd maintain it themselves." - Chris Capone, Capone Landscape



In 2015, with 28 to 32 fulltime employees, Father Nature Landscapes had a revenue of \$4.2 million. Currently, the company offers design/planning, outdoor living rooms, plantings, driveways, custom mailboxes and hardscape services.

"We have more leads than we know what to do with," McCurry says. "Right now, we're sending work away."

Because of a lack of skilled employees, the company currently subcontracts out portions of excavation, irrigation, driveways, tree work, block and brick work, electrical, plumbing and carpentry, depending on schedule and technical skill.

Chris Capone, office manager at Capone Landscape in Wakefield, Massachusetts, savs the economy - as well as the company's reputation - is the reasoning behind this.

Capone Landscape provides maintenance, lawn service, fertilizing, aeration, spring and fall clean-up and remulching as the bulk of its business. Last year's revenue was \$1 million.

"We just went through the busiest spring ever," she says. "We were drowning this People are craving what we have and it could be because the labor force sucks so bad, people are having a tough time finding companies that really care about the details because the laborers don't really care much about the details."

Daniel L. McCurry, **Father Nature** Landscapes

spring, absolutely drowning in work. We feel as though the business will continue to grow into 2017."

She also credits this growth to the younger generations, who are growing up with different ideals than their parents and grandparents.

"I think that the younger generation has decided that they can afford to have their lawn mowed, which is the bulk of our business," she says, "We've seen an uptick of younger people asking us to maintain their property, whereas before they'd maintain it themselves."

GOING SOUTH UP NORTH. While confidence in the industry is strong for contractors, there are problems in some parts of North America. In Canada, the shift has come in the opposite direction, and it's happened in the past few months.

Darren Kovacs, COO and founder of Exact ET in Calgary, Alberta, Canada says the oil and gas industries are the major market drivers in his area. Within the past six to 12 months, they took a bigger drop than anyone in the area anticipated, which has resulted in people being tighter with their money.

"The market isn't what it was," he says. "There's so many people in that (oil and gas) industry it really impacts. For example, there's been a significant number of business closures, I think 4,000 this year alone in the Calgary area, because of the indirect relationship with the oil and gas."

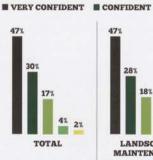
However, he says they're staying optimistic about 2017 and into 2018 because oil and gas markets are reciprocal.

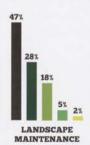
"So, by that time around I can see that either companies have become extremely efficient in what they're doing, and naturally they can survive on a lower value for oil, or by that time I think the market's going to come around," he says. "There's still a fair amount of investment that's gone into this area. As soon as it comes around I think the market's going to be good."

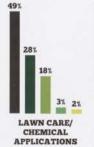
TO MARKET, OR NOT. McCurry credits some of the revenue growth to grassroots marketing, such as advertising on Facebook.

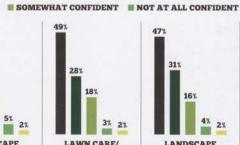
"You can get your name around so easily for less money

How confident are you that your location's **business** will grow in revenue next year?



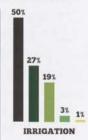






DESIGN/

CONSTRUCTION





than you've ever been able to," he says. "We've cut our marketing budget back to ridiculous numbers. We might hit half a percent in marketing."

McCurry says that with Facebook, his company is able to target a specific client based on a set of qualifications, including age, what services they might want and where they're located.

The cost isn't high, and McCurry says they've been able to reach more potential clients than ever.

"The wealth is being spread massively," he says. "We're very acute in how we market. We don't broadcast market, we just try to communicate to our clients. We have more leads than we know what to do with."

In Shelton, Connecticut, Robert Hansen, owner of Robert Hansen Landscape, which currently employs eight to nine full-time employees and a total of 21 in season, doesn't credit the growth to marketing.

"I have friends in the business and they're way more adept to the younger generation with social media," he says.

"I don't do any advertise-

ment at all, other than through our website or word of mouth."

He says the growth is because a lot of homeowners, as well as business owners, are looking to hire others to do their landscaping, maintenance and yard work.

"Nobody wants to do it themselves, and I think that opens a market for landscapers," he says. "There's plenty of work out there. Plenty of competition out there too, but it's not competition that really affects us in our area."

Capone doesn't advertise either, something that is surprising since her company had so many inquiries this spring.

"Phone ringing off the hook, and we did zero advertising," she says. "I was telling people, 'I'm sorry, I can't attend to that work right now,' if they called in April, but, by the end of July, we could probably get to it. And some people wait for us."

THE POLITICAL CLIMATE. Normally, a year with a presidential election can cause uncertainty in the business, but, while McCurry has heard a few customers mentioning they'd have to cancel his services based on the outcome of the election, he isn't worried about a big drop-off.

"You know, I think a lot of people are scared right now, and I feel like a lot of people are going to find, just like Y2K, the day after the election the world isn't going to melt," McCurry says.

"We have a lot of people that are still doing work with us, and a lot of them are threatening to say after Hillary or after Trump, we're going to have to massively cut back, but how many times over the past 20 years have we heard people say that?"

Capone says she doesn't see much of an effect on her company, although she doesn't know if that rings true for others in the industry.

"We're very fortunate that all of our employees are here legally," she says. "I'm sure there are landscapers out there who will be hit hard."

McCurry says we've all experienced these Armageddon-type moments in life and it takes an emotionally mature person to understand what your client is going through and is patient about it.

"People go through their emotional ups and downs," he says. "Everything's going to come back and balance out."

Being in Canada, Kovacs says he doesn't know how the upcoming election might impact his business.

"There's a direct relationship between Canada and the U.S.," he says. "They're the largest trading partners."

INTO THE FUTURE. Confidence is high, but do landscapers see it waning anytime soon?

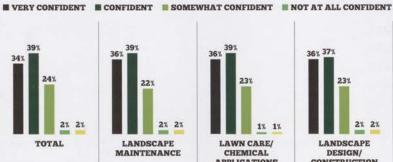
"I feel confident in my business," Hansen says. "I can't answer for other people, but I see continued growth. We're to the point where we can keep growing. We always have work."

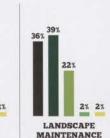
Capone says she also doesn't see her company losing confidence, but isn't as sure about other companies.

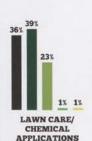
"Landscapers who are out there and have specific crews just for design or construction, they were the ones hurting in 2008," she says.

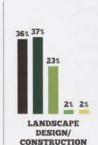
"We don't expose ourselves to that level. Grass always grows and here in the Northeast, there's always people who need their lawn mowed." .

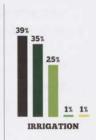
How confident are you that the national landscape industry will grow in overall revenue next year?

















New rules from the Department of Labor could mean big changes to your payroll.

By Kate Spirgen

GET READY. BEGINNING DEC. 1, EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW ABOUT OVERTIME IS CHANGING.

Starting in a few weeks, any employee making less than \$47,476 annually will be eligible for overtime pay, more than doubling the former threshold of \$23,660. And for the first time, employers will be able to meet up to 10 percent of the salary level with bonuses and commissions.

The rule will impact 4.2 million workers, according to the Department of Labor.

In response to the new overtime rule, employers can:

- Pay time and a half for all work performed over 40 hours per week.
- Raise workers' salaries above \$47,476 per year.
- Limit workers' hours to no more than 40 hours per week.
- · Combine any of the above.

Moving forward, the salary level will be increased every three years beginning in 2020 based on the 40th percentile of full-time wages in the region where that level is lowest. But it's not just how landscapers are going to pay their staff, they'll also have to keep records.

"Landscape and lawn care professionals should be aware that these new regulations will change the way their employees are paid, but most importantly, the record-keeping requirements to track hours for salary and hourly employees is now even more important than ever before," says green industry consultant Jason Cupp. "I've seen cases in the DOL that have been decided by the lack of proper record-keeping, so that is paramount."

Beau Hartman, manager of Hartman Landscaping in Zanesville, Ohio, had been planning to create more salaried positions in the coming years, but says that's now impossible. Instead, he'll have to move his employees from salaried to hourly.

Hartman Landscaping's revenue falls into the \$800,000 to \$1 million range with a staff of 12 crewmembers, Hartman and one office staff member. He started the business in 2005 and the it became his primary source of income in 2011.

Hartman says salaried positions were something he had just started considering two years ago.

Only two of his staff will be directly impacted by the Department of Labor changes, with his operations manager being the most affected.



Hartman had planned on creating a third salaried position but says he is no longer able to do that due to the changes. He had also been planning to move a couple of his snow team members to a salary of about \$25,000 in the next few years, but now that idea is impossible.

"We don't really have much choice other than to go back to hourly," he says.

Rich Arlington, owner of Arlington Lawn Care, an all-season, full-service landscape construction and maintenance firm in Erie, Pennsylvania, says 31 of his 41 employees will be affected by the change. He's been preparing by putting new rules in place, and educating and training employees.

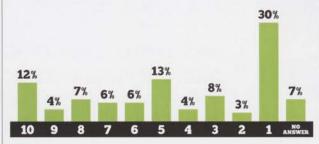
"We have instituted a rigid no working after hours policy and have made it a termination offense if they break the policy," he says.

Arlington Lawn Care has also stopped supplying company cell phones to all employees except executive and on-call staff.

THE EMPLOYEE REACTION. The response from his staff was negative but Arlington has told them that they need to get out

when contractors were asked how they would rate their concern the DOL overtime change would have on their location's business in the next three years, the result was a 4.6, which ranked 14th out of 25 options.

(10 = very concerned, 1 = not at all concerned)



and vote if they want to see anything change.

Hartman says he was surprised by the reaction he got from his employees when he first discussed the changes with them a few months ago. He was expecting them to be in favor of the possibility of more overtime to earn some extra money, but that wasn't the case.

"They liked the fact that they didn't have to worry about timecards," he says, adding that they've worked at the company long enough to know what is expected of them, and they enjoyed knowing that they would have the same paycheck every week no matter what.

He says his operations manager expressed concerns since he knows the cost of running a small business and agreed to the salaried position knowing that he might be working 50 or 60 hours one week and 30 the next, but that it would all even out.

"We're a small company so it's definitely tough to get up from \$23,000 to \$47,000 or \$48,000," Hartman says. But since his operations manager is not far under that threshold, he is hoping to move him back to salaried position in the next couple of years.

"But in the meantime, he's going to have to go back to punching that time clock along with the other guys as well."

Hartman originally started offering salaried positions primarily to retain employees during the off season. "It made it a little bit easier to stomach the fact that we're going to have more guys here through the winter that might now be doing very much some days aside from maintenance and some sales."

THE MAN-HOUR COSTS. Overall, Hartman is expecting an increase in labor costs, but isn't quite sure how much that will be yet. He plans to reevaluate hourly pay for his workers and make sure that they're happy with where they are. "It will probably increase our costs slightly. I don't think it will be too terrible though," he says.

While he would like to increase the billing rate, Arlington says that in the current climate, customers are wanting more for less. "There is no way to increase our price to the client so we cannot increase pay to the staff," he says.

In terms of selling jobs, Hartman expects his capacity to remain generally the same, but says it will make it more difficult to bring on a new team member or offer a year-round salaried position. "We can't offer a mowing crew \$48,000 a year here in Ohio," he says. "I wish I could but unfortunately, I can't."

Arlington also doesn't expect to sell fewer jobs or service fewer accounts. He plans to just keep selling and hire more employees to make up for the end of overtime.

The biggest challenge, Hartman says, will be getting his crews to remember to clock in and out again.

HOLDING OUT MANY CONTRACTORS WE SPOKE with said that while they're concerned

about the changes to overtime, they haven't come up with a plan on how to handle the new rules yet. And they may not have to make such drastic changes if a group of 12 bipartisan House members are successful in their effort to phase in the new salary threshold over the next three years. Their proposal is to increase the limit to about \$36,000 and gradually increase until 2019.

And 21 states have filed a lawsuit against the federal government over the new rule, arguing that it's unconstitutional because it issues fiscal mandates to states. Led by Nevada Attorney General Adam Laxalt, the suit claims the administration has overstepped its authority.



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Seats to

Hiring continues to be at the forefront of what is holding landscaping companies back from growth. By Katie Tuttle





Read on to find out how contractors across the country assess their market when it comes to hiring and what they are doing to get ahead.



1. Sean Sandri, Dallas

SEAN'S LAWNS AND LANDSCAPING

I could, generally speaking, say that staffing has been a growing challenge. The qualified labor pool has diminished as the demand for skilled workers has increased. There has been a corresponding spike in demand for higher wages. Compared to last year, the challenge has increased.

We've found basing starting wage on experience and then increasing incrementally sooner rather than later based on merit has been effective in retaining labor.

2. Christian Nardi, Southampton, N.J.

SOD SERVICES

We've always hired guys right out of high school approximately 18 to 22 years old. I've come to notice that there are very few 18- to 22-year-old people that are mature enough to handle a job and take it seriously. They are out there but they're hard to find. It's been very frustrating trying to build around people like that. So, in the winter of 2015 into 2016 I hit the reset button. I went out and hired people specifically older than the age of 25. I do have to offer higher starting pay. I've come to realize with getting the older, more mature guys you have to start them out between \$14 and \$16 an hour.

If they have experience, they're worth more and usually I'm starting them out between \$16 and \$18 per hour. Most of these people have families and a lot more financial obligations than kids fresh out of high school. I've come to realize that these people have more willingness to learn and do things efficiently. It's almost as if they just flat out care more. I think it has to do with the maturity level. In the long run, it's money worth spending.

These are guys that need a job. They have wives, kids, families to support and bills to pay. This year has been great. I've had cooperation like I've never had before. I also have people that will actually take the job seriously and do things correctly. It's hard managing people who have their minds on everything else other than work. I learned my lesson the past few years and I have run myself ragged trying to babysit. I'm done doing that.



3. Aaron Rodolph, Casper, Wyo.

RODOLPH BROTHERS

Here in Casper, Wyoming, there's a bit of a recession going on in the oil field, so we've actually hired some really great people because they lost their job in the oil field. We have a little bit of a glut of people to hire right now, ever since the oil market crashed in late 2014.

We're highly dependent on the price of oil here in Wyoming.

Unfortunately, of course during the boom years it's hard to find anybody. We pay almost twice what anyone else in the industry pays because of the energy industry. Those guys are making \$30 an hour so for us to come in and have to pay them \$25 dollars an hour, which is really high for our industry, they're still taking a pay cut but the benefit is they're working in town and not working out of town all the time so they can be home with their families.



I have had to change my philosophy to reflect this new market. It is no longer hire



4. Jim Zylstra, Byron Center, Mich.

TUFF TURF MOLEBUSTERS

I am in the second largest city in Michigan. The labor market is the worst it has ever been in my market. The chamber of commerce reports that for every job opening there is half an applicant. We have been looking for an administrative assistant for over two months. We have very little employee turnover and we pay higher than anybody else in the industry. We pay our office staff more than most companies in any industry. We had a dozen candidates that we called back for a second interview that had already accepted a different job within hours of their initial interview with us.

We are seeing a lot of wage inflation. We had one technician leave us to work for a trash company. Our supervisor has friends in the trash industry and was surprised to find out that our former technician was starting at a higher wage than people that had been with the trash company for nine years. They were also paying for all his CDL training and testing, which can be several thousand dollars.

I have had to change my philosophy to reflect this new market. It is no longer hire slow, fire fast. Many companies have taken the approach of hiring decent candidates at the first interview so as to eliminate the candidate going on other interviews. I am embarrassed to say we tolerate employee behavior that we never would've before. The reality is if we have to replace somebody, we will be paying a person with little or no experience more money than our veterans.

5. George D. Ward, Jr., Eastlake, Ohio

WARD'S LAWN CARE & LANDSCAPE CO.

I would have to say that the hiring/labor force in my particular area (Northeast Ohio) is the same or slightly worse than it has been in the past.

Our continued difficulties are finding people that have valid driver's licenses or, I should say, would be able to be insured to drive our vehicles. DUIs or crashes are automatic scratches.

If we do find a person that is eligible to drive, very few times do they have experience. If they are able to drive and have experience, there is usually some crazy reason why they are no longer working.

This is our 30th year and I have yet to find a solution to this problem. We pay well and offer competitive benefits. Finding someone that is willing to work and show up to work every day has been quite the challenge.

6. Alaina Bible, St. Petersburg, Fla.

MJ'S HOME AND LAWN CARE SERVICE

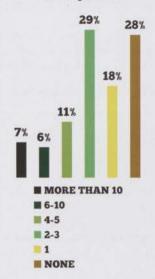
We were actually in the market

to try and find, basically, a partner so we could start up a second crew. When I initially posted for the listing, we had 80 people within a matter of an hour until I realized I forgot to put on there that a driver's license was required. That went from 80 people in one hour to five people in three days just to find somebody with a driver's license that wanted to make a percentage of the business. I mean, there's always a whole bunch of people that are willing to work. We have problems actually finding good quality people. There's always a quantity of people who are helpers, it's finding good, responsible candidates.

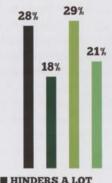
We have a little bit of a glut of people to hire right now."

Aaron Rodolph. **Rodolph Brothers**

How many new employees does your location typically hire each year?



How much does a lack of quality employees hinder your location's growth?



- HINDERS A LOT
- HINDERS
- HINDERS SOMEWHAT
- DOES NOT HINDER

slow, fire fast." - Jim Zylstra, Tuff Turf Molebusters



burden. s a BARI

A moratorium on pesticides in one Maryland county is putting the industry on watch. **By Kate Spirgen**

LAWN AND LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS IN MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND, WILL SOON BE LOSING AN IMPORTANT TOOL IN THE TOOL BOX.

Beginning Jan. 1, 2018, all cosmetic pesticides will be banned in the county with some exceptions for athletic fields, golf courses and invasive species treatments.

Mowing & More in Chevy Chase, Maryland, services about 450 residential clients in the county, about 150 of whom receive lawn care applications. Chad Stern, manager, says his company will continue to do the best it can, but he knows that the quality of his customers' lawns will suffer if the ban goes into effect.

"I guess I'm kind of waiting to see what happens as far as this legislation actually being enforced. I'm kind of keeping my fingers crossed for perhaps some last-minute modification to this that wouldn't make it into such a cumbersome and heavy-handed bill," he says.

There are no enforcement provisions in the ordinance, which is leaving many to wonder what will happen to those who don't abide by the new law.

"I have heard that applicators are con-

cerned because it was never the county's intention to enforce this," says Karen Reardon, vice president of public affairs for Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment. "And the Department of Environmental Protection in the county has told us they will not be enforcing it because the law is silent on enforcement."

CURRENT EFFECTS. Brandon Sheppard, owner of a Weed Man franchise in Maryland says Montgomery County was a big part of his expansion plan until the pesticide ban was passed.

He currently services areas west, east and south of Montgomery, and the size of the county plus the affluent demographic made it attractive. But those plans were scrapped when the ban was passed.

When the ordinance was first introduced, Stern alerted his customers via email, and if the ban goes into effect in 2018, he'll do his best to explain the situation to them. He also plans to include



the information on the yearly renewals he sends his customers.

"If there are clients who are dissatisfied with the lawn care service, then I would explain to them the situation and how our hands are tied because we can't use herbicides, and we can stop that part of the service and then continue with other services," he says.

He says his company has been asked to







stop using herbicides by several clients in the past who then called Mowing & More to complain about weeds. "It's kind of like there's a disconnect between us not being able to use herbicides and there being weeds in the lawn," he says.

POTENTIAL IMPACT. Sheppard has seen the effects of bans like this and says the impact is "catastrophic." He and his family ran a lawn care company in Tillsonburg, Ontario, before joining Weed Man and although they sold the business before the ban took effect, he saw the impacts it had.

"Many of the offices in Toronto have yet to recover their sales that were lost after that," he

says. "And we're going more than 15 years out since they passed the bill and they still can't make the sales dollars back from it."

He says that the bans being proposed in the U.S. very closely mirror those that have been passed in Canada and expects similar results in Montgomery County. The problem, he says, is that LCOs and landscapers don't have the ability to achieve the same results they once did, but customers' expectations don't change.

"Many of the products that are allowed for weed control and pest control are just simply not very effective and so you have increased cost of the material, reduced effectiveness and a massive jump in the labor required to deliver the service because of the number of reapplications you have to do with a less comparable product," Sheppard says.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT. Although there are state laws regarding the safe use of pesticides, Maryland is one of seven states that does not have preemption laws. This means that local ordinances, like the pesticide ban, can override state laws. The others are Alaska, Hawaii, Maine, Nevada, Utah and Vermont. A recent ban in South Portland, Maine, and a movement to spread the ban to the city of Portland, has many in the industry keeping watch on the issue. The National Association of Landscape Professionals is still trying to assess the impact and look at the options available. Both NALP and RISE have said that taking the issue to court is on the table.

"I think any state that does not have pesticide preemption - they should be cognizant and vigilant about this. We're monitoring those states in particular," says NALP Vice President of Governmental Affairs Paul Mendelsohn.

He says one of the key steps is getting a better handle on the business and practice impacts, which have been difficult to monitor so far. "We're not really hearing of members who have clients who have called them up and said, 'We're not going to have you providing service any longer," he says.

Some say that the ban could spread quickly, while others say that only those

in states without preemption need to be concerned. But Sheppard says everyone should be ready. "I is kidding themselves," he says.

think anybody who thinks it's not going to happen WHAT YOU CAN DO. Industry professionals say the

issue is that anti-pesticide groups are only telling their side of the story, and while there is scientific research supporting responsible pesticide use, it needs to get into the right hands.

"For every study that they cite, we can also cite research that was done that finds the opposite," Mendelsohn says. "The jury on this is very much out and there's a lack of consensus in the scientific community about the impact, so we're trying to make sure that when communities make decisions, they're well informed."

Sheppard stresses the importance of putting a face on the industry and showing those in government the benefits of what landscapers do in terms of public health.

"The argument that is always made against it is health and safety but we're the ones protecting the public from the very real dangers of things like Lyme disease, West Nile and now Zika," he says. "I've had Lyme disease. As a relatively, young, fit guy, it was like getting thrown down a flight of stairs with a bag of hammers. Those are very real, tangible risks and we're often confronted by groups that oppose us with risks that are essentially academic. They're hypothetical and theoretical."

In Montgomery County, Stern has gotten involved in County Council hearings during the debate and agrees that industry voices need to be heard.

"Over the years, I've realized that if you just sit back, then there's always an abundance of people who have great ideas that could be harmful to your company and unless you're actively involved in the regulatory process, then your business will just kind of get steamrolled," he says. .

"Over the years, I've realized that if you just sit back, then there's always an abundance of people who have great ideas that could be harmful to your company and unless you're actively involved in the regulatory process, then your business will just kind of get steamrolled."

Chad Stern, Mowing & More



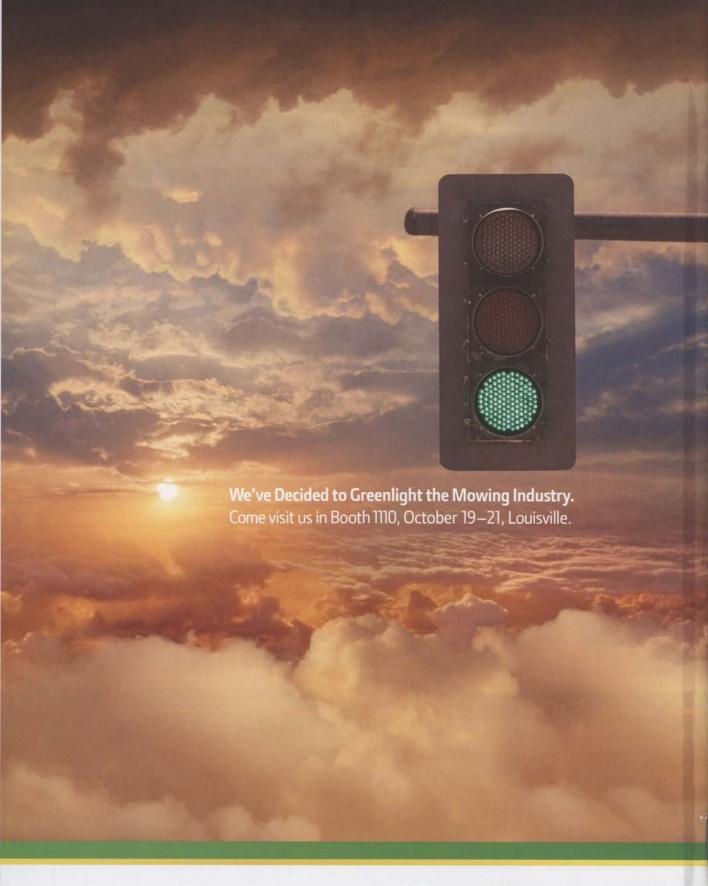
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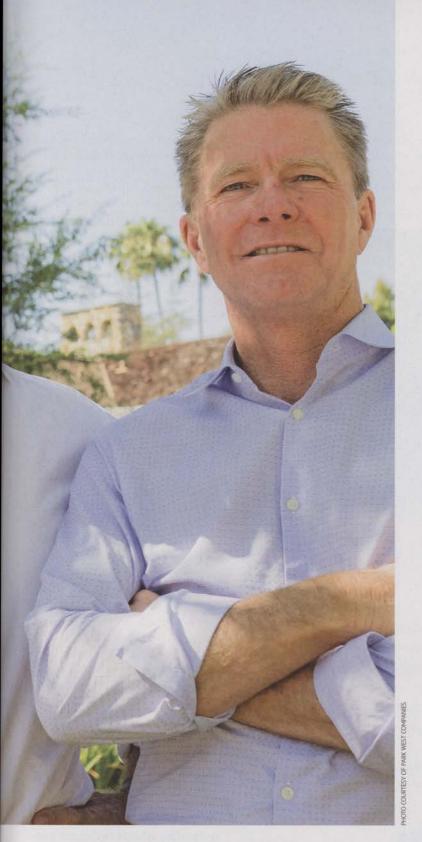


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TRIPLETHR



Park West Companies proves why three companies are better than one. By Brooke N. Bates

HEN STORMS WASHED AWAY THE BEACH of an oceanfront hotel property serviced by Park West Land-

scape Management, President Dustin Kemmerer knew the earth-moving needs surpassed the capabilities of his maintenance crews. Park West Landscape Management's forte is planting, mowing, weeding, trimming, light construction and irrigation maintenance - not operating front loaders and other heavy equipment this situation required.

Instead of calling subcontractors or stretching his crews beyond their core competencies, Kemmerer turned to the built-in support of Park West Landscape Construc-

FROM LEFT: Jim Tracy-CEO Park West Companies, Dustin Kemmerer-president Management, Mike Tracy-founder, Bart Ryder-president Park West Landscape.

tion, led by that department's president, Bart Ryder.

A separate company Park West Landscape underneath the same parent organization of Park West Companies, which landed at number 10 on Lawn

& Landscape's Top 100 list, Park West Landscape Construction provided the equipment and experience Park West Landscape Maintenance needed.

Plus, the client didn't have to hassle with an unfamiliar subcontractor or doubt whether crews specialized in each phase of work being performed.

"The cohesion between the companies is fantastic," Kemmerer says. "These companies work hand-in-hand and support each other. There's collaboration almost daily."

Kemmerer says it's not too often that a decision has to be made by the three company leaders that will affect the entire organization. If there is, and they can't come to a consensus, CEO Jim Tracy, brother of the company's founder, Mike Tracy, and the company's board of directors will serve as the tie-breaker.

Kemmerer, Ryder and Corey Gallagher, who leads the tree division, meet monthly to discuss issues, and are in daily communication with each other. "Even though I run the construction company on a daily basis, all three companies operate out of the same corporate office, Ryder says. "We literally see each other every day and discuss business matters, whether it pertains to maintenance, construction or the tree care company.

"From a procedural stand point we all follow the same guideline. From an operational point of view, we are very different – different clients, different equipment needs, different staffing requirements."

GROWING THROUGH HARD TIMES. In 1978, long before Park West Companies, Mike Tracy graduated from high school and advertised his landscape services in the PennySaver. By 1986, he built Tracy Landscaping to \$5 million in annual revenue by focusing on commercial landscape installation.

Tracy saw opportunities to service projects after completion, but he didn't want to take attention away from construction. So he founded a separate landscape maintenance company in 1986 called Park Maintenance to take over the work his construction company installed. Park West Companies, the parent organization, formed in 1997. Tracy Landscaping became Park West Landscape Construction a few years later, and Park Maintenance became Park West Landscape Management in 2004.

When Kemmerer became president in 2004, Park West Landscape Management was doing \$12 million in revenue with 275 employees. It has grown steadily every year since, to a projected 2016 revenue of \$55 million, with 860 of the parent organization's 1,500 employees and 337 of its 491 vehicles.



to reduce operational costs for struggling HOAs, maintenance crews removed annual color and installed permanent plant material, which reduced the need for multiple change outs annually, thus reducing cost."

Dustin Kemmerer, president, Park West Landscape Management



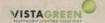
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Pre-recession, Park West Companies' revenue peaked at \$186 million in 2007; encompassing \$168 million from landscape construction and about \$18 million from landscape management. By 2010, as recession halted most construction, Landscape Construction dropped to \$45 million while Landscape Management grew to \$28 million.

"About 75 to 80 percent of our business is HOAs and master planned communities, and they got hit hard," Kemmerer says. "Foreclosures were up, directly effecting (HOA) dues. But we partnered with our customers through those times and continued to grow.

"In many cases, to reduce operational costs for struggling HOAs, maintenance crews removed annual color and installed permanent plant material, which reduced the need for multiple change outs annually, thus reducing cost. We also gave our customers options for more drought-tolerant plant material and drip irrigation that would ultimately reduce their water costs."

"More importantly, we communicated with our customers through these times. Each customer had its own unique challenges and needs, and we worked with them to achieve those objectives. Our goal with all of our clients is to create long-term mutually beneficial relationships, and being flexible is essential to achieving those objectives."

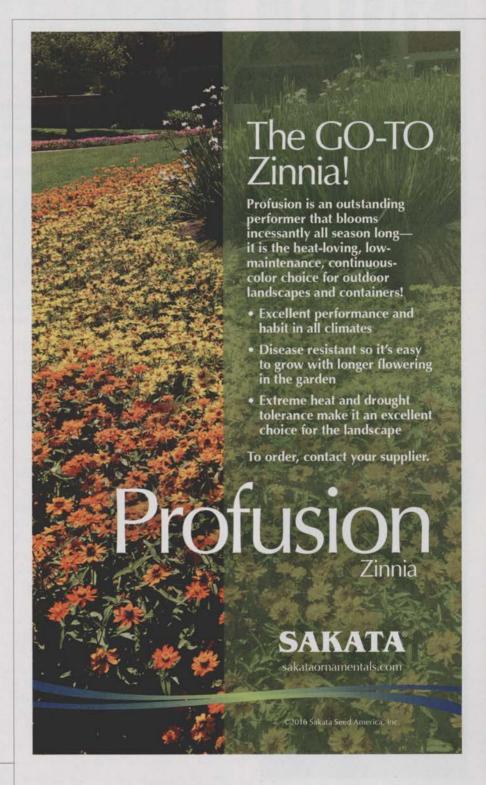
CLIMBING HIGHER. Last year, Park West Landscape Management's revenue grew to \$45 million, while construction climbed to \$83 million. Other than sharing administrative functions like IT and accounting, the companies operate independently and partner often. Kemmerer's crews may take over post-construction maintenance work that's built into construction contracts, and construction crews might assist maintenance with large-scale enhancements, especially when work requires heavy equipment.

However, there are still some jobs that, even together, both companies can't do. Hiring a few hardscaping subcontractors here and there was no big deal, but the amount of business being outsourced to tree care specialists signaled big opportunity for Park West. That

led the organization to expand again in 2015 by adding Park West Tree Care, and bringing in Gallagher to lead that department.

"We were subcontracting significant

revenues and we were able to open our tree company to absorb that revenue," Kemmerer says, projecting more than \$3 million for firstyear tree revenue. "The timing was right and





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COMPANY PROFILE



Last year, Park West Landscape Management's revenue grew to \$45 million, while Park West Construction climbed to \$83 million. In its first year, Park West Tree Care is projected to be \$3 million.

it made perfect sense to perform the tree work on our accounts. We have built-in revenue because it's vertically integrated,"

Now, instead of sending away revenue to tree contractors, Kemmerer can call Park West Tree Care and the customer is only dealing with one company.

"Some customers just want one invoice, one contact, so we invoice them under maintenance and then the tree company bills us," Kemmerer says. "In some cases, we connect our maintenance customer directly with our tree care representatives and they work directly with each other. At the end of the day, we want to make sure that customers get the best experience with the least amount of effort."

THREE ARE BETTER THAN ONE. Park West Landscape Management is successful independently; construction referrals only make up 20 percent of its customer base. But in the process of building its own brand as a maintenance company, it benefits from the added strengths and specialties of two vertically integrated companies.

"When we market the maintenance company, we share the capabilities of our construction company and our tree care company, and explain how that helps us service the client," Kemmerer says. "It's a holistic approach where we can satisfy all of their needs, instead of being limited to maintenance. We want to serve all of their needs, so the marketing and branding needs to emulate that."

Over the past year, Park West Companies has been putting more effort into marketing its companies collectively in addition to promoting brands individually by hiring a PR firm to accentuate its three-in-one combined strengths. By building a full-service reputation, Park West positions all three companies for growth.

"You'll start to see a lot more 'Park West Companies' branding," Kemmerer says. "That's one of the reasons we brought on the tree company, because we want to be able to serve all of our customers with whatever they need. Whether it's landscape, irrigation, enhancements or tree care, we want to be full-service for these customers." L&L

TECHNOLOGICAL TRACKING

n 2013, to help supervisors and managers at Park West Companies manage their respective areas, the corporate IT department developed a robust database to track real-time metrics.

The in-house application tracks job costing, fleet maintenance, materials procurement, labor reporting and more.

"As timecards are submitted and material is procured, that all hits the job profitability report," says Dustin Kemmerer, president of Park West Landscape Management, one of thee companies under the Park West umbrella.

"If somebody purchases plant material and we receive the invoice from the vendor, that payable is coded to a job. As material is purchased and as labor is logged and processed, because it's all coded with job specifics, it populates the report."

Quality and safety inspections are logged through a remote tablet application to sync with this software automatically, giving managers realtime access to current data.

For example, clicking the asset number of a vehicle reveals photos, fuel purchases and maintenance records, along with current mileage.

When the company rolled out the application, Kemmerer says management and the developers didn't think enough about what it would be like to use it in the field.

"It's easy to do things here from a corporate office, but there were some things that did not apply perfectly well," he says.

For example, there was a punch list application on their iPad, where they could write the punch list down in a template in their iPad, and as soon as the walk was done, email it to the property manager's inbox.

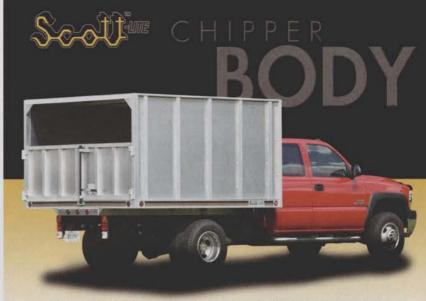
"But the problem is as you're writing and typing the landscape walk is happening and it doesn't allow you to be present, so to speak, in the walk," Kemmerer says.

"Technology in that instance was a stumbling block because it slows things down where you want to be present in the walk and presenting ideas."

To fix that, they brought in the ground team for feedback and made adjustments, but the team is still working on it, which is a theme for technology in general at the company.

Kemmerer says even smaller companies that might not have the funds to spend on technology should still think about taking a chance on a larger investment in technology.

"Sometimes you have to move with the times, or develop things that oftentimes cost money," he says.



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PRIORITY ON PARTS

An organized shop can mean quicker turnaround with busted equipment, which results in more money to your bottom line.

By Kristen Hampshire

PIECES AND PARTS – they add up to a load of inventory and a major investment when you're talking about the shop at your landscape firm. How do you track parts and order what you really need? What systems keep your shop organized, productive and profitable?

This month, Lawn & Landscape spoke with three companies to learn how they manage their shops.



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RUSH MANAGEMENT

Richard Rush, president

LOCATION: Lafayette, Colorado

ESTABLISHED:

2003 (landscaping division), 1992 company

EMPLOYEES: 50+

2015 REVENUE:

Not disclosed

CUSTOMERS:

90% commercial, 10% residential

SERVICES:

Maintenance, snow removal, lot and driveway sweeping

Stay on track

e put a premium on tracking parts and service, and managing where the dollars are going," says Richard Rush, operations manager at Rush Management in Lafayette, Colorado.

To accomplish this, the company uses an online asset management system called EMA. It allows Rush Management to list every vehicle and piece of equipment, and set up service alerts. "If we need an oil change every 5,000 to 7,000 miles, the system

will send us an email when a vehicle is due," Rush says.

If a piece of equipment needs a repair, a work ticket is generated and the shop receives the notice. "We can pull up the ticket online, monitor technician hours and figure out exactly how much we spend on each vehicle at the end of the year," he says.

Rush Management has four in-house technicians, one of whom is a service manager. The shop is an organized space with shelves for parts that are kept in stock. There is also a 1,200

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

BE DILIGENT.

A system improves transparency so a company knows what's in stock, what parts are widely used and what equipment is spending more time in the shop than in the field.

MAKE ROOM.

"You need the space and organizational systems in place to stock parts," Rush says. Shelving systems keep everything organized at Rush Management.

HIRE SMART.

There's a lot to lose in the shop, so you need good people to maintain this division of the business.





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square-foot area where they can store parts and a few different bays where they can pull in trucks and equipment for service.

"We have a good amount of space and we can always use more," he says, relating that not every landscape firm has the area a functional shop requires.

But it's worth dedicating real estate to repairs at Rush Management. The ability to stock parts and service vehicles and equipment without sending assets out for repair is huge for preventing downtime, Rush says. Keeping up with maintenance is critical.

"We bring in trimmers, blowers and mowers on a weekly basis," he says. Older vehicles are "We put a premium on tracking parts and service, and managing where the dollars are going."

Richard Rush, operations manager, Rush Management

in the shop every two weeks or so.

As for parts, Rush keeps mower blades, fuel filters and other common parts on the shelves. "We have relationships with local dealers so we can run out and grab parts as needed," he says. Now, the company is working on a more accurate parts inventory system that will include bar codes, Rush says. Knowing how important tracking is, Rush says embracing technology has been critical to keeping the shop organized. Before using EMA, the firm relied on an automotive industry program called ShopKey. "We graduated to the system we are using now," Rush says, relating that the online access to information is a real benefit.

Because, depending on how a shop is organized and maintained, it can be a blessing or curse to the bottom line. "As a business owner, it's up to you to implement a system," Rush says.

Follow the numbers

helves full of parts are silent but costly, especially when economic speed bumps crop up and business slows down. "I'm a numbers guy – very data driven," says Mike La Rosa, president of La Rosa Landscape in Cedarburg, Wisconsin, explaining his approach to managing parts and the shop overall.

After 27 years in business, he has learned that the little things add up to big expenses. So even

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LA ROSA LANDSCAPE CO.

Mike La Rosa, president

LOCATION: Cedarburg, Wisconsin

ESTABLISHED:

EMPLOYEES: 100+

2015 REVENUE: \$7 to \$10 million

CUSTOMERS:

85% residential, 15% commercial

SERVICES:

Landscape maintenance, design/ build, snow removal, tree and shrub, and property management through air filters or other parts required to repair mowers, handheld equipment and more might not be expensive by piece, a shop storage area of them is a real investment.

To combat this, La Rosa has developed strong vendor relationships with equipment dealers that allows the company to hold parts and pay as it uses them.

"Dealers have a parts cache here that is basically a consignment-style system," he says.

"They'll stock our shop with what we normally go through in parts, and they come every two weeks and anything that is used, we are billed for."

This gives La Rosa instant

access to parts, which is critical to revenue-producing up-time.

"That keeps our equipment on the road, and keeps the crews active," he says.

"Also, it helps with our budget, because we are not carrying a huge amount of inventory (expense)," he adds.

La Rosa has been stocking parts this way for about a decade, and the company reviews repair track records to determine what to stock. Again, it's back to the data.

"We know the idiosyncrasies of each piece of equipment – are we going through belts on these mowers, are we going through brakes on these trucks?" La Rosa says. "We know which repairs

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

TRACK IT.

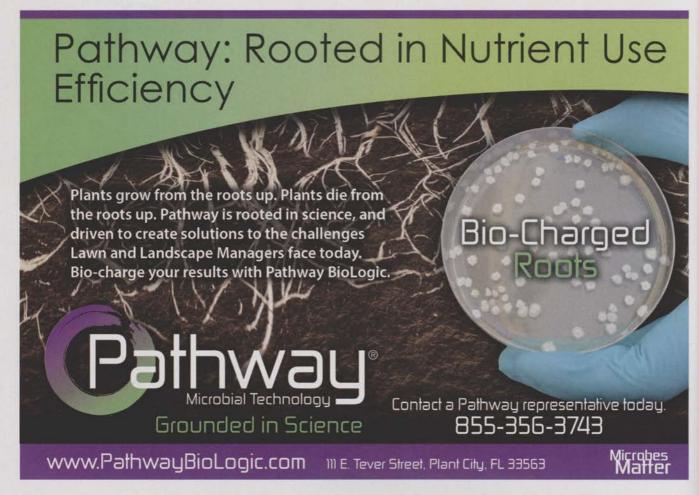
Keep careful repair logs so you know exactly what parts are in high use vs. pieces you can order as needed.

REDUCE RUNAROUND.

"We try to get as much delivered here as possible because it keeps our overhead down vs. sending someone to go get parts," he says.

WATCH IT.

A dedicated fleet manager oversees everyday shop operations, including parts ordering and staying on top of repair schedules.



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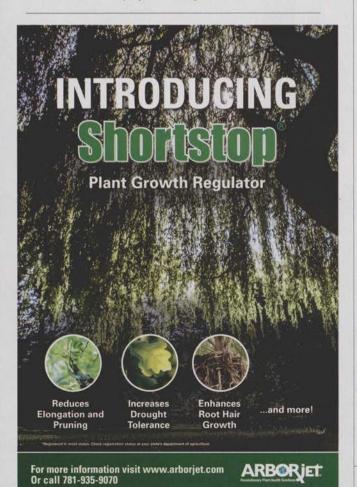
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FORMULAS FOR SUCCESS

parts we consistently use." A fleet manager oversees the shop. "If there are bigger repair issues that we are challenged with, we conference in and make decisions together," La Rosa says. "But the day-to-day operations and keeping the fleet on the road is his job."

For now, La Rosa Landscape does not use a parts or inventory software program to track its shop inventory. "We use Include business software and our assets are managed through that program," he says. "But honestly, we use more of a manual system than anything else."

In the field, crews are aware of when service is due on equipment. Based on hours, manual requests are created for service and machines are rotated in and out of the company shop.

As for the amount of inventory La Rosa stocks, "It's quite a bit," he says. Tires, filters, belts, hydraulic hoses and more are right at hand.

"I'd guess that's between \$10,000 and \$20,000 in parts," he says. But a stock-now-paylater system with vendors takes the financial burden off of the company.

"Our vendors know what we are using, and they check with our mechanics so they can anticipate what to stock here," La Rosa says.

Meanwhile, maintaining a positive attitude in the shop is an important for morale and productivity – and all this feeds into performance at the end of the day, La Rosa says.

"We keep a mindset that the repair shop's customers are our crews in the field, and their job is to keep crews productive," he says. "With that philosophy, it really becomes a team effort."

Owning minor maintenance

oseph Rabago had always depended on his equipment dealer to manage all of the maintenance on his equipment—the mower, trimmer, blower. "But I get so busy that we just don't have the time stop and take something to the shop, especially if it's located across town," says the president of Divine Landscapes in Dinuba, California.

The closest dealer Rabago works with is about a half-hour drive. That's not far, but round-trip plus downtime without the equipment could add up to a half-day's work. And in a smaller organization, there isn't back-up equipment or crews to step in and keep the revenue rolling in while a piece is down.

"So recently, I've started doing some service myself," Rabago says.

He purchases parts online or at local outlets. He can change oil and filters, no problem. "It's cheaper and I get it done faster," he says, adding that of course he'd prefer to have the dealer manage these maintenance points. But time is money.

Minor equipment upkeep is work Rabago can do before the day starts, but he reserves any major repairs for the dealership. As for trucks and trailers, "I don't mess with that," he says. So, he doesn't need to stock parts for this type of maintenance.

But Rabago does need to stock parts to run his irrigation division, and having the right pieces on hand is critical for completing

CORDLESS OUTDOOR POWER

HOW LITHIUM-ION TECHNOLOGY IS CHANGING THE GAME













DON KOONSr. Director of Commercial Sales

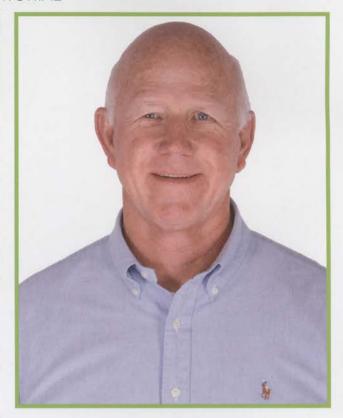
In 1997, Toyota introduced the Prius, its first mass produced hybrid, to the Japanese market. It was a very peculiar looking vehicle that was imported into the US in 2000 and the automobile market has continued to evolve ever since. Fast forward to today and some of the highest performing automobiles on the planet are now electric.

You may ask, what does that have to do with lawns and landscaping? Actually, the answer is quite simple; as the auto industry goes, so goes outdoor power equipment.

Landscapers today are facing pressures of conformity on numerous fronts. In the US, over 150 municipalities now enforce noise ordinances that limit operating hours of landscapers' power equipment. In many parts of the country, there are now environmental restrictions on emissions created by Outdoor Power Equipment (OPE) that didn't exist before. There are rising concerns of fatigue related to vibration and finally, the rising cost of fuel and our reliance on oil. Currently, the government allows up to 10% ethanol as a gasoline additive but that number could increase to 30% in the near future. The bad thing is that ethanol wreaks havoc on small engines. What's a landscaper to do?

Naturally, in an industry that has always been powered by gasoline, there are skeptics when you first mention battery operated power equipment. The same thing happened when the first hybrid arrived on our shore. However, lithium-ion technology has improved tool performance at a compounded rate and magic happens when you put the tool in an end-user's hand and have them start it up. The satisfaction is apparent as they realize power is not compromised and these tools are game changers.

Much like Toyota, Greenworks Commercial™ has been a pioneer in developing this technology. Our tools are built on an 82-volt platform, the most powerful in the industry. When anyone tries a Greenworks Commercial™ 82 tool, the power always exceeds expectations. Users marvel at how quiet they operate, the obvious lack of vibration and ease of operation. No more pull cords, simply press the button and go. And then, there's the surprising performance. All of our tools operate on the same battery platform, meaning when you finish trimming, simply put the battery in the blower or another tool and keep running! It's like moving gas from one tank to another. And let's talk about efficiency and cost savings. A 5-amp hour battery costs about \$.10 to



fully charge. Daily operating cost savings is substantial. In the long term, batteries can be recharged up to 500 times and can last up to 5 years.

This cordless segment of OPE is rapidly growing, just like the auto industry. Nearly all gas OPE manufacturers either have or are quickly developing battery operated tools in anticipation of the coming trend. There is value for landscapers to advertise the use of battery operated tools and sell it as a value-added service as restrictions become a reality. Those who embrace this technology now are likely the ones who will benefit the most as the future unfolds.

The following pages will dive deeper into cordless and more specifically, Greenworks Commercial™ 82. We hope you enjoy your look into the future.



WHY CORDLESS?

So you've used gas powered outdoor power equipment from the very first time you picked up a string trimmer. It's what your dad used. It's what your grandfather used. It's always gotten the job done. Yes, it's loud... and heavy... and messy with all of the gas, oil, and mixing. And then there's the maintenance and downtime when something breaks... but it's what you know. It is what it is, if you want to get the job done, right? What else would you use?



LITHIUM-ION: NOT YOUR GRANDFATHER'S BATTERY

Lithium-ion battery operated cordless tools provide all the power of a gas-engine with many benefits that make it the clear choice to replace your gas operated tools. Developments in Lithium-ion battery technology have enhanced the performance of cordless outdoor power equipment. Lithium-ion batteries are not the same as the Nickel Cadmium (NiCad) batteries that first took the cordless world by storm only to deliver heavy weight, weak, and inconsistent power. Lithium-ion

batteries deliver a longer life, higher and reliable power, and quicker recharge times. They can be recharged before they are fully discharged without creating a "memory effect" and operate in a wider temperature range. These are common issues users were faced with NiCad batteries. Lithium-ion batteries are smaller, lighter weight and environmentally safe, as lithium is nonhazardous and recyclable waste.

NO GAS. NO OIL. NO FUMES.

No fluctuating fuel costs. No mixing. No spills. No smelling like fuel and exhaust all day long. Cordless tools deliver outdoor power without the mess and smell of gas and oil, so you can breathe easy. Charging a battery is typically a fraction of the cost of a tank of gas, lowering operating costs.

LOW MAINTENANCE

Because there is no gas going through the engine, cordless outdoor power equipment requires lower maintenance. No carburetors to service, no lines to be replaced, no oil to change, no replacing spark plugs, no cleaning air filters... means no down time. With cordless outdoor power equipment, the tools are ready to work when you are.

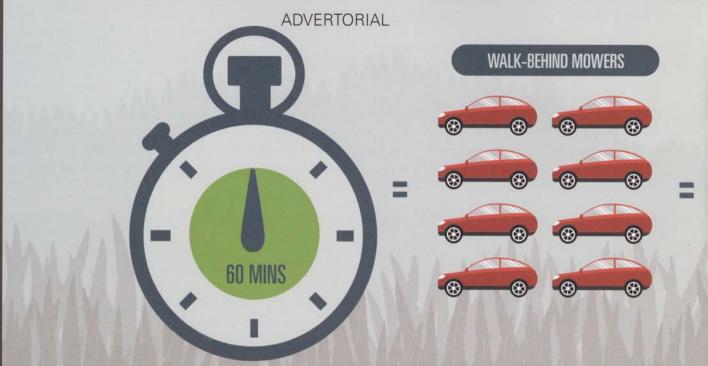


Cordless outdoor power equipment, especially when powered by a brushless motor, are up to 50% quieter than a gas-powered tool. This quiet operation allows you to work in sites where there are noise restrictions in place. Quieter operation means you can start your day earlier, get to more jobs, and work later — all without disturbing your clients. Additionally, lower noise levels protect the hearing of the tool operator.

EASY TO OPERATE

Cordless outdoor power equipment starts with the push of a button, or squeeze of a trigger – no more pulling a cord. Start and restart easily. When brushless motor technology is involved, cordless outdoor power equipment drastically reduces vibrations as compared to gas-powered equipment. Lighter-weight tools with reduced vibrations means less user fatigue, resulting in extended use and an easier week of work. When you're using these tools 8-12 hours a day, this

is a huge benefit. When you make a living with your tools, you want something that you can rely on, and will deliver the power and performance you need. Thanks to advancements in lithium-ion battery technology and brushless motors, today's cordless outdoor power equipment can deliver just that. Cordless tools give you reliable power without the hassle of gas.



BATTERY-POWERED OUTDOOR POWE

In one hour, one walk-behind gas mower emits the same amount of pollutants as eight cars operating for the same period of time. And for a ride-on gas mower it is even worse — 34 cars in one hour! The US Government continues to look for ways to reduce emissions from engines that burn gas and oil. For years, Ethanol has been their answer, and recently has come under scrutiny.

Ethanol is a renewable fuel made from various plant materials collectively known as biomass. Almost 97% of U.S. gasoline contains E10 ethanol (10% ethanol, 90% gasoline), to oxygenate the fuel and reduce air pollution.(Energy.gov).

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the increased use of ethanol will help reduce emissions and improve air quality, increase energy independence, and replace MTBE (Methyl Tert-Butyl Ether), an oxygenate used to raise the octane number, and which has known to occur in our groundwater. In addition, the US Department of Energy credits ethanol for job creation and fuel economy and performance in vehicles.

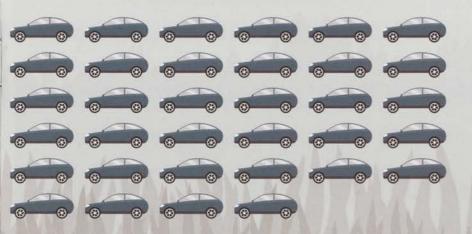
The EPA is pushing for higher ethanol levels in the gasoline that fuels our cars, boats, snow mobiles, ATVs and small engine lawn and snow equipment. But small, two-stroke engines, if not properly maintained while running E10 are subject to condensation in fuel tanks which can lead to corrosion of engine components. Ethanol is a solvent. It can release sludge and other deposits into the fuel and combustion systems and damage the engine. Two-stroke engines have ports and jets that can become clogged from these deposits causing the engine to be harmed. (Matthew W. Veal, PhD, NC State Cooperative Extension, August 2014)

OPEI is pushing for more education for consumers who don't understand what ethanol is doing to their lawn equipment when buying their gasoline at the pump. Recently, the EPA approved a waiver that allowed the ethanol formulation to be increased to 15% Ethanol or E15, but outdoor power equipment remains exempt from this waiver. There is not enough data on two-stroke engine performance when burning E15. But its time will come. Over 150 cities and towns in the US have some type of ban on gas-powered lawn equipment either due to noise or emissions.

While ethanol continues to wreak havoc on two-stroke engines across the country, there is a new movement in commercial outdoor power equipment. Like electric cars, battery-powered lawn equipment is growing in popularity with both consumers and now commercial landscape professionals. During the last decade, lithium-ion technology has replaced nickel-cadmium batteries in handheld power tools on every jobsite increasing confidence in performance and offering advantages versus gas as well. Lithium-ion batteries are smaller in size and lighter weight with virtually no self-discharge. This means the battery can be stored for many months without losing its charge.

What about power? New innovative technologies have brought higher voltage platforms and brushless motors which offer greater efficiency, durability and tool performance. These tools can tackle more difficult applications because the power and the mechanics work together to increase output. Increasing voltage or motor efficiency increases power. One key advantage to lithium-ion batteries is that you can get more power without increasing weight.

RIDING MOWERS



EQUIPMENT, THE ONLY ALTERNATIVE

For over 10 years, Greenworks Commercial™, a leader in electric & battery-powered equipment, has designed and manufactured innovative lithium-ion battery platforms which power multiple outdoor tools, delivering gas-equivalent power and performance without the mess, fumes and noise. After years of research and development, Greenworks Commercial™ debuts nationwide to professional landscapers at GIE & EXPO. Designed with input from landscape professionals, Greenworks Commercial™ 82V battery-powered tools offer easy start, low maintenance, low vibration and quiet tools compared to gas.

Designed with the professional in mind, Greenworks Commercial™ offer tool balance, streamline design, with quality parts. With over 13 tools and accessory items, Greenworks Commercial™ 82V offers one of the widest assortments, and highest voltage platforms in the business. Hassle-free lithium-ion battery powered tools also offer cost savings versus gas considering engine maintenance, the time and cost of gas and oil mixing and trips to the gas station. No purging or winterizing necessary. Just push the button without the worry and hassle of cold starts. Greenworks Commercial™ 82V Battery Powered Outdoor Tools offer the best alternative to gas-powered tools.

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34 POUNDS OF OTHER POLLUTANTS



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THAT'S THE SAME AMOUNT CARRIED BY 2,800 TANKER TRUCKS



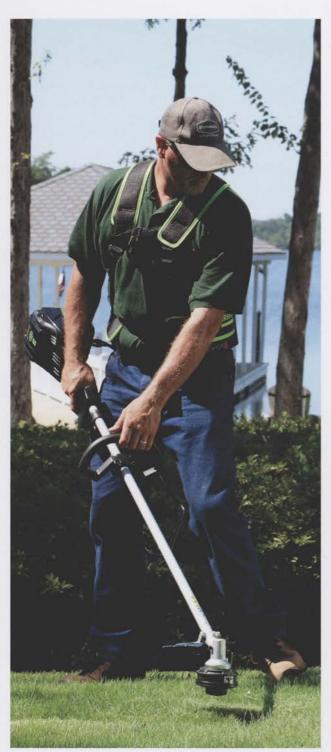
Solaris: Green Facts

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WHISPERING PINES FOR LAWN & LANDSCAPE

Brian Webber, Owner of Whispering Pines Landscaping, Inc. has been in business since 1988. He chose to base his business just North of Charlotte, in Denver, NC, and has completed many landscaping projects throughout the area. He has enjoyed continued growth by building relationships with the area's finest builders, maintaining a substantial customer base and inviting referrals.

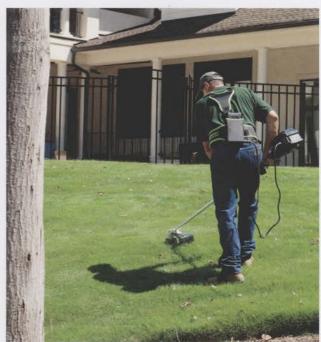
Whispering Pines is a full service full service lawn care and landscape construction company, serving both residential and commercial clients. Brian offers customers a wide variety of services such as custom landscape design, irrigation, drainage, lighting, hardscapes, installation, maintenance and more.



WHY BATTERY?

We asked Brian why he decided to go to battery power. He said, "I decided to try the battery tools after I went to a tool demonstration. At that time, I was able to use the hedge trimmer and chainsaw for one week. After doing that, I was sold." "They really worked out well. That was when I started to purchase these tools for my team. Now that I made the change, the team asks for these tools. They don't want to mess with the old ones."

Searching for a better way to manage his costs, Brian noted that with the Greenworks Commercial battery operated tools, "the battery is a fixed cost and the tools are more reliable." When asked about those costs, he said "We can better determine our costs when we are pricing a contract, whether it's for a year or a season." He continued, "with gas tools there is an unknown cost of fuel, tool maintenance and/or replacement. As an example, when using gas tools, the crew may set the tool down without turning it off because it is difficult to start, wasting fuel and stressing the tool." And as another thought, he added "There Is also savings in hearing protection because the tools are so much quieter that the crew does not require as many earplugs. It is a small cost, but these small things add up."



RELIABLE

Whispering Pines has a busy business and we were curious about how they kept up with the demands of the business. He noted that "Once we get the labor force managed, we need efficient, reliable tools. In the past we have had to plan for downtime, due to tool breakdown and problems. Now we can schedule our days and feel confident that we will accomplish what is on the schedule because we have reliable tools." He added, "Ethanol fuel eats carburetors and hoses and can even crumble a tool within a year. That's a frustration and an expense. You may be able to use other fuels to help, but it doesn't really save you money. Fuel costs are an issue and an unknown factor with fuel costs changing all the time. "

Scheduling has been an additional challenge to the growing Whispering Pines business. When considering scheduling and efficiencies, he said "when I send my guys out, they are on the job right away because the battery tools always start." "There is no fussing around with mixing fuel; you don't have to pull and pull, so they get started right away with the push of a button as soon as they arrive and are ready to start the job." "It is nice knowing I can send a trimming crew to a job and can count on the Greenworks Commercial™ battery tools. The crew doesn't have to chase gas, clean gas spills if sloshed or tipped over, worry about getting fuel on their skin or have any other issues that come with gas, they just get started and get the job finished quickly."

USER FRIENDLY

When we talked about health concerns, Brian said "I have had people injure their shoulders pulling and pulling to start gas tools. Now, with the simple push button start, that worry goes away." He also noted the benefit of his employees not being exposed to the gas fumes, exhaust and possible personal injury. He also mentioned that the tools are quieter so the concerns of hearing damage is lower. "Not only are they quieter, but the tools are lighter, resulting in less fatigue for my crew. After an 8-hour day working with these tools, it is so much easier on them. They also have less shoulder and arm injuries because they don't have to pull and pull on a pull cord."

"The battery tools have been a great surprise. After the test crew tested the mower, they loved it." It's quiet, no pulling and it cuts extremely well. We also like that it is lightweight and easy to maneuver. It's lighter and easier to get on and off the truck, and once again, it is nice to know it will always start.

Whispering Pines crew gives rave reviews on the push mower, blower and hedge trimmer — "rave reviews on all those and the chainsaw." They are now requesting Greenworks CommercialTM tools for all their jobs. One of my team noted that "the hedge trimmer ran all day on one battery." Our workers are asking for Greenworks CommercialTM, not gas.



WHISPERING PINES FOR LAWN & LANDSCAPE



SAVES TIME AND MONEY



Brian noted that they have seen the value in the Greenworks Commercial™ tools in many ways. He said, "we don't have to replace tools as often, repairs are minimized, pull cords never have to be replaced, fuel costs, oil costs, maintenance on carburetors, adjusting valves, and maintenance costs in general are lower." "It also saves us down time due to unexpected tool breakdowns. The quality of the Greenworks Commercial™ tools are superior, and the cutting quality is great. My crew loves them. "

Another value he notes was that the Greenworks CommercialTM tools helps him economically perform what they need to do at 10-12 houses a day. He said, "If the crew spends an hour a day starting equipment, that is a huge loss of time. Multiply the time it takes to pull the start cord every work day over a year, the time the Greenworks CommercialTM tools save is huge."

"It's easy to talk about how Greenworks Commercial™ saves me time and money," said Brian. "Just think about the time spent stopping for gas, mixing gas and oil, fueling up the tools, starting the tools – all those are expensive time factors."

"The Greenworks Commercial™ tools are more efficient in just about every way. As an example, the chainsaw always starts; never a problem - hit the trigger and it goes — Greenworks Commercial™ really nailed this tool. Compared to gas chainsaws that can be the most frustrating — even with the best maintenance they can a problem — and they are frustrating to start. With the Greenworks Commercial™ tools, they start every time, cut and wait for the next cut. We have found that the battery lasts the equal to 3 tanks of gas."





ECO-FRIENDLY



He also noted other environmental benefits. "The lower noise is huge - no one wants to hear loud blowers. We can start jobs as early as 7:30 A.M. due to the lower noise factor. Or maybe a job runs late, 5:30 P.M., dinner time — we can continue to work and not worry that we are bothering our clients with the noise."

He went on to say "Obviously the tool emissions and the problems with gas spillage when filling or mixing. We don't worry about those things with Greenworks Commercial $^{\text{TM}}$."

Brian mentioned that as an owner, the warranty is very attractive to him. "With Greenworks Commercial™ 2-year tool and one-year battery warranty, it makes purchasing these tools an easy decision. Overall, we are extremely pleased with the Greenworks Commercial™ tools and look forward to new tools coming out such as a power lopper, extended reach trimmer and charging case. I will be buying several more sets for my crew. When I found out you have power tools, I bought some of those, too."

AGZA SERVICE PROVIDERS AND AGZA GREEN ZONES® ARE CHANGING THE LANDSCAPE OF GROUNDS MAINTENANCE

The American Green Zone Alliance is the global leader in zero-emission sustainable grounds maintenance strategies. Our sustainability consultancy helps your grounds maintenance service make informed, practical and profitable decisions as we guide your transition to quieter, zero-emission technologies. Our decade of experience has proven that the best way to take care of your bottom line while also taking care of your crew, your community, and the environment is to evolve your gas equipment to the best performing commercial-ready electric tools.

AGZA's two core services are accrediting AGZA Service Providers and certifying AGZA Green Zones®.

AGZA educates grounds supervisors, lawn care professionals, and property owners on the hazards of gas machines, the performance, features and benefits of battery-electric equipment, their safe and optimal operation, and effective charging infrastructure. Mastery of our proprietary materials is distinguished with accreditation as an AGZA Service Provider.

AGZA Green Zones® are properties on which routine maintenance is serviced with zero-emission equipment, hand tools, and sustainable land care practices. These pristine zones are coveted in communities and campuses for their quiet, fume-free maintenance and extremely low carbon footprint. Green Zones can be created in outdoor spaces of any size, from residential to academic, commercial, and municipal.

AGZA is proud to have publicly certified Malibu Country Mart as the nation's first AGZA Green Zone commercial property, Torrance American Baseball Fields as the nation's first AGZA Green Zone sports complex, and South Pasadena as the nation's first entirely AGZA Green Zone City.

AGZA's passion for electric operations actually comes from our roots in the gas-powered lawn and garden industry. Like millions of other hard working grounds crews, we experienced the noise, fumes, and pollution of gas equipment every day, simply because there hadn't been a serious, commercial alternative.

But stunning leaps in battery tech and industrial design like those in the Greenworks Commercial 82 Volt Commercial line have resulted in entire suites of cordless electric tools that finally rival the raw performance of gas. The lawn care industry is experiencing a zero-emission, low-noise revolution. The cost savings by completely eliminating fuel, oil, spark plugs, filters, hoses, and the maintenance thereof ensures a healthy ROI to go along with your much healthier lawncare, air quality, and peace of mind.

Green Gardening Service and Evergreen Lawn Care are two impressive accredited AGZA Service Providers whose commercial operations are built around 100% electric machinery, including top-of-the-line tools from Greenworks. In fact Green Gardening Service uses exclusively Greenworks equipment to maintain their route of over 70 homes.

AGZA is busy accrediting forward-thinking zero-emission grounds crews across the country, and developing AGZA Green Zones which require their services. Collaborating with our East Coast partner Quiet Communities, AGZA is in the process of certifying the first AGZA Green Zone on the East Coast in the city of Southampton, NY.

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~ Michael Cacciotti, Mayor Pro Tem of South Pasadena and a Governing Board Member of the SCAQMD

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"It can take you months to save for a piece of equipment or save up for extra parts, and it takes someone about 15 seconds to steal it."

> Joseph Rabago, president, Divine Landscape

jobs on time. He keeps these parts secure in an enclosed trailer.

"You have to keep your eye on parts, otherwise, they'll grow legs," he says, relating how easy it is to misplace or for others to lift small and large assets. "It can take you months to save for a piece of equipment or save up for extra parts, and it takes someone about 15 seconds to steal it," he says.

Because Rabago is based at home, he relies on the enclosed trailer as a "warehouse" that is equipped with an alarm system. "It goes off when the doors open," he says.

Rabago plans on servicing his equipment about three to four times annually, and gradually he is growing his firm and investing in the fleet. With 19 years of experience in the industry, and a previous career working for a large landscape design firm, he's proud to be growing his own.

That includes learning what works with parts and maintenance, to adding services like synthetic turf. "I'm a bit of a perfectionist," Rabago says, adding that he hopes to add two more people to his team this year. L&L

DIVINE LANDSCAPES

Joseph Rabago, president

LOCATION:

Dinuba, California

ESTABLISHED: 2008

EMPLOYEES:

1

2015 REVENUE: Not disclosed

CUSTOMERS:

Design/build: 95% residential, 5% commercial; Maintenance: 95% commercial, 5% residential

SERVICES:

Landscape maintenance, design/build, irrigation

TAKE-AWAY TIPS

CONSIDER TIME.

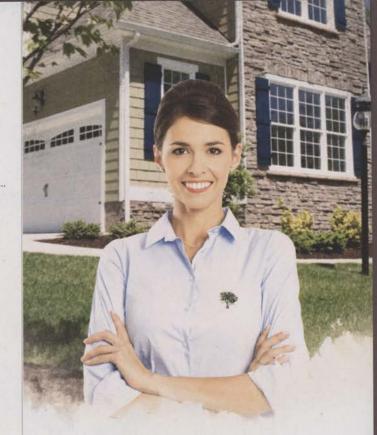
While Rabago would prefer to have a technician at his dealer perform all service, he knows he can manage basic tasks like changing oil and filters. This prevents costly drive time. "We don't have time for that," he says.

SECURE PARTS.

An enclosed trailer serves as a safe storehouse for parts Rabago uses for equipment and on irrigation jobs. "As soon as that trailer door opens, that alarm is loud," he says.

START SLOW.

Rabago is an owner/operator who realizes he can't do it all. But he is taking on tasks as he feels comfortable — and that includes keeping basic parts on hand so he can handle some minor repairs.



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The Six Deadly Mistakes of Jobcosting

'm not sure there's any topic in the landscape industry that's talked about more and executed less than jobcosting. Every owner I've ever talked to would like to know more about what's working and what's not. I don't know if you'd be able to find a consultant/ expert who says "Ignore jobcosting. It's a waste of time."

But for many companies, jobcosting is a waste of time. It's too much effort, it's too late with information and it's too inaccurate to trust the information coming back. Unfortunately, most landscape companies fall into one of these categories:

- Don't do jobcosting don't have time or the resources to start
- Gave up on jobcosting –
 information was too late with
 too many mistakes to be worth
 the time to enter it all
- Going through the motions
 of jobcosting but rarely
 use or trust the information
 provided

If any of the above scenarios sound familiar, your business is falling victim to one (or more) of the six deadly mistakes of jobcosting.

Deadly Mistake #1: Doing Jobcosting In Your Head

"We're a small company. I know how we're doing on our jobs."

Owners of small businesses are often involved enough on the job to keep tabs on where each job is at. But these owners usually end up as their own worst enemy. The information is all contained in their head, but as they grow, they get too busy to communicate properly. Employees, who don't have the

facts to make good decisions, depend on the owner for all the answers to every who, what, when, where and why. The owner then gets frustrated with staff because they feel like the staff have to be spoon-fed everything.

And if/when you do grow, all that information in your head is going to be very difficult to teach anyone else. If you had results tracked in a system, anyone could look back at old estimates and old jobcosting to learn how long things take.

But maybe the biggest reason for jobcosting when you're small is the perception to your staff. If you don't show that tracking hours and communicating "the score" are important, your people will never value bringing jobs in on-time and on-budget, either.

Deadly Mistake #2: Working Without a Good Estimate

Without a good, cost-based estimate, you're missing most of the benefits of Jobcosting:

- The estimate defines success for the job (the crew has x many hours to complete the work given a specific list of equipment).
- The estimate defines how time and costs should be tracked. It breaks down jobs into major sub-totals and dictates the level of detail for jobcosting and hours tracking.

Without standardizing how jobs are tracked, crews and bookkeepers have to guess how to record time and costs. Some people are going to make little effort to guess well and the results will be useless. Other people are going try their best to guess correctly, but if they're enter-



ing information in areas that don't line up with your expectations, the results are still useless. For instance, if you estimate 80 hours for a patio, but the crew records 18 hours for Excavation (without identifying it was for a patio), the office has to either guess what those excavation hours were for, or waste valuable time chasing the foreman with more questions.

Deadly Mistake #3: Too Complicated

Mistake #3 is a common mistake for the companies who start jobcosting. I certainly made this one for years in my own business. In theory, detail is great. You want good production metrics. We'd all like to dial-in our estimating, knowing things like:

- How much time does it take to excavate 100 ft.² at 8"?
- How much time does it take to install/compact that much base?
- How much time to plant a 5G shrub?
- How much time to pour each yard/meter of concrete?
- How much time to trim 100' of turf edge?

With all this information, we were sure to become much better at estimating, right?

But there's little chance that a foreman who is trying to dig the area to the correct grade, chasing laborers, receiving deliveries, and planning their next task is going to be able to tell you exactly how much time each staff member spent on each task – not at that level of detail. At best, they're going to guess at the end of the day.

So instead of getting good, accurate data, the information we were getting wasn't what actually If you don't show that tracking hours and communicating "the score" are important, your people will never value bringing jobs in on-time and on-budget, either.

happened, it was what the foreman thought I wanted to see. They simply made actual hours as close to estimated hours as they could, filling in hours not by what actually happened, but by what our jobcosting sheet said should be happening. So even though I had all this data, I didn't trust any of it.

On top of that, when we compiled all the results, the complex time breakdowns meant things often got missed and forgotten. Some tasks on the job had 0 hours, while others had four times their budgeted hours. Again, the reports didn't reflect reality, foremen were guessing at the end of each day, and it only took a few of those jobs to poison the totals for the whole season, so that none of our task-tracking was trustworthy.

Too much detail in your jobcosting gives you the worst of both worlds: a time-consuming, confusing, detail-oriented system and nobody really trusts or uses the results.

Deadly Mistake #4: One system for payroll. Another system for jobcosting

When a timeclock (or some timekeeping system) is used for

payroll, and daily sheets are filled out by the foreman for jobcosting, you're going to get a lot of inaccuracy and a lot of extra work. When payroll is separate from jobcosting, you end up with a lot of 'missing hours' and a whole lot of overhead time wasted trying to reconcile the missing hours.

Payroll and jobcosting should be the same system, not different systems. In order for crews to get paid for hours worked, they have to account for all their time to some task. That's how they get paid, and that's how you cost their time.

Your staff is likely fantastic at tracking their time... short them 10 min on their next pay, and just watch how quickly they catch the mistakel Payroll and jobcosting should be the same system/form and EVERY payroll hour needs to get allocated to something (it doesn't have to be a customer job – it can be shop time, driving time, or deliveries, etc.). When the two systems are the same, jobcosting information will be far more accurate and complete.

Deadly Mistake #5: Too Many Systems

Most companies already have everything they need to use for better jobcosting... their accounting software. Its where you enter all your costs - vendor invoices, employee paychecks, subcontractor invoices, rental invoices - all the costs you need to track. The most efficient, and most accurate, way to jobcost your projects is to use your accounting software. Unfortunately, most companies only use their accounting for end-of-year statements and paying taxes, The major accounting packages do jobcosting, but most

Mark Bradley is the CEO of TBG Landscape and LMN (Landscape Management Network). TBG Landscape is one of L&L's top 100 companies of 2016 while LMN is one of the largest estimating and mobile timesheet software products for the green industry. www.golmn.com.

contractors haven't setup their accounting, or their internal processes, to take advantage of it. Instead, there's some office staff plugging costs into accounting, while other staff enter the same costs into spreadsheets or other software.

You don't need information getting entered twice and three times in different systems. You need it to get entered once, correctly.

Deadly Mistake #6: No Feedback Back to the Crews

If you're going to do jobcosting, you need to share the results often. One of the biggest advantages is "knowing the score" while the game is being played. It's nice to know when we went over budget – but it's even better to avoid going over budget in the first place.

Consistent feedback and a scoreboard attracts good employees and repels the bad ones. Share jobcosting information. Give updates as often as you can. You're not only keeping your crews in the loop, you're reinforcing the fact that being profitable is not something to take for granted – it's something that needs attention every single day.

Mark Bradley's Corner is an occasional advertorial series sponsored by LMN. For more information, visit their website at www.golmn.com.



TRACTION ACTION

Compact wheel and track loaders can help your business in different ways. By Neil Moran

wo invaluable machines in the landscape construction and maintenance business are the compact track and wheel loaders. These two pieces of equipment have specific functions – as well as limitations – as they relate to landscape construction, maintenance and snow removal.

Track loaders are kind of like that power washer sitting in the garage. It's not something some contractors need all the time, but when it is needed it sure saves a lot of work. Wheel loaders, on the other hand, are needed mostly when the weatherman is calling for snow, and lots of it.

TREAD LIGHTLY. Mark Smith, project manager with Belknap Landscape Company, knows a thing or two about track and wheel loaders. They service high end clients in the Lakes Region in the heart of New Hampshire. Much of their work is concentrated around Lake Winnipesaukee, the largest lake in the state.

"Ninety percent are second homes, high end residential," Smith says. "We also have high end commercial accounts: shopping malls, schools, private, university and local hospitals — these people really value what they get out of a contractor."

The track loader is the equipment of choice for most of this work, especially landscape maintenance, where it leaves less of an impact on existing lawns.

"We focus mostly around a lake and a lot of the terrain is very steep and difficult to traverse with a wheel loader," says Smith. "It works good on existing lots, wheel loaders do much more damage to existing landscapes."

Matthew Stano, owner of Stano Landscaping in Milwaukee has a similar opinion on track loaders.

"Two of our Bobcats are track loaders," he says. "We use them specifically when we have site conditions where we need to preserve the appearance of the lawn." He says they will also use them when the ground is wet and they need to grade out the site. He says the two compact track loaders they own work better than a skid-steer in these conditions.

"They're absolutely required in our business," says Stano. "I wouldn't say we have a crew going out every day with them, but we use them a lot."

Belknap Landscape has had a good year as well. While they have a lot of landscape maintenance and repeat business, new construction definitely helps their bottom line and helps to justify the purchase of the two track loaders they own. He says they've been busy this past year with a good deal of new landscape construction taking place around the lake and other properties in the area.

Belknap's business runs the gamut from traditional landscaping, including landscape design, to masonry work, pool excavation, and brick pavers. They employ 90-100 people during peak season. The track loaders with different attachments make it easier and more efficient to perform the tasks at hand with less labor.

"The name of the game today is to be more mechanical and not as heavy on staff," says Smith. "We rely on a diversity of wheel and track loaders, they're more reliable than labor."

The must-have labor-saving accessories they can attach to a track loader include standard buckets, forks and brush grapplers.

Running a large-scale business requires effort, commitment and a strong pain reliever.

Sure, a larger business means bigger profits — but it also means bigger headaches. Take my operation, for instance. On any given day, we're running 8 mowers at more than 40 locations across a 120-square-mile area, so logistics alone is challenging enough.

Add staffing, scheduling and maintenance into the equation, and you're looking at enough variables to make Einstein recheck his figures. And when you've got a mower or two down for repair, it's even more complicated. That's why I started buying Grasshopper mowers a few years back. They just keep running, no matter what. And they're designed to cut maintenance just as well as they cut grass, which — believe me —



my crews appreciate after a long day. Since we're running diesel mowers, they also save us thousands of dollars a year in fuel costs. And I don't know any businessman who wouldn't welcome adding a chunk of change that size to his bottom line. After all, running a business on this scale has enough headaches. At least now, my equipment isn't one of them. Talk about a pain reliever.



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DESIGN/BUILD

Track loaders aren't without some disadvantages. They're not as versatile for snow removal as wheel loaders, and they're more expensive to maintain due to track replacement that is periodically required.

"The largest disadvantage of track loaders is the sheer cost of the track," says Smith. "We take that into account with our financial planning and charge rates." He says track replacement can run up to \$10,000.

THE HEAVY LIFTERS. One thing both Stano and Smith have in common is they live in areas that receive a significant amount of snowfall. This makes the wheel

loaders invaluable, especially for clearing large, open lots.

"We use everything for snow removal in some fashion," Smith says. He says this even includes compact track loaders, but more for smaller amounts of snow. The large bucket makes the wheel loader their equipment of choice for clearing large parking lots and pushing back snow.

Belknap deploys seven wheel loaders during the winter for snow removal and rents three more as needed.

One advantage of the wheel loaders Belknap owns, which are mostly Caterpillar, is the fact that the attachments they use with them are interchangeable with their skid-steer, making both machines much more diverse.

"We have a couple of Caterpillars (wheel loaders) that are very diverse that can service smaller lots," Smith says. "They can go through tight locations, such as ATM drive thrus."

The wheel loaders aren't exactly left idle in the summer. They can be used in the yard to load large amounts of mulch, stone or topsoil.

PRIORITY ON MAINTENANCE. The only thing worse about having to shell out thousands of dollars on equipment would be to not properly maintain it. Both Stano and Smith can sleep a little better at

night knowing they have reliable maintenance staff to keep these expensive pieces of equipment in shape. Their maintenance staff can take care of most of the maintenance issues. Like a lot of heavy equipment in this industry, a well maintained machine should last at least 10 years, something both landscapers strive to achieve.

"Generally, maintenance is done in-house," Smith says. "Some of our equipment have 1-2-year maintenance plans. We have three in-house mechanics, they are our firefighters and general maintenance technicians. Large repairs are sent out." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Michigan.





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TURF TREATMENT

While the product does most of the work on a lawn, the right sprayer or spreader can make the application easier for the technician. By Neil Moran

equipment can save time and money, that is, if you have chosen the right pieces of equipment and maintain them properly. Here is the inside scoop on spreaders and sprayers from three lawn care operators, each who have been in the business for over two decades.

SPREADERS AND SPRAYERS. Nick Brummel and his crew at Brummel Lawn & Landscape can't afford to have issues with their equipment, especially their spreaders and sprayers. They use them on a daily basis in the greater Kansas City area to service mostly commercial properties.

Like most lawn care companies, Brummel's lawn care regimen includes a mix of granular and liquid applications at different times of the year. For smaller properties, they'll use Lesco spreaders with 80 pound-capacity hoppers. Technicians use them to apply granular pre-emergent and grub control products. Brummel selects his brand



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Cub Cadet

of spreaders based on product reviews, making sure there aren't issues with the spreader before making the investment.

"We look at the quality and make sure they're stainless steel and have grease points," Brummel says.

These push behind units may be great for smaller properties, but they just don't cut it for the larger properties they service.

"We're spraying and fertilizing at some point every 10 days, compared to a residential lawn we only see six times a year," Brummel says.

For large commercial properties and lawns they'll use the ride-on Z-sprayers with their "We look at the quality and make sure they're stainless steel and have grease points."

> Nick Brummel, Brummel Lawn & Landscape

combination sprayer and spreader capability. They own two of these machines which sell for about \$12,000 each.

Mark Black, owner of Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists, out of South Roxana, Illinois, wants his spreaders and

other equipment to be consistent from one job to the next.

"I'm looking for the McDonald (restaurant) effect," Black says, which is evident in his fleet of vehicles, all mid-size pickup trucks, which are identical in appearance. The spreaders and sprayers his trucks are equipped with are identical as well.

Black prefers the Anderson spreaders. He says the hopper on these pieces of equipment hold 80 pounds, but he says technicians use a little common sense and don't over work them.

"You have to look at the material," Black says. "Bulkier material should be limited to about 50 lbs. The more you put in the

hopper the more potential for damage, the gears tend to strip underneath a whole lot quicker when guys really fill them up."

He says one thing he has learned over the years is to fill them according to the square footage of the property. He says if the property is under 15,000 square feet, then only 25-30 pounds should be poured into the hopper.

For the guys doing routine spraying on what he calls the normal route, they use the ride-on PermaGreen and Z-Spray units.

Paul Wagner and his crew at Fit Turf see it all when it comes to variable weather and climate conditions as it relates to lawn





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care. With four locations, two in rainy Michigan, and two out in drought-prone Denver, Colorado, Wagner and his crew face a challenge keeping turf in tip top shape; it's made a little easier by the equipment he has chosen.

Like Black, Wagner appreciates the versatility of the Z-Spray, and thinks the investment is worth it. "I've found with over 30 years in this business that you're always better off spending a little extra," says Wagner.

Although these machines are generally safe to operate, it is nevertheless prudent to follow some safety precautions. He says the Z-Spray isn't the best choice for real hilly properties. In fact, an

employee rolled one, so he makes sure one of his more experienced crew members operate this machine, although he occasionally trains new hires to operate one.

One feature Wagner likes about his ride-on sprayer/spreader is the fact that it causes less fatigue for his crew. This is pretty important in the Denver area, where the summer temperatures routinely top 90 degrees.

"For automated equipment you don't have to have a 25-yearold person," Wagner says. "You can have an older individual out there with a lot of experience and they're not killing themselves."

The crew also uses tanks mounted on a pick-up truck for lawn and tree care applications. The tanks have separate pumps and hoses concealed from view.

They use the front tank for lawn care and the back tank for trees.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE. Spreaders and sprayers haven't changed a great deal over the years, according to these LCOs. It's mostly an "if it ain't broke, why fix it," situation.

If there have been any changes, it's with the sprayers which have seen improvements in the pumps and the number of hoses that can be used at one time. It is also easier to calibrate the new machines like the Z-Spray,

Since they hold their value

well, purchasing used spreaders and sprayers may be an option, just be sure to carefully inspect the entire unit before purchasing it.

As for backpack sprayers, they haven't exactly gone the way of the typewriter in the lawn care industry. They come in handy for spot weed control and around rocks in a rock garden, according to Wagner, a point that was echoed by the other LCOs.

MAINTAINING PERFORMANCE.

Much like you wouldn't take shortcuts servicing a customer's lawn, the same should be said for your approach to performing maintenance on your spreaders



and sprayers. If you consistently adhere to best practices not only will this important equipment go the distance, but you'll consistently and efficiently apply the products that keep lawns looking beautiful.

The number one rule in spreader maintenance, one that many a foreman harps on, is keeping the hoppers free of the corrosive material you're using.

A telltale sign of a slipshod operation is product left in a hopper "until the next application." The screens in the hoppers will clog quickly, resulting in inconsistent application of fertilizers and other lawn care products.

"Some of our crew members

"If you expect to be in business for a long time, spend the extra two to three thousand dollars and buy the best equipment and maintain the hell out of it."

Paul Wagner, Fit Turf

are pretty good about pulling the grates out," Brummel says. "And we find if they do they clog up, chunks of product fall through and clog the spreaders."

As for maintenance, he says to make sure you grease them and clean them out since the product is pretty corrosive.

"We have maintenance kits on each truck," Wagner says. "Oil changes, lubrication, cleanliness of the units is the most important thing.

"If you neglect any of this – and it has to be done on a daily basis – you're going to have something that is going to break down.

Sprayers are a little different animal when it comes to maintenance. The ride-on machines, like the Z-Spray, need regular oil changes.

The hoppers and hoses also

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need to be flushed regularly to rinse out corrosive product. And of course sprayers and spreaders alike need to be properly cleaned, drained and stored in the winter so they're ready to go before the first flush of growth in the spring lawns.

Perhaps Wagner sums it up the best when it comes to purchasing and maintaining spreaders and sprayers:

"If you expect to be in business for a long time, spend the extra two to three thousand dollars and buy the best equipment and maintain the hell out of it," he says. L&L

Making Seasons Bright!

The author is a freelance writer based in Michigan.



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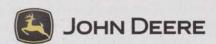
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• LED 3D Starburst & Lightburst



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JohnDeere.com/Eskid

RIGHTMIX

As we head toward the end of 2016, chemical manufacturers are getting a head start on how they can help your company in the new year.

INTELLIGRO

intelligro.

CIVITAS WEEDfree BRAND Concentrate, an Intelligro brand,

launched last year and continues to enter new markets across the United States with its most recent approval in California. The goal was to use technology to answer the needs of lawn and landscape professionals to create a solution that has staying power in an ever-evolving environment that demands sustainability and accountability.

It is as effective as the traditional three-way mixes but its microtechnology delivery system penetrates into weeds more efficiently, resulting in significantly less active ingredients required to kill weeds down to the root. It also addresses a common industry concern with a no-offensive-odor formula. As regulations and public interest in product makeup increase, a solution with fewer active ingredients will continue to be a competitive point of difference for lawn care businesses.

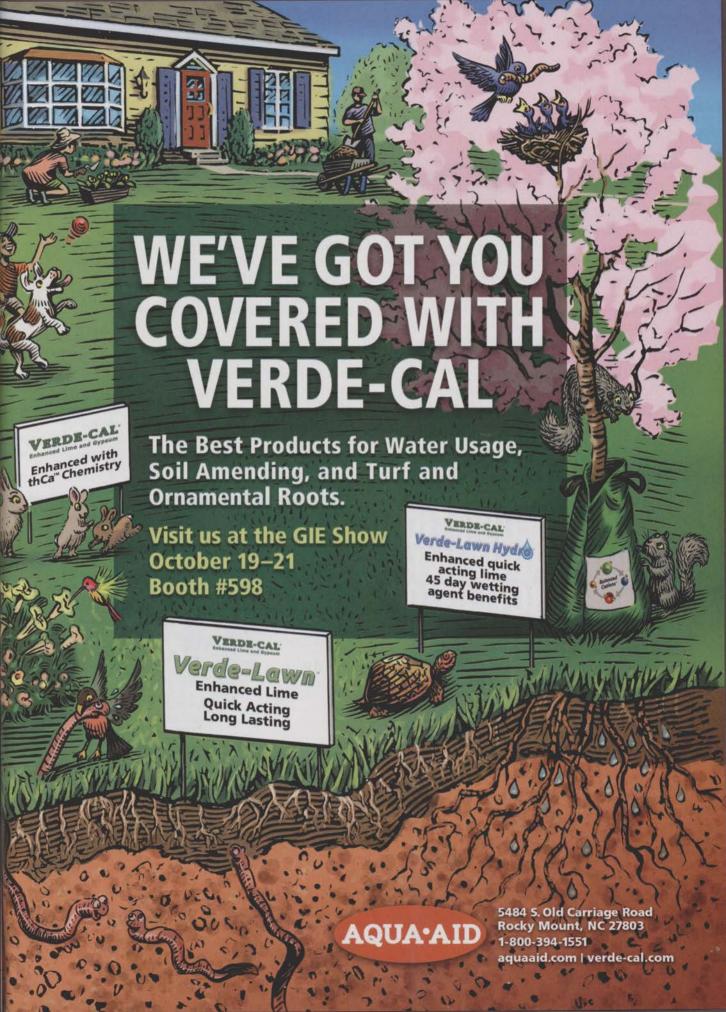
SYNGENTA



GrowWithSyngenta.com offers free marketing materi-

als LCOs can order to inform homeowners about topics like mosquito control, fire ant control and lawn disease identification. Additionally, new this year for the lawn market, GreenTrust Rewards gives LCOs opportunities to earn points from product purchases as part of the GreenTrust 365 program. Points can be redeemed for a variety of gift cards from Visa, Amazon, Lowe's, Staples and more to purchase items for their business or reward their staff. Learn more at GreenCastOnline.com/Lawn.

The 2017 GreenTrust 365 Lawn Program kicked off Oct. 1 with new GreenTrust Rewards. The annual program provides LCOs with the Barricade herbicide Brand Bonus, a Pallet Solution, multipaks, ProductAssurances, SummerPay terms and more. LCOs can contact their local Syngenta territory manager or visit GreenTrust365.com for more information on the program.



LEBANONTURF

ProScape fertilizer with Acelepryn plus Dimension is finishing its first full season after a successful launch. Powered by



the proprietary, non-coated nutrient sources of Meth-Ex (methylene urea), MESA (ammonium sulfate and methylene urea complex) and Expo (slow-release potassium), this combination product delivers season-long nutrition while providing season-long protection against crabgrass and grubs. One spring application of ProScape fertilizer with Acelepryn plus Dimension provides pre-emergent and early post-emergent control of crabgrass, as well as season-long control of other grassy weeds.

Additionally, it controls multiple insect pests including grubs, chinch bugs, billbugs and annual bluegrass weevils.

PBI-GORDON

One of the biggest challenges in the industry right now is labor. We hear it from LCOs, and Lawn



& Landscape has had more than a few stories about labor shortages and related issues. While we can't help increase the labor pool, we can help LCOs alleviate other issues so they have more time to work on the labor problem.

For instance, the PBI-Gordon Early Order Rebate Program helps pros prepare for next season, so they can focus on tasks like building and training crews.

Through the PBI-Gordon Early Order Program, participating endusers must purchase a minimum \$1,500 of PBI-Gordon qualifying products from a PBI-Gordon distributor between Oct. 1, 2016 and Jan. 15, 2017. End-users can maximize their rebate by placing an order before Oct. 31, 2016.

Rebate values can be as high as \$412.50 per unit, and PBI-Gordon also offers a Bonus Booster plan. With a minimum purchase of \$2,500 in qualifying products, end-users can earn an extra 1.5 percent bonus rebate.





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JohnDeere.com/MowPro

JOHN DEERE

*\$300 off and 0/48 National Offer: Offer ends October 28, 2016. Subject to approved installment credit with John Deere Financial, for commercial use only. \$300 off and fixed rate of 0.0% for 48 months available August 1, 2016 through October 28, 2016. Savings based on the purchase of eligible equipment. Offers available on new equipment and in the U.S. only. Prices and savings in U.S. dollars. See your dealer for details.

***GreenFleet discount offer expires October 28, 2016. GreenFleet level savings are based on total units purchased. A member's per unit discount for an eligible sale will be based on the highest accumulated qualifying equipment purchased at the time of an eligible sale. See terms and conditions at JohnDeere.com/GreenFleet for details. JohnDeere.com/GreenFleet for details.



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As managing partner of the GIE+EXPO, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) is proud to serve as the industry's leading trade association representing more than 100 power equipment, engine and utility vehicle manufacturers and suppliers. Beyond our industry leading work as a Standards Development Organization for the American National Standards Institute, OPEI is also the advocacy organization and voice behind some of the industry's most successful outreach programs.

The right spray head

The right spray head or nozzle can assure water gets to all the right spots.



RAIN BIRD ROTARY NOZZLES

The pitch: Rain Bird's Rotary Nozzles have multiple rotating streams to deliver close-in watering and even coverage throughout the radius range.

- Rotary Nozzles can be zoned with Rain Bird 5000/5000 Plus MPR Rotor Nozzles.
- Stainless steel radius reduction screw allows reduction down to 13 feet on the R13-18 and to 17 feet on the R17-24 to accommodate varying landscape needs.
- Rain Bird Rotary Nozzles offer color-coded top plugs to help you quickly identify the arc/pattern, and color coded radius adjustment plugs.

For more information: Rainbird.com



HUNTER MP NOZZLE

The pitch: The MP Nozzle delivers multiple streams of water at a steady rate, allowing water to gently soak into the soil for even distribution.

- It has the ability to control the amount of water flowing through the nozzle at various arc and radius settings.
- The nozzle pops up from its protected position only after the

riser is fully extended, providing a defense against dirt and debris.

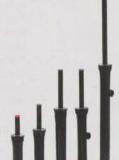
• The standard MP Rotator line applies water at 0.4 in/hr, while the SR Series has a precipitation rate of 0.8 in/hr.

For more information: Hunterindustries.com

IRRITROL I-PRO SPRAY HEADS

The pitch: Irritrol's I-PROTM Series spray heads combine a pressure-activated wiper seal and advanced formula lubricant for troublesome stick ups.

- A tapered lip design prevents debris from entering
 - the body.



- Prevents low-head drainage, eliminating flood or erosion damage by keeping water in lateral pipes in elevation changes up to 14 feet.
- They are available in four pop-up heights with side inlet, pressure regulation and check valve options.

For more information: Irritrol.com

K-RAIN HE KVF NOZZLES

The pitch: K-Rain's High Efficiency KVF nozzles are good for contractors working with sprays in a variety of terrains.

- The fully adjustable, female threaded nozzles fit the K-Rain Pro-S series and the NP spray bodies, as well as any other male threaded spray body on the market.
- K-Rain KVF Nozzles can be easily set (no tools required) at any angle from 0 to 360 degrees, allowing sprinklers to be fine-tuned to exactly the precise

pattern needed.



• Available in 8, 10, 12, 15, and 17-foot configurations.

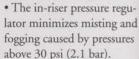
For more information: Krain.com

TORO IRRIGATION 570Z PRX SERIES

The pitch: The 570Z PRX Series features 115 different nozzles to provide versatility in applications.

 It comes with the X-flow water shut-off device, which is built into the riser and restricts water loss by

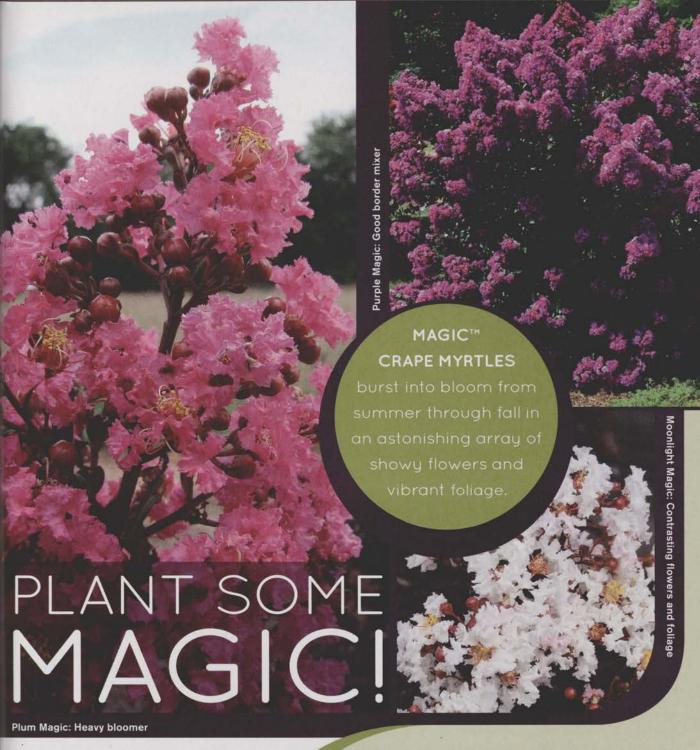
99 percent if the nozzle is removed or damaged.



 With a small, 2-inch diameter cap, the nozzles are less visible, reducing damage from exposure.

For more information:





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FRESH WATER

There are a number of new elements at the 2016 Irrigation Show and Education Conference.

t this year's Irrigation Show and Education Conference, you'll have a full plate, but don't forget to check out these can'tmiss events Dec. 5-9 in Las Vegas.

This year, IA is co-locating with the National Ground Water Association. The co-location is expected to double the attendance to 9,000, and will give attendees the opportunity to visit more than 600 exhibitors.

TUESDAY, DEC. 6 Contractor common interest group tour



The contractor common interest group is inviting attendees to a site overview tour of the Springs Preserve in Las Vegas.

The bus will depart promptly

at 8 a.m. from the Las Vegas Convention Center. A boxed lunch will be provided. To register for the tour, RSVP by emailing education@irrigation.org.

WEDNESDAY, DEC. 7 "Thirsty Land" film screening



Join award-winning filmmaker Conrad Weaver for a special screening of his newest full-length documentary, "Thirsty Land," from 5-6:30 p.m. "Thirsty Land" is a story about extreme drought, agriculture and the water crisis in the western United States, and how these challenges impact farmers, communities and the environment. The screening is open to all IA and NGWA attendees and exhibitors.

TUESDAY AND WEDNESDAY, DEC. 7 – 8 Oasis

The Oasis, sponsored by Smart Water Application Technologies, on the show floor allows participants to:

- Network with water providers
- · Discuss SWAT initiatives
- Share highlights of successful water efficient programs.

The Oasis provides an opportunity to bring irrigation professionals and water conservation specialists together to brainstorm new and refreshing ideas for the products or programs.

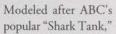
WEDNESDAY, DEC. 8 Young professionals breakfast

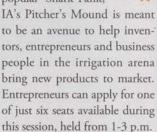


Are you 40 years-old or younger? Join your fellow young professionals from 8-9 a.m. for a cup of coffee and breakfast, while learning how you can succeed in the irrigation industry from

those who have walked in your shoes.

Pitcher's Mound





Contact Shannon Pluta, office coordinator (shannonpluta@irrigation.org; 703-536-7080) if you're interested in being on the Pitcher's Mound.

CLASSES

All classes are priced separately and are not included in the full registration fee. Each class registration includes a free exhibitsonly pass, which includes access to exhibits, the new product contest, show floor presentations, keynote address, general session and drought summit.

Those interested must register by Nov. 18 for discounted pricing. All classes are taught in Imperial units.

IA SEMINARS

Irrigation seminars allow instructors to delve into practical techniques, best practices and how-to's for landscape irrigation.

There are five one-hour sessions spread out over a three-day period from Dec. 6 to 8. They are open to all attendees with a full registration. Participants will earn 1 CEU for each hour.

The full show schedule can be found at Irrigationshow.com.

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CRUNCH THE NUMBERS

Lawn & Landscape surveyed more than 500 contractors on how they approach buying trucks. The majority of respondents (78 percent) make less than \$1 million in revenue. For more results from this survey, check out the truck supplement sponsored by BOSS Snowplow in our September issue. You can also use the hashtag #LLTruckMonth to follow along on social media.

WHAT AMENITY WOULD YOU WANT MOST IN YOUR TRUCK? 55%

Other suggestions: Heated seats, Bluetooth compatibility to meet hands-free requirements per state laws, rubber floors and back-up cameras.



3% CD PLAYER/ SATELLITE RADIO/MP3

9%

GPS



EVERYTHING

HOW MUCH ARE YOU WILLING TO SPEND ON A TRUCK?



LESS THAN \$15,000



\$15,001 TO \$25,000



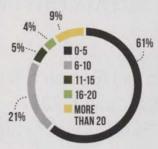
\$25,001 TO \$35,000 TO \$45,000



MORE THAN \$45,000

25%

HOW MANY TRUCKS DO YOU HAVE IN YOUR FLEET?



DO YOU NORMALLY BUY OR LEASE?



CHEVROLET LOW TRUCKS

The pitch: The new Low Cab Forward truck marks Chevrolet's return to the medium duty market.

- The new trucks are offered in regular cab and crew cab body styles.
- The Low Cab Forward comes with the option of either a 6.0L V-8 gas engine, a 3.0L turbodiesel engine or a 5.2L turbo-diesel engine.
- · All engines are mated to six-speed automatic transmissions, Class 3 through 5 models are available with maximum GVWR ranges of up to 19,500 pounds.

For more information: Chevrolet.com

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DODGE RAM 5500

The pitch: The new Ram 5500 has a max trailer weight of 29,600 pounds and GCWR of up to 37,500 pounds.

- 6.4-liter V-8 powers the truck with 370 horsepower at 4,600 rpm (410 horsepower at 5,600 rpm under 10,000-lb. GVWR) and 429 lb.-ft. of torque at 4,000 rpm.
 - 6.7-liter Cummins available producing 325 horsepower at 2,400 rpm and 750 lb.-ft. of torque at 1,500 rpm
 - · Features a manual six-speed transmissions diesel output.

For more information: Ramtrucks.com



HARPER DEWEZE 1000 SERIES FLATBED

The pitch: The DewEze 1000 Series comes standard with features for functional performance and lasting durability.

- · Gatorhyde lining, a polyurethane coating, covers the flatbed deck to create a corrosion-resistant surface that can withstand inclement weather and extreme conditions.
- · Ultra-bright LEDs, located on the full-view headache rack, side clearance and tailgate, offer improved lighting and visibility.
- · Across-the-bed and underbody toolboxes, with stainless steel latches, and side rails can be added for additional storage.

For more information: Deweze.com



QUIPMENT IN A LANDSCAPER'S ARSENAL.



MORGAN CORPORATION PROSCAPE VAN

The pitch: The new Proscape Van is geared toward the landscape industry.

- The van's door and ramp has a 2,500-pound load capacity and eliminates the need for an internal beavertail/doverail (saving floor space).
- Because there is no external fold-up ramp, a full palate can fit on the back of the truck for advertising.
 - Enclosed cap assures that expensive equipment is locked up and out of the weather.

For more information: Morgancorp.com



NISSAN NV CARGO

The pitch: The 2016 Nissan NV Cargo van features a square-top wheelwell housings and nearly vertical sidewalls.

- It offers body-on-frame construction and a high roof, offering most users the ability to walk, stand and work in the cargo area.
 - Powering the rear-wheel drive Nissan NV Cargo is a choice between a 4.0-liter V6 and 5.6-liter V8.
- NissanConnectSM features A 5.8-inch touch screen display, Nissan Voice Recognition for audio and navigation, SiriusXM Traffic and Hands-free Text Messaging Assistant.

For more information: Nissancommercialvehicles.com







CUTTING CONVERSION

Two contractors explain why they made the switch to propane, and what to consider if you are thinking about making the move. By Arricca Elin SanSone

hen Erik Ringstrand, owner of Ringers Landscaping in the Chicago suburbs, began investigating propane, he quickly became a believer. He converted one mower to propane using a kit from a local dealer in 2014 and last year, he converted the rest of his fleet. "Now I'm thinking about propane for other equipment such as trucks, string trimmers and blowers," he says.

For Ringstrand and other companies, the biggest draw is reduced fuel cost. "Converting saved me \$10,000 the first year in fuel and efficiencies," Ringstrand says. In fact, surveys of propane mower users by the

Propane Education & Research Council estimate propane mowers usually yield about 30 percent fuel cost savings.

GREEN POWER. A recent third party research study says propane mowers reduce greenhouse gas emissions by more than 15 percent and carbon monoxide emissions by more than 40 percent compared to gas mowers. For many companies, that's reason enough to switch. And in some parts of the country, if you're submitting proposals for commercial jobs, alternative fuel usage is required in the bid specs.

Since converting his fleet during the past four years, "We see less issues with fouling," says Mark Barnes, president of Barnes, a full-service landscape company in Madison, Wisconsin, "The oil is cleaner, We could run our intervals longer, but right now, we're following the manufacturer's recommendations for oil changes." Another benefit: "We've always promoted ourselves as green, and the crews say they feel good doing right for the environment."

Performance is comparable to gasoline. "We don't see an appreciable loss of power," Barnes says. To manage fuel, PERC suggests the usual common sense tips: Teach crews to avoid idling and use the appropriate power for the task.

REFUELING IS EFFICIENT. There's a gas station on every corner, which makes gas mowers

Healthy Trees Start Here

Mauget Keeps Them That Way

From every seed, a tree. And healthy trees come from Mauget – the leader in tree injection technology. Using environmentally friendly and safe methods of applying chemicals directly into the trunk, Mauget has targeted the world's most damaging tree care issues. Put our proven chemistry to work and learn more about tree care by visiting mauget.com or call 800-TREES Rx (800-873-3779)



MAINTENANCE

easy to refuel no matter where you are. But that may negatively impact productivity, says Troy Grindle, fleet manager for Barnes.

"We find propane more efficient. Many companies don't grasp how much time is wasted going to the fuel pumps 15 minutes a day, five days a week."

Generally, small fleets set up a propane cylinder exchange and delivery program with a supplier. Larger fleets (those with more than 10 mowers) lease or own dispensing tanks to refill on site.

According to PERC, a typical cylinder lease price is \$15-\$35 per month. Owning runs \$250-\$400 per cylinder. For onsite dispensing leases, the fuel price often includes the cost of refueling. For owned onsite dispensing, costs run from \$5,000-\$15,000, plus site prep (which can run another \$800-\$1,500).

Most mowers require two to four propane

cylinders, which are 33.5 or 43.5 pounds. One disadvantage is that you must store cylinders outside. According to PERC, the average storage cage for a landscape contractor is eight to 10 cylinders at 35 feet wide, 40 feet deep and 72 feet high.

"If you're renting space to park but don't have additional outdoor storage for the cage and tanks, it could be an issue," Ringstrand says.

Because propane mowers use tanks with a proprietary thread pattern that doesn't fit anything else, theft isn't an issue as it can be with gasoline. There's also less waste because gasoline can evaporate in an open container or spill if a tank tips over on your trailer.

BUYING NEW VS. CONVERTING. There are 15 original equipment manufacturers, including all of the major players such as John

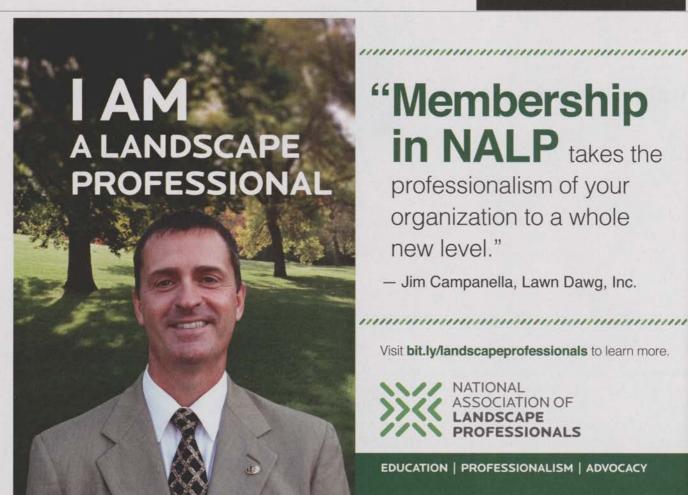
THREE MYTHS ABOUT PROPANE

Jeremy Wishart, deputy director of PERC, debunks these myths:

IT'S DANGEROUS. "People think of that Hollywood factor and believe tanks will explode," Wishart says. "But propane has a higher ignition point than gasoline, and the cylinders are 20 times more punctureresistant than mower gas tanks."

IT'S INCONVENIENT. Refueling means a quick tank swap with no trips to the gas station. Check the PERC website to find a propane retailer near you.

IT'S EXPENSIVE. The cost of a gas barbecue grill cylinder exchange, which has a lot of middle men, isn't an accurate pricing model for mowers. "You negotiate price with your provider for a specified contract of a few months to multiple years. You can lock that price in and budget it out versus driving to the gas station to refuel every day," Wishart says.



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- Jim Campanella, Lawn Dawg, Inc.

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1 of 8 \$50 Gift Cards

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Deere, Exmark and Toro, with more than 150 different propane mower configurations available. A number of EPA-approved conversion kits also are available. One caveat is that conversion is not recommended for engines with more than 250 hours on them. "Carbon deposits may be built up too much on older engines so you won't get the results you want," says Jeremy Wishart, deputy director of PERC.

Typically, new mowers cost about \$1,200-\$1,600 more than gas models with similar specs. Conversion kits run around \$700-\$1,200 each. To offset costs, business owners are eligible for up to 25 incentives per season

(check the PERC website for this year's program). Some state propane associations offer additional incentives.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK. As appealing as switching sounds, it's not feasible for everyone. "Run the numbers," Barnes says. "Know the hours per year you're operating, how many gallons you're using and how much waste you have so you can calculate your ROI. You can't make decisions if you don't understand your company's particulars."

PERC has a Propane Mower Calculator you can download from the Google Play or iTunes store that allows you to compare

fuel costs using real numbers from your business. It's a tool to figure out whether or not to convert and how much you might save.

Even with rebates and incentives, you're going to have upfront out-of-pocket expenses. According to Wishart, ROI typically is reaped within eight to 16 months per mower. It varies according to your business model.

For example, if you're a small operation, you'll see more immediate upfront fuel costs savings but a longer ROI because you're not pushing as much fuel through as you would with a multiple mower fleet.

Other factors, such as the life expectancy of your fleet, play a

part in the decision. If you have new equipment, are you really going to be able or does it even make sense to jump into more expenses right now? If you're in a new lease, what's the cost of getting out of it?

To learn more, contact PERC, obtain a dealer demo model to use in the field and find an industry mentor to talk it through. "I'm happy to talk to fellow professionals to share the real story," Ringstrand says. "We're in this together. We have to learn from each other instead of being afraid of competition." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in the Northeast.

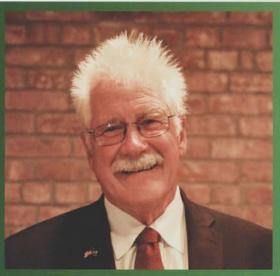












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Lawn and landscape leaders set industry up for lasting success

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Syngenta and Lawn & Landscape are dedicated to recognizing professionals in the lawn and landscape industry who keep us moving forward. For 16 years, the Lawn & Landscape Leadership Awards have honored individuals who step up to guide others toward empowerment, opportunity and growth. Syngenta is proud to sponsor the 2016 Lawn & Landscape Leadership Awards because we value those willing to work hard to shape our industry's future.

When faced with a challenge, industry leaders seek the point where preparation and opportunity meet, transforming boundaries into success. Syngenta is fueled by this drive, and we are committed to supporting your business with a variety of products and tools to help you prepare for success in a variety of conditions. Our annual program, Green Trust 365, offers the opportunity for yearlong rebates to help maximize your business's purchasing power. Additionally, our complimentary customer-facing brochures can help set your business apart by extending easy-to-read resources to your clientele for informed, confident decision-making. To order these customizable brochures, please visit GrowWithSyngenta.com.

Syngenta is inspired by the recipients of the 2016 Lawn & Landscape Leadership Awards; their dedication to lead the industry forward drives our passion to develop solutions that make a difference. As former President John Quincy Adams said, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more and become more, you are a leader."

Congratulations to this year's recipients. We appreciate the vision and expertise you bring to the lawn and landscape profession, and we look forward to growing beside leaders like you in the years to come.

For more information on the resources available for your business, please visit GreenCastOnline.com/Lawn.

Stephanie Schwenke

Turf Market Manager Syngenta Lawn and Garden

Sephoio Shunko



STEPHANIE SCHWENKE SYNGENTA LAWN AND GARDEN

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MW 1L6T6013-LP-AG51 09/16





DESINEDTO

What started with a toy designed for kids took Paul Fields to the top of a multi-million-dollar landscaping company.

By Brian Horn

as a child was an Etch A Sketch and tiller. But it was his mother's taste in magazines that really got him thinking about a

career in landscape architecture.

One day after school in the mid-1980s, Fields came home and picked up a copy of his mother's Southern Living magazine. He came across an article about a garden that was designed by a landscape architect.

A landscape architect?

Fields had no idea what those two words together meant, but they combined two hobbies he loved: drawing and working in gardens.

"I did a little more research and found out there was actually a career called landscape architecture," says Fields, who is president and director of design at Lambert Landscape Company in Dallas.

"The next year, senior year, I started looking at possibilities of different universities that offered degrees in landscape architecture and ended up suddenly at Mississippi State getting my degree in landscape architecture."

What started out as fun stuff for a kid turned into a storied career in the landscaping industry where he took a well-established company and made it even more successful. "Lambert's had been there a long time, but when Paul came along they really went to the next level," says Michael Hatcher, owner of Hatcher Landscape in Memphis, and a friend of Fields.

"He really took the company to the next level with the clients and the designs that he had put together."

Dirt and drawing

For as long as Fields can remember, he loved drawing and wanted to be an architect.

As a first-grader, he loved drawing floor plans and buildings, and would use an Etch A Sketch to create the drawings. Fields was so proficient at using the Etch A Sketch as a first-grader that his parents would want to save them.

"I remember drawing a full three-dimensional rendering of the family room of my parents' home and them just being amazed," he says. "They put it up on the mantle and wouldn't let me touch it."

When he wasn't sketching away on his toy, he was helping his grandfather, who was a farmer, and his father, who grew up on the farm, with landscaping and gardening projects.

"My grandfather gave me

his old tiller," he says. "I can remember coming home from school and the first thing I would do – and the handlebars were about at eye level on the tiller – I could work and work and get it started, and loved to till the garden when I got home from school in first grade."

As Fields got older, his love for both drawing and landscaping didn't wane, but became more intense, especially after he realized he could make a career as a landscape architect.

In high school, he had a vision of owning a nursery and design/build firm, and while in college, he found that company already existed.

"I ran into someone from Lambert's, got to talking to him, and he encouraged me to come over to their booth," he says.

"And he told me more about the company, and I got this eerie feeling at the time. I'm like, 'Wow. That sounds exactly like the company I've envisioned in my mind that I want to build."

After three internships with the company, Fields was hired



full time, but little did he know those internships would eventually lead to becoming president of he company.

All eyes on you

Frank Mariani, owner of Mariani Landscape in Chicago, has known Fields for almost 25 years, and often refers to Lambert's as "Mariani West" and vice versa.

Both companies service high-end clientele, and Mariani says Fields' love for the industry, specifically landscape architecture is evident in his company's work.

"His passion and his attention to detail are something that I find inspiring and hard to emulate," he says.

"He will focus in on the most minute detail just to make a project perfect. It's what takes a project from being very, very good to excellent."

While that passion has helped Fields, who bought the company with two other partners in 2005, become a top-notch landscape architect, it has made the transition to president somewhat difficult for him.

"It's been really challenging for me, primarily because I "I remember drawing a full three-dimensional rendering of the family room of my parents' home and them just being amazed. They put it up on the mantle and wouldn't let me touch it."

Paul Fields,

president and director of design, Lambert Landscape Company

can't focus solely on the thing I enjoy most, which is designing," he says.

The biggest surprises he encountered when stepping into the role was how much money went to overhead.

"As an employee, you always look at what a company charges and think, 'Oh, my gosh, the owners are making a killing," he says.

"But when you actually get into the nuts and bolts, so to speak, of the financial side of a business, it really shows you how there's a small fraction of every dollar we earn that actually goes to the bottom line."

There is always pressure to grow the bottom line and, as vice president, the spotlight wasn't on him to make a final decision on how that can exactly be done.

"Everybody's looking at you for direction, and sometimes you just have to admit you don't always have the answer," he says. "You have to start reaching out to different people that you know."

That is one personality trait Mariani says serves Fields well in a leadership role.

"He's not afraid to seek outside help and he recognizes where he is weak," Mariani says.

"Any entrepreneur can gain from that because some entrepreneurs make the silly mistake of thinking they need to be all things to all people. I think the best entrepreneur is a team-builder."

Being the boss

As if the pressure of making crucial decisions for the company wasn't enough when transitioning to president, Fields also had to come to the realization

that he was now the boss. "I try to approach everyone as a peer, but people look at you differently when you're in the actual leadership role," he says.

"I guess that was the hardest thing for me to kind of understand. I don't know that I still fully get it or grasp it."

Fields says it was easier to solve personnel or organizational issues when he wasn't president because people were more open with him at the time and more willing to talk about the issues.

"Sometimes they're not always as open or willing to admit there are issues or problems to somebody who's in that leadership position," he says.

So, he tries to take an employee to lunch on days that he doesn't have something on his calendar.

"I love to eat, so it's kind of a fun thing for me to get an employee away from the office and just talk a little bit about what's going on in their life personally, but also delve into the professional side a little bit," Fields says.

"It gives me a little better insight to the day-to-day goings on in the company, as well."

Eventually, Fields would like to relinquish control of the day-to-day operations, while still designing and serving in a visionary role.

"Titles don't mean much to me," he says.

"I'd be perfectly happy if someone picked up the president title and ran with the running of the day-to-day business and allowed me to do those other things."

Magical meeting

one other place as a professional, and that was an internship at Disney World after his freshman year at Mississippi State University. An advisor/professor told Fields he thought he'd be a great fit for the company and discovered last minute they were on campus that day. After spending two long nights in a row working on a project, which gave him no time to

shower, Fields got word that if he could interview immediately, they would meet with him.

"So, not having had a shower, I was dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, didn't have anything with me other than the roll of drawings that I was going to present that project on," he says. "I walked in and she said, 'You know what? I think you'd be a great fit for us,' and hired me for an internship at Disney."



GIVING

Zachary
Johnson spends
his time in the
industry
molding the
minds of others
around him.

By Katie Tuttle

HE INDUSTRY IS EVOLVING,

and more and more companies are seeking out employees with horticulture degrees that they hope will carry on the green industry legacy. In order to achieve this, industry members need to take the time to guide future industry leaders.

One person doing so is Zachary Johnson.



Currently, Johnson teaches a program at Colorado State University – a program he took when he was a student there. That previous knowledge, as well as his industry experiences, provide him the chance to give his students a unique look at what opportunities are out there for them.

As part of the program, Johnson has a class called Professional Landscape Practices, which he started with the late Todd Williams, former president of Terracare Associates. Every week, the class invites industry professionals to come do a guest lecture on a variety of landscape topics ranging from landscape design to finances.

"It's a way for students who have been in the philosophical, theoretical world learning about these things, to hear from business owners," says Kristen Fefes, executive director of the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado. She knows Johnson through the ALCC, which he's been a member of for more than 20 years.

Fefes says real world experience for the students is something the ALCC board has been trying to work on with the university. Because of this, the ALCC helps fund the program.

"We think the outcome is so important," she says. "And so is the idea behind it."

"While university study is important, it's just a piece," Johnson says. "I think it's cool to get that perspective from people who have been out and done that. It benefits the students."



"While university study is important, it's just a piece. I think it's cool to get that perspective from people who have been out and done that. It benefits the students."

Zachary Johnson, professor, Colorado State University This program is his brainchild, and it earned him AL-CC's Person of the Year Award.

"I've had the occasion just here and there to be around him in his classroom or see him interact with his students," says Becky Garber, communications director with the ALCC. "It's very clear that his students respect him and it's just fun to watch him interact with them."

Peer focused

Education in the industry shouldn't just be limited to students, and Johnson is playing a role in that.

Next Level Network is one of Bruce Wilson's peer groups

that Johnson is involved it. Each year, a handful of professors come to the annual meeting and have the opportunity to educate members on how to better recruit students and new employees.

"We work with them and help them understand that each generation is a little different," he says.

Fefes credits Johnson with sometimes being the voice of reason at association board meetings.

"I think he is one of the smartest people in our industry," she says. "He's incredibly thoughtful, meaning he really thinks through things."



When a topic is being discussed, Johnson will often focus on the other side of the conversation or ask the group if they were really talking about the bigger picture and how it would affect members and the industry.

"We teased him sometimes around the board table of being the contrarian," Fefes says. "At ALCC he was not always out front in the most vocal way, but he did it from behind to make sure the right discussion was being had."

Sustainable partners

Johnson also chaired a group with the ALCC that started



a program called the Green Strategies Program. "It's a program where companies and businesses can actually become what we're calling sustainable partners," he says.

Each year, participants go through a series of classes, with different presentations on design, construction and maintenance ideas to make projects more sustainable.

"It's a way to really look at our profession in a way that demonstrates that we do good things," he says. "The reality is a lot of things we do aren't good for the planet. We drive around trucks all day long, we drive around mowers all day long. At the end of the day, there's a lot of offsets in terms of what we're doing."

He says the key idea to the program is to improve a company's bottom line in terms of fiscal importance, and in terms of environmental practices.

The Green Strategies Program is part of the ALCC, but Garber credits Johnson with taking the lead starting it.

"Zach has had a vision for

quite some time to promote our industry doing things in terms of its practices," she says. "And promoting those things (that are sustainable) to companies and clients."

For the program, the first step was to create a blueprint for how to become a sustainable company, specific to Colorado. Johnson directed and facilitated the document into writing, and his involvement in the program earned him his second Person of the Year from the ALCC in 2015.

"I think it's remarkable that Zach's vision has actually resulted in building a wave of momentum within our industry and within our membership that really looks at and cares about sustainability," Garber says. "It's not just marketing; it's serious. We want to do this. We want to do more and get this message out to our clients and help them understand it."

Out of the office

Just because Johnson can't be found in his office at CSU, doesn't mean he's not on the job. This fall he'll be traveling to Costa Rica to help students work on a project to design wetlands that help clean up water.

"Costa Rica has a reputation as a pristine place," he says. "(But) the water just gets drained out to small streams." They plan to clean up that water by designing simple wetlands so it's done sustainably.

The university also sends him to different campuses around the world, including one being built in Mexico.

Johnson says he loves to travel, and his family – including his wife, Ellen, 13-year-old daughter, Juno, and 11-year-old son, Leo, – travel a lot. He's also an avid cyclist, something which connects him to the environment he cares about so much.

"I was in New Zealand and took my bicycle down there," he says. "It's amazing, you see things so much differently. When you're in a car it's one speed, but a bike is a different speed."

Fefes says that his travels serve a double purpose: work and the thrill of showing his kids other cultures.

"Until you get to know him, you don't know how deep he really runs. It's really impressive," she says.

Garber agrees.

"It's just been great to be on the sidelines and watch him develop from the young designer who is learning the ropes to now being this imminent person within the university and the industry," she says.

"We don't often get to see that: someone cross all those lines in their career."





CHIEF ENCOURAGEMENT

OFFICER

Although Larry Ryan doesn't own most of his company, he still puts his entire heart into the operation. By Katie Tuttle



OST PEOPLE WILL SAY that the best jobs they had were the ones where their boss, CEO, owner and other higher ups knew them and took the time to make them feel like a part of the work family.

This can be said about Larry Ryan, founder of Ryan Lawn & Tree.

"Most people who were around the office felt very free to pop in and say something to Larry," says Chris Senske, president of Senske Services, who visited Ryan's company for business reasons. "And it didn't matter whether it was a manager or a service technician, a field person or office person. He knew them all by name, which I think is awesome."

Started by Ryan in 1987, Ryan Lawn & Tree has a unique setup in that it's now an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP).

"If you told me 29 years ago that we'd had this today, I would not believe it," Ryan says.

Ryan says the idea to have the ESOP came from his bank. One of the employees told him how they owned part of the bank, and he decided to look into it. Previously, Ryan Lawn & Tree had shared profits in a similar situation with its employees, but Ryan liked the idea of giving more to his team.

"They were growing the company so shouldn't they share the rewards?" he says. Every year, employees are given stock based on profitability. As the current owners, Ryan and his wife had to sell off part of the company, which they did at a time when it was small enough that shares didn't cost much.

At one point, the Ryans sold \$3 million of the company to their more than 240 employees for the price of \$1 million. The couple then donated part of that money to local charities,

which in return use Ryan Lawn & Tree for services. Ryan and his wife now own 40 percent of the company.

"My wife's and my goal is to not get rich out of this deal," he says. "It's to create an environment where our employees turn into owners of the company." He likens it to a farmer passing on the family farm to his children.

Ryan does admit that it's not always a perfect setup to no longer fully own his company.

"I don't want this to sound like utopia," he says. "It's incredible, but every day I have to realize I'm losing control of the company. So you have to work with that side of yourself. Are you really willing to live being the giver?"

In company meetings and in day-to-day activities, the associates come up with ideas to make the company better. They also work together to plan their days, maintain and purchase equipment, and brainstorm how to solve problems for upset clients.

Those ideas are helping. Ryan says they expect the company to reach \$100 million by 2030 through both organic growth and acquisitions of other companies.

About the team

Focusing on employee needs is something Ryan does a lot of.

"His main concern is making sure our futures are secure and that we have a fulfilling career," says Debra Warner, staffing coordinator with Ryan Lawn & Tree. "There are few multi-million dollar companies where the president is accessible and works just as hard as his employees either in the field or in the office. Larry challenges all of us to be the best version of ourselves."

"I'm an encourager," he says. "One of my jobs that I feel very strongly for is to encourage the people who join us – to thank them."

He makes an effort to show new employees what a job with Ryan Lawn & Tree can give them. He shows them that they can raise a family with



2016 LEADERSHIP AWARDS

this job, and that it's a way to start a career.

"Their job will grow. Their salary will grow. There's a future for them," he says.

And a future in the business for his employees is something he strives to nurture.

"Every single person has got to believe in what we do and who we are," he says. "That is better than any training you can do."

Training is important, which is why Ryan Lawn & Tree has a training center with a coordinator to handle all the training requirements for new and current crew members.

However, Ryan says a good employee starts with the hiring process.

"Selecting the right people is a huge part of the whole equation," he says. "We spend a lot of time selecting the right people."

But according to Senske, it's not just about selecting the right people. Ryan also puts in an extra effort to build relationships with employees.

"He knows all his employees and all of the things going on in their lives," Senske says. "There wasn't a single one we bumped into that he didn't ask about a wife, or somebody's surgery or how they're healing after an injury. That kind of thing."

When Ryan says "selecting the right people," he's not just talking about new hires. Ryan Lawn & Tree also does a number of acquisitions, which is important for him because those companies' employees become Ryan Lawn & Tree owners.

"At the end of the day, every



More than 30 of the company's associates have more than \$100,000 of value in Ryan Lawn & Tree.

"I'm an encourager.
One of my jobs
that I feel very
strongly for is to
encourage the
people who join us.
To thank them."

Larry Ryan, founder, Rvan Lawn & Tree

single associate becomes the face of Ryan," he says. "If a person doesn't fit, there is not magic."

Before acquiring a company, Ryan makes sure the current owner and employees are willing to continue operating under the Ryan Lawn & Tree format. After an acquired company joins Ryan, he tries to visit that new branch frequently.

"Branch visits are very important. You can't visit a branch two times a year and have the associates in the branch understand who you are, have your values or get

your culture," he says. "Visits need to be frequent and the newly acquired associates need to see your sincerity."

Thomas Tolkacz, CEO and owner of Swingle Lawn, Tree and Landscape Care, says Ryan has a passion for the industry, but it might be trumped by his passion for those in it.

"I think behind this person, who is sincerely dedicated to the green industry from a horticultural standpoint, there is a very intuitive, well read, sharp, driven, savvy business person who likes to be a winner, he says.

"It is rare you find someone who, I think, has combined their avocation and their vocation so closely together, not only to their own personal success and benefit, but to the team members and community."

On the job

Because he's not technically a majority owner of the company, Ryan could easily spend the majority of his time outside of the office, managing from afar.

He doesn't, however, instead choosing to be immersed in

the company culture with his employees.

His day typically starts at a branch, where he'll take time to talk to the crews and see how they're doing. His handson approach continues as he usually will then ride with one of the technicians for the day, keeping his finger on the pulse of the company as he's out in the field, experiencing what the crews are doing.

The rest of his day is spent reading articles and talking with different people to figure out who Ryan Lawn & Tree is and where the company is going.

"The real key ingredient, I think, is the passion for the business and the compassion for employees," Senske says. "And building that business based on sharing and everybody participating."

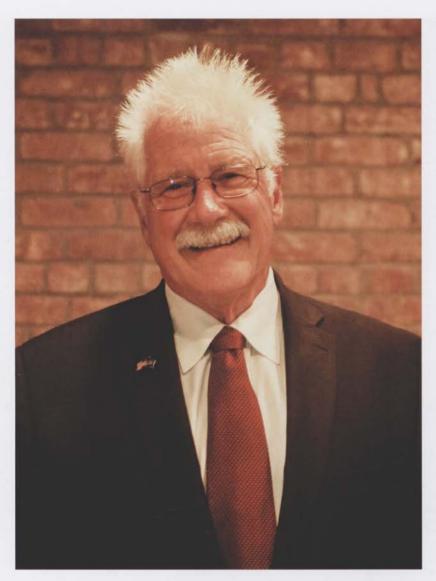
Although Ryan can't take all the credit for himself, it's safe to say he plays a large role in how Ryan Lawn & Tree impacts the industry.

"We have been so blessed for 29 years," he says. "We work every day to try to be a role model company."

"We know we can't change the industry or other companies," he says. "If we put all our energy into the Ryan organization, we have a chance to affect some change. The first words in our mission statement are 'Serve God.'

"We only do this when our people feel good about what they do, take those good feelings to our clients, and at the end of the year, get pay checks that allow them to live a worthwhile life."





CONQUER

Larry Wilson has spent years bringing New York lawn and landscape professionals together to fight harmful regulations.

By Kate Spirgen

HEN BURDENSOME RULES and regulations hit the New York legislature, Larry Wilson is the man to call. For the past 16 years, Wilson has worked tirelessly to fight legislation that would harm or hinder green industry companies, and he's had great success.

A late start

Wilson did some landscape work in college, but he never really thought of a career in the industry. He eventually went on to own a wine store, but after he turned 40, he decided he wanted a career change.

When Wilson's father-in-law asked him to watch his business, Lawrence Landscape Design, while he dealt with an illness, Wilson agreed and realized he loved it. So in 1990, when his father-in-law retired, Wilson took over the business.

"I wanted to express myself," he says.
"I never really thought of doing that through horticulture but it soon became a passion for me. I enjoy seeing my work and I enjoyed making mistakes because I made a lot of mistakes and it was very enlightening to me."

Wilson says he suffered from a lack of confidence when he was first starting out, but through the New York State Turf and Landscape Association, he learned how to succeed.

"I would be nowhere without them," he says. "They taught me everything I need to know."

He says that through his positions as first director, then vice president and then president, he gained the confidence he needed to feel comfortable speaking with other people, writing communication and running his business in lower Westchester County.

A taste for politics

Wilson became president of the New York State Turf and Landscape Association in 1997 but really got passionate about green industry politics in 2000 when the state of New York passed the Neighbor Notifica-

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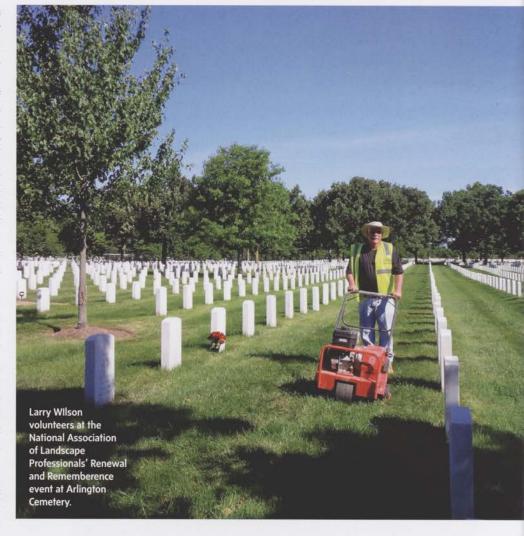
tion Law, requiring applicators to post notifications and notify neighboring properties when applying down pesticides in participating counties.

"We knew there would be more coming our way and the industry all of a sudden said, 'We need to get together here. We need to be unified,' at the time and I was sort of a facilitator," he says. He called the right people, organized meetings and started the fight against crippling legislation.

Elizabeth Seme, executive director of the New York State Turfgrass Association, has worked with Wilson on legislative issues for more than 20 years and says that no one works harder than he does. By keeping up to date with issues, keeping industry members informed and involved, raising funds and making the right strategic moves, she says he's a uniting force lobbying for lawn and landscape operators.

"He made good inroads, he communicated and he started to compile all of this and use his connections and his influence to kind of pull the state together," she says. "And he's been able to do it, with help, of course. He keeps us moving in the right direction. And I think we've even gotten stronger in the last five or six years."

Wilson brought together 12 different trade organizations through the New York Alliance of Environmental Concerns, where he serves as chairman, and started making great progress on the legislative front. Wilson's area is a hotbed for legislative activity and so he was on the forefront of the



"As a volunteer, you do not see anybody that is more tenacious, dedicated and loyal to an industry than Larry."

Elizabeth Seme,

executive director, New York State Turfgrass Association action. He says he didn't expect to be the leader, but when he was asked, he stepped up to the plate.

"We were basically angry," he says. "We were angry we were really being ignored by the legislature. They would ignore our story and they couldn't care less about passing laws. They were listening to those that knew nothing about what we do and that still aggravates me a great deal. Being so well educated, it was disconcerting to me to hear someone telling

me that we didn't know what we were doing. That was a great motivating factor to get involved in the legislature."

And thanks to his efforts, the organizations have been working together for years. By staying on top of the issues, taking the time to effectively communicate and fight legislation pesticide issues, applicator fees, applicator reporting, pesticide use, fertilizer regulation and more.

"The biggest thing is that under his leadership we've main-



tained a communication base within the government and regulatory arenas of the state and we have either stopped legislation from coming through or lessened the impact of it or in some cases, we were able to get some of our own agenda items through so that's a pretty big statement right there," Seme says.

Continuing the fight

Now, at the age of 68, Wilson is still as passionate about his work as chair of the New York Alliance for Environmental Concerns. "If I don't stay on the cutting edge, I'm going to go over it. And I do sometimes fall asleep at night on the computer doing my job and helping others do their jobs," he says. "I'm proud of the fact that I've stopped 16 years of onerous legislation."

He does it to defend the best interests of businesses in the state of New York, particularly because New York is such a bellwether state for pesticide legislation. And he has plenty of work to keep him busy. Right now, there are more than 100 bills in the legislature dealing with the application, storage, use and transportation of pesticides.

"As a volunteer, you do not see anybody that is more tenacious, dedicated and loyal to an industry than Larry," Seme says.

Through the New York State Turf and Landscape Alliance, Wilson helps organize all kinds of seminars and educational sessions for applicators since the state of New York's applicator licenses "When I see people walk in and tell us how to do our jobs and tell us what we're doing wrong without the basis of any experience, without even knowing the challenges that we face and how we work, that still aggravates me."

Larry Wilson, owner, Lawrence Landscape

require continuing education

Working with Cornell University, the University of Connecticut, the University of Massachusetts and others, the organization works hard to make sure those credits are available.

Even after many successes in his years fighting for the lawn and landscape industry, Wilson still gets fired up at the current state of politics in his sector.

"When I see people walk in and tell us how to do our jobs and tell us what we're doing wrong without the basis of any experience, without even knowing the challenges that we face and how we work, that still aggravates me," he says.

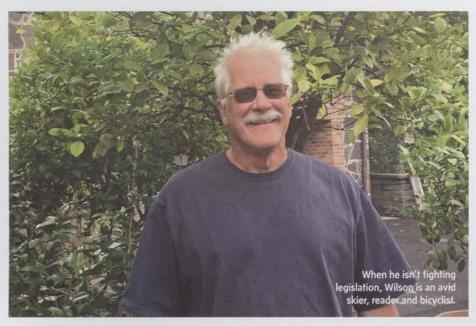
The end of the year

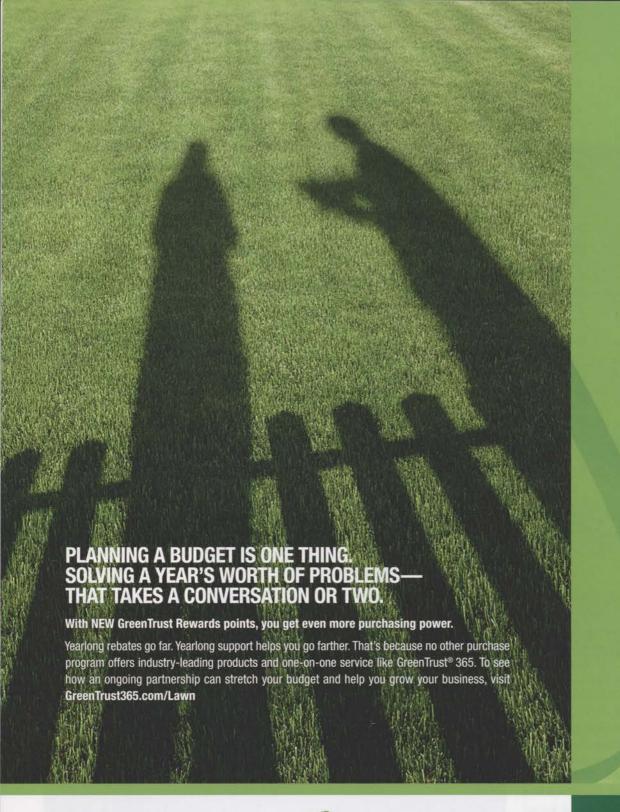
Wilson's favorite part of the year is when then legislature closes and he can take a look back at what he and his colleagues have been able to accomplish and spend more time on his own business.

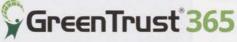
He's is an avid skier, bicyclist and reader, making sure he sneaks at least a half hour or 45 minutes of reading in before bed. And when he can, he loves to spend time with his wife, JoAnne, his daughter, Christina, and his son, James.

But the closing of the New York legislature isn't the end of Wilson's duties. Besides running his own business, he also serves as vice chair of the Westchester Parks Recreational Conservation Board and president of the Hyatt Community Association, and he continues to be active with GREENPAC, the New York state green industry political action committee he helped establish in 2006.

"I think the fact that he's been able to stay in this and continue on and people trust him and follow him is a huge compliment to his abilities," Seme says. "He holds everything all together and it's not an easy industry. It's a tough game, it really is, and yet he's withstood the test of time."





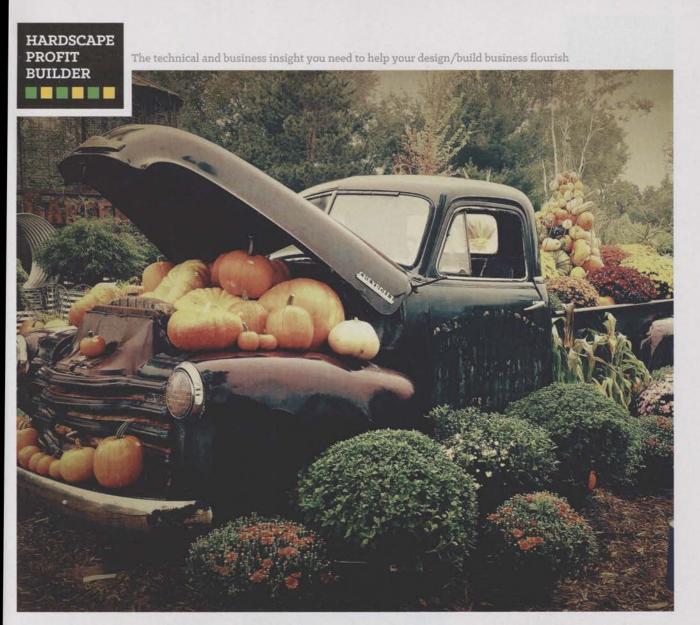


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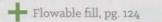


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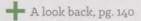
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Double coverage Down to Earth is building two sides of a brand that feed each other. pg. 126







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EARLY END DATE

Raised patios with flowable fill will reduce construction time. By David R. Smith

he market for raised patios continues to grow where the backyard ground elevation is well below the rear entrance. A construction method using flowable fill can shave off days of construction time for raised patios, depending on their size and design. With a pancake batter consistency, flowable fill is a low-strength (150-200 psi) concrete available in most markets from ready-mix concrete producers.

While the material is about four to five times more expensive than dense-graded aggregate base typically used to raise patios, the labor savings can be more than worth the extra material cost.

Contractor Tom Arthur of West Grove, Pennsylvania was one of the first contractors to use this construction method in 2005 and provided the photos for this article. Arthur has done many raised patio projects with this construction method. For this Pennsylvania project built in 2004, a raised patio with flowable fill "reduced construction time by a week compared to endless compacting of dense-graded base." He said all of his raised patios use flowable fill as long as the ready-mix truck can access the backyard for delivery.

Construction begins like a typical raised patio, i.e., a footer trench is dug, lined with geotextile and filled with compacted, densegraded aggregate and a segmental retaining wall course raised to begin forming the rest of the wall. As it rises, the wall interior is lined with geotextile to prevent loss of flowable fill through joints. Any drain pipes and conduit for electrical lines are placed prior to each pour.

The flowable fill is poured in layers. This project required four pours, each 18-inch deep (3 courses) with geogrids at each interval. This minimizes lateral forces against the wall units and the house during curing.



A ready-mix concrete truck delivers flowable fill, a mix of sand, cement and water that reduces the longer installation time using dense-graded



Once the flowable fill is poured in lifts and each allowed to harden, a 4-in. thick compacted aggregate base is installed.



An inch of bedding sand and concrete pavers are then installed and cut to fit the patio area.



The finished patio project saved time and money compared to using a dense-graded base.

Lateral forces are minimized once the flowable fill cures.

After each pour cures, the geotextile is trimmed away and geogrid is installed between the next courses of wall units and positioned on the cured fill. Additional courses are placed, glued and geotextile placed against them in preparation for the next pour. Each pour was done in the afternoon and allowed to cure overnight so it could receive a new pour the next day.

Conduit is positioned for wiring step lights and the same treatment can be done for water, sewer and storm drains, plus natural gas supply lines for barbecue grills, fireplaces and fire pits.

Because cured flowable fill can be dug with a shovel, it can be excavated to install lines after the pour, making it a forgiving material if a conduit is inadvertently left out.

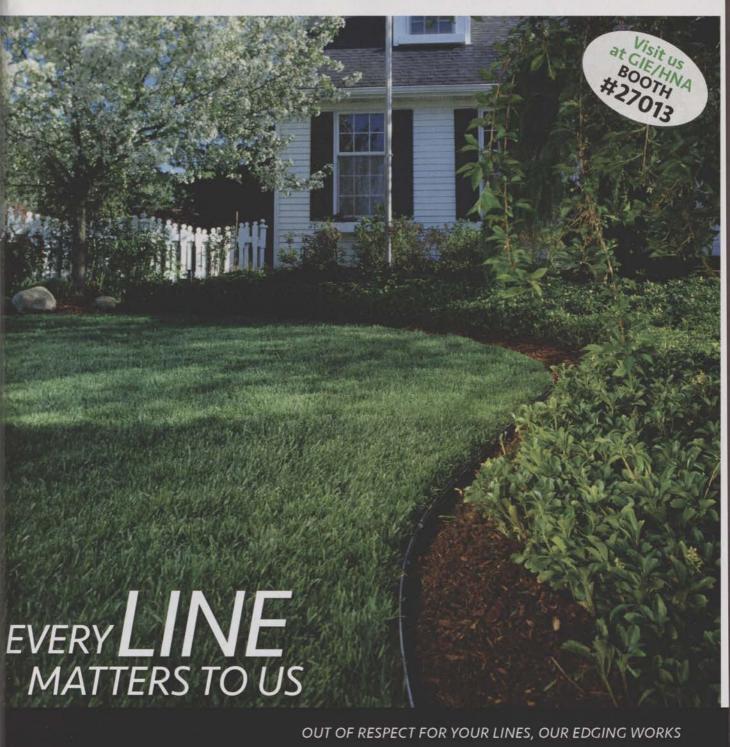
Once the final fill layer has cured, a 4-inch thick aggregate base is placed and compacted. While the outer wall elevations help create a slope for the paver surface, the base layer surface provides an opportunity to fine tune or sculpt the final slope for drainage. After the base is compacted, a 1-inch thick layer of bedding sand is screeded.

Pavers are installed as in any patio project, i.e., placed, cut, compacted, joints sanded and the entire paver area compacted again. A small strip of geotextile is placed against the wall units to prevent migration of bedding sand.

Once the flowable fill is poured in lifts and each allowed to harden, a 4-inch thick compacted aggregate base is installed. An inch of bedding sand and concrete pavers are then installed and cut to fit the patio area.

Time is money on hardscape projects. When labor is saved, money is saved. That's the idea behind using flowable fill. Assuming site access by the delivery truck and a house foundation that can withstand the additional lateral load, a raised patio project should be estimated comparing costs of an aggregate base to flowable fill. This might render lower labor costs, faster project delivery and potential for doing more projects per year. L&L

The author is technical director for the Interlocking Concrete Paving Institute.



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Double coverage

Down to Earth is building two sides of a brand that feed each other. By Kristen Hampshire

ROM GROWING A BOND TO PLANTING A CAREER PATH, the purpose of Down to Earth Garden Center was naturally simple. Benjamin Polzin was 12 years old, and his father suggested starting a lawn mowing business as a way to spend time together outside. So, after school and during weekends, the duo cut locals' properties in semi-rural Cadott, Wisconsin, where a city billboard boasts you are "half-way between the equator and the North Pole." Walker has spent 3 years trying to determine the most productive mower in the industry . . .



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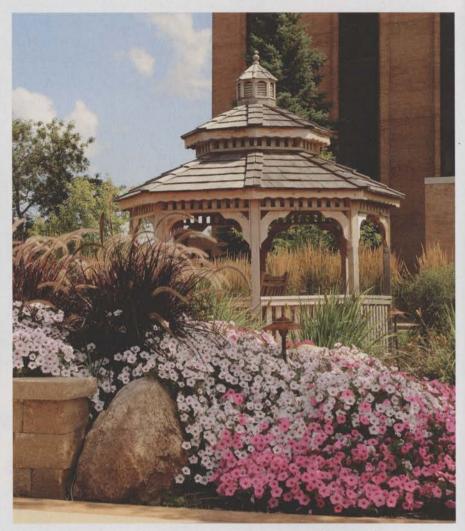
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KICHLER





Down to Earth Garden Center features a more experiential environment than some other centers, making it a showroom where they display plants they can use in customers' landscapes.

A year after the Polzin father-son team started "playing" outdoors together, momentum picked up and cousin Dominic came on board, too. "We were learning, growing and one thing led to another," Polzin says.

But more than anything, Polzin really loved plants. He participated in Future Farmers of America and entrepreneurial activities in high school, continuing to grow the business with Dominic and his father. He also thought about all the driving he was doing to acquire plants for customers.

"We decided as a side gig to start growing our own so we'd have plants in stock for landscaping jobs," Polzin says of the modest plot of perennials he cultivated in 2000 on his family's farm.

Eventually, Down to Earth was landscaping Monday through Thursday and selling plants out of the farm-based landscape yard on Fridays and weekends.

There are plenty of garden centers that start landscape divisions as a complimentary business - their customers want help putting the right plants in the right place in their yards.

But Polzin's story is "unusual," he says. That's because the thriving destination that today is Eau Claire's Down to Earth Garden Center came after the landscape maintenance operation had taken off.

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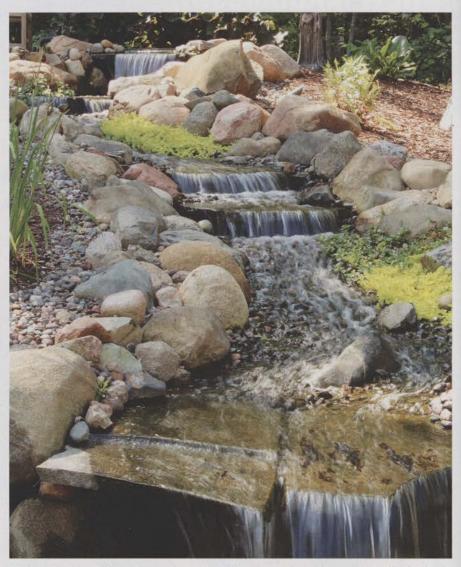


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HARDSCAPE BUILDER



Creating a landscaped atmosphere at the garden center allows customers to see the possibilities for their yards, resulting in more landscape customers for Down to Earth.

Today, the landscape maintenance and design/build operation feeds the garden center and vice versa.

Down to Earth is a garden center on the map in Chippewa County, Wisconsin, as a visitor's stop and plant lover's paradise.

"We've grown tremendously in size," Polzin says of the 25,000 perennials the garden center grows annually, with increased capacity or display given a recent expansion.

Down to Earth will grow 25 percent this year and employs roughly 50 people during the busy season.

And, the three original partners are still at the helm steering the company's success.

"When I was 12, I don't think I ever could have dreamed what we were doing would turn into this," Polzin says.

RETAIL BUSINESS AND CLIENT BASE. Stop, stroll and meditate on the simple. That's the invitation at the garden center that opened in 2010.

By then, the plant portion of the family business had grown enough critical mass to justify a more robust retail experience than stopping in at the farm for plants. Though,





Polzin points out that the Cadott growing farm is still a familiar, loved spot for some customers and is "open by chance or by appointment."

Of course, running a garden center isn't all that simple, as Polzin will tell you. Branching out into the original 2.2-acre facility in growing Eau Claire was certainly "a leap of faith," he says.

But opening a garden center was something Polzin had always wanted to do since Future Farmers of America and high school and planting some perennials on a plot at the family farm. "Plants have always been a passion of mine. I love the plant and people side of the business," he says.

STRONG ROOTS

tarting as a landscape firm gave Down to Earth in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the construction background to realistically embark on a garden center expansion. "We had worked on enough new construction projects that helped us be the general contractor of our own project," says owner Benjamin Polzin, noting that they had contacts with plumbers, electricians and other trades. "We had those relationships already."

Another critical relationship: a positive rapport with their bank. "That has made it easier on us to go through the expansion

process," Polzin says.

And by expansion, Polzin is talking about ultimately tripling the size of Down to Earth Garden Center from 2.2 acres to 6 total during the next two years. Such significant growth requires careful planning and market knowledge. Down to Earth visits garden centers in the region and across the country several times each year. "We got the idea for our café in Philadelphia," Polzin says.

Here are some considerations the Down to Earth team considered:

• PARKING AND TRAFFIC FLOW. "General parking and layout is a big thing - making sure you have enough spaces and how the lot is laid out in conjunction with the building," Polzin says. "Now, we have separate 'in' and 'out' lanes so there is no congestion at a single point. Because if people think you are too busy, you can lose customers."

- SIGNAGE. "Until you have a busy Mother's Day weekend, you don't know where lines will form inside and how people will move - even if there is a big sign that says 'Enter,'" Polzin savs
- CHECKOUTS. Who wants to wait in line? "We added checkouts so it's more streamlined and efficient for people," he says.



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"I know that we have landscape customers that only know about us because they stopped here."

Benjamin Polzin, co-founder

So when the opportunity came to expand from the growing farm into a full-blown retail center in Eau Claire six years ago, Polzin jumped on it.

He took the lead on managing the garden center side of the business while Dominic focused on landscape operations.

The Eau Claire location extended landscaping opportunities into a growing region of the county with lots of commercial and residential development. "The whole area is exploding with growth," Polzin says. "Eau Claire is really finding its own, growing the downtown and also in the ourskirts."

So the customer base was there. and while there were garden centers, they were more traditional rows-of-plants retailers vs. the experiential environment Down to Earth wants to provide.

The garden center drew in landscape customers, and for some time, Down to Earth's overall business mix was about 75 percent landscaping and 25 percent retail. Today, the revenue split is 50/50.

"The daily interactions with new people on the retail side helps guide a lot of landscape business and the garden center is a showroom for us to display plants we can use in customers' landscapes," Polzin says of the complimentary business lines.

Landscaping customers can peruse plants and sit down at The

Five & Two Café inside Down to Earth Garden Center for a healthy lunch or cup of specialty coffee. They can sip and dream about the potential in their back yards.

"We can have that one-onone experience with customers as we walk them through the showroom," Polzin says, adding that getting into the food service business of running a café was new territory.

CREATING A GARDEN EXPERIENCE.

Down to Earth Garden Center is in the midst of a significant \$1.5-million expansion now, growing from 2 to 6 total acres. "It's not just a greenhouse," Polzin says of the center. "It's a whole experience - the expansion changes everything."

Dreaming up the next phase of the garden center involved travel to other retailers throughout the country to gather ideas.

"We wanted to have strategic goals in mind, and everything we have done this past winter has been part of our bigger plan," Polzin says.

That is, to create the ultimate garden center experience that feeds a robust landscaping operation focused on helping people realize their backyard dreams.

"We knew during the last five years that we couldn't stay with the structure we had. We needed more," Polzin says.

The Down to Earth team evalu-

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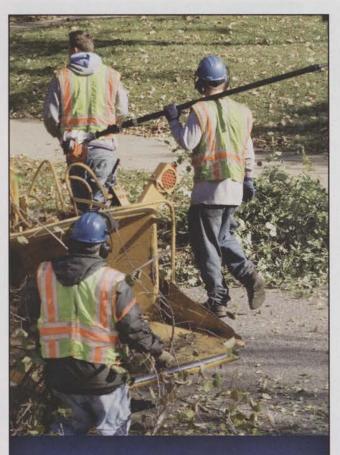
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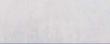
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A PLACE TO PLAN

oused inside Down to Earth Garden Center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, is a sweet spot to stop for coffee. lunch or even reserve the space for an event. The Five & Two Café was born after owner Benjamin Polzin went touring garden centers and landed on an enticing food service experience in Philadelphia, Polzin wanted to create a similar concept at Down to Earth, giving shoppers a place to relax and landscape customers a venue to meet.

So at first, Polzin invited a local coffee shop to set up inside the garden center. But, the traffic wasn't there to make the arrangement a real success for the owner, and Down to Earth recognized its food service needed

to be an in-house effort. So within a year, Polzin hired a café manager with some experience.

Polzin says the café is "not the most profitable, but it gives our landscape customers a place to sit down, grab a coffee and go over a proposal, and it's a place where friends can meet out for breakfast or lunch and shop our greenhouses." Polzin says.

Food service is a complement to the plant business and it adds to the experience Polzin wants customers to have when they visit Down to Earth. The menu includes gourmet cracker crust pizzas, panini sandwiches, local ingredients and sweet treats to go with specialty coffee drinks.

"It's an extra service for our customers," Polzin says.

ated other garden centers' parking, displays and amenities, what they sold (and didn't). Polzin reconfigured the shopping experience, so now there are 2 acres of parking and outdoor selling space with evergreens, shrubs and trees.

The traffic flow inside the garden center has evolved with two checkouts and double the space in that area.

The café continues to be a draw, as does a country store inside the garden center that sells gifts and novelties. Shoppers can pick up garden tools, home décor and even a birthday gift. It's all about the experience.

The expansion is opening up opportunity for more creativity and differentiation in the market, Polzin says. "We want guests to have fun - and we always greet people with a smile," he adds.

"We have unique plants they might not find other places, and

we merchandise differently by layering displays. It's not the straight rows of plants you normally see in garden centers and nurseries."

Polzin can measure the success by the garden center's traffic and increased inquiries about landscaping services. (In fact, the extra capacity at the garden center is a large part of that 25 percent projected growth this year.)

"A lot of times, customers shop the retail side before we do any landscape install work for them," he says. "I know that we have landscape customers that only know about us because they stopped here."

What's more, the garden center really cements the Down to Earth brand, Polzin says.

"We have a presence. We have a reputation and goes with our name, and people know what to expect when they come here. They trust us." L&L

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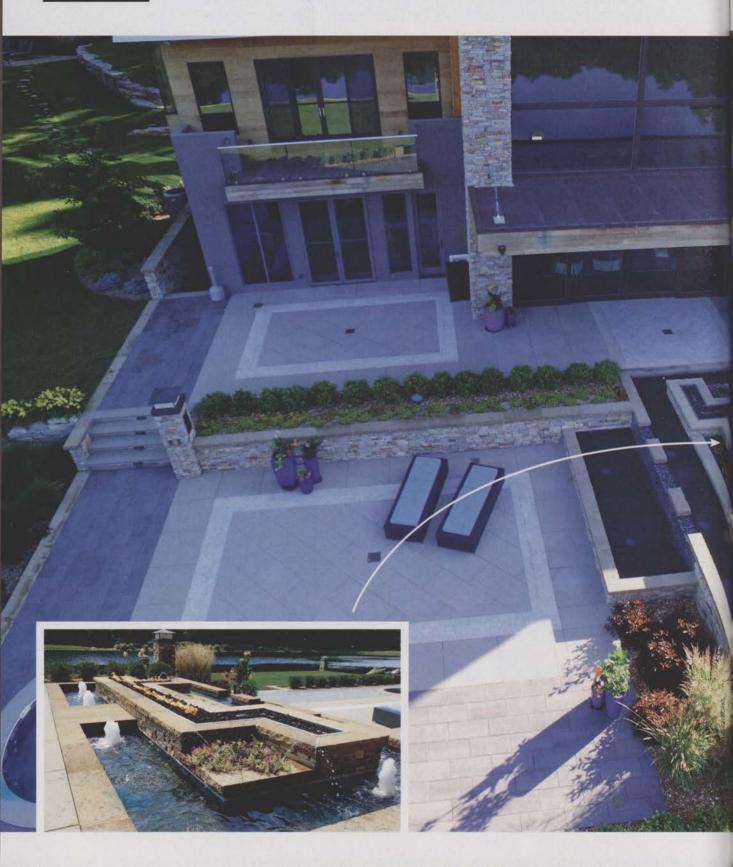
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A Michigan company grew what began as a small firepit project into one of the company's biggest.

his firepit was part of a yearlong landscape project for a custom house. The actual firepit was a small piece of the project, but it took several months to finish, says Troy Stefl, owner of Landscape Designworks located near Kalamazoo, Michigan.

"Initially, the firepit was going to be just one burner down the middle of the water feature," Stefl says. "Upon further consideration of the design, we were given permission from the owner to really expand the interaction between the water feature and fire pit."

Steff says there was enough room in the firepit to create several turns to the burner, and integrate planters and more water into the design.

The stone coping around the water feature was changed to allow for a "bridge" to get closer to the firepit. The company designed the shape of the burners and was able to get them custom made to spec.

"The burners are liquid propane, so we had to consult with the manufacturer, gas company and mechanical contractor to make sure we could get enough gas to the burner and maintain a nice sized flame," he says.

SUPPLIES USED ON THIS PROJECT INCLUDE:

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"Because of the water surrounding the firepit, we had to tunnel under the water feature to provide adequate venting for the space under the burners.

Due to the complexity of the project, there were a number of people working on it, which increased the need for constant communication, "he says.

Along with Landscape Designworks, a poured wall contractor, mechanical contractor, electrician, burner manufacturer, propane supplier, masonry contractor, concrete finisher, pool installer, general contractor for the house, pool finish contractor and the homeowner were all involved.

Steff says cost is hard to pin down since the firepit/water feature was all assembled together, but it was in excess of \$75,000.

"This is the biggest job I have ever done, and will probably ever do," he says. "My onsite foreman, Will Hamel, did a great job keeping it all on track." L&L



A LOOK BACK

After 12 months of the Hardscape Profit Builder, you have plenty of resources for your next hardscape project.

e're coming up on the 1-year anniversary of our Hardscape Profit Builder section, and what better way to celebrate then to take a look back at some of our favorite HPB stories.

DECKS OR PATIOS. In the April section of Hardscape Profit Builder, we looked at the U.S. Census Bureau's Survey of

Construction for 2014, which indicated a clear preference for patios over decks in new single-family homes.

In 2014, just over 640,000 single family homes were constructed. Of these, 56 percent were graced by a patio. Only 23 percent had a deck.

Even more telling is reviewing the Census Bureau data in its nine census regions. Favorable climate most of the year might influence regional patio installation in new homes. Patios are most common in new homes in the West South Central region, with 79 percent, followed by the Mountain region with 66 percent and the Pacific region with 65 percent.

To read our complete article on the data, head over to bit.ly/deckvspatio.

BUSINESS AND PLEASURE. Each month, the section highlights a submitted project, looking at before and after pictures of what the company did to the property and why.

In January, we featured a

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project from Columbus, Ohio, where homeowners had recently purchased the home when they called the designer, Archie C. Suttles, looking to rework their back patio area. The existing wooden deck was in poor shape, rotting and falling apart, and the homeowners wanted a patio that was appropriate for having fun and conducting business. Visit bit.ly/Suttlesdesign to see what Suttles did to complete this look.





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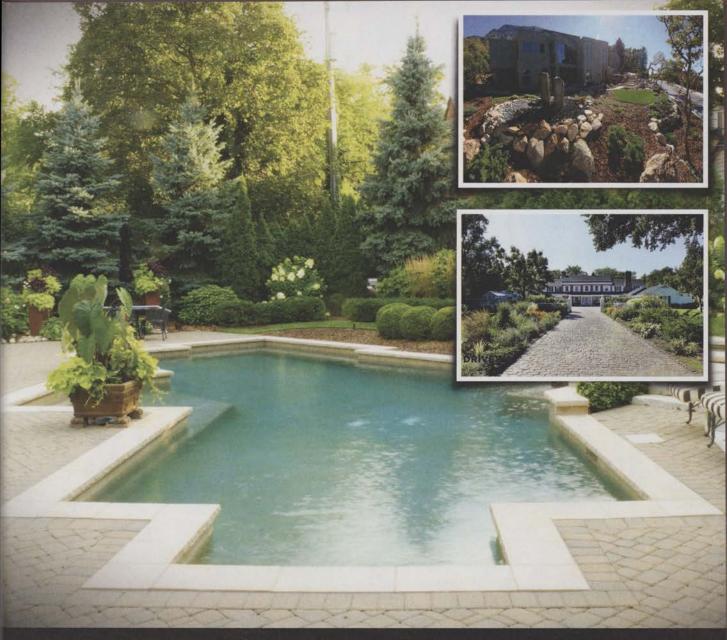
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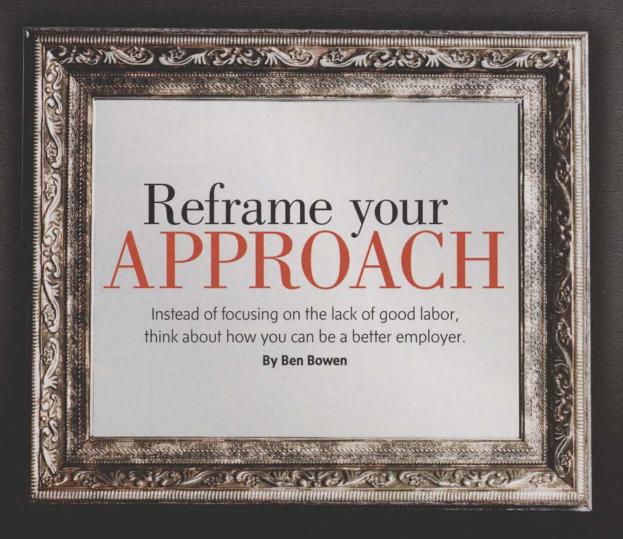
ATTENTION DESIGN/BUILD CONTRACTORS!

awn & Landscape is looking for companies in the industry to submit the best work they've done. We'll feature some of the best submissions we receive in future issues of the magazine. All we need are a few high resolution photos (preferably before and after) along with some information on why you are submitting this project. We're open to taking a wide range of jobs – pools, patios, driveways, rain gardens, xeriscapes, etc.

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

Please email submissions or any questions to Managing Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.



have four kids ages 11 and under. My wife and I work really hard to raise and train them. Sometimes people will comment on our kids, saying, "You have good kids." We appreciate that.

But you know what really makes us feel good? When an experienced parent looks at our kids and says, "You guys are doing a good job as parents." They understand that when you see well-behaved children, it says more about the parents.

I see something similar in the employee/employer relationship.

READ THE INDUSTRY SURVEYS. Go to the online forums. They all say the same thing - finding and keeping high-quality employees is one of the biggest, if not the biggest, problem we

face. And yet, in every market there are exceptions. Some companies (like my family firm) don't rate employees as a major problem. Are they just lucky enough to have found great employees? No, these companies understand something important: You attract and retain good employees when you are a good employer.

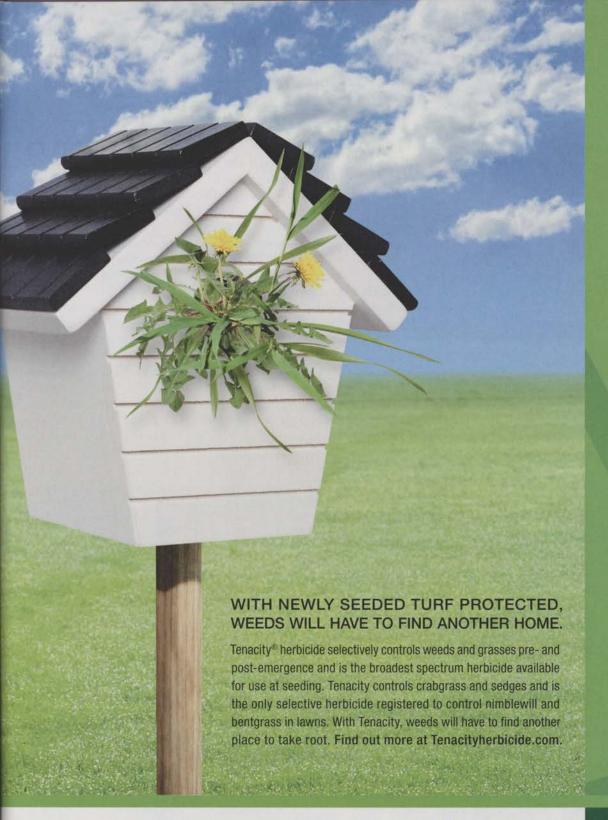
Stop fretting about the work ethic of Millennials, immigration issues or whatever you think is driving the problem. Focus instead on something you can control. Start thinking really hard about being a better employer.

I assume if you're reading this, you're already trying to be a good employer. You pay fair wages for your market, follow local labor laws and don't make your people's work day miserable. But in today's competitive job market "good" is not good enough. So how can you be a great employer - the kind people really want to work for?

RESPECT YOUR EMPLOYEES. We operate on the assumption that all of our employees are honest and hardworking. This starts day one; they don't have to earn it. People have a tendency to live up to the expectations we have for them.

When someone gives us a gift we naturally want to give something back. This natural human tendency can help you as a leader. Give the gift of respect and employees will give back by living up to your expectations for them.

Not all people will respond to your respect. The employee we caught smoking meth in the boss's backyard certainly didn't value it. But you have to fight to keep from becoming cynical. Think about it. You can distrust





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people and make everyone unhappy or you can trust everyone and then deal with the few who let you down.

One important way to convey respect is by getting to know your employees. Start with names, but don't stop there. The more you know and understand them, the easier it is to treat them with respect – especially on days when they are not at their best.

It is just as important to let your employees get to know you. I occasionally bring my kids to job site visits. I will introduce my kids to the crew. They get to see me interact with my kids, which is obviously a side they don't normally see. When something big is going on in my life, I don't hide it. When I recently had my fourth child, I sent a picture to my crew leaders. It was a simple way to show I counted them as important. They also understand why I haven't been in the field as often.

This simple concept affects many other work situations as well. It has a positive impact on the way our team members treat each other. I'm able to confidently tell clients they can trust my team to be at their home, around their family.

Perhaps the biggest benefit is the loyalty that is earned by treating people this way. Our senior crew leader was approached by a former employer. He was offered double what we were paying him to return.

He immediately let us know about the offer and assured us he would give at least 60 days notice before quitting. After deliberating for a couple weeks he decided to stay. Why? The former employer is an amazing landscape architect and landscaper, but he treats his employees like cogs in a machine.

He stayed with us because we respect him. Don't underestimate how highly your people will value being treated as valuable individuals.

BE AS FLEXIBLE AS POSSIBLE.

We offer a small amount of paid time off and the state required paid sick leave. Nothing fancy there. But we have found ways to add flexibility in ways our people value.

Employees can take unpaid leave whenever they want, and with very little notice required. Construction personnel can call in the morning and get the day off. During the mowing season we ask for a day or two notice from maintenance crew members. Our crew leaders decide when their crews start and stop for the day. And if a crew wants Friday off but wants to work on



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Saturday, we allow it. What comes of all this flexibility? Our team members miss very few days of work, but are able to take time when they really need it.

Our crews vary when they start and stop based on the time of year and weather. They usually start earlier and work later than me. and miss maybe two to three days a year due to weather. But they have a level of control and autonomy that's obviously valued.

Treating our people with respect and giving them a high level of flexibility is not always easy. For example, we had a large design/build project in the summer of 2014 that seemed to be moving very slowly. We were behind schedule and the homeowner was concerned. He was a great client, but he was retired and often spent the day just watching the project crawl along.

We spoke to our crew leader about the issue. Because we respect him and he has a long history of excellent work we never implied he was doing anything wrong. And since we have given him flexibility we resisted the urge to mandate more hours or weekend work. We simply presented the problem and the client's concern, and asked for his thoughts.

The result? The crew volunteered to work the next two Saturdays. This showed the client we were taking his concern seriously. We also realized part of the problem was cosmetic in nature. The crew would arrive early and drink coffee in their trucks before starting. Lunch breaks were taken in view of large back windows. By parking a couple blocks away to drink a morning cup of coffee and taking lunch in the more private side vard we were able to lessen the mistaken impression that the crew was not working hard enough. In the end the client and crew were both happy.

To a large degree, your success, or lack thereof, in building a team will depend on you. Take the initiative to treat people with respect from day one. Decide how much flexibility you can give your people. Then give them a little more.

Of course these are not the only ways to be a great employer. Maybe you can provide other benefits. The key is to provide something that your people will value - not simply something that you value.

The most important thing to remember? Just as great parents are more likely to have great kids, great employers are more likely to have great employees. L&L

The author is head landscape designer and salesman at Ross NW Watergardens in Oregon.



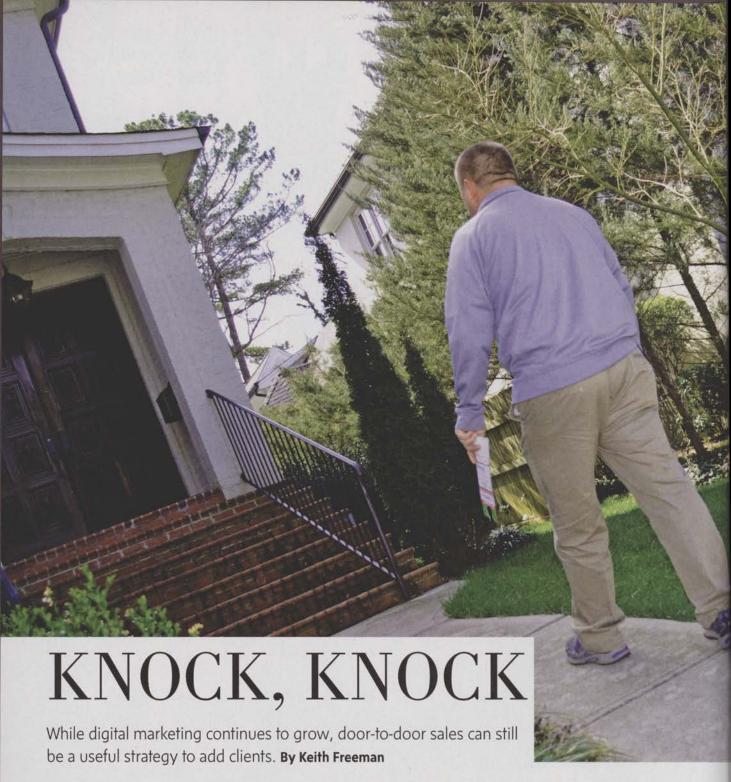


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oor-to-door sales is a type of outside or direct sales. A direct salesperson not only has to sell a product or service but also has to seek out prospects before they necessarily know they are in the market for the product or service. They create their prospects. This job is usually a commission-only position and is an easy way to begin a sales career. The success rate for these entry-level positions can be low but

Just like any other sales position, direct sales has activities that will drive results. It requires the proper plan and scheduling for the day's activities. Best practices also exist that can help ensure the activities are yielding the growth results needed to drive the business forward and provide a good compensation for salespeople. These best practices are simple: count, connect and close.

Any sales position can be broken down into activities and numbers. Daily expectations for

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Before going door to door, make sure you check with your local municipality about what permits you need. You should wear a uniform and an I.D. badge when knocking on doors.

those who stick with it can have a high reward.

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A key to door-to-door sales is to invite a customer out to their yard and point out problem spots on the lawn. Common problems to point out include weeds, thin areas, poor color, tree and shrub issues and insect damage.

door-to-door selling are easy to establish and measure, and will produce results when implemented. A common goal for a door-to-door lawn care salesperson is three sales per day. In order to achieve this goal we can apply some standard conversion rates:

GOAL: 3 sales

- Fifteen percent conversion rate means you need to pitch 20 homeowners to make 3 sales.
- · An average 20 percent contact rate means you need to knock on 100 doors to pitch to 20 homeowners.

One note, before going door to door, is make sure you check with your local municipality about what permits you need.

STICK TO THE PLAN. At first, it would seem you could never

find 100 new homes to knock each day. You actually don't need 100 because you will canvas each neighborhood twice - to do a knock and a re-knock. Each salesperson should have a scheduled area of streets that will yield 60 new knocks per day. When you add in 40 re-knocks, you will achieve a total of 100 knocks required each day.

Here is how a typical day might go, assuming you want to end the day by 8 p.m.

- Noon: Team meeting and role play
- 1 p.m.: Start walking and knocking in the neighborhood. Complete the section assigned to you and plan to knock on 60 new doors. Track your progress through the neighborhood and count the knocks.

- 4:30 p.m.: Begin re-knocks in your second pass through the neighborhood - looking for homeowners that have returned home. Check for door hangers that have been removed or cars that are in the driveway.
- 8 p.m.: Follow up on any prospects via phone that need a call back. Go home and celebrate vour success.

There should be no less than 6.5 field hours each day. This is critical to ensure the proper number of knocks are achieved.

Salespeople should avoid house skipping and rely on reknocks to improve their daily contact rate. Often, salespeople feel the need to roam around looking for people who are home rather than executing the knocks on the streets assigned. Stick to

REJECTION READY

prepared with what

- NOT INTERESTED: "I am sorry
- DO IT MYSELF: "I am glad in the lawn and see value in
- TOO EXPENSIVE: "I hear where
- LET ME THINK ABOUT IT: "I satisfied all their questions and found a compelling reason.
- DO NOT CARE ABOUT THE LAWN: "I understand. I realize maintain it just like you do the oil in your car.
- LAWN LOOKS FINE: "lagree! glad you are doing something to care for it. We can help maintain next week to show you what we

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the plan to ensure efficiency and drive the 100 knocks each day.

BE PREPARED. The tools needed in the field

are simple but essential to ensure the level of activity is achieved. An ample supply of door hangers is required for the day. Every house knocked should get a door hanger which

will drive leads later. Service plans for sales or call backs are needed to capture prospect information. Prospecting street assignments are required.

Associates should wear a uniform and identification badges while knocking. Other items needed include a clipboard, calculator, laminated price list, maps, water bottle and a rain poncho. The activity for the day of 100 knocks is key. Ensuring that the salesperson has a plan and is equipped with all the pertinent supplies will help avoid distractions or reasons to fail on the achievement of the daily goals.

The market area must be marketed per a developed plan to ensure efficiency and results. It also helps to avoid drive time. Develop a strategy to penetrate your market by month and week.

When working an area, park the car and walk from house to house knocking. Once the streets have been fully knocked then walk them again re-knocking on houses where homeowners have returned home. The goal is to ensure a contact rate of 20 percent.

Your seasonal plan can also assist in production density and be used to augment areas that need more customers for the route density.

Training and daily role play are important. Just like an athlete, practice improves the skills. A team meeting each day that incorporates situational role play will help drive results. Teaching agronomics and horticulture will aid in proper expectations and establishing good retention. Sales skill training and overcoming objections will create growth. Knowing what to say and when to say it, accompanied with proper body language, will increase conversions of the 20 percent of residents that are home.

After you have developed a strategic plan to contact 100 homes, it is time to connect. The approach during knocking is important.

· The salesperson's appearance must be appropriate and should represent your brand in the best possible way. You only have a few seconds to make a positive impression to the homeowner. Make it count. Pants should be pressed with a uniformed shirt or jacket and



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only hats with a company logo. A name badge should be worn at all times. Good walking shoes with little to no color or design helps avoid distraction from the uniform.

- · Knock on the door. Keep facing the door. Do not turn away because the homeowner needs to see who you are.
- · Introduce yourself and your company name. Hand them a flyer immediately.
- · Establish rapport and raise awareness. Let them know you were in the area visiting customers (neighbors) and ensuring the yards look good. Let them know you noticed some areas that could improve and want to find out what they are doing for the yard this year.
- Pull them out to the yard. Don't let fear keep you on the porch. Wave your hands toward the lawn, turn and walk out to the lawn and show them some issues going on. People only solve problems they are aware of so creating awareness is key. Get them on the lawn so they can see what is happening.
- · Common problems to point out include weeds, thin areas, poor color, tree and shrub issues and insect damage
- · Ask for the business. Remember, if you can't get the sale then get a phone number so you can call them later to follow up.
- · Good retention will only happen if proper expectations are set. Training is essential to accomplish proper expectations for the customer.

SEAL THE DEAL. Now you are ready for the final step - closing. Ask for the business to get the sale. What do you think you will hear - no? Buffer and probe during the conversation. Buffers let the homeowner know we identify with them and we understand their feelings.

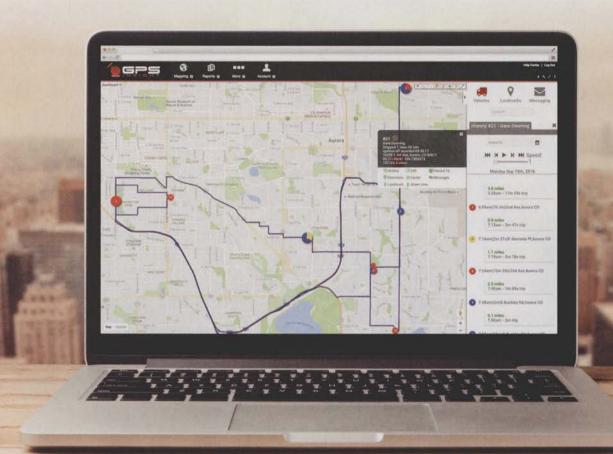
This will take the edge off of the questions we need to ask to get the sale. "No" is the first reaction when asking for the sale so be prepared. They are not saying "no" to your service but rather the idea of buying something. Keep smiling and stay the course. Buffer the prospect; "I am sorry to hear that ...", "I understand how you feel. A lot of my present customers felt the same way but what they found ...", or "I am glad to see you take interest in the lawn."

The objection usually does not provide enough information so ask probing questions to begin the conversation. Prepare for the objections and practice your responses (See sidebar, Rejection ready). After you overcome each objection with your response then close and ask for the business.

There are a few things to remember. Keep it simple in your plan and execute the metrics of 100 knocks per day. The contact rate and close rate will happen and if not, then work on the presentation. Always finish with a close when overcoming an objection. That is a basic for any sales position. Smile and show enthusiasm and remember your body language is important. Always get the homeowner involved. Exercise good posture and eye contact at all times. Success with door-to-door sales depends on your activities. Remember to count, connect and close. L&L

The author is an owning partner with GreenView Partners, a landscaping company based in the Raleigh-Durham, North Carolina area.

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youth MOVEMENT

Recruiting younger talent can be a challenge, but selling the industry to the next generation is one way to do it.

By Emily Goodwin

very vivid memory of mine is missing the bus and having my father drop me off at school in a big, loud, dirty dump truck. In the fourth grade, I just wanted to fit in, fly under the radar of my classmates and be "normal." Let's just say my arrival that day was mortifying.

I've come back to this memory

a couple of times, most recently when dropping my son off at day care in my company lettered truck. To my 2-year-old, driving around in Mom's truck apparently is quite amazing. His big "diggers," loaders and dump trucks are the toys he runs to as soon as he wakes.

I wonder if this attitude will change. If he grows to hate Mom's trucks, how can I convey to him that the landscape and construction industry or trade is an important part of today's economy and a good livelihood?

When I think about my father's big, loud dump truck, I contemplate the decision he made for himself and eventually our family. From the early 1970s to today, things have evolved on

so many levels. Is he an entrepreneur?

He removed himself from the norm - the expected and potentially desirable corporate financial world. He set roots in his family's vacationing community and got his hands in the dirt. At the time, creating a landscape company and supporting a young family was a courageous and entrepreneurial decision. Today, maybe it is less entrepreneurial. There are a multitude of landscape trades today. Now the struggle is setting yourself apart from the rest.

REDISCOVERING A PATH. Growing up, I could not wait to get out of our little coastal community - get away from mowing lawns, pulling weeds, being dirty, getting up early. I saw bigger and better things for my future.



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Fast forward 30 years. I went to boarding school and college, played lacrosse in Australia, spent winters skiing, traveled, coached lacrosse, volunteered in Vietnam and worked an office job.

So, I did it. I got out of Maine and saw parts of the world the average person may never see, but I always came back to my small community. And I started to see the bigger picture. Maybe that loud, dirty truck wasn't so bad. After all, it helped me afford a fortunate start to life.

In the fourth grade did I ever think I would be helping facilitate our multi-million-dollar family landscaping business? No way! Did I in high school? Nope. In college I started to see things a bit differently. Decisions needed to be made. Career? Family? I wanted to start my own path, and I knew I needed to make some decisions.

Our family business was at a transition point. Would we stay where we were or jump to the next level? My brother and I decided to take the leap with our father. Today we are operating, give or take, 20 crew members, a fleet of vehicles and machinery, and a multitude of projects.

GOOD HELP WANTED. One of our biggest struggles is finding the help. It is a tough sell. The 5 a.m. alarm clock, the green stained boots, the hard work in every kind of inclement weather. Our average employee age is 40. Finding young, hardworking, reliable, experienced and Bresourceful employees has been near impossible.

We have tried word of mouth, newspapers, online advertising, listing through colleges, you "If he grows to hate Mom's trucks, how can I convey to him that the landscape and construction industry or trade is an important part of today's economy and a good livelihood?"

name it. My father actually found one of our standout employees at a yard sale. We've tried all angles. We have given financial incentive, offering retirement employee matching, paid holidays and vacation time, bonuses, etc.

My conclusion: industry-wide we have to be forward thinking. We find we not only have to set ourselves apart from other firms, but we need to sell the industry to the next generation.

A HEALTHY ALTERNATIVE. I have a couple of sales pitches. Come at it from the angle of personal and environmental health. I think it is fair to say being "healthy" is no longer a trend but the expectation and the hopeful "norm." Whether we all live by this or not, it is the direction the world and the environment is aspiring to.

You do not have to dig too deep in a Google search to find studies linking better health and longevity to merely spending more time outside. Our bodies need the fresh air, the leaves, the dirt, the light to keep us all human. On the surface the landscape industry does not look very enticing to an untrained or youthful eye. Sure, it's long hours and dirty, hard work. We may all start off small and take a few years to get our feet under us, but the payoff can be rewarding, lucrative and significant. My father is a prime example.

He is 74 years-old, takes no medication, is out in the field every day, and shows by example. His counterparts are on a plethora of medications and have heart problems, bad hips, surgeries, you name it.

On the environmental side, across the board, whatever industry we are in we need to be conscious of how we affect the planet today and moving forward. What could be better than being at the forefront of the impact? Depending on your chosen area of landscaping, you could be an integral part of the environmental change we need, whether you're at a big or small firm.

The overall impact this industry has is immeasurable. Prior to including lawn treatments in our repertoire of services, I remember the absurd number of improper homeowner lawn treatments applied seasonally to numerous coastal properties.

Today, 95 percent of our 40plus clients hire a professional turf treatment company through us, and I specifically select a turf company that is acutely aware of the impacts of their treatments in a coastal area.

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND. We could sell the depth and variety of work this industry offers. You could be designing and installing award-winning city parks or elaborate infinity pools or outdoor living rooms. You could get an adrenaline rush climbing trees or fulfill your childhood

dreams of moving earth with massive pieces of machinery. This industry is constantly evolving.

We should recognize that we are in the instant gratification millennium and landscaping should be an enticing field for youth who are easily bored and need steady change along with a sense of achievement and satisfaction.

Even at our small firm, the projects are never the same, and they can be extremely complex and challenging. My most recent approach to the couple of young employees we have is to expose them to all aspects of our firm, from the business side to the various levels of construction and landscaping we offer. Putting them behind a weed whacker or giving them a 5-gallon bucket and telling them to weed this area will not sell them on our business or entice them to stay.

Whatever the sales approach may be, we have to be realistic and understanding of the rising generation. College degrees come with high expectations and may not be everyone's path. Potential employees might jump around from job to job, but could find a niche in landscaping.

We need to go out on a limb for the right individuals by offering training and continued education to help them to improve and grow. Landscaping led me down roads that I never imagined and introduced me to people I would have otherwise never met. I know it could do the same for my young employees. L&L

The author co-owns Back Meadow Farm, a family-owned business in midcoast Maine providing landscape and development services.



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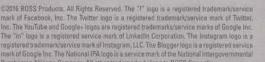










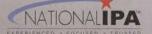




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PEER PRESSURE THE RIGHT WAY

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD IN ILLINOIS

n August, Illinois Governor Bruce Rauner signed into law The Snow Removal Service Liability Limitation Act (Senate Bill 2138). This is the ASCA's model legislation, which we created, introduced and lobbied hard for throughout the process.

HOW IT STARTED. In May of 2015, ASCA staff and a group of Illinois members descended upon Springfield to introduce our model legislation. We succeeded in getting sponsors from both sides of the aisle, securing bipartisan support for the bill.

We followed up with letters, meetings and phone calls to maintain momentum and achieve forward progress. The Illinois Landscape Contractors Association (ILCA) also jumped on board to support the bill. In May of this year, I testified on behalf of the industry and ASCA members in the Illinois Senate Judiciary Committee.

Later that month, the bill passed unanimously through the Illinois Senate, and shortly thereafter, it received unanimous support in the House. It was sent to Governor Rauner on June 29, and signed on Aug. 25, a mere 15 months after its introduction.

While the legislation had unanimous support, the bill was not without its opposition. The ASCA worked behind the scenes to massage the language in the original bill to bring fairness to all of the parties involved. The obvious opposition to this bill were your clients. However, after working with their asso-

ciation representatives, we came to terms on acceptable language.

Once the legislation hit the floor of the



Kevin GILBRIDE

Illinois House, we had already overcome any objections to the bill. David Manning, with the ILCA, did a great job navigating these conversations.

HOW IT HELPS. This law now makes indemnification agreements and hold-harmless language passing liability from the property owner or property managers to the contractor null and void in Illinois.

For example, if a customer wants a two-inch trigger, and they have an indemnification clause that says the snow contractor is responsible for any and all incidents or injuries related to snow or ice, that clause is unenforceable with an injury and only one-inch of snow. In a scenario where the customer tells you not to salt, then they are responsible.

At the same time, if a snow and ice manager contracted to provide service does a poor job that results in a personal injury, then that contractor is responsible.

This legislation is straight forward and simply places responsibility on the appropriate party.

HOW WE WERE SURPRISED. Earlier in August, at Executive Summit, I had an interesting conversation with Illinois snow contractor Peter Smolka of Ever-

WORKING
TOGETHER WE
HAVE THE ABILITY
TO DELIVER A
POWERFUL STORY
TO THOSE WHO CAN
HELP LEVEL THE
PLAYING FIELD FOR
OUR INDUSTRY.

est Snow Management. Peter was instrumental in lobbying for the ASCA legislation in his state throughout the process.

During our conversation, Peter noted that while a fair amount of hard work was involved, the entirety of the legislative effort was a lot easier than anticipated.

Peter said to me that we are always led to believe that government is broken and our elected officials can never get anything accomplished. But the experience so far taught him this notion really isn't the case.

He marveled that once the meetings were set, the industry's story was told and the elected officials were educated on the issue, the momentum generated carried it the rest of the way. "I guess government really does work," he told me.

Peter wasn't far off the mark with his observation. Many of SPONSORED BY



us have bought into the thinking that nothing ever changes, so why bother trying?

Well, I'm here to point out that within 15 months, the actions of a small upstart association and its membership resulted in some pretty important positive legislative change in Illinois for the professional snow and ice management industry.

So just image what we could accomplish together. If more of you were involved at the grass-roots level? The ASCA continues to work in all snow-industry states for the introduction and adoption of this same legislation.

At this time, the ASCA has succeeded in getting our bill introduced in Michigan, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York and Indiana. ASCA staff and membership are working diligently to get these bills moving, and we are close to the finish line in many others.

It's important to understand that the ASCA has not accomplished this on our own. These efforts require membership because dues support these important legislative initiatives.

For this legislation to become law in your state, we encourage you to join ASCA and actively support the cause at the local level. Working together we have the ability to deliver a powerful story to those who can help level the playing field for our industry. L&L

The author is the executive director of the ASCA.

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Short season

The team at Sunshine Landscape doesn't experience snow for too long, but still has to stay alert for offseason storms. By Holly Hammersmith

or many landscape contractors based in the eastern United States, snow management is a staple service. But not in Idaho, says Levi Duckett, president of Sunshine Landscape, a commercial landscape services company.

"It's not a consistently reliable revenue driver. The price can be good when there's a lot of snow, but we haven't had a year like that for at least five years,"

"Most of our revenue on the snow removal is driven off of deicing and what I would call ice management," Still, Duckett says he has offered the service since 2007 and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future.

Of his 45 employees, about seven work full time in the winter. Additional workers are called in as needed for snow and ice removal events. All of Sunshine Landscape's customers are commercial and last year the company brought in \$2.4 million. Of that amount, in 2015 about \$100,000 was snow and ice removal work.

"Most of our properties that we do snow removal are just an add-on service to our landscape maintenance contracts," Duckett says, adding that the company's clients come from word of mouth and some doorto-door sales.

The company provides grounds maintenance and landscape construction in addition to snow and ice removal.

Clients include the government, such as the Idaho State Capital, a regional hospital and a commercial bank.

short and unpredictable, Duckett says he charges for snow removal work per event or by the hour.

"Our customers just don't want to pay for it unless it actually happens," he says.

Duckett says the season onlyruns about two months. December and January. On occasion he has had crews out for November or March snowstorms, but not regularly.

"By March, we're landscaping hot and heavy here," he says, adding that this past winter was so mild, crews began landscaping work the first of February.

Snow and ice management contracts are usually finalized by mid-October and trucks are ready mid-November.

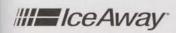
"It is hard for us though because we use those same trucks for landscaping," Duckett says. "On our maintenance side, we'll be doing leaf cleanup sometimes clear into December."

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SNOW PROFILE



Levi Duckett (right), who co-owns Sunshine Landscape just outside of Boise, Idaho, says winters in the area are short but unpredictable.

In order to combat this unpredictability, Duckett says he usually hooks up one to two plow trucks by mid-November "just in case." The rest of the fleet continues with end of season landscaping and cleanup.

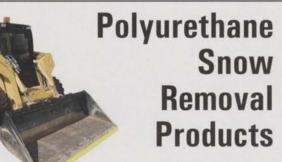
MOTHER NATURE'S MERCY.

Business is most lucrative when temps stay frigid.

"When it snows and then stays really cold, it doesn't all melt right off," Duckett says. "It warms up enough during the day that it melts in the parking lots and then we have to go back the next night and reapply deicer." Sunshine Landscape is based in Meridian, Idaho, just outside of Boise. Most of the company's work is performed within a populated area known as the Treasure Valley. This valley tends to warm up quickly after a snowfall, he says.

It may be freezing and snow overnight, but by noon it can warm up to 40 degrees or more, he adds.

This past season Duckett says his team only experienced two snow events. There were about 15 deicing events.



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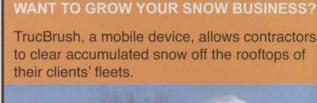


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NOTHING IS FUN AT 2 A.M.

t Sunshine Landscape, every truck has its own route.

"Every plow truck has a binder that's got time sheets and a route," Duckett says. "The route is assigned to that truck not the driver. We've built the routes under the belief that nothing's that fun at 2 o'clock in the morning."

Routes are assigned based on what each truck is best suited for, he says.

"We try to line them (drivers) up with routes that we feel like they'll be best at. A new guy, we're not going to put on a complicated route," he says.

The same goes for trucks used to spread calcium chloride and for hand crews clearing sidewalks. In addition, trucks are restocked and prepped for the next day before crews go home.

"We have them reload (trucks) with deicer ... and wash out their spreaders and make sure everything is good to go the next morning," Duckett says. "When they show up at 2 o'clock they're not running around trying to find a shovel and some bags of ice melt. They just jump in the truck and they have their routes and away they go."

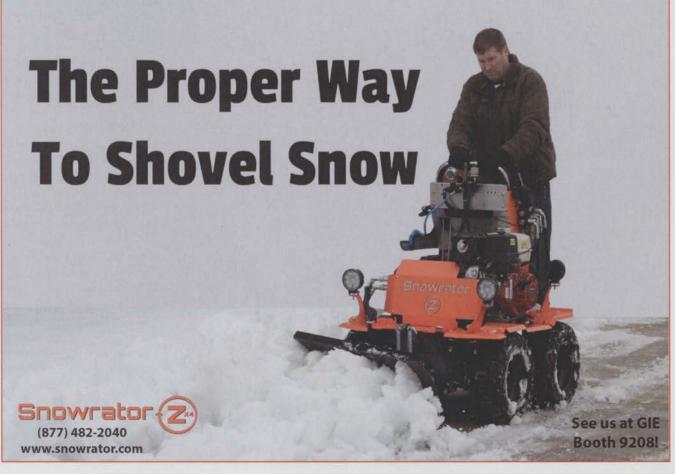
MANAGING MANPOWER. One to 2 inches will usually be enough to get the plows out, Duckett says. "We call in people when we need them. On a good storm we may have 30 people working," he says. "I can't keep my laborers on full time through the winter just to respond to snow removal because we don't get enough of it to make that pay."

Employees from the green season who offer to be available for snow removal work are used. They are guaranteed at least two hours of pay when they are called in, whether they end up working 30 minutes or the full two hours. During a hard snow, they may work a 17-hour shift. Most of the time, though,

they will tend to work four to six hours per snow event, Duckett says. "The biggest challenge we face here with snow removal is keeping guys on board that want to do it because there's no guarantee in the hours," he says. "You may get nothing one week and 35 hours the next week."

To combat this challenge, Duckett pays employees more per hour during the winter season and tries to offer an end-of-season bonus. "We're really fair with them. We're honest and up front. We pay them on time," he says. "I think it's the little things like that that they appreciate." 181

The author is a freelance writer based in Ohio.



Delayed SAVINGS

A bill passed in late 2015 could mean more money for snow contractors in 2016 and beyond. By Mark E. Battersby



nce again, lawmakers waited until late in the year to pass yet another 'extenders" bill. The "Protecting Americans from Tax Hikes (PATH) Act of 2015" passed late in December 2015, is causing many professional snow removal and ice management professionals to scramble to take advantage of tax breaks for 2015 transactions, change or correct already-filed 2015 tax returns and make the moves necessary to reap the benefits of PATH in 2016 and later.

The so-called "Cadillac" tax on the high-cost health insurance plans so many snow removal contractors provide themselves and key employees will be delayed from 2018 to 2020. And beginning with the Forms W-2, W-3, and returns for reporting non-employee compensation (e.g., Form 1099-MISC) filed for the 2016 tax year, PATH will require filing before January 31.

FIRST-YEAR WRITE-OFFS. The socalled "Section 179" deduction allows a snow and ice removal business an up-front expense deduction for the entire cost of equipment ranging from computers to furniture to vehicles and machinery. The amount allowed as a write off in the first year (instead of slowly deducting or depreciating over several years), is now permanently fixed at \$500,000 per year (phased out dollar-for-dollar as expenditures begin to exceed \$2,010,000 in a year).

Beware of the often-ignored trap when trade-ins are involved. Although either new or used equipment purchases can be expensed and deducted, if purchased using a trade-in as part of the price, only the portion of the purchase price in excess of the undepreciated book value of the property traded in will qualify for the Section 179 first-year write-off or bonus depreciation.

A BONUS WRITE-OFF. Originally created as a short-term stimulus measure, bonus depreciation is back albeit phased out over a five-year period. Bonus depreciation, which permits the immediate deduction of any business equipment expenses, rather than a depreciated tax benefit over time, has been extended at the former 50 percent rate for the

GENERALLY, ANY SNOW REMOVAL BUSINESS - OR ITS OWNER - CAN CHANGE THEIR MIND ABOUT A PREVIOUSLY FILED TAX RETURN WITHIN THREE YEARS.

2015-2017 tax years, phased down to 40 percent in 2018 and 30 percent in 2019.

Making it even semi-permanent allows businesses which spend heavily on equipment, machinery and other business property to reap large up-front tax breaks. Overall tax savings are predicted to be \$281 billion over a 10-year period.

Many snow and ice removal operations will find the bonus

depreciation break may be more valuable than the Section 179 deduction because the Section 179 expensing deduction is limited to the taxable income of the business with any excess carried forward.

Naturally, losses generated by the 50 percent bonus depreciation can offset other income. They can also be carried back for two years, thereby generating a refund from Uncle Sam.

ENERGY EFFICIENT BUILDINGS.

A provision in PATH extends through the 2016 tax year, the above-the-line deduction for the cost of energy efficient improvements made to commercial buildings.

A snow removal business can get tax deductions for new or renovated buildings that save 50 percent or more of projected annual energy costs for heating, cooling and lighting compared to model national standards, and partial deductions for efficiency improvements to individual lighting, HVAC and water heating, or envelope systems.

The tax deduction amount is up to \$1.80 per square foot and



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SNOW FINANCE

is available to owners or tenants of new or existing commercial buildings. A partial deduction of \$0.60 per square foot can be taken for improvements made to one of three building systems — the building envelope, lighting or heating and the cooling system.

ENERGY EFFICIENT FLEETS. Those snow removal professionals thinking green will enjoy the tax credit for alternate fuel refueling "property" that has been extended as has the biodiesel and renewable diesel incentives. The existing \$1.00 per gallon tax credit for biodiesel and biodiesel mixtures has been extended through 2016. Also extended through 2016 is the 50 cents per gallon alternative fuel tax credit and alternative fuel mixture tax credit.

And don't forget the credit for purchasing qualifying new fuel cell motor vehicles. It too, has been extended through the 2016 tax year. The new extended rules make a tax credit of between \$4,000 and \$40,000, depending on the weight of the vehicle, available on the purchase of such vehicles.

WORK OPPORTUNITY CREDIT.

PATH retroactively extended and greatly expanded the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) through the 2019 tax year. The WOTC allows employers who hire members of certain targeted groups to get a credit against income tax of a percentage of first-year wages up to \$6,000 per employee (\$3,000 for qualified summer youth employees).

In situations where the employee is a long-term family

MANY PROFESSIONAL SNOW REMOVAL AND ICE MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONALS ARE SCRAMBLING AS A RESULT OF LAWMAKERS.



assistance (LTFA) recipient, the WOTC is a percentage of first and second year wages, up to \$10,000 per employee.

While the maximum WOTC for a snow removal and ice management business hiring a qualifying veteran is generally also \$6,000, it can be as high as \$12,000, \$14,000 or \$24,000, depending on factors such as whether the veteran has a service-

connected disability, the period of his or her unemployment before being hired, and when that period of unemployment occurred relative to the WOTCeligible hiring date.

In other words, the amount of WOTC employers can claim depends upon the target group of the individual hired, the wages paid to that individual in the first year of employment, and the number of hours that individual worked. There is also a maximum tax credit that can be earned.

For the long-term Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) target group only, the credit is available to employers who hire members of this group for up to a two-year period.

- In the first year, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 40 percent of the first-year wages, up to the maximum tax credit, if the individual works at least 400 hours.
- In the second year, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 50 percent of the second-year wages, up to the maximum tax credit, if the individual works at least 400 hours.

For all other target groups, the credit is available to employers who hire members of these groups, based on the individual's hours worked and wages earned in the first year.

- If the individual works at least 120 hours, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 25 percent of the individual's first year wages, up to the maximum tax credit.
- If the individual works at least 400 hours, the employer may claim a tax credit equal to 40 percent of the individual's first year wages, up to the maximum tax credit.

GAINS OF 5 CORPORATIONS. As the economy improves, many snow removal businesses are replacing much of their equipment and other assets. Unfortunately, many are just discovering a corporate-level tax is being imposed at the highest marginal rate (currently 35 percent) on the so-called "built-in gain"

of a business operating as an S corporation. That built-in gain is usually gains that arose prior to the snow removal operation's conversion from a regular 'C' corporation to an S corporation, and arises when assets are sold. PATH retroactively and permanently provides that, for determining the net recognized built-in gain, the recognition period is a 5-year period – the same period that applied to tax years beginning in 2014.

In other words, the built-in capital gains of a corporation which has become an S-corporation must be held for five years in order to avoid a conversion capital gains tax. Permanently reducing the S corporation recognition period for the built-in gains tax will make it easier for incorporated businesses to become Subchapter-S corporations and more fluidly change the status of their business entity to respond to changing market conditions.

REAPING RETROACTIVELY. Correcting or amending any tax return because of errors, omissions, mistakes, overlooked deductions or ignored retroactive law changes is both necessary and encouraged by the IRS.

Generally, any snow removal business – or its owner – can change their mind about a previously filed tax return within three years from the time the return was filed, or within two years from the time the tax was fully paid, whichever is later. It's seven years if the refund claim involves the deductibility of bad debts or worthless securities.

Individuals, sole proprietors, etc., use Form 1040X, Amended Individual Tax Return. A corporation that filed Form 1120 uses Form 1120X, Amended U.S. Corporation Income Tax Return, to file an amended return, while S corporations and partnerships check a box on the Form 1120S or Form 1065.

There are, of course, quite a few more tax-saving provisions, many of them quite narrow in scope such as those for film and theater producers, NASCAR racetrack owners, racehorse owners, and rum producers in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, all included as part of PATH.

The complexity, the fact that many of its provisions apply to transactions occurring in 2015 and the uneven expiration date for many of these tax benefits makes professional assistance almost mandatory.

But, which of the provisions will best help your snow removal and ice management business reap its share of the \$622 billion in tax savings? L&L

The author is a financial writer based in Pennsylvania.



SNOW IN-CAB



Control during the chaos

In-cab controls can make all the difference during a huge storm.

BY HOLLY HAMMERSMITH

simplicity is at the forefront when picking out snow removal equipment containing in-cab controls, according to snow contractors.

At Lawns & Beyond in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, Owner and Operator Mark Tremere uses a Kioti CK35 cabbed tractor, which he purchased new for the 2014-2015 season.

It was also the first season he offered snow removal service and the machine was broken in right out of the gate. In addition to snow removal, Lawns & Beyond offers maintenance and landscaping services, and some hardscaping, to commercial and residential customers.

"That first season I think there was 550 centimeters (216 inches)

of snow," he says. The average seasonal snowfall in Prince Edward Island is 98 to 118 inches.

Controls to move the tractor's plow are in the cab on the right, Tremere says.

"You're turned around a lot of times watching backwards, so you've got to use the controls without seeing them," he says. "Once you get efficient at it, there's no problem reaching them or going from left to right, or up and down."

Lawns & Beyond has an annual revenue of about \$250,000 to \$300,000 and employs eight full-time seasonal workers. It takes about 20 to 30 hours of on-the-job use with the tractor to become proficient using the controls, he says.

At Seasons Change Services, based in Comstock Park, Michigan, President and Owner Andrew Stachowiak runs pick-up trucks with BOSS Snowplow straight blades and V-plows.

The company offers property maintenance including lawn care and landscaping to commercial, residential and small municipal clients, in addition to snow and ice removal.

"I can run mine now without thinking. It's kind of just an extension of your hand," he says of his plow controls. "I've put people that have never run one (snow plow) in a pick-up truck and they've caught on very well."

FAVORITE CONTROLS. "The thing I do like about the BOSS, there's

no mode buttons where you have to push another button to do another type of movement," Stachowiak says. "The BOSS is all self-contained and it's really simple."

The controls will move the blades up and down, and left and right. The V-plow controller can be used to run either blade, if needed in an emergency situation, adding versatility.

"I can move either left or right wing (on the V-plow) independently," he says.

Tremere's Kioti has a hydrostatic transmission similar to an automatic transmission in a car, which also makes employee training simple.

"You don't have to shift gears quite so much," he says. "I'm basically, with my right foot, pushing forward for forward, and I push back on my heel to go in reverse."

The snow blower's hydraulic controls help place snow in a specific location, Tremere says.

"If there's shrub beds and cars around, you don't have a lot of room to maneuver, so you really have to kind of dial it in and pinpoint where you're throwing the snow," he says.

PRECISE APPLICATION. At Seasons Change Services, SnowEx spreaders are used to apply rock salt to properties. The company has two year-round employees and has annual revenue of about \$150,000.

"There are fewer parts to it," Stachowiak says. "It has an auger system versus the chain drive or a belt drive.

"It's nice to be able to control the flow of your material as well as the speed of your spinner so you can either broadcast further or less."

The SnowEx also has a blast control, which allows the user to give a quick burst of salt application.

"If you run into a parking lot that maybe has just a small ice patch in the center, you can just do a quick shot," Stachowiak says.

Controlling the flow amount on the spreader, as well as the spinner, is done from inside the cab.

"With the Western (spreader he had previously), the feed rate was controlled by a gate, so you had to exit the vehicle at the time to control the feed," Stachowiak says.

I'VE PUT PEOPLE THAT HAVE NEVER RUN ONE IN A PICK-UP TRUCK AND THEY'VE CAUGHT ON VERY WELL."

ANDREW STACHOWIAK, PRESIDENT AND OWNER, SEASONS CHANGE SERVICES

In addition, the SnowEx spreader has a digital readout, which allows the user to set the machine's motor to run at zero to 100 percent throwing power.

"The old system was pretty much you just turned it up a little bit or you turned it down. There was no telling where you were at," Stachowiak says.

PREFERENCES OVER CONTROLS.

For Stachowiak, having larger in-cab controls is important.

"There are companies that offer different types of wireless controls, but some of those controllers look pretty small – easily losable within a cab," he says. "They're almost the size of a key fob."

Tremere's tractor has more compact cab than other Kioti models. "The four-way flashers are in a bad spot. My knee always hits them and turns them off," he says.

"You wouldn't want to be much larger to fit in a cab of that size." Defrost controls in the cab would be nice, Tremere says.

"Having window defrosters like you do in your car with the wires going through the back windows that actually apply heat to the glass that defrost ice off the actual glass – that would be fantastic," he says. 181

The author is a freelance writer based in Ohio.

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HITTING THE ROAD

One New York contractor swears by blended ice melts. By Hilary Daninhirsch

ith the crisp, fall air hanging overhead, the snow and ice season is right around the corners. Snow contractors must begin thinking about the products they use to melt ice.

Traditional single compound products such as sodium chloride (rock salt), magnesium chloride or calcium chloride get the job done. However, deicing blends composed of a mixture of compounds, have becoming increasingly popular over the past several years.

But are they worth their salt? Several considerations to weigh include whether and how well the product performs in very cold temperatures, whether it will prevent refreezing and how quickly it will work once applied.

In the snowy region of Buffalo, New York, Gary Benson operates a snowplowing and snow removal service during winter months. Benson, general manager of Dreamscapes Landscaping, is a proponent of deicing blends and uses them for virtually all of his company's customers.

"Our customers have become more aware of them and are requesting and requiring them in place of standard rock salt," he says.

One major reason is the customers' awareness of the immediate effectiveness of a blend.

Deicers can be endothermic (absorbing heat) or exothermic (releasing heat.) Generally, endothermic takes longer to work.

Rock salt is exothermic; once it's activated, it creates a brine that reduces the freezing point of liquid.

"The problem is that once it is activated, there is nothing for the liquid to convert to so that it does not refreeze," he says. Blends melt immediately, and the brine created helps prevent refreezing.

Benson says unlike pure rock salt, blended products work longer when they are activated and come into contact with the ground surfaces being treated.

At extremely cold temperatures, rock salt does not have enough water content to activate, becoming ineffective below 20 degrees or so, he says. Plus, rock salt needs to be reapplied regularly to reap the same benefits.

Another bonus of using the blended products is they are gentler on the environment, including surrounding shrubs and grass as well as concrete surfaces.

"If you use (standard rock salt) as your primary ice control product over a long period of time, it will start to destroy your concrete and will change the pH of the ground, which in effect has an impact on the way grass will

grow. In most cases it will stunt the grass growth and will damage plant materials, especially those that are not salt tolerant," Benson says.

Also, rock salt, if tracked into a building, can scratch hardwood and tile floors. Blended products are less likely to track into buildings.

There are not many downsides to using blends, but in general, blended products do cost more money than traditional products.

However, Benson says the overall cost is well worth it, as the product's effectiveness outweighs the potential for reduced slips and falls, thereby resulting in fewer liability claims. It also leads to increased customer confidence.

Another potential challenge is the availability of the product, although he says this past year, there wasn't much of an issue.

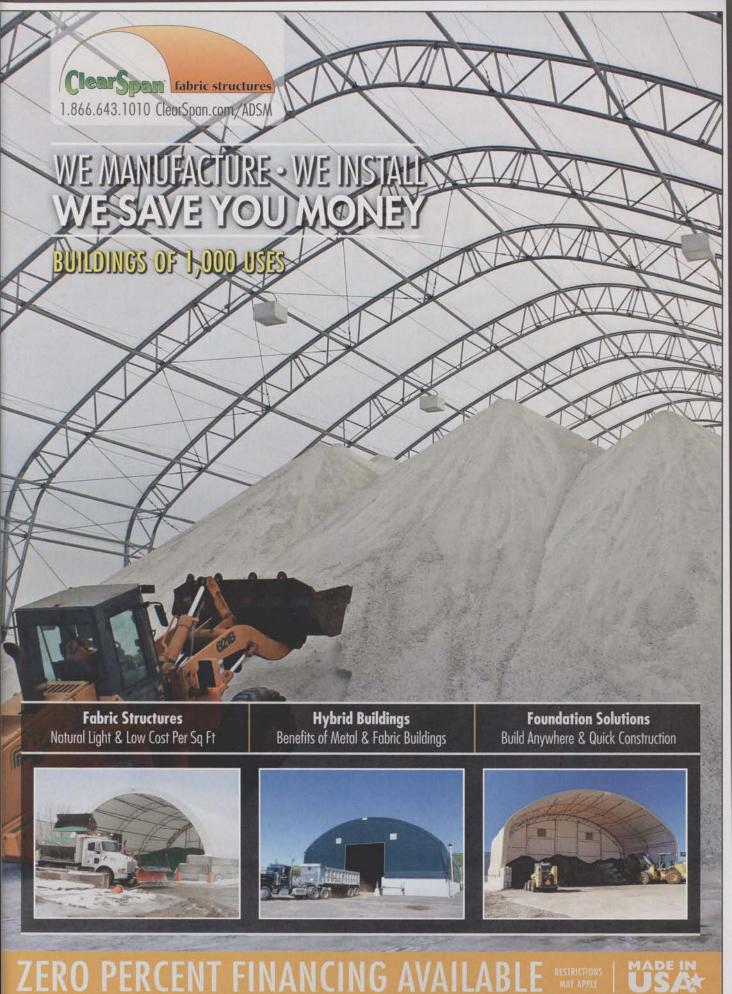
In addition to the increased popularity of blends among private snow contractors, Benson says many municipalities have started to use deicing blends in a liquid form.

For the few customers who insist on single source ice melts, primarily due to costs, Benson asks them to sign an indemnification waiver.

"The risk is too high to use anything but blended," he says. And even if he didn't live in Buffalo's notorious polar zone, he would still use blends.

"If I were to pick up my business and move it anywhere else in country, I would absolutely incorporate the blended product into my sidewalk ice control," he says. L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Pennsylvania.



SNOW AWARDS

LEAD PLOW

awn & Landscape's sister publication, Snow magazine, presents its
Leadership Awards to individuals in the professional snow and ice
management industry who demonstrate outstanding leadership within their companies, as well as in the industry and in the communities
they live and do business in. The nomination process began after the first of
the year through an open call for submissions. After collecting nominations,
a committee of industry insiders was convened to determine the recipients.



THE ROAD HOME

Joe Kujawa may not have been raised in the snow business, but he was born for it. BY JIM DUNLAP

o say Joe Kujawa took a road less traveled would be an understatement, but one that, in retrospect, makes perfect sense.

Unlike his older brother and partner Chris, who has worked with Kujawa Enterprises business full-time since 1982, Joe never aspired to join the family business. He dreamed of becoming an architect, and took the first step by earning a 5-year professional architecture degree at Cornell University, then joining prominent national engineering

and architectural firm HOK after college. A few years later, he added an MBA from Vanderbilt University, and relocated to Chicago, where he found himself on the road far too often to suit him, his wife Patty and their three young children.

After visiting the new KEI headquarters in Milwaukee, Joe asked Patty on the drive home if he should consider asking his father Ron for a job. Concluding it might not be fair to Chris, he shelved the idea. Then, while on a consulting trip to Washington, D.C., his cell phone rang and it was Chris, asking if Joe would consider coming home to work with the company.

"Joe is very intelligent, and looks at the business side," Chris says. "He works directly with the operations people, and keeps an eye on the nuts and bolts side of the business."

KEI has evolved into what Joe calls "a full service, four-season service company" with four major divisions: landscape management, snow management, interior plants and holiday decor and landscape construction.

People who know Kujawa cite his dedication to facts and data as the basis for business decisions, rather than opinion or speculation.

"Joe is not one for last-minute changes," says Tom Jurasinski, KEI's operations manager, who has been with the company for 26 years.

Because of the importance Joe and the rest of the Kujawa family place on employee development and well-being, Kujawa has implemented what the company calls Higher Ground University for key employees, a way to share thoughts and ideas and spark creative thinking.

He has actually started a book club on staff, with employees assigned to various business or management-themed books and invited to share their thoughts on them.

Creative and critical thinking is encouraged at KEI. Freedom to formulate their own solutions to problems is part of the company's culture.

"Joe is one heck of an awesome boss," Jurasinski says. "You always know where you stand, and he's very consistent. He truly conducts himself by the Golden Rule, and that makes him an awesome guy to work for. And, he believes in job fulfillment and a life balance between home life and work. During snow season, you might work 40-50 hour weeks, but in slow season you might work 35-40."

Jim Dunlap is a freelance writer based in California.





A GARDEN OF GROWTH

David Lammers, president of Garden Grove Landscaping, has grown his company and his life through the tenants of faith, integrity and dedication.

BY PATRICK WILLIAMS

hat began as the brainchild of a 15-year-old boy became the first employee- and customer-driven multimillion-dollar snow and landscape company to become an ISO-certified snow contractor in Canada.

David Lammers, president of Garden Grove Landscaping, founded the business out of his parents' Burlington, Ontario, home in 1990. For several years, he maintained lawns under the name Lammers Landscape, but he changed it to reflect his vision for the business.

"I thought, 'I can't let this be about me. If this business is going to be about me then it's going to fail. So I'm going to make it about everyone else within the

organization and I'm going to have people surround it with a culture," he says. "I knew that back then already. I don't know how. It's just intuition."

Now the company serves as a leader in the landscaping and snow and ice markets in the Toronto area and in the commercial landscape construction market throughout Ontario. The company's values, including to "honor God" and "operate ethically and with integrity," spell it out clearly.

Through family and faith, Lammers grew up learning the value of love and nurturing. In both his work and personal life, he takes care of the people he comes into contact with. He values fairness, respect and differences in opinion while

leading by his own example. Lammers recalls something his father told him when he was in his early 20s. "He says, 'Listen, if you want to make a go at this, I'll tell you right now, you're going to have one big, big, big problem," Lammers says. "I says, 'What's that?'

"He says, 'You are going to have endless problems with your workforce.'

"I say, 'Well, Dad, you know what - if that's going to be my biggest problem - then I'm going to make that my biggest focus then," he says. "If my number one problem is going to be in my workforce, then I'm going to make that my greatest solution."

Managing employees has been difficult, but Lammers requires them to keep up with the company's growth. He and his team hire for positive attitude and teach skill from there. If employees are struggling with an issue, Lammers is willing to do what he can - whether it's finding them a mentor or someone to aid them in financial management or something else - to achieve the sense of family he strives for in his company. "We're nothing without our people," he says. "We're absolutely dead in the water. We can't do a thing if we don't have a solid team that's committed to the vision of who we are."

Not always focused on the green industry, Lammers studied classical piano at the prestigious Toronto Royal Conservatory of Music, learning about music theory and composers while writing pieces of his own. He received his ARCT diploma from the conservatory, which required a two-hour memorized performance of compositions by the likes of Bach, Debussy, Liszt, Mozart and Rachmaninoff.

At the young age he juggled the responsibilities of lawn maintenance with classical piano performance and business studies. He knew no one was going to do the work for him. Twenty years later, he's placed trust in colleagues to allow himself to continue looking at the bigger picture.

"That's the beauty of people being aligned collectively and as one, and when you've got unity and vision, you have an unstoppable force," he says. "You're just solid, you're one, you're unified. And that's how I want to lead my life."

Patrick Williams is a freelance writer based in Ohio

SNOW AWARDS

BORN TO LEAD

Starting a business in high school, Peter Smolka was destined to be a leader for the industry.

BY JIM DUNLAP

ew people are destined from adolescence to become trailblazers in their chosen field, but Peter Smolka may come as close as anyone. Smolka, the founder and day-to-day leader of Chicago area-based Everest Snow Management, has run his own business since his junior year of high school.

After building his landscape

maintenance business, while doing some snow and ice work in the winters, he had something of an epiphany and made what turned out to be a life-changing career decision.

"I realized that focusing on one thing was the key," he says. "I sold the landscape division and focused strictly on snow. I realized that I was more passionate about snow. It's easier for me to understand, and I enjoy figuring out the challenges that each different storm poses."

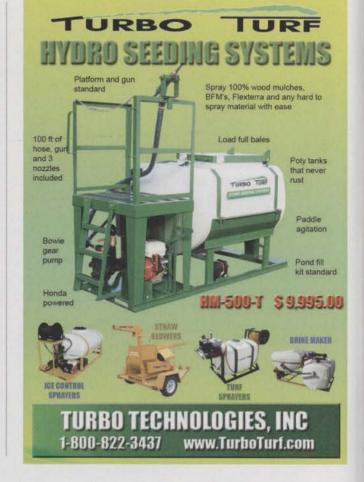
While many may wonder about the business model of a company that essentially has no income stream for six or more months a year, Smolka and his executive team make maximum use of the off-season time. In addition to making sales and marketing for the upcoming season, company personnel spend the warmer months reviewing events from the previous winter and analyzing both problems and successes, along with tasks like equipment maintenance, inventory and professional development.

"We have a core group in the office of 15 people, and we always look at what we do," says Chris Carter, Everest's vice president. "We're not set in our ways, and we constantly look at ways we can improve and do things differently. That keeps everybody engaged, and everyone is involved in company meetings.

"No two storms are exactly alike, so how did we handle each, and how can we do it differently and better? It's almost like we're busier in the summer with all that than we are in the season."

One gets the feeling from talking with Everest staff members that their worth as both employees and individuals is





just as important to Smolka as the company's net worth. "I've been here for four years, and I couldn't imagine working for a greater boss," says the company's client satisfaction manager, Robin Strasser. "There's a lot of team building that goes on here, and Peter goes above and beyond to make sure that we're all happy and productive."

Smolka also does his part to support the industry in which he and Everest make their living.

Troy Clogg, owner of Troy Clogg Landscape and Snow Associates in the Detroit area, applauds Smolka's business acumen and his dedication to advancing the success of the



snow management industry.

"I have a lot of respect for Peter," Clogg says. "He's a great role model for the industry. He strives for professionalism and what's right for everybody in the industry, not just for him." One critical endeavor cited by both Clogg and Smolka is a legislative initiative in the state of Illinois

which could have industrywide ramifications. It involves a change in the legal language dealing with the assessment of liability in claims involving snow and ice and lawsuits resulting from those situations.

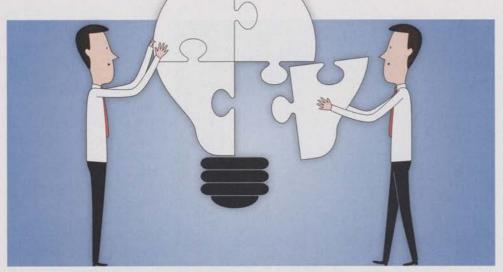
"Peter has been a great advocate, and is making the industry better for everyone," Clogg says. "He's created a number of different kinds of technology and applications to make the industry better – he's led the charge, and some of what he's shared with the rest of us is proprietary stuff, just to help improve the industry's level of professionalism." L&L

Jim Dunlap is a freelance writer based in California.





Mike Callahan is owner of Callahan Lawn Care and Property Maintenance in New York. He has been in the snow business for 20 years. He can be reached at mcallahan@giemedia.com.



POSITIVE PFFR PRFSSIIRF

very entrepreneur dreams of striking it rich in a very big way. I know I did when ■ I pursued running my own lawn care and snow removal business more than 20 years ago. As entrepreneurs, we chase a dream we are passionate about and dump every ounce of our being into making it a successful reality. The truth is, it's much more difficult than we imagine it to be at the outset. It's simple

to get lost in the minutia. The most important lesson I have learned in these 20 years in business is this: Entrepreneurs cannot go it alone and expect to be wildly successful. It was through co-creating and maintaining a "mastermind group" that I learned this difficult lesson.

Four years ago, I needed help learning how to equip my business with office systems and procedures that would allow me to scale to \$5 million in sales and beyond. I attended a roundtable event where all of the participants were seeking to understand how to capitalize on their strengths and expose their weaknesses in an attempt to overcome them

It was at this event that I was lucky enough to meet two other individuals who share my passion for business and drive to succeed. It was not until about two

months after I returned home that I realized the impact these friendships would have on me and my business. We became our own mastermind group.

Our group meets twice a month using screen share technology to discuss our businesses. We support one another through our willingness to both provide and accept constructive criticism and positive feedback regarding business progress. We brainstorm together and help one another set realistic goals for the future.

Finally, we host on-site meetings three times per year at our respective businesses to uncover issues and help with day-to-day operations and planning. It is through true commitment, honesty and mutual respect that we are able to help one another improve the quality of our business and our personal lives.

I began to rely on my mastermind group to help me make the changes I wanted for my business. This group of professionals acts as a peer advisory group; we help each other set realistic goals and practical timelines and then hold each other accountable for achieving them. The group members

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9866 Freshley Road Alliance, Ohio (330) 821-3550 8-4:30 Mon.-Fri., Closed Sat. Except in Season constantly remind one another to remain flexible enough with executables and timelines to allow for adaptation to fluctuating market conditions. The group requires constant communication of changing expectations; we discuss the changes and document them to assist with accountability measures. Finally, we are constantly collaboratively problem-solving and helping each other think bigger.

Joining and sustaining a successful mastermind group means having the ability to trust the members. Honesty is the first step in building this trust, Each member must be willing to be honest when looking inward, as

AS ENTREPRENEURS, WE CHASE A DREAM WE ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT AND DUMP EVERY OUNCE OF OUR BEING INTO MAKING IT A SUCCESSFUL REALITY.

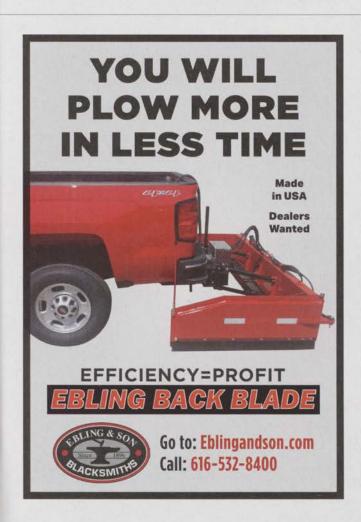
your business will be exposed for what it really is. At the same time, members must be honest when sharing outward about the reality of others businesses.

My mastermind group has quickly learned the process of peeling back the layers in everyone's operations - service offerings, staffing, pricing and even the owner's ability to run their own company - can be seriously intense. We have helped group members make tough decisions and drastic changes in their operations which have often become catalysts for growth.

Because trust is of utmost importance, the group has fluctuated in size over the years. Although we have accepted and dismissed members from the group if there is a lack of willingness to be honest and truly commit to the process, the core group has always remained

the same for the values we share. Being a member of this group is the best thing I have done in all my years in business. I have come to rely heavily on the communication, support and positive peer pressure this group provides me. The insights I have gained from the diverse members have single-handedly helped me grow my operations and my capacity as a business owner.

I now know there is nothing better than having a support group to help you deal with the daily grind of being an entrepreneur. If you can handle a little peer pressure, seeking out a mastermind group could be the best investment you make. L&L









WHERE CREEK CREEK COING SOURCE COING

Professionals weigh in on the current and future state of green rooftops, and how it can apply to landscaping and beyond. By Conner Howard

is a given – but their styles and forms are not. Design sensibilities are constantly changing, and the green industry is rapidly taking notice of one trend in particular: green roofs.

Elevated gardening is not a new concept. People have been planting gardens on rooftops for decades, but the practicality and appeal of green roofs, which function similarly to a yard planted on the roof of a building, are catching on with architects, landscapers, urban planners, homeowners and more.

To plant a green roof or living roof, a waterproofing membrane is built into the surface of a building's roof (or wall to create a living wall) and a growing medium is layered over the membrane, in which ornamental grasses, turf and other plants can be grown. This provides extra color, life and vibrancy to new and existing structures, and can also enhance the rain water drainage capabilities of the building.

Coinciding with the increasing popularity of urban gardens, green roofing is gaining favor with planners and landscapers alike. Ed Snodgrass, president and owner of Green Roof Plants in Maryland, says the perception of green roofs has certainly changed during the past 10 to 20 years.



Green roofs, or living roofs, are gaining popularity as a method of beautification and storm water filtration on new and existing structures.

"It's not been parabolic growth, but if I look all the way back to 1999 or something, there would be no one on architecture boards who would have a green roof," Snodgrass says. "Now, I think, almost all flat-roof commercial buildings probably start with a green roof, and it has to be taken out (of the plan) for financial reasons or structural loading. They are part of the conversation now, so that marketing hurdle has been crossed.

"Roofers used to say, 'I've spent my whole career trying to move water off the roof and now you're trying to hold it?' Now, roofers are some of the biggest advocates," Snodgrass says.

However, the growth of green roofs is determined in large part by government action and public policy, which varies drastically between counties, states and countries.

"Green roofs, no matter which country they're in, are going to go as far as public policy pushes them."

Ed Snodgrass, owner, Green Roof Plants

RULE OF LAW. Around the world. national leaders are recognizing the importance of green space to the point that in some countries, green roofs are expected for buildings of a certain size, Snodgrass says.

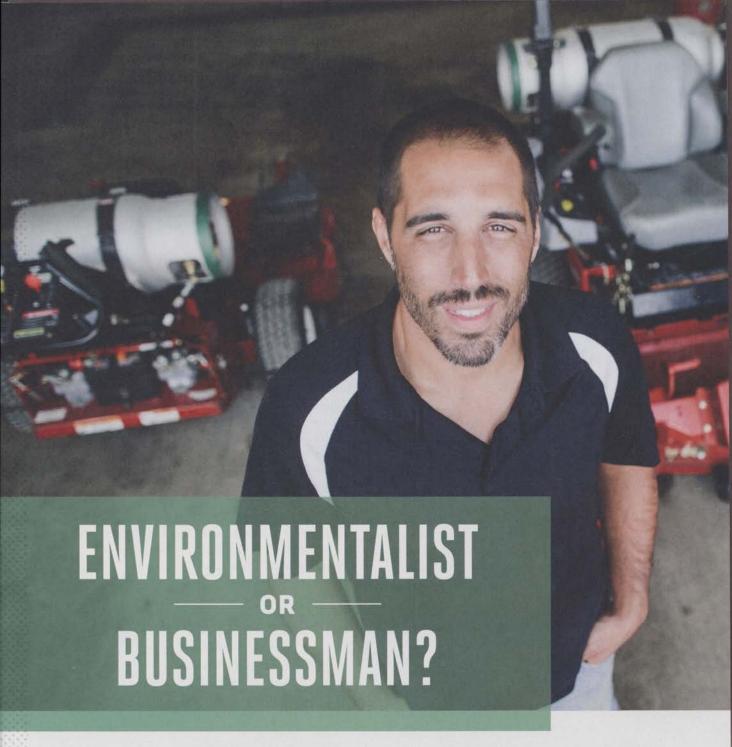
"Green roofs, no matter which country they're in, are going to go as far as public policy pushes them," he says. "If there's a robust public policy, like in Germany (where various tax credits heavily incentivize green roof construction) ... we're not quite there in the U.S., and our jurisdictions are not national. Building codes are local in the U.S., so each market might have a different way to incentivize a green roof or to require it."

Some American markets and regions are beginning to catch on to the positive aspects of green roofs, says green roof system installer Kate Ancaya. Along with her husband, Emilio, Kate is co-founder and operator of Living Roofs in Asheville, North Carolina, a company that also specializes in living walls.

"Cities like Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Portland, Oregon, are demonstrating how green roof policy influences the quantity and quality of green roofs," she says. "It is our hope that other municipalities will pay attention and adopt their own green roof policies."

The city of Philadelphia's water department encourages green roof construction by offering a tax credit to businesses that install green roofs and advises homeowners that they can reduce their storm water treatment bills by doing the same.

This push for treatment of storm water by running it through soil is possibly the beginning of a greater trend toward bi-



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ological filtration, Snodgrass says. As with many new technologies, green roofs are being incentivized by governments for now, but at some point, businesses will start to see the business sense on their own, he says.

"It will be driven by government in terms of investment because businesses don't invest more than they have to, but eventually, the system gets cheaper," Snodgrass says. "It's like the solar panel thing 20 years ago. Now, you see Apple and Google and Oracle building their own power plants for themselves. They don't need the incentive because they say, 'Oh, energy independence. Yeah, we'll take that.' I think the same thing will happen with biological water filtration."

THE RIGHT PLANTS FOR THE JOB.

Although impressions of green roof technology are moving in a positive direction, professionals involved in their design and implementation warn against jumping into such projects unprepared. Ancaya says that green "It is important to understand the conditions on a roof are very different than the conditions of an at-grade landscape."

Kate Aneaya, co-founder, Living Roofs

roofs face a much different set of challenges than a traditional lawn or garden.

"It is important to understand the conditions on a roof are very different than the conditions of an at-grade landscape," she says. "Roofs are typically harsh environments with extreme wind, heat, exposure and limited soil depths."

Additionally, too many green roof installers fail to take the time to consider which plants fit the environment of the roof they're working on, Snodgrass says. Coming from a growing background before getting involved in green roof consulting, he knows to think about what will survive on the roof, thrive in the region's climate and provide lasting value.

"I think there's a real push

by some manufacturers to use the same plants everywhere in the U.S. So, it's a funny thing coming from a horticulture and plant background ... and all the contractors ... just want to say, 'Here's what worked in New York, and we're doing a project in Phoenix, so why don't we just do the same thing there?'

"There's that hurdle to cross yet, where the systems (should be) really optimized horticulturally for that locale," Snodgrass says. "That's what we've been focused on. I think plant people want the right plant in the right place, generally."

Another consideration that plant people can bring to the green roof process is the question of what a business or homeowner wants to accomplish with their green roof. Goals can range from storm water treatment and mitigation to pollinator-friendly gardens to pure ornamental landscapes.

"We have found that some homeowners are most excited about environmental benefits while others are pleased with the economic benefits," Ancaya says. "For a homeowner looking out onto their green roof, they have the added appeal of the aesthetic quality of a green roof."

Whatever a client wants to do with their green roof, Snodgrass says it all comes down to knowing what different plants are capable of and how they can be used.

GETTING INPUT Landscaping experts are seeing an opportunity to apply their skills in the green roof market, but they

Experts say green roof installers should heavily consider the local environment when deciding on which plants to use.

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Some cities in the U.S. offer tax incentives to businesses that incorporate green roofs into their construction plans.

don't have to do it alone.

Snodgrass says that with more homeowners adding onto their homes and asking their architects to incorporate green roofs into the design/build process, there's an indication that the trend could start to be applied in smaller-scale projects around the home.

Customers building a green roof on their house will most likely go to a contractor for the plants they'll need, but a local

retailer could help a contractor and a customer plan out a living wall for the side of a house, for

"I think you're looking at the retail level - it's something where you could use green roof technology but on a homeowner's scale," Snodgrass says.

"Whether that would be birdhouses, doghouses, dish gardens or xeriscaping. It's saying, 'Well, if I'm going to put something on the roof and it's going to grow in

4 inches of non-irrigated media, also I have this hillside in my property' ... you can use that same technology to solve other residential problems."

Contractors can also look to their suppliers as possible customers because green roofs can be an asset for a garden center.

When retailers improve or update their facilities, it's worth it for them to consider a green roof or living wall for their building.

Such a move toward extra

greenery can brand the business and signal to the world: This company is in the business of plants.

"It becomes another billboard for them," Snodgrass says. "If you're driving down the highway and you see a roof - especially if it has a little pitch to it - full of plants, your eye is going to go to that. 'Oh, that's a garden center!' And you may not have even seen the sign that says 'garden center.""

Time will tell where the green roof trend will lead, but as with any investment, green roofing will not be a simple matter of spending or even market research.

An investment of personnel and knowledge is also critical for retailers interested in living roofs and walls.

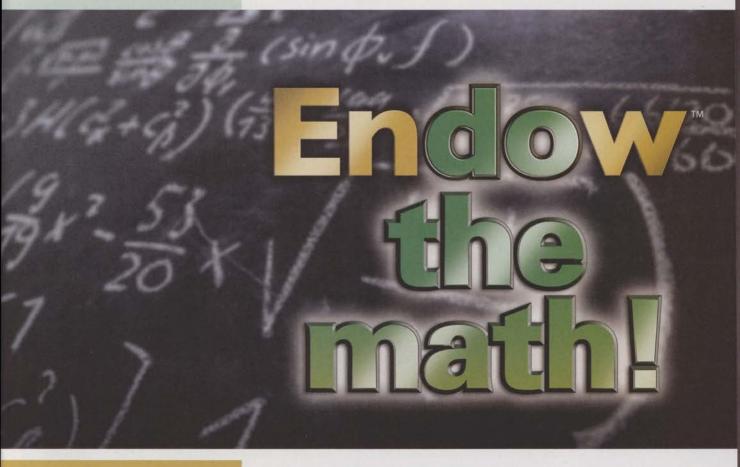
"It's not just the plant any more," Snodgrass says. "It's not for the garden center that just wants to plop down some plants and think it's going to happen.

"You're going to have to invest the intellectual capital in these lines if you want to get into it." L&L

The author is an associate editor of Garden Center magazine, a sister publication of Lawn & Landscape.







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GPS systems help contractors save time and money, and recover their vehicles.

By Catherine Meany

ate one night in Sarasota, Florida, burglars drove a truck and trailer filled with over \$80,000 worth of landscaping equipment right off of ArtisTree Landscaping Maintenance & Design's lot and into Miami.

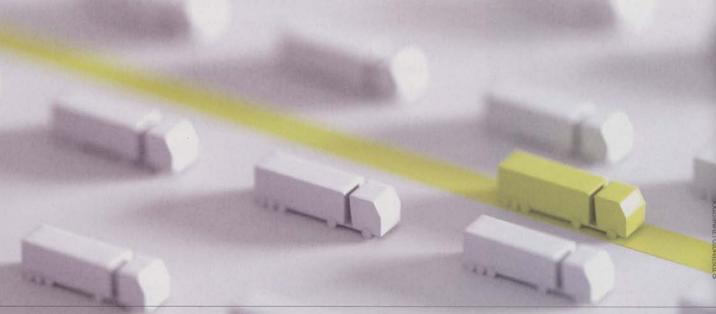
In a village just outside Chicago, \$120,000 worth of landscaping equipment was stolen from Straightline Landscaping and Lawn Maintenance and driven about 25 miles south to Richton Park.

What each incident also had in common was a happy ending, thanks to the GPS systems installed in each companies' fleets. In both cases, the tracking devices were able to quickly and accurately locate the stolen trucks and assist police in arresting those responsible.

"We were targeted, hit, and we recovered everything a couple hours after it was stolen," says Stewart Parazaider, manager at Straightline. "I can only imagine coming into work and losing \$120,000 of equipment and not being able to service our clients. It's a horrible feeling to have to get that call. These trailers and this equipment is our livelihood."

Fleetmatics, the GPS system installed in Straightline Landscaping's fleet, pinpointed the location of the truck right away. But the trailer filled with equipment wasn't there. Parazaider credits Fleetmatics' indepth reports that tracked the truck's route as a critical component in finding the rest of the stolen property.

"You could see that the truck stopped in another town for 45 minutes prior," he says. "They sent a second team of police to that location, and there was the trailer with everything in it."







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At ArtisTree Landscaping Maintenance & Design, iQ4Mobility is installed in every vehicle to monitor for costly habits.

MEASUREABLES. The level of detail measured by GPS systems continues to improve, measuring everything from driver behavior to vehicle diagnostics. It has become an invaluable tool for contractors to more efficiently manage their companies, says Paul Hurlock, fleet manager at ArtisTree.

"The theft was a weird kind of case, but we see savings all the time," Hurlock says.

iQ4Mobility, the GPS system installed in every vehicle at Artis Tree, monitors for costly habits such as excessive idling. The system is programmed to make an entry on a report whenever a certain threshold of idling time is met, Hurlock says.

"That was one of the reports I created very early on," he says. "The guys weren't turning the vehicles off all day, which cost me a ton of money."

Another way the GPS system has reduced costs for ArtisTree is by identifying places where crews are spending too much time or going off route on the clock. A feature called geofencing allows contractors to draw boundaries

on a map and be alerted when vehicles travel outside of that area.

This tool allowed Hurlock to notice his crews were spending significantly more time at gas stations in the morning than in the afternoon. He adjusted the company policy so all crews gassed up in the afternoons instead.

"If they gas up when they are tired and they want to get home, it takes them about 10 or 15 minutes," Hurlock says. "But if they gas up in the morning, they all stop and go in and get their coffees, which they should have done before they punched in. If you have a crew of six guys, there goes half an hour. At \$12 an hour, the savings soon add up."

GPS systems are also able to track which trucks are due for maintenance as well as identify driver behaviors that might be costing more in gas or leading to more repairs, Parazaider says.

"Beyond tracking where a vehicle goes and when it turns on, I can track anything from hard acceleration to hard braking to hard cornering; any possible liability when a truck is on," he says.

FOR YOUR RECORDS. With all of this data collected and stored by their GPS systems, landscaping companies have a complete record they can refer to when dealing with complaints or even warranties. Whether a customer claims crews never showed up to plow their driveway or a company truck sped past a neighborhood, contractors have proof one way or the other, Hurlock says.

"This system allows me to look at the history and say 'on such and such date, crews were there for an hour and a half," he says. "It's been very helpful that way. People believe when you say 'let me send you a copy of the report that says when we were at your place,' or 'how fast a truck was driving.'"

The data can provide both concrete evidence against fraudulent claims as well as confirmation if an incident does happen. And if it does, the contractor can tell the caller they know exactly which truck and driver it was so they can address the problem.

"You can never cover all the bases, but it definitely minimizes our liability," Parazaider says.

HELP WANTED. As GPS systems evolve, contractors should look for companies with great customer service and support to help them take advantage of the latest features, Hurlock says.

"I am still learning about the system and what I can do with it," he says. "Learning the basics was very simple, but I couldn't learn it all in one or two hourlong training sessions. As I keep expanding the usage of my system, I just call our representative and ask for her to come out and help me set it up."

After trying out two different GPS systems and finding shortcomings with both of them, Hurlock has come to find the value in having local support like what is available with iQ4Mobility.

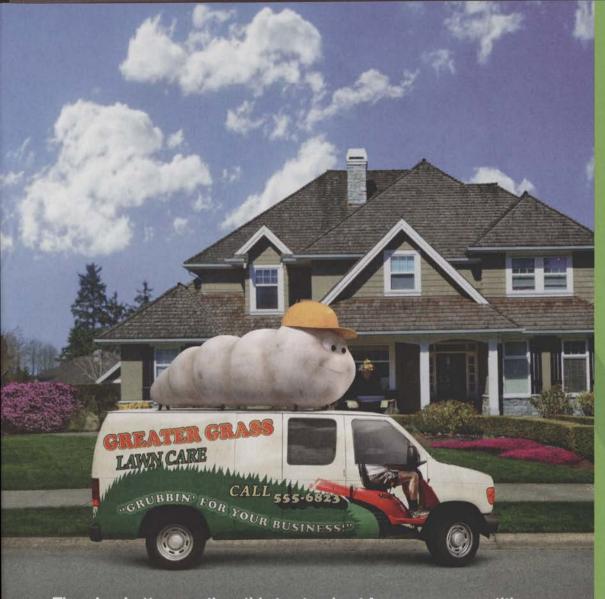
"IQ4 is in Sarasota and the representative here is available at a moment's notice if I need anything," Hurlock says. "Most of the GPS technologies are similar, but it's the local support that I find is key. Maybe some people are really savvy and can do it online, but I like to have somebody showing me how to draw this geofence around a community."

Fleetmatics holds conference calls and web-based tutorials to train Straightline's staff on new features, and has been readily available for troubleshooting.

"We need to be more efficient in saving time and money, which is the reason we looked at Fleetmatics technology," Parazaider says.

"Our company is now better managed and we can create more efficient driving routes for our employees." L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Kentucky.



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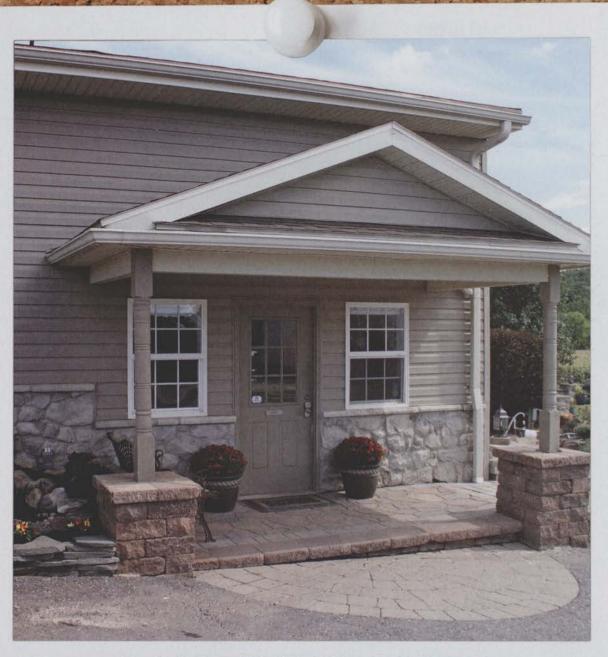
*Larson, Jonathan L., Redmond, Carl T., Potter, Daniel A, "Assassing Insecticide Hazard to Bumble Bees Foraging on Flowering Weeds in Treated Lawins." PLOS ONE 6.8 (2013): n.pag. Web.

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BACK OFFICE BLUES

There are a few simple steps you can take to organize your administrative world. **By Leslie Allebach**

EARS AGO, I REMEMBER HAVING A CONVERSATION with my accountant about how many of her clients would hand her shoe boxes full of receipts at the end of the year and expect her to sort through them in order to prepare their taxes. She expressed frustration over this, and rightly so. In order to run a successful business, we cannot be throwing all of our receipts in a box. Instead, we need to be organized, although I admit that this can be a big challenge.

Many times we are so busy returning phone calls, meeting with customers and doing actual landscaping work, our office takes last place. However, having an organized office saves money by keeping us efficient, diminishes the

frustration that naturally comes with disorganization and gives us access to real-time information about our profits and expenses.

You may be thinking that you agree with me. You know that you should organize your office, but you just don't know where to begin. Hopefully, after reading this article, you will have some ideas to put into practice.

USE TECHNOLOGY. There are a few key things that need to be in place before you get started. First, I would



Leslie ALLEBACH

recommend you find a good software program. You will find this is worth every penny of your investment, no matter if you gross \$40,000 or \$4 million per year. In our company we use QuickBooks as our main accounting software and

then two additional landscape-specific programs that link to QuickBooks and help us with routing, designing and billing.

There are a lot of programs out there so be sure to take your time and pick the one that is right for your company. If you choose not to use a computer for your bookwork, then it is critical you head to your local office supply store and invest in what you need for keeping accurate records.

MAKE THE TIME. The second key thing

every business owner needs to give in order to have an organized office is time. Whether it is your own personal time or the time of a trusted employee, someone needs to be designated to do this job on a consistent basis. It isn't something that can be done once a month or every other week. Daily is best and weekly is doable.

Once you have figured out what method you are going to use to keep your books and who is going to invest their time to organize the office and then maintain that organization, it is time to take a realistic look at your office and get started. If you have piles and piles of receipts and bills laying around, it is time to buy a good file cabinet, hanging files and file folders.

PAY THE BILLS. Let's start with accounts payables. Enter each bill into your accounting software and then file it in a folder labeled 'unpaid bills.' Pay bills on a biweekly basis and then file any hard copies in alphabetical folders designated for this use.

Use all 30 days to pay your bills if you so choose, but do not go over the 30 days or you will end up paying a finance charge. There are two options to use when paying bills – computer-printed (or hand-written) checks or automatic payments via credit cards or a deduction from your bank account. Never use a credit card for an





Having an organized office saves The Greenskeeper money by diminishing the frustration that comes with disorganization, and gives employees access to real-time information about profits and expenses.

automatic payment unless you have the funds to pay it off each month. Doing so sets you up to operate in constant debt. If you set up automatic payments for utilities, cellphone and other regular monthly bills, you will avoid paying finance charges for late payments. Of course, this means you need to always have enough in your checking account to cover these bills.

If you just don't have the cash flow to pay bills in a timely fashion, it is important to be in communication with the vendor. Offering to pay a small portion of the bill or make monthly payments will aid in keeping your company in good standing with vendors. In our early days, we had some situations like this and we found most vendors to be very amenable to the idea of accepting small installments as we worked to pay an account in full. Never ignore bills or pretend they don't exist.

One way to make sure you never have to worry about not paying your bills is to make sure you invoice your jobs on time. Cash flow is considerably enhanced when jobs are billed in a timely manner. Using your software (or a handwritten invoice, if you prefer), give your best efforts to invoice your customers within a week for one-time jobs (such as landscape projects) or per month for weekly jobs (such as mowing).

Never demand payment immediately when a job is completed as this indicates you're a poor money manager and are struggling financially.

Here in our company we are set up on 30 days, but anywhere between 15 and 30 days is best for all involved. It doesn't appear too demanding but it keeps the cash flow coming in.

COLLECT YOUR MONEY. Once you have billed your customers, email or send the invoice and then file any hard copies alphabetically. Be sure to look at your accounts receivable report once a month to make sure customers are paying you in a timely fashion.

If you have a non-paying

customer, first, it is important you contact them and make sure there are no problems. If they're upset about something that's your responsibility like a dying plant or a broken window, see that it's fixed before demanding your money. Once you're assured there aren't any problems, contact them once a week until payment is made in full. Always be courteous and gentle.

If you are still having trouble receiving payment, you have a few options. In our company, we generally choose to write off anything less than \$1,000. If it is over that, we head to small claims court. If you choose to go this direction, it is imperative you have a signed contract stating all the details of the work.

You can also use a collection agency if you would prefer to hand over the hassle to someone else. Thankfully, most customers have integrity and are willing to work things out so court or a collection agency is rarely necessary.

Once you've been in business for a while, you may need to hire a few employees. This is one area where you want to make sure you do things properly. When we hired our first employee more than 30 years ago, we had no idea what we were doing and made a mess. It took us a long time to find a contact at the IRS who would help us sort through all of the mistakes we made. This taught us an important lesson to pass along to others just beginning their own companies: Know what you are doing before you hire an employee.

If you've already hired one and find yourself in the same fix we did, I suggest you keep calling the IRS until you find someone willing to work with you in a kind and courteous manner. It took many phone calls, but once I found someone who took some interest in my case, she became a lifesaver.

If you have software such as QuickBooks, it will calculate payroll taxes for you. If you do not, you will need to do this on your own. Whichever way you choose, make sure paying your payroll taxes is a priority. Start a savings account just for this, if you need to, so that you have the money available when you need it and aren't tempted to put it off.

If you decide you don't want to hassle with calculating payroll, you can contract with a payroll company to do it for you. This is the safest way to keep from making costly errors, but it can be expensive.

If you start putting some of these ideas in place today, you will be well on your way to having your own organized office.

The author is vice president of The Greenskeeper, a landscape firm based in Palmyra, Pennsylvania.

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Stay the OIIISE

When a crisis hits, it helps to keep the simple steps in mind when weathering the storm. By Joy Diaz

possibly cover every situation, but at its foundation you will know how to respond. Thinking ahead now to when you are served papers, sued or when scandal hits will help you be prepared. Here are some steps to help you formulate the crisis plan.

GO ON THE OFFENSE. You will need to communicate, but not too much. There is a fine line on answering questions, confirming information and responding.

Remember, silence deems approval. Be prepared to address rumors in an honest, positive and frank manner. It's up to you to sift out what's true and what's not. It's up to you to know what you want others to know and it's your job to make sure the point is shouted loud, clear and consistently above all other voices out there.

In this day of quick social media posts, you need to be ahead to decide where and when it's going to crash. Don't be afraid to use social media to skillfully get the message out that you need. When

proactive in your message.

KEEP IT POSITIVE. You need to make your message honest and truthful while maintaining the positive belief that you'll come out the backside as a better, stronger person. Responding in a positive manner is an integral part to a successful resolution.

watching you, they're taking their cue on how to respond from your example. Even when you deliver hard or difficult news, speak clearly and slowly, make sure you make eye contact, use hand gestures that convey warmth and openness.



EMPHASIZE MOVING FORWARD.

It is essential your entire team understands the "show must go on" and does everything to keep business as usual while pushing the positive message you have identified as the central theme to keeping everyone focused.

ADMIT YOUR MISTAKES. If you've made a mistake or error in judgment, be prepared to accept full responsibility, apologize or ask forgiveness and then show the steps you're taking to rectify the situation.

We're wired to be gracious when human error occurs and it helps when the person admits with humility and honesty when they've made a mistake.

ASK FOR HELP. Finding a trusted source can be a tiring process so make sure you have already started the process of vetting that person.

You need to start with defining your ethical, moral, character and value standards and how your trusted source needs to share your views in different areas.

It is wise to ask around, check social media, seek references and then always interview on matters that you will need key advice on.

Ask your peers who they have used and their results. This is where organizations like the National Association of Landscape Professionals deliver such a valuable resource in providing opportunities for green industry professionals to network and connect and find trusted sources.

Don't be too proud to accept help or ask for help.

USE THAT HELP. You have to know who your support system is. This is when the trusted business relationships you have built and managed over the years come into play.

If you have already established a clear and honest communication path with your contacts, then letting them know that what you need and how they can support you through the crisis should be well received.

Using a trusted source as a sounding board is wise and may be a lifesaving experience to offset

the high emotional price crises bring. Trusted sources can include clergy and paid professional counselors, not just those within our green industry.

Finally, I would Joy advise you to trust your gut feeling. It's there for a reason.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. You need sleep, rest, exercise and quiet time to get you through high stress situations and you have to make this a key priority.

You won't be able to think or respond clearly and efficiently if your brain is fighting to stay awake or your body is lethargic due to overloading with bad eating choices.

Your brain needs mental breaks – free from thinking about "it" and whether you can focus on other things during exercise or quiet time, you will be able to focus better on problem solving if you have given your brain a reprise from the stress.

Taking a walk, stretching your body or turning off the light in



Joy DIAZ

JOURNAL WHAT YOU

your office to sit and breathe deeply for a few minutes can be

rejuvenating. Your music choice can also play a large part in

your brain response, so choose wisely.

LEARNED. Write down the things that worked and the things that failed so when the next crisis hits, you will be better prepared to fight the experience. I find that writing, on paper is therapeutic, but there are some days when pounding out the words on my keyboard is satisfying also.

I have a set quiet time for journaling to allow my mind to reflect, and then record those thoughts, so when the crisis hits you can review the emotions, actions and responses you had.

This will give you strength and hope as you power through and remind yourself you have already made it through a dark time and, when the next crisis hits, you will be prepared. 181

The author is CMO and executive vice president of Land Care, a landscaping company in North Las Vegas, Nevada.

Customize your coverage

Get a better grasp on your insurance options to create a package that's right for your company. By Misty Johns

nsurance. It's a word that makes me uncomfortable only because I personally do not enjoy paying for the "what if" to happen.

I am somewhat of a controller and I felt like Coastal Greenery was being held hostage by insurance companies. All of this thinking had to be altered because doing business as a landscape company means that our company has to be protected. I had to leave my personal issues with insurance behind and make certain that Coastal Greenery was insured and prepared for the day when we would have a claim.

So instead of fighting insurance, I learned all that I could and in doing this I found we were not captives to insurance; we did have choices and options. Coastal Greenery has had some hard lessons learned when it comes to insurance but we were able to take away a few useful tools to help us navigate the insurance world.

CHOOSE A SMART BROKER. An insurance broker represents your company in purchasing and negotiating with insurance carriers.

Find a broker who knows the

landscape business and the situations that you are up against daily. Let's face the facts. We know landscapes, not insurance so choosing a broker is not an area where you want to tread lightly.

KNOW YOUR POLICIES. Your broker should go over every policy and what they mean in layman's terms with you. This is not a time for you to be quiet. Ask questions.

Our general liability policy had coverage that I finally ques-







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tioned after a year or two and found out that "terrorism" coverage didn't have to be included in our policy, thus saving us few

UNDERSTAND THE TYPES OF COVERAGE.

General liability is insurance coverage to protect a company from a variety of losses that can arise while you are in business. Areas that are covered within the GL policy should be designed to fit your company's needs, so to speak and can include:

- Protection of property: The ways in which property can be damaged are endless so it is much easier for you to know what is not covered by your policy than what is covered.
- Coinsurance: A clause in a policy which you must know and understand. Coinsurance has a few meanings in the insurance world so make sure you know how it relates to your policy. This is one of those areas where not understanding could leave you penalized in the event of a loss.
- · Commercial liability: Covers damage to third parties that the company becomes legally obligated to pay. Years ago our company found this coverage to be well worth the money. An employee didn't dilute a chemical he applied to turf on a property and, needless to say, our commercial GL coverage paid for the labor and materials to re-sod this property. A business owner not carrying this coverage could result in business suicide.
- Business automobile: This coverage is the same as personal auto insurance and can include liability, comprehensive and collision. Save some money by taking a look at the trucks within your fleet and determine if the older trucks need full coverage. If totaled, would you receive enough money from the policy to replace the vehicle or is the cost of insurance more than the value of the vehicle?
- Inland marine: This coverage involves the tools and equipment a company owns and uses to do business. You will need to have the insurance company define for you what they consider a "tool" and a piece of "equipment."

Workers' compensation is insurance provided to employees who sustain a workrelated injury. State law requires most employees to carry this coverage. This coverage is another policy that if your business doesn't have it, you could be committing business

Umbrella policies are policies that are carried on top of your general liability coverage to increase limits. Umbrella policies are

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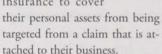
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really a determination of the business owner and need to be carefully thought out. A great reason to carry an umbrella policy would be for a business owner to obtain extra personal insurance to cover





Misty JOHNS

ADDITIONAL INSURANCE TOOLS

- · Have one individual in the company "own" the insurance process and be the "go to" person for insurance.
- · Keep an inventory of all equipment and include serial numbers, VINs, dates of purchase, purchase price, etc. The more key information you have, the better your chances of recouping your loss on equipment.
- · Small tools can be inventoried by crew with little information other than type and brand needed.
- · Keep records of all employees who drive company vehicles. Run a motor vehicle report on driving employees upon hire. Make certain that you have the employee sign an MVR agreement giving you permission to run the report and make a clear copy of the driver's license.
- · Have a vendor/contractor agreement signed by all subcontractors that you hire and keep it on file before they step foot on your job site. With this agreement, they agree to carry insurance coverage and will provide you with updated insurance certificates. These agreements release your business from any and all liability if they or their employees are injured on the job.

- · Keep in mind that any contractor on your job site is considered your employee by WC and you will be charged for their work during your yearly WC audit unless the contractor carries WC insurance.
- Make safety training a priority and hold weekly, if not daily, safety meetings. Enforce safety on all job sites and at your facility. Hold all employees accountable for safety violations and reward employees who display safety on the job.
- · Maintain a drug-free workplace. Test for drugs upon hire, periodically, after accidents and when speculation arises. Maintaining a drug-free workplace will lower your WC insurance in some states.
- · Each year your company is given an MOD score that reflects the accidents that have occurred in the past year. This "company report card" can affect your WC rates for three years as each incident stays on your MOD for three years.

Since 1994, my view on insurance has changed. Although I do not like paying the high premiums every month, nor do I enjoy being audited every year to basically pay additional premiums, I do feel confident that if and when an accident occurs, we are covered.

It is a must for a business owner to protect their company and employees with the proper insurance coverage. Let's face it: there are a few certainties in the landscape world, namely weeds, taxes and insurance. L&L

The author is director of administration at Coastal Greenery in Brunswick, Georgia.

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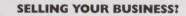
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ployee intentionally damages the yards, or perhaps the lawn was not properly diagnosed, there is no coverage for the damage done to the customer's lawn as a result of **your work**. Some insurers call this the business risk exclusion.

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TIPS FROM THE TOP

Interviewed by BRIAN HORN





JODY O'DONNELL

// PRESIDENT, LMI LANDSCAPES

JODY O'DONNELL is

trying to bring more technology into his business in a number of ways, one of which is through adding GPS systems on trucks and big equipment like trenchers and skid-steers. In the first six months, he

saw a return on his investment.

"Our number of vehicle incidents decreased substantially, and I just think when people know that somebody else is looking, they have a tendency to behave a little

LOCATION

Carrollton, Texas

TOP 100 RANKING

2015 REVENUE \$24.1 million better," says O'Donnell, owner of LMI Landscapes in Texas, Lawn & Landscape spoke with O'Donnell about how he rolled out these changes.

L&L: Is there anything you should pay attention to when you're shopping

or any features that you find specifically

JO: You want to be able to know when people are going outside of their designated routes and be notified, and we found that

it helps to be notified when it occurs. You don't want to have to go back and pull it up and then see it, and then try to address it then. Some people, the terminology of the vernacular I think in that industry, they set up a geo zone, and if someone goes out of that zone or into that zone, we get notified instantaneously via email.

Also, via the routes and roads that these folks travel on, it'll give us speeding notices instantaneously. There's a series of alerts that you can set up, and having that flexibility in what things matter most, I mean idling time is a big one, speeding is a big one, getting away from where they're supposed to be going or the route that they're supposed to be on is another.

L&L: When you first started getting those reports in, how did you address it without making it seem like big brother is watching them?

JO: I want them to know that Big Brother is watching them. We may not be watching them every second of every day, but they know we have access to data that can show us where they've been versus where they were supposed to be.

Ironically, the very first day we implemented it, and the guys have routes, we had a guy - he took one of the company vehicles and drove it home to go do whatever, and was there for 45 minutes. When confronted with it, initially it was denial that he ever did it, and then, when they pullup the report there was some excuse, and then it cost him his job.

L&L: Was he the only one that you found out was doing that stuff?

JO: He was the one example and we haven't found or caught anybody else that's doing anything they weren't supposed to be doing. It's been good. I think initially it was somewhat of a sense of surprise that somebody was actually looking, and then once they realized that we were, it pretty much fell in line and did what they were supposed to do. L&L



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