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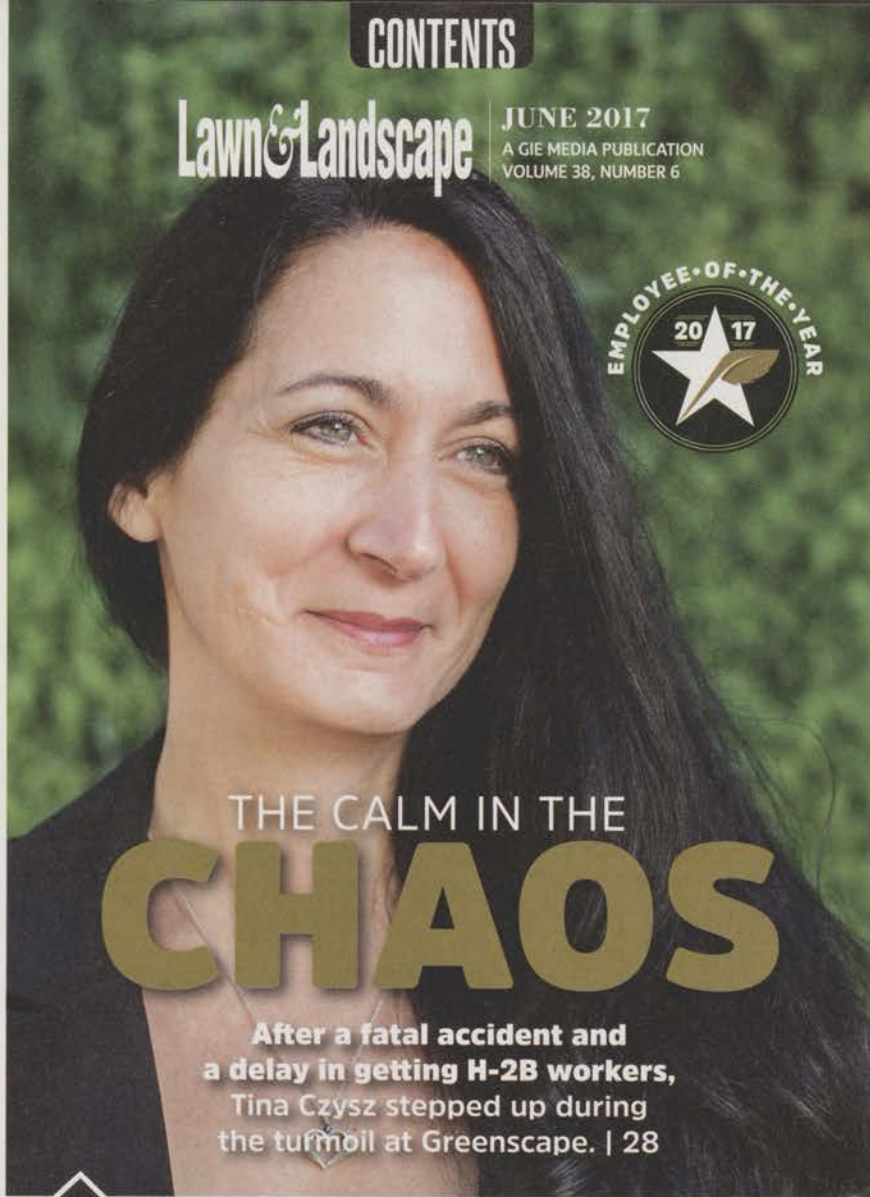
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Chuck Bowen
Editor | Lawn & Landscape

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industry for
allowing me
the good
fortune to
write and talk
and visit with
you for the
last several
years.

Thank you

I've spent the last 10 years working as an editor here at GIE Media. I came from working as a daily newspaper reporter to a business-to-business publishing company with no knowledge of what "business-to-business publishing" even meant, but I knew I liked to write and to ask people questions.

When I came in for my first interview, I remember waiting at the receptionist's desk and reading over the titles of all the magazines GIE Media published, including one called Snow Magazine. I had worked at my family's parking lot business in the winter clearing snow, so I knew the basics of wind rowing and staying up all night in the cold and dark.

"How can you publish a magazine entirely about clearing snow?" I thought. "It's not that complicated. What would you even write about?"

I now sit next to the editor of Snow Magazine, and I've learned that they write about a lot of stuff that goes far beyond my main questions as a newbie plow driver, which were mostly: "What coffee place is open at 3 a.m." and "Did I remember to put all my Tom Petty CDs in the truck?"

In the last decade that I've spent here, first a year with PCT magazine and then 9 with Lawn & Landscape, I've continued to learn

a lot, and I have been helped by more people than I can count. But after 10 years with GIE Media, this will be the last time you see my head shot in this column. Starting in August, I'll be joining the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) as its vice president of communications.

Every month I send a stack of thank-you notes to people who have helped get the issue out the door. Now it's me who's headed out the door, and so I'd like to use this column as a way to say thank you to an entire company – and industry – for allowing me the good fortune to write and talk and visit with you for the last several years.

I'm so grateful for all the experiences I've had in this industry, and all that I've learned. I've raced go-karts at Briggs & Stratton's private track at Road America, run new UTVs through fresh powder at Lake Tahoe and hung out on the beach in the Bahamas talking shop with landscapers.

All that was fun, but what I'm most proud of are the emails and calls and letters I get from contractors all across the country who tell me that some story or report or research we published has helped them solve a problem or improve their business. During the Great Recession, a landscaper in Wisconsin wrote

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How can you have an entire magazine about mowing lawns? Simple: The magazine isn't about mowing lawns. It's about the people who work every day in the industry to make it better. That's what makes this industry so special, and that's what I am so grateful to have been a part of.

me to say that the positive messages we had in our magazine encouraged him to stick with his business and not give up, even though it felt like the entire world was falling apart.

And I'm proud of the team I get to work with – and all the folks I have worked with – here at GIE. I know I'm biased, but I think we have the smartest, most talented, most

creative, most ambitious and most tenacious group of editors, designers, salespeople and support staff in the business. I couldn't ask for a better group of people to work with each day.

When I started here at GIE, I came in thinking of myself as a reporter: I asked people questions, I wrote down what they said and then I put it together into a story. Ten years later, and thanks to the support of the team at GIE Media, I get to do that and so much more.

As the editor, I often hear from people like that contractor in Wisconsin, about how Lawn & Landscape has helped them.

But as much as our magazine has helped them, the people in the landscape industry have helped me even more. You all have shown me that an entrepreneur can overcome tremendous

challenges to build something strong and long-lasting. You've shown me that a public greenspace can be a place of healing and rejuvenation. You've shown me that with the right equipment and some ingenuity, a team of dedicated people can build something much larger than themselves.

You have opened up your offices and your trucks to me. But more than that, you've opened up your hearts. I've heard terrible stories of theft, loss and sometimes death. I've written stories honoring the achievements of contractors who have changed the industry for the better. I've talked with landscapers who have built multi-million dollar businesses only to see them crumble into bankruptcy. And I've also been able to help celebrate those companies coming back from nothing to rebuild.

How can you have an entire magazine about mowing lawns? Simple: The magazine isn't about mowing lawns.

The magazine is about the people – each of the landscapers, lawn care operators, hardscapers, educators, equipment dealers, distributors, engineers, suppliers, association executives and salespeople – who work every day to make it better. That's what makes this industry so special, and that's what I am so grateful to have been a part of.

This summer my family and I will move to northern Virginia and start a new adventure. In my new role with OPEI, I'll still be around the industry, and I hope our paths will continue to cross. Once again, good luck out there.

And thank you. – *Chuck Bowen*

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A new chapter

Martha Hill is leaving the world of horticulture education after three decades at Hinds Community College. **By Brian Horn**

After spending more than 30 years teaching students about the green industry, Martha Hill is calling it a day. But the chair of the Landscape Management Department at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Mississippi, and 2014 Lawn & Landscape Leadership Award winner says she won't be leaving the industry completely.

After starting Hinds' program from scratch in 1986 and spending countless

hours helping students and promoting the industry as a career to them, Hill will take some down time. Then she'll look for part-time work in the industry and stay active with the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP).

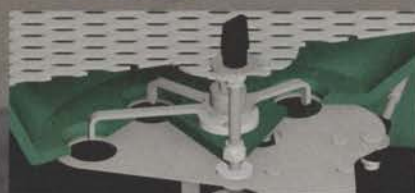
"I'm not going to be sitting on a beach," Hill says. "I'm going to take about a year off. My mother is 95. I need to spend some time with her. I have four nieces and nephews getting married next year and three of them are in the same family,

PHOTO COURTESY OF MARTHA HILL

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so my brother and his wife are pulling their hair out."

L&L caught up with Hill to find out why she is moving on from education, what lessons she's learned and her thoughts on the state of horticulture programs.

Lawn & Landscape: Why did you decide to retire now?

Martha Hill: I know that there is a lot of opportunity in this state for training our industry. I've had quite a few of my colleagues and former students who own companies – they would be interested in hiring me to do training in their business.

I think that would be a great

opportunity because I stay in the loop with education.

Also, I'm looking forward to working with NALP's accreditation teams – visiting teams that go and visit with schools when they want to be accredited.

There are site teams that go into colleges and review curriculum and meet with administrators and advisory committees and faculty and students.

I'm looking forward to doing that with NALP because I've been through accreditation a few times myself.

I know what is involved in it and I assisted with rewriting the accreditation guidelines for NALP along with Randy Wall

and a committee. I still believe in that. I'm still fired up about the landscape industry, not only in Mississippi, but nationally.

We're at such a critical point with a lot of educational programs to grow them, but to also provide what the industry needs as far as employees, so the need is out there. Our phones are ringing off the wall with job opportunities.

L&L: What's been your favorite memory from your career?

MH: I've always said when you have a student that comes in your program that really doesn't understand what the industry is about and what the potential is,

and when they go to conventions and seminars and they start learning what the industry is about and the light bulb comes on.

It's so rewarding. You've made an impact on a student when that happens.

We hosted our first reunion of our graduates and former students this past February and that was a phenomenal event.

Those former students got up at our dinner and talked about the impact that this program has had on them from taking them to places they never would've dreamed of going like to the (National Collegiate Landscape Competition) or the

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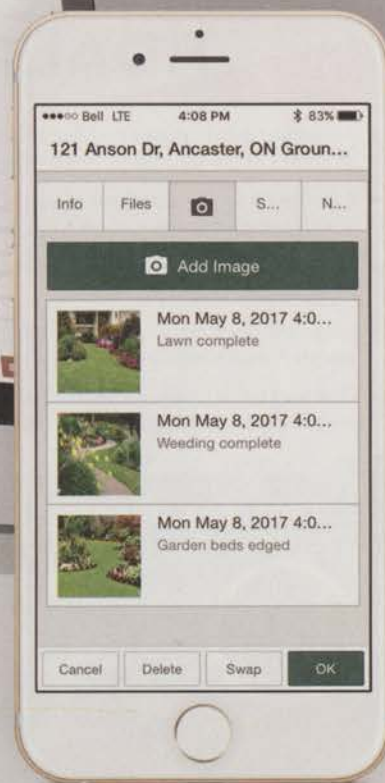
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GIE+EXPO. There was a 65-year-old man who got up at the dinner, an African-American man, and he talked about how he grew up on the plantation and he never dreamed he would get a college education, but again, he never dreamed that he would get to go to Washington, D.C., and stand in front of the White House.

Apparently when we were in the (NCLC) competition one year, we toured D.C. and he got to do that and that just blew his mind. Never in a million years did he dream that he would do that.

L&L: What have you learned from your students?

MH: Sometimes you have to sit back and realize you don't know what happens to that person sitting in your classroom right before they walked into your classroom.

They have lives beyond the classroom and educators sometimes have a hard time remembering that.

But through counseling students through all kinds of issues from marriage problems to work problems to employee problems, financial problems, even abuse and drug and alcohol abuse, you never know what someone goes through before they walk in your classroom.

That's one lesson that I learned early on and to be flexible and to be supportive of those people because sometimes they may not have the support anywhere else.

L&L: What would you have changed or done differently in your career?

MH: I don't know that I could've personally done this. I mean we



**"... YOU NEVER KNOW
WHAT SOMEONE GOES
THROUGH BEFORE THEY WALK
IN YOUR CLASSROOM."**

— Martha Hill, Hinds Community College

tried, but I wish we could've had more options in our department for students like horticulture, golf and sports turf management.

We didn't pursue those when we probably should have and we missed the boat. Not that it's not too late to bring them on now, but I wish we had done that years ago.

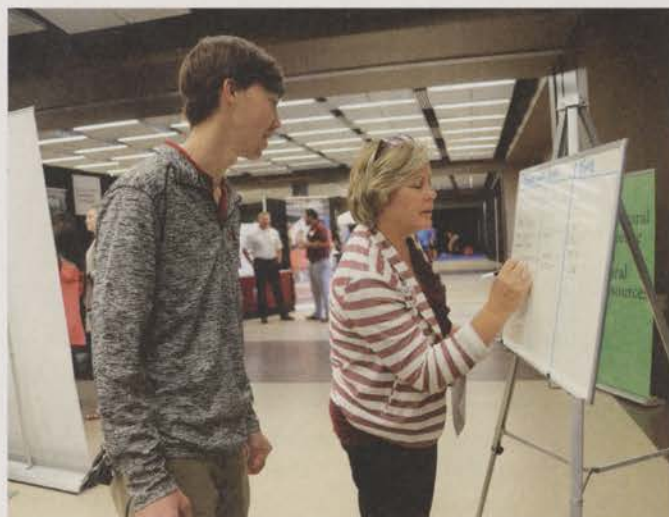
L&L: What would you say about the state of horticulture programs in 2017?

MH: I think it is very bright. I think that we have an oppor-





One of Martha Hill's goals as an educator was to show students that landscaping could be a career and not just a job.



tunity ahead of us to grow the industry.

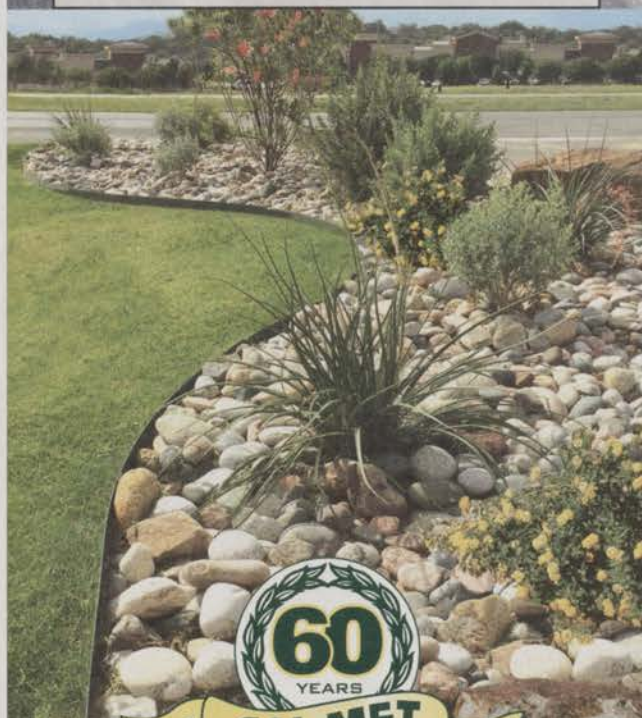
The sky is the limit still and with some concerted efforts from our professional organizations that I'm seeing, I think we've got a lot of potential to grow the industry and find those niches

that we can get students funneled to our programs in education and ultimately to our company.

Not everybody is cut out to be in college or go to school and there's still a place for them in the landscape industry. That's one thing if I had stayed here,

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and I hope that Mississippi will do this, we need to develop a vocational program, a career certificate program for the non-high school graduates to come in and just get some basic knowledge and some life skills and get them out to work.

That could be a one semester 15-hour program where they can maybe even work with an internship or an apprenticeship program.

I think that would be a plus to the educational side and then a plus for the companies that hire those folks as well. I think

we're past the lowest point of that downturn. I think we're coming back. Just in looking at the number of people who have inquired about our program ... and we ask them their top three majors.

When I get that report, my numbers are going up on that report every month, so that's a good sign.

I think that the industry finally stepped up to the plate and we're seeing some changes and some focus finally be put on our industry that are going to help us in education.

SOCIAL MEDIA THE RIGHT WAY

Two industry contractors give some tips on how to use the communication tool to attract employees and clients. **By Brian Horn**

Timothée Sallin was sitting at home one night watching TV and working on his Chromebook when a message popped up via his Facebook Messenger. The message said "Hola." One of his Hispanic workers found him on Facebook and shot him a message.

That one message opened a whole new way for the president of CherryLake, a landscaping company and nursery based in Groveland, Florida, to communicate with his H-2B workers in

the offseason. "We don't issue email addresses to them, but they are all on Facebook," Sallin says. "They are active on it."

Sallin and Rick Orr, owner of APL Lawn Spraying in Tampa, were part of a panel discussion on social media at the annual meeting for the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association.

They were joined by Brandon Richey, superintendent at Lake Nona Golf & Country Club in Orlando and Matt Bruderek



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Orlando City FC head groundskeeper. Orr, who also operates iloveturf.com, says he jumped into the social media world to help the public with lawn care questions they had.

He approaches social media and the website in a similar way to advice he once received: if you want to make money off the internet, then give away something for free.

"The one thing I could give away was information," he says. After people read the articles on his website, "The phone calls that came in weren't 'how much do you charge?' It was, 'I read your website. When can you start spraying my lawn?'"



**"THE PHONE CALLS
THAT CAME IN WEREN'T
'HOW MUCH DO YOU CHARGE?'
IT WAS, 'I READ YOUR WEBSITE,
WHEN CAN YOU START
SPRAYING MY LAWN?'"**

—Rick Orr, APL Lawn Spraying

you start spraying my lawn?" It served as a great customer filter."

Not only have Sallin and his marketing team used social media to develop relationships with his workers, but they've also used it to promote the professionalism of the company.

He wants potential employees to look at his company as more than a landscaping company, so they post photos of strategic meetings and standing desks to showcase that.

"That's made a huge difference," he says. "We have completely changed the profile of the people that come and apply for a job. It's huge."

While Sallin has a marketing team to help him manage social media, Orr is on his own, and that means it's up to him to deal with those who attack him. He's gotten criticism from people who want to remove lawns and replace them with places to grow food.

But Orr must remember that the way he responds to these critics will be seen by everyone. It also sums up the way he approaches all communication online.

"It's social media. Have conversations with people," he says. "No name calling. Be respectful." **L&L**

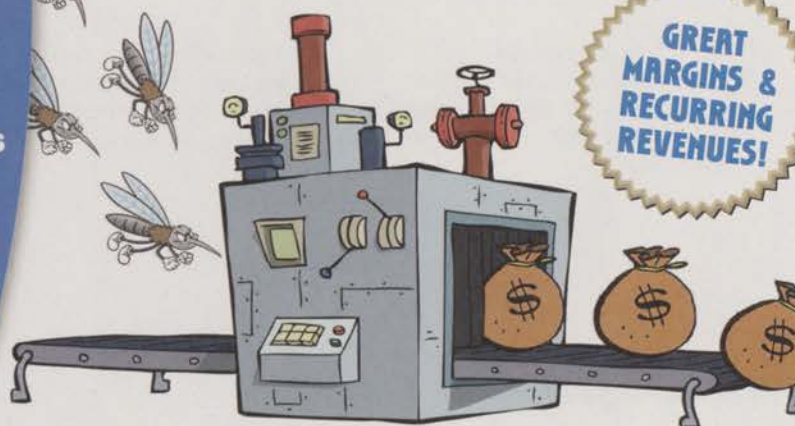


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7 YEARS AND STILL LEARNING |

AFTER HAVING JUST GOTTEN OFF THE PHONE with Jim McCutcheon, CEO of HighGrove Partners in Atlanta, I had some great motivation to write this column. A trained landscape architect by way of the University of Georgia, Jim is also one of the savviest businessmen I know, steering his company to become an acclaimed leader in commercial landscaping services, and demonstrating a dedication to our profession that's as contagious as it is inspiring.

I had called Jim to iron out the final details on a fun educational event the great Frank Mariani and I will be holding ("Frank and Marty's Excellent Adventure") with the National Association of Landscape Professionals at HighGrove in August. As with every conversation I've had with Jim in the seven years since Frank introduced us, I was struck by just how much there is to learn from the man.

Here are some of the most valuable lessons I've come away with:

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO HAVE A STRATEGIC PLAN. You have to maintain a consistent and committed focus on it. I often marvel at the corporate organization Jim has succeeded in bringing to his business, particularly in what can sometimes seem like a fly-by-night field. In



MARTY GRUNDER is a speaker, consultant and author. He owns Grunder Landscaping Co.

the 24 years I've been consulting, I've watched the green industry mature – all for the better. But while I encounter far fewer landscape companies today that don't have a strategic plan than I used to, I don't know many who are as keenly trained on following their plan as Jim's operation is. At HighGrove, their strategic plan is not just a piece of paper in a drawer or a file on a desktop. As Jim puts it, their plan is not something that they do. It is what they do. That's why they have a whole room devoted to it, filled with their key metrics on white-

YOUR BRAND IS ALSO THE RELATIONSHIPS YOU FOSTER WITH YOUR CLIENTS."


boards, where the senior leadership team meets regularly to discuss what Jim calls their Drivers of Success.

EVERYTHING YOU DO, AND EVERY DECISION YOU MAKE, COMMUNICATES YOUR BRAND. In branding, we all know how important it is to get the obvious right? Logo, slogan, color palette, website, signage, letterhead and all the other usual suspects. HighGrove gets these right in spades and recently completed an impressive rebranding. But Jim

will tell you all those items are only part of your brand. Your brand is also the relationships you foster with your clients, the way you treat your team and the culture you instill at and in your company. That's why HighGrove has a customer advisory council, why their sales team has a budget for client events, why the company holds regular town halls for staff and an annual retreat, and why they have a whole team devoted to community service.

LANDSCAPING IS NOT JUST A JOB, IT'S A PROFESSION. If we want the green industry to thrive, we have to continue to elevate landscaping as a profession with its own specialized knowledge, skills and standards, and we have to shape consumer understanding of the value that professionalism brings. Jim is a leading advocate in this effort, having served as a past president of NALP, and now chairing its public affairs advisory council. He donates his time and treasure to education and advocacy on behalf of our profession. If there's an event or cause that will help landscape pros, he jumps right in. And then with his infectious enthusiasm, he turns around and motivates a great many of us to do the same.

YOU CAN BE A GREAT CEO AND A GREAT DAD. Like many of you, I've worked long hours to get where I am and I've struggled at times to balance the demands of my landscaping and consulting businesses with those of being a father. Heck, I still struggle, especially after an exceedingly long day at work when all I really want to do is go home and go to bed but my son has a lacrosse game an hour away. Jim makes all this look easy, leading a team of 250 employees, while always being present for his kids, taking weeks off to spend with them and making sure he's active in their lives. His example is a constant reminder and an inspiration that you can excel at both. **L&L**



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THE GAMBLER

- **I WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE 700-MILE DRIVE** from Idaho Falls, Idaho, to Reno, Nevada. It was mid-April and my four-month winter consulting run was coming to a close. The early spring drive would do me good and allow me to decompress a little.

In between audio books, I listened to Sirius/XM radio and Kenny Rogers' 1978 hit song, "The Gambler" came on. In it, he sings about an aged, veteran gambler offering advice to a young novice. "Every hand's a winner and every hand's a loser," he sings. The key is "knowing what to throw away and knowing what to keep." Hence, "You've got to know when to hold 'em; know when to fold 'em."

Not all benchmarks are created equal. Objective, analytical ones you measure with a calculator. Intuitive ones you measure with your gut. Your profit and loss (P&L) statement provides you with plenty of data that you can analyze. Your psyche or spirit tells you if you're under a lot of stress. It tells you whether you're enjoying your career or not.



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

The intuitive benchmark for all of us to attain is to flourish in all areas of our lives. You don't need a calculator to tell you that you're depressed, lacking hope or despondent. These are first-hand benchmarks. You know them from direct experience.

STRESS ACROSS THE BOARD. A young landscape contractor on the West Coast was overwhelmed. Money was tight. Labor was almost impossible to find. Tension at home with the wife and kids was high. His gut was trying to tell him that he was confused and needed encour-

**“THE INTUITIVE
BENCHMARK FOR ALL
OF US TO ATTAIN IS TO
FLOURISH IN ALL AREAS
OF OUR LIVES.”**

agement and direction.

A mid-life landscape entrepreneur on the East Coast was having trouble wrapping his head around his business. It had always been a struggle but a divorce and a very sick child made things almost impossible. He was overwhelmed and losing hope. His gut was trying to tell him that he needed help for both himself and his son.

A 65-year-old green industry

contractor in the Midwest had done well but a couple of accidents and the stress of a heavy workload were taking their toll. He knew he only had, at most, a couple of years left, if he could hang on. He needed to exit his business but his options were few. His gut was trying to tell him that he needed creative options, and fast.

GO BEYOND THE NUMBERS. The gambler adds that you have to, "Know when to walk away and know when to run." I'm not saying that the three men mentioned above need to walk away from their businesses or run away from their challenges. However, they need to pay attention to not only the analytical indicators (benchmarks) in their businesses, but also the intuitive indicators in their lives. They need to get creative and think outside of the box. See these signs for what they are – indicators of something more.

I've worked with thousands of green industry entrepreneurs these last 30 years. The ones who flourish learn to use not only the analytical data in their businesses but they also learn how to pay attention to their intuitive data, so to speak. They monitor both their critical numbers and their gut.

Every green industry business can be a winner. And every green industry business can be a loser. It's how you play the hand that you're dealt that's important.

If you seek out advice from wise counselors throughout the green industry and pay attention to both your internal and external benchmarks, the chances that you and your business will be winners will be greatly enhanced.

However, if you refuse to learn and refuse to pay attention to the indicators all around you, your chances of being successful will be significantly diminished. And that's a gamble you can't afford to take. **L&L**

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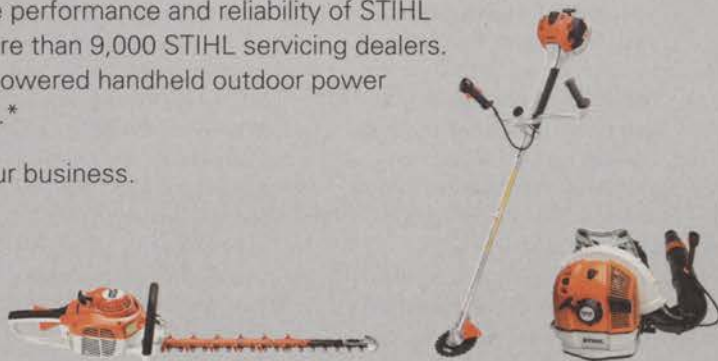
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MINDSET MATTERS

- **AT A TIME WHEN WORK IS PLENTIFUL** and there are more job openings than people to fill them, it's no surprise to anyone running a landscape company today that solving HR challenges is our industry's biggest box to think out of.

For many companies, the disparity between demand and supply, and H-2B issues in particular, have been devastating.

Most of us easily acknowledge that hiring and training are critical components to running an effective business.

But despite our best intentions, the labor shortage has left some of us feeling vulnerable.

Having just completed the first round of peer group meetings for 2017 (seven groups and 40 companies representing nearly 80 leaders among them), one unifying takeaway from this sample has emerged: In each successful company, when faced with disruptive challenges such as these, there is a unifying consensus about mindset.

I have observed that common to each leader is an unrelenting focus



BRUCE WILSON is principal of green industry consulting firm Bruce Wilson & Company.

on the big picture, a view of problem-solving as a continuous journey and the ability to run their company with a positive vibe instead of one full of frustration and negativity.

If our most important job as owners is to inspire and create a better future for our companies, then liberating our thinking is the first step to leading change.

In my experience, personality and leadership styles may differ, but all the high-performing CEOs I know share an ability to withstand adversity and have a fearless sense of urgency about making their companies more meaningful.

“MOST OF US ACKNOWLEDGE THAT HIRING AND TRAINING ARE CRITICAL COMPONENTS TO RUNNING AN EFFECTIVE BUSINESS.”

THE OPERATION-CENTRIC CEO: This owner views his business from the inside out.

He's thinking about how well the gears turn, how to produce more with less, raising rates of pay to attract a different pool of employees, and encouraging his entire work team to be on-the-ground recruiters, bringing in friends and family.

This CEO will solve the workforce problem through improved functionality, championing people pipeline

development, professional training and building well-lubricated systems and processes that sustain careers.

THE BOTTOM LINE CEO: This owner is constantly fine-tuning risk and profitability. He grows what's working, eliminates what's not, aligns operations to sales, gives sales an operational mindset and devises pricing strategies to quickly recover higher labor costs. This CEO sees value from outside consultants, relying on data, professional recruiters and cost/benefit analyses to solve problems.

THE TECHNOLOGY CEO: These execs know there's an app for that. They find digital opportunities for every idea and find new ways of improving upon old things. They are proud of going paperless.

They use social channels to expand their message and recruiting reach. They use automated, remote and wireless technologies to streamline operations, proposal and administrative processes.

They set up customer portals and vendor management systems, implemented green/cost effective materials and file sharing to simplify management of the field and produce more value for customers.

THE GREAT BAMBINO. Like Babe Ruth said about baseball, “Yesterday's home runs don't win today's games.” Highly effective CEOs already know this. If the demand for high-quality employees with skills and experience will continue to grow, then creating a culture focused on positive outcomes will make it easier to hire and retain employees who believe they are part of a bright future.

When CEOs lead with a growth mindset, the enthusiasm is contagious. Everyone in the company knows what winning looks like and why it's important to have a collective commitment to success. **L&L**

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TAKE OFF THE TRAINING WHEELS



AT WEED MAN, we use the management circle (empower, verify, follow up, adjust) to demonstrate how we approach the day-to-day organization of our business. This management style places emphasis on individual performance and focuses on training our employees to be their absolute best. Here's how it works:

EMPOWER. After training our employees, we grant them the trust to go out and perform their responsibilities.

Employee empowerment means allowing members of your team to act autonomously in their work and make decisions on their own. This level of trust ultimately fosters honest leadership, open communication and employee job satisfaction.

For all intents and purposes, empowerment is the direct opposite of micromanagement. It is not, as many mistakenly believe, the practice of relinquishing all managerial power.

It involves trusting your employees so that they feel confident and empowered enough to perform to the best of their abilities. Employee empowerment goes hand in hand with overall job satisfaction. It will prompt members of your team to take action, make decisions and work toward a common goal.



JEN LEMCKE
is chief operating
officer for Weed
Man, USA.

VERIFY. We trust our employees by empowering them to do their jobs. We also verify their work through measurement and quality control.

Verifying involves "checking in" to confirm projects are being completed, and, more importantly, being completed well. How often you verify an employee's work is completely up to you, and likely depends on your level of trust in an individual's abilities. Even if you encourage relative autonomy, you'll want to assess work quality on occasion to ensure it meets or exceeds your standards. Not only will verification keep employees on point and eager to perform, it also gives added peace of mind when it comes to work flow and deliverables.

FOLLOW UP. It is essential that you follow up with employees on a regular basis to ensure clarity and continued success. Following up involves communicating with staff members in order to assess performance and confirm satisfaction from both the manager and employee(s).

Following up with employees has many benefits:

- It helps ensure that the new skills and knowledge an employee acquired during training are being properly applied to the job in question.
- It provides your employees with the opportunity to speak openly about the challenges and successes they face within their daily tasks (this is particularly crucial during an employee's first weeks and months on a job).
- It allows you to stay on top of company progress as employees grow and develop within their roles.

- It highlights learning gaps and areas for improvement, enabling you to rearrange initial training or provide employees with additional resources/support.
- It demonstrates your dedication to employee success.
- It shows your employees that their performance plays an active role in the inner workings of your company.

ADJUST. The next crucial step in the management circle is adjusting. Adjusting involves taking action in regards to any employee knowledge gaps or deficiencies in your training methods. More simply, it means changing anything that isn't consistently working or giving you the results you need to succeed.

Take a step back. When following up with an employee, you may discover gaps in your training methods or the employee in question has a more innovative way of doing things. This is where adjusting plays a key role. It's important you take what you learned in your follow-up and implement positive changes within your company's infrastructure.

Although this may seem like a big project to take on, keeping things as they are will simply perpetuate poor results. Don't be afraid to adjust your methods to close any gaps and/or revamp the training programs you already have in place.

We've approached the management circle in stages, but each component is by no means exclusive. They all go hand in hand and rely on one another for success. Integrating this circular process within your place of work will not only make you a better manager, but will also help your employees perform to the best of their abilities. **L&L**

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TINA CZYSZ HELPED

HEAL THE TEAM

AT GREENSCAPE

AFTER A FATAL

TRUCK ACCIDENT.

the calm in the **CHAOS**

Story by **Brian Horn** | Photos by **Courtney Potter**



When Tina Czysz
heard the tone
of her project
manager's
voice, she knew
something was
WRONG.

One of Greenscape's project managers was on the other end of a phone call she received as she sat down at her desk to start her day at 7 a.m. on March 30, 2016.

"He was in panic mode," says Czysz (pronounced Chez.) "He was somewhat in shock because he had received the phone call from one of the employees that was in the vehicle."

The employee was in a truck carrying four other Greenscape employees that had been in a violent accident on the way to a job. At the time of the call, the details were sketchy and there was the possibility that an employee had died in the wreck. Czysz told the project manager to meet her in front of the office so they could go to the scene together.

"Instinctually, I was already up and grabbing my coat and going out the front door while I was on the phone with him," she says.

As the human resources director, it was part of Czysz's job to be the lead on a situation like this, except this isn't a situation you wake up in the morning anticipating.



“
THERE WERE
PEOPLE HOLDING
ME BACK AND,
OF COURSE, I'D
NEVER INTERFERE
WITH EMS AND
STUFF LIKE THAT,
BUT I JUST WENT
RUNNING TO
THE CLIFF AND
I REALLY THINK
MY BODY WASN'T
GOING TO STOP.”



EOY CONTEST

Lawn & Landscape collected almost 50 entries in February and March for this contest. Many of the nominations were compelling but these five were the best.

If you have someone in mind for the contest, we will again be collecting nominations early next year, so make a note to send them to Managing Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.

When they arrived at the scene, it looked like something out of an action movie – fire trucks, ambulances, police officers, flashing lights and sirens were everywhere.

According to media reports, Greenscape's truck was travelling on N.C. 540 when it veered off into the median, hit a bridge railing and went off a steep incline, landing in a creek. The truck was engulfed in flames. (*Editor's note:* The accident is still under investigation and Greenscape can't release the current status of those involved.)

"There was a couple of us there who were on scene who I think probably spent the majority of time just basically trying to process it," says Daniel Curran, Greenscape president and CEO. "She was immediately in action, communicating with the officers on the scene, getting the information they needed, finding out about medical stuff and getting that information to the EMTs who were taking guys to the hospital."

ASSESS THE SITUATION. Czysz's first instinct was to run down, jump in the truck and save them.

"There were people holding me back," she says. "And, of course, I'd never interfere with EMS and stuff like that, but I just went running to the cliff and I really think my body wasn't going to stop. It was just going to run down the cliff and be able to hold their hand, make eye contact with them, hear their voice, just see them."

But her superhero instincts had to be suppressed because she first needed to do some real world human resource work. After speaking with police, it was confirmed that one employee was killed in the accident while the four others were severely injured.

Czysz had the emergency contact information for the employees and would have to notify the families of the accident and focus on the support the families of the injured would need.

"I have to deliver the news and the person on the other end suddenly is in panic mode because I cannot reassure them that they're going to be OK," she says. "I'm not a doctor and I can only deliver the news and then assist in the ability to make sure that the support system is there."

After she left the scene and was driven to the hospital, Czysz started calling the five families.

As difficult as it may be, Czysz says when you have to deliver news like she did, you can't operate emotionally.

"Work the hardest you can to not operate in the emotional side when you're delivering the news," she says. "Be empathetic but not emotionally driven. The more grounded you can stay with empathy, the better purpose it serves because it's not an easy task. And that's exactly what I did."

"And then also knowing your place. Sometimes in these situations, with your best intentions, you want to offer support, and it truly is about gauging what those individuals need because there are times, not in this particular time, but there are times when this type of situation poses a defense mechanism in individuals, and you become the blame."

"It's very important to always be one step ahead in gauging what those individuals need, not to overcompensate, but also not to undercompensate."

That night, Czysz didn't sleep. She had to focus on how the company would move forward.

Except, while everyone was reeling from the tragedy, Czysz had to turn her attention back to a business problem the company was already scrambling to solve when the accident happened. The 25 H-2B workers expected to arrive in April were delayed and the company had no details on when they'd arrive.

WORK, BUT NO WORKERS. The accident had left an emotional scar on everyone at the company, but as callous as it may sound, it also left them with five fewer employees at the start of the season.

That's in addition to the news the company received a few weeks prior: that Greenscape would not be receiving its 25 H-2B workers as planned on April 1. And the company had no idea when they would even land in North Carolina.

With the emotions from the accident still fresh in her mind, Czysz had to continue to focus on filling the 30 positions to keep customers happy.

Fortunately, she had hit the ground running when they got word a few weeks prior to the accident that the workers would not be showing up on time, so at least there was a foundation in place to finding workers.

"I ran as many blanket ads as I could," she says of the work she did before the accident. "Came in early, stayed late, worked weekends to capture as much of the labor force as I could on their



terms, running more bigger, structured, open-type interviews and just extending the courtesy of whatever it took to get it done to bring people in here.”

She also reached out to local resources like the Jobs for Life program, Step-up Ministries, Durham Rescue Mission – “all the partners, as I like to call them, that help mentor and foster development in individuals who are seeking the opportunity to better themselves to get gainful employment,” she says.

Once she got people in for an interview, she had to take advantage of anyone in the company who could help with interviews and empower them to make decisions on hiring.

“It’s coaching and helping make sure they have the right interview questions and they’re

THE RIGHT TONE

Czysz had to balance keeping her emotions in check and showing empathy when notifying the families of her co-workers about the vehicle accident.

gauging employees for the right fits of what we’re trying to bring on here as team members, teaching them the sides of interviewing that are just technically but culturally important,” she says.

She went over what you can and can’t ask, what you should ask and what you should be looking for. But most importantly, she taught them to drive home how physical the job is and that there may not be a scheduled end time every day.

“It’s really trying to find the individuals who are passionate for that outdoor work and who are aesthetically driven by the results that they see because that has to outweigh the fact that I’m getting a paycheck every Friday,” she says.

“Otherwise, the first time they miss dinner



“I’M NOT A DOCTOR AND I CAN ONLY DELIVER THE NEWS AND THEN ASSIST IN THE ABILITY TO MAKE SURE THAT THE SUPPORT SYSTEM IS THERE.





or the first time they can't go hang out with their friends at 6 like they used to do, it becomes burdensome."

HANDLING GRIEF. The training and recruiting she did before the accident provided a foundation for the managers. She had 25 workers lined up to be trained, which she would have to leave to the managers to do.

For the next two weeks, Czynsz would only focus on the accident, spending time in the hospital rooms and homes of the employees involved in the crash, arranging phone and Facetime calls between them and co-workers, and keeping the Greenscape team updated on the status of the injured employees. She also expressed the company's gratitude to the first responders and put them in touch with the victims.

"(I made) sure that updates were delivered in the very beginning obviously on a daily basis and then once things started to level out a little bit, on a weekly basis and so on. And to this day, I still give updates on a monthly basis," she says.

Keith Updyke, Holly Springs branch manager, says he and others at Greenscape asked her throughout the process what she needed, but were careful not to jump in and try and take over. Rather, they let her know they were available to help and let her facilitate from there.

"I feel like, over time, she certainly became worn down from the emotional aspect of dealing with this for so long" he says. "Someone who repeatedly puts themselves in that situation with employees that are seriously injured and families that are

uncertain about what's going on. They are all very emotional and she was in the middle of that from day one. All we could do is offer our support to her."

Though she did bring grief counselors into the building and offered prayer time, Czynsz also made herself available to workers.

"I'm not a professional grief counselor, but I certainly can offer perspective on things and help people feel when they just want to get it out," she says. "I offer a sounding board and I offer a no-judgment policy when you speak to me as an individual."

Some employees just wanted to know the details.

"I would say it's a 75/25 ratio; 75 percent just need to be able to process it and they need help doing that," she says. "And then there's 25 percent that actually want you to give them the

details and help them because it helps their mind stop wondering how did it happen, what did it look like.

"So, they needed those pieces to be able to gain some closure to it. So that's always a good tool to let those individuals know that that's available to them."

SETTLING DOWN. Czynsz is still working through aspects of the accident, along with updating current employees on the status of the survivors.

Eventually the H-2B workers arrived at the end of June and early July. Of the 30 positions, Greenscape was able to fill about 80 percent with domestic workers, and Czynsz says about 100 people cycled through those 30 positions.

"Tina, more than anybody, understands what our business

does and whether H-2B fails, she didn't say 'Well, I did my part.' She understands that these trucks have to roll and we need people to do this work."

Through both challenges, Czynsz says the simple acknowledgement from other Greenscape employees that they could help went a long way in keeping her from being overwhelmed. "Believe it or not, that may not sound like much, but it really is," she says.

Curran says the accident was the most overwhelming leadership experience he's ever seen, and one he couldn't imagine getting through without Czynsz's help.

"There was no job description for what Tina did," he says. "She was the reason we got through it, specifically as gracefully as we did." **L&L**

NOT ALONE

Czynsz, pictured here with branch manager Keith Updyke, left, and Jason Buehring, Director of Assets & Purchasing, relied on the leadership team to help with the H-2B problem while she focused on all aspects on the accident.



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“You can go so much further than what your brain tells yourself, and that was one of the best experiences I had in the military. We, as people, are 10 times stronger than what we think of ourselves.”

Jacob Adams,
Oasis Turf & Tree



THE DISCOMFORT ZONE

The more Jacob Adams feels out of place, the better he performs.

By Katie Tuttle

When an elementary school father-daughter dance made Jacob Adams' nerves skyrocket,

he pushed them aside. While all but one other dad acted like a group of middle school wallflowers, Adams decided to break away from the crowd and joined his daughter on the dance floor as the DJ played Taylor Swift's "Shake It Off."

Being out of your comfort zone is a familiar situation for Adams, a turf and tree team leader at Oasis Turf & Tree in Loveland, Ohio. In fact, he tries his hardest to put himself there.

"I have learned what's uncomfortable for most people is comfortable to me," he says. "Most of me is like, 'Yeah let's do this. I'll figure it out and jump in feet first.'"

Adams spent five years in the military, enlisting in the Army in 2005 as part of the 101st Airborne Division out of Fort Campbell on the Kentucky-Tennessee border.

"(The military) gave me discipline, integrity, pride," he says. "To really take pride in what you do and do a good job and to put your name on it."

"He goes above and beyond what is expected from (him)," says Angie Bradley, director of operations for Oasis. "If there's something else that needs to be done, he'll jump in and do it. ... You don't find that too often in many people. You don't find that character."





JACOB ADAMS

Oasis Turf & Tree



GOING FULL TIME. Adams left the military in 2010 and struggled to find steady work. Trying a stint at a temp agency, he grew frustrated with bouncing between jobs and getting laid off repeatedly. He decided it was time to try something new.

His sister and her husband, who worked at Oasis, suggested the company hire him, and he was brought on in November as a seasonal aeration technician.

Since he'd only be working a half-season before being laid off for the winter, Adams was a little worried about paying bills and providing for his kids. Still, he decided to give it a shot, something he knew right away

was the right decision.

"Coming in and working the half-season, I could tell right away this was something I wanted to be a part of," he says, citing the up-to-date equipment and the family feel of the company.

The team at Oasis was equally impressed by him.

"Just something about him and his personality, and just how he presents himself, you could just tell immediately there was going to be something special about this man," Bradley says.

NO REST IN THE OFF SEASON.

When the moment Adams worried about came, he knew he wanted to return the follow-

ing season. During the winter, he studied to become a certified lawn technician, and was hired full time for 2013 in that role.

Bradley says when Adams came back as a lawn technician, he showed that hunger for learning.

"Out of my career, I don't think I've seen anyone take to the industry that way, especially someone from outside the industry," she says.

For Adams, the pushing not only feeds him, it also helps him get out of his comfort zone, something he learned from the military.

"You can go so much further than what your brain tells your-

self and that was one of the best experiences I had in the military," he says. "We, as people, are 10 times stronger than what we think of ourselves. I think that's something that helps me excel at Oasis because I take pride in the tough jobs, the hard jobs, the uncomfortable ones."

THE LEARNING PATH. After trying his hand at lawn applications, Adams studied tree care.

When one of the company's tree guys didn't work out, Adams was offered the job as a part-time role.

"Unless you've had background in it, (tree care) intimidates a lot of people," Bradley says.

When Bradley offered the job,

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JACOB ADAMS

Oasis Turf & Tree

she says Adams briefly looked like a deer in headlights before telling her he was interested.

"I was a little skeptical at first about doing the tree care," Adams says. "She challenged me in a way by asking me (to do the job)."

Adams says he prefers tree care. Lawn care, he says, can be mastered in a year or two, but every day there's something new about trees.

"Tree care, I've been doing it two years now and I probably know 30 percent," he says. "To some people it's scary, but to me it's fun. The more I get to learn, the more I know."

The fear is what makes Adams the type of person to dive in.

"I tell myself I've seen and been through a lot overseas," he says. "It's just learning that when we feel scared and when we feel timid, some people back away and some people push forward."

ABOVE AND BEYOND. According to Rob Reindl, president and owner of the company, Adams' achievements extend beyond the knowledge he's gained.

"He's someone we can send out to meet with customers," Reindl says.

"It takes a certain demeanor to put up with a customer that's screaming and yelling in your face and calmly explain to them the situation. Those types of

things occur on a regular basis, and he's been the person who will work with those customers in those situations."

Bradley says one day she decided to secretly observe the technicians, and saw Adams dealing with a situation he didn't have to.

"We had just recently had some storms come through and (the clients) were out trying to trim broken branches," she says.

"It's not what he was there to do but I saw him going in the garage, come out with some trimmers, and he was out there because they were struggling with these branches and he went out there, trimmed them down, took care of them and put them where

they needed to go." It's that attitude that makes Adams valuable not only outside the office, but inside as well.

"At the end of the day, you're usually tired," Reindl says. "He walks through the office with a smile. He's always engaging, he's always saying hello to people. His enthusiasm is very contagious."

Adams continues to push himself, and this year he's hoping to become a National Association of Landscape Professionals Lawn Care Technician and an NALP Horticulture Technician.

"He just continuously, season after season, sets goals for himself and takes advantage of every opportunity," Bradley says. **L&L**

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VICTOR PARRALES

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NO JOB **TOO BIG** (OR SMALL)

Victor Parrales went from cleaning up after jobs to temporarily running Professional Grounds when owner Bill Trimmer had a health scare.

By Brian Horn

VICTOR PARRALES

once managed an accounting department of 35 people, but at Professional Grounds, he was working with a wheelbarrow and a broom sweeping curbs. That was on top of working at a car wash and as a dishwasher.

For some, those jobs would be viewed as a step down – a job not worthy of someone coming from the white-collar world.

But Parrales, now vice president of operations, had the complete opposite approach the day he was handed that broom

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JUST LIKE DAD

"They bend over backward for him," says Jon Zalewski, business development manager. "You don't want to let him down. He's like your dad."

and shown the wheelbarrow.

"I'm going to grow my position," he says. "I know I am going to grow with this company. With effort, I am going to show them I am the best employee they could ever hire."

Parrales arrived in the U.S. in 1985 at the age of 37. He had a management job at a bank in Nicaragua but left the country for a better life in the United States.

He and his family chose Virginia because they had family in the area. While he was working as a dishwasher, Professional Grounds came to do the landscaping and he inquired if they were hiring.

He was hired by Professional Grounds and immediately the company's owner, Bill Trimmer, who was on a crew with Parrales, saw his potential.

"He expects certain things from people and if he doesn't get that, the employee will know about it so he can know what he needs to work on to reach those goals," Trimmer says.

"You can start the conversation out by saying 'You know what Jim, I have a bone to pick with you.' Or you can say, 'Jim, I have a problem and I think you can help me with.' He has that second approach and is very good at it."

CLIMBING THE LADDER. When Parrales showed up for his first day of work, he didn't speak English, but that didn't affect the way Trimmer viewed him.

Trimmer was so impressed with his work ethic the company paid for his English lessons.

After a few months of cleaning up after jobs, Parrales was moved up to a mowing crew.

“

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CHALLENGES,
YOU WILL NEVER
LEARN AND YOU
WILL NEVER
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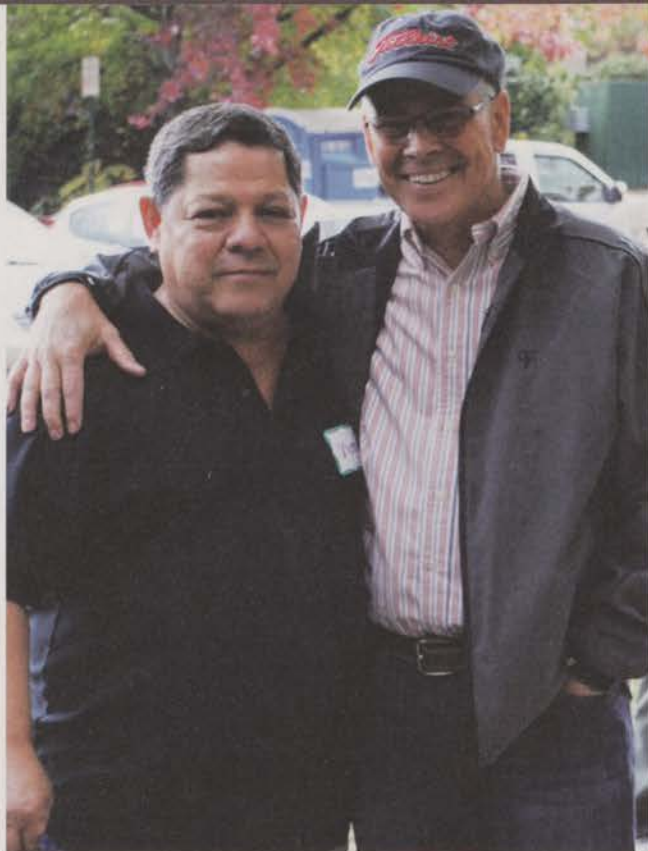
VICTOR PARRALES,
VICE PRESIDENT
OF OPERATIONS

There, he would make suggestions on how crews could mow faster, and would time himself on each lawn.

"I was trying to own each job," Parrales says. "I always try to take the lead."

In 1987, the company sponsored his U.S. citizenship application, and in the early 1990s, he was named head of the commercial maintenance division. Trimmer says what shot Parrales up the company ladder was the ability to look for the positive in every situation.

"He's a coach and a mentor," Trimmer says. "He looks for a positive out of everything. If there is a negative out there that



Bill Trimmer, right, trusted Parrales to lead the company while Trimmer had to receive cancer treatment in Sarasota, Florida, for two months.

VICTOR PARRALES

Professional Grounds

happened, he's going to turn it into a positive. That's just the way he works."

YOU'RE IN CHARGE. If words aren't enough to illustrate Trimmer's appreciation for Parrales, let actions do the talking. In 2007, Trimmer was diagnosed with aggressive prostate cancer. He would have to stay in Sarasota, Florida, for two months while receiving treatment. Trimmer was a self-described "hands-on owner" then, so the transition was going to be difficult.

"For me, even to take a week off – it was a big deal for me to be away from the company that long," he says.



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VICTOR PARRALES
Professional Grounds



Trimmer chose Parrales to lead the company in his absence because of the respect all the employees had for him. "He held that together until I got back," Trimmer says.

Parrales says he approached the situation as if he owned the company, and made decisions as such.

"It wasn't easy," Parrales says. "We had bumps and bruises but we got it done and our customers were pleased with my performance."

Trimmer says the cancer diagnosis ended up being a blessing in disguise because he saw the company could run without him.

"Because Victor did such a wonderful job here, I was able to get away," he says. "I started taking more vacations."

DAVID VS. GOLIATH. Parrales' actions during a snow event in 2016 would only re-enforce his worth to the company.

When weather forecasts started to show record-breaking snow on the way, Parrales began to prepare his team for the worst.

He organized a pre-storm pep rally where he motivated the team and told them they were David and the storm was Goliath.

Along with pumping them up for the long night ahead, he also unveiled a plan to give them the best chance to handle the storm.

He provided bagged food and reserved rooms at hotels next to key interstates to ensure access to properties while the roads were almost impassable.

He also rented additional equipment, including vehicles to shuttle drivers back and forth from the hotel to plow trucks instead of plow trucks going back and forth to the office.

While workers were out plowing, Parrales was at the company's headquarters where he worked, slept and ate for four consecutive days.

"Since everyone knew the plan a few days prior to the storm there were no surprises and everyone was able to make arrangements with family situations since it was an all hands-on deck situation," he says.

Professional Grounds dealt with the storm so well the company was able to help out a number of HOAs and commercial property owners whose contractors abandoned them.

The very detailed plan Parrales used was key in the company's success in handling the storm, but it was his leadership that made employees buy in to it.

"They bend over backward for him," says Jon Zalewski, business development manager. "You don't want to let him down. He's like your dad."

Zalewski works with Parrales every day, and views Parrales as his boss, even though he isn't.

"He is in charge of so much at the company. He literally is the reason we succeed or fail every year," Zalewski says. "Thankfully, we don't fail. He's got a lot on his plate and handles it with an extremely positive attitude."

Whether it's a record breaking-snow storm, or some grass that needs to be swept off a sidewalk, Parrales is going to treat it like it's the most important job in the world.

"If you don't take challenges, you will never learn and you will never raise the bar," Parrales says. "Take challenges, take responsibilities and have a lot of passion." **L&L**



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LISA ANDERSON

Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists



Lisa Anderson came into Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists with a mission and she has no plans to stop.

SMART SALES

Lisa Anderson and Sales Associate Steve Hess work together to provide no-pressure service to their clients.

RUN, DON'T WALK

By Kate Spirgen

LISA ANDERSON ISN'T AN OWNER AT COUNTRY CLUB LAWN & TREE SPECIALISTS, BUT YOU'D NEVER KNOW IT IF YOU'VE SEEN HER AT WORK.

In the nine years since Anderson joined the team, she has worked tirelessly to build relationships, meet with clients, market the business and grow the customer base, more than tripling it from 1,734 to 5,400 – a number she knows off the top of her head.

Anderson, sales and marketing manager of the South Roxana, Illinois, company, says she's frequently asked if she's an owner or one of their wives when she's out on the job, but she says she's just an employee who gets a paycheck.

"But I take ownership in this company because for me, not only do we have sales

goals every single month, but I've watched this company grow over the years and it's rewarding in that aspect. But it's rewarding in so many ways for me in that I've built so many friendships," she says.

DOWN TO BUSINESS. In 2008, budget cuts at Walgreens left Anderson with the option to take a lower level position or move on. So she made the difficult decision to move on from her job.

At the same time, Mark Black and Matt Brooks, owners of Country Club, were pulling the trigger on creating a sales manager position. Black and Anderson

had been friends for decades, and when he heard about Anderson's situation, he brought her in for an interview.

"Ever since day one, she hit the ground not walking, but hit the ground running," Black says.

Black and Brooks were trying to manage the business, make sales, handle marketing and everything else a small business owner does. But when they brought on Anderson, they could focus on the big picture.

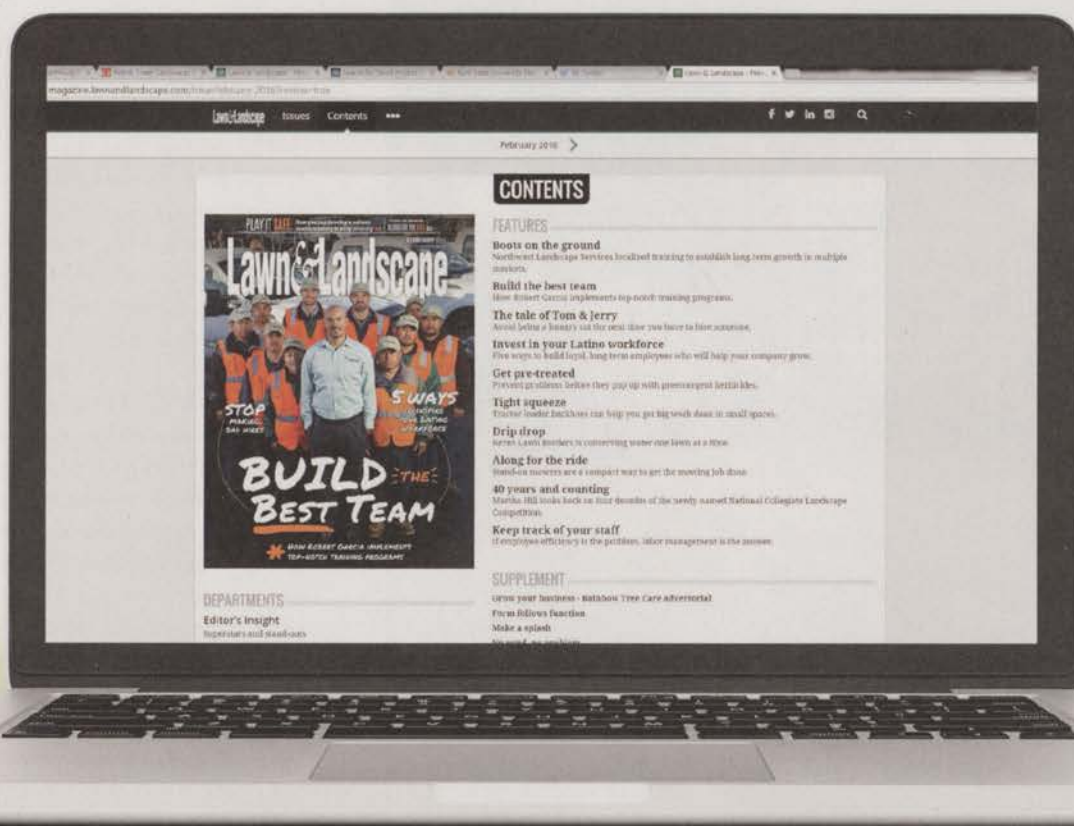
"It allows me to manage my business," Black says. "The farthest thing from my mind I have to worry about now is sales and marketing. Period."

And Anderson has no plans to stop anytime soon. Two years ago, she set the 5,000-customer goal and now that she

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Lawn & Landscape



and her team have passed that, she wants to get to 6,500 by 2020.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS. Anderson set up the sales and marketing structure of Coun-

try Club and has since hired an additional salesperson. And she's looking for another to keep up with the company's growth. But even though the company is growing by about a route a year, the personal touch is still there.



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LISA ANDERSON

Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists



She makes sure that someone from the sales team walks every single lawn, and she really knows her stuff. Coming into the industry knowing nothing about lawn care, she's now impressing customers with her know-how.

"Her drive makes her not want to stop until she's mastered something 100 percent," Black says. "That's why anytime a cancel comes through or anytime something happens, she takes it personally. That's a quality you can't find in everybody."

Ken Lickenbrock, a Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists customer, says that's what impressed him when he met her eight years ago. He was having some trouble with his lawn care provider and when he switched to Country Club, he could immediately tell the difference.

Anderson walked the lawn with him, explained how the service would work and followed up with him to make sure everything was going well. And whenever he calls her with a question, she's ready to do whatever she can to help.

For example, when he called with concerns about his neighbor's clover creeping onto his lawn, the company came right out to spray. Lickenbrock, a financial advisor, now refers his clients to Anderson with glowing reviews.

"She's just a real positive for the industry that's so overrun with so many people that are Chuck-with-a-truck kind of guys," he says.

That customer service is important since 33 percent of the company's business comes from referrals. And about 12 percent of business each year comes from referrals from other contractors who offer different services.

And even though she's a "workaholic," as Lickenbrock says, Anderson still finds time to make it to every one of her 13-year-old son Alex's football and baseball games, and gets out on the Harley with her husband Dan.

But Anderson loves her job and says she can't imagine doing anything else. Even though it's not a typical 9 to 5 and the hours are long, she doesn't want to be anywhere else.

"You couldn't find a better job than you come to work in khakis and a polo and tennis shoes and you're in the outdoors all day long," she says. **L&L**

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CUT OUT FOR THE **GREEN INDUSTRY**

Having a general manager like Justin Green has allowed 360 to grow like never before.

By Kate Spirgen

Working at 360 was supposed to be a temporary gig for Justin Green, but once he got started, he couldn't stop.

Green had been in lawn care and landscaping since his teenage years, but he was pursuing a career in corporate sales when he started working with his longtime friend Brandon Guffey at his Charlotte, North Carolina-area company.

Green came on in January of 2016 to help organize and clean up operations, starting in lawn care. He quickly moved to take over other divisions and eventually became general manager. And after turning down two corporate job offers, he says he can't see himself doing anything else.

"Over there, I would just be one of many and here I'm kind of one of somebody," he says. "Over there, you would cap out and my future here is as bright as I want it to be."

Consistently working 50 to 65 hours a week, Green has been blowing past his sales goals and growing the business from

\$421,000 in 2015 to \$1.3 million by the end of 2016. "I think most of it's Justin," Guffey says of the growth. "I think it's him portraying the confidence to the customers and with his leadership of the crewmembers. It's not anything I was ever able to do."

Since Green got started, the company has added an irrigation division and the pair wants to keep growing. While 360 had tried to add irrigation in the past, it wasn't successful since they didn't have enough jobs lined up to pay for a dedicated crew.

But once Green started upselling irrigation to the company's existing customers, it really took off. Now, it's one of the biggest divisions. His years of experience have given him a solid knowledge of everything from sod to chemical applications to landscaping, and he's using that, plus his employees' strengths, to grow the company.

"So, we grew very fast here and it's like OK, we got lawn care, now let's focus on landscaping and then we did the landscaping," Green says. "Then a hardscape guy



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came on board and I said, 'Hey, let's branch out and start doing hardscaping. So, whoever came to the door, if that was their expertise, then we kind of just said let's go ahead and do it.'

A LIFETIME OF FRIENDSHIP

Green, left, and Guffey have known each other since childhood, when they lived in the same apartment complex and have been the best of friends for years.

PEOPLE PERSON. "I'll work sunup to sundown – that's pretty much every day. But it's because I enjoy it. It's not because I have to," Green says.

He loves the people and he loves the quality of the work he and his crews are able to produce. He says the reviews are one of the best parts of the jobs, and his guys aren't satisfied with anything less than five stars. If a four-star review comes in, they're immediately on the phone with the client asking how they can fix any issues and make the property a five-star job.

"Justin's one of those guys that will ride you all day long and the guys listen to him and respect him and know when he means business," Guffey says.

It's a top-down approach to customer service that makes it work, Green says. He strives for the best and he's instilled that in the foremen, who push it out to the crew leaders, who make sure crewmembers know the expectations.

"I'm always wanting laborers to know you're not just a laborer. If you work hard and you've got what it takes, you can step up and be another key piece," Green says.

But finding the right people is the most difficult piece of the puzzle for 360. That's why Green doesn't look for the candidate with the most industry knowledge or the best resume; he looks for someone who will work hard and dedicate themselves to the job.

"You want somebody that's goal-oriented and you want somebody that wants to move up, not somebody that wants to be a laborer," he says. "You want somebody that's going to say, 'Hey

As the company grew, Green instituted practices to make the crews look more professional, like putting logos on all of the trucks, making crewmembers tuck in their shirts on the job and banning any hats that don't have the 360 name on them.



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man, what does it take for me to be a crew leader?' And they're out there. They're just a little harder to find."

During the interview process, he makes sure to pay attention to how candidates carry themselves and the particular words they use during the interview. He also does a test to make sure a candidate can actually perform the task they say they can. And he makes sure to follow up with crew leaders to make sure the employee is a good fit who can keep up the 360 standard of work.

ON THE SAME PAGE. Guffey and Green have known each other since childhood and have been

best friends since elementary school. They met growing up in the same apartment complex and have spent years hanging out at each other's houses.

"He's always looked out for me. I mean he's got a huge heart and he's an awesome dude," Green says of Guffey.

Green loves his freedom, and Guffey has no problem handing over the reins so that he can focus on the business. Green sets his own hours and his own wages and for the last year and a half, so Guffey hasn't had to worry about production.

"I was the one wearing all the hats, trying to manage all the divisions," Guffey says. "I was

the general manger but I was also the company owner. So whenever Justin came in, I was able to step back and focus more on the business side of things and let him run the crews."

While Green handles the sales, production and management side, Guffey is working on marketing and advertising, so the two can make sure that they're growing and ensuring quality work.

But they still bounce ideas off each other and come to each other with any problems. "Anytime there's a big decision made that I make or Brandon makes, I come to him or he comes to me and says, 'What do you think about this?'" Green says.

A BRIGHT FUTURE. Bringing on Green has also allowed Guffey to take on new ventures like opening a supply yard.

And after growing so quickly, Green wants to make sure there are proper procedures in place. Franchising could be in the cards, and to prepare, he's hoping to get everything running smoothly.

The company is also thinking about a nursery and an electrical division. Guffey wants to have 10 total divisions and the company still has three to go.

"Anything, honestly, that comes along that we think might be beneficial for the company, and for us, then it's something we would look into," Green says. **L&L**



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TAKING **BABY** STEPS

Success with walkways is all in the prep work. **56**

ALSO: SuperScapes' bread and butter is in new construction installations. **54**

Compact tractors are a big help on those smaller jobs. **60**

How to get the most out of your design software. **62**



DEDICATED TO DESIGN/BUILD

SuperScapes' bread and butter is new construction installations, and developing systems and efficiencies has allowed the firm to turn this work into stable revenue.

By Kristen Hampshire



SuperScapes does strictly design/build services, and the company has mostly residential clients.

SUPERSCAPES CREWS have nothing to do with zero-turn mowers, edgers or routine grass-cutting visits to customer accounts. At this 100-percent design/build firm in Wilmington, North Carolina, the bulk of the business is new construction installations for a couple of national builders.

"Even in the worst of times, those guys still build," says Dane Milligan, president. Most design/build firms pick up some maintenance for the recurring revenue.

Not SuperScapes.

"Honestly, I used to do maintenance and I never had my heart broken so much," Milligan says. "We felt like we gave so much energy and effort to maintain a property and no one was ever happy. I'd walk the properties, and they'd look good. Then we'd

get an email or phone call at 9 p.m. about one weed in a bed."

The only maintenance SuperScapes performs is on some model homes. Milligan intends to keep the business this way, diversifying with the installation services: hardscape, retaining walls, irrigation systems, site solutions and grading.

SuperScapes employs 22 people and did \$2.5 million last year. The company is growing, on pace to break \$3 million in 2017. The new construction market shows no sign of slowing down, Milligan says, noting that the last few years have been particularly strong.

Most of SuperScapes' installation business is focused on new construction – some national companies including D.R. Horton and Pulte, along with a range



YOU CAN'T BE A PUSH-OVER, BUT AT THE SAME TIME YOU CAN'T BE TOO AGGRESSIVE IN YOUR APPROACH."

**DANE MILLIGAN,
PRESIDENT, SUPERSCAPES**

of "semi-custom" builders that deliver higher profit margins.

"It's a good balance for us because we get stability with installation from the national builders, and our semi-custom builds are very profitable," Milligan says.

STREAMLINING OPERATIONS.

You have to spend money to make money. That's the reality with materials-intensive work where cash outlay for plants, soil, hardscape materials, irrigation parts and more requires an investment before invoicing. Milligan learned the hard way with a significant commercial installation job back in 2010 that he estimated at a tight margin to win the bid.

"We ended up getting paid only a portion of that," he says.

Materials were acquired, but, not only was the pay slow, it never came in to compensate for the job. Milligan notes that since this time, North Carolina has put regulations in place to protect contractors more so than ever. As long as lien waivers are properly filed, regulations now put vendors ahead in the lien process.

If a developer is not paying on time or in full, those vendors are compensated for materials first. While they must still collect for their labor, the contractors benefit because they aren't responsible for materials costs.

"We went back to residential installation jobs where I could get paid every week or couple of weeks, so the cash flow was fine," Milligan says. The business has mostly stayed away from commercial after that experience.

What Milligan ultimately learned is that any way he can streamline the business is beneficial for cash flow. He's focused on volume purchasing to save time and money on materials, capturing unbillable hours by reducing wasteful shop time, improving routing and automating as much of the business as possible.

4 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH NATIONAL BUILDERS

DANE MULLIGAN, president of SuperScapes, a design/build company in North Carolina, offers these insights for successfully working with large national builders:

Materials matter: Projects are designed a couple months in advance using software that allows Milligan to do accurate field take-offs from the office without wasting man-hours in the field. Because of the advance planning, materials for several jobs can be purchased in bulk to save cost.

"We save a percentage, and we can load the truck with materials on site and we don't have to wait on materials to finish jobs."

Shop time: With 20-plus employees on installation job sites daily, the gathering of materials and equipment at the shop could seriously eat up billable hours. Staggering the start of the work-day helps. Five foremen arrive

Pick your battles. "You can't be a pushover, but at the same time you can't be too aggressive in your approach," he says of bidding, pricing and delivering.

Work smart. "You can't go out there and make money working for builders without being efficient," Milligan says, speaking to the importance of software, estimating and production systems.

Be prepared. Milligan's package-based system allows SuperScapes to order in bulk and have materials on hand when needed.

Focus your business. "It's no different than shooting free throws," Milligan says. "If you shoot 100 a day, you'll be better than someone who only shoots 10. Repetition makes a difference."

30 minutes early to load trucks.

Better routing: Even without any maintenance business, routing is still crucial.

"It's different than maintenance or lawn care, but we try to have two or three houses ready to install in the same neighborhood at the same time so we can eliminate windshield time," Milligan says.

He analyzed the numbers and figured out that by doing the same exact jobs on one street vs. driving across town, he can save \$6,000 to \$8,000. "That's the difference in sales if jobs are lined up right," he says. (This includes materials being on hand.)

Automating the business:

Software has helped SuperScapes save time by doing measurements and designs in the office rather than eating up hours in the field. But what you put into these software programs dictates how effective they are.

Milligan says he took a good look at the bottom line, overhead, materials – and warranty costs. "We figured out our break-even point and we know how efficient we need to be to hit our profit margin," he says.

The team is focused on hitting a certain dollar amount per crew, per week. Linking crew efficiency to dollars helps them understand how their production fits into the success of the company. **L&L**



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TAKING BABY STEPS



Like many things in life, success with walkways is all in the prep work.

By Arricca Elin SanSone

DESIGNING AND INSTALLING WALKWAYS and paths seems like a simple venture, but it takes planning to deliver a quality project. “Site prep is everything,” says Jim Conway, president of All Services Landscaping in Norristown, Pennsylvania.

“We take the most time getting the base right in order to ensure the longevity of the product. If the base isn’t correct, the path will fail within a year or two,” Conway says.

Common problems include washout, buckling and shifting of materials. Here’s what to consider when creating walks and paths.

CHOOSE THE RIGHT PRODUCT. Pavers and natural stone are the most commonly used materials. Conway says many of the homes in his area are historic, so a paver walk, with its traditional look, is preferred. In less formal settings, such as a path through a wooded area, natural stone is an alternative. Stamped concrete also is requested by clients in some areas of the country.

Because it’s difficult for clients to visualize colors and textures out of a catalogue, bring samples with you, or meet clients at a vendor display site. “We find it’s easier when clients can see the styles and patterns laid out in front of them,” says

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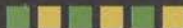
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ABOVE: Fontaine Landscaping brings samples when meeting with clients instead of relying on catalog photos.

Kevin Bolt Fontaine, owner and president of Fontaine Landscaping in Holly Springs, North Carolina. Or use a 3D software program to superimpose the client's house with the completed design.

Our experts surveyed say cost is similar for most products, ranging from about \$22 to 25 per square foot for pavers and about \$5 to 10 more per square foot for natural stone. Concrete is somewhat less expensive (by half in some parts of the country), but it's not the product of choice for most contractors.

"We do concrete, but we prefer the design impact of pavers in most settings," Conway says. Upsells include drainage work, lighting, plantings or refacing adjoining steps with stone.

Some companies quote by the project, rather than by the square foot. "We see too much variation depending on the complexity of the job," says James Ulmer, owner of Back to Nature Landscaping and Construction in Blacksburg, Virginia. "Almost every house is on a hill here, which makes accessibility more challenging."

FUTURE-PROOF YOUR DESIGN. Because a properly installed walkway can last for decades, think ahead. "If



**IF THE BASE ISN'T
CORRECT, THE
PATH WILL
FAIL WITHIN
A YEAR OR TWO."**

**JIM CONWAY,
ALL SERVICES
LANDSCAPING**

you have a large tree nearby, address the roots, which will eventually move your work around," Conway says. Selective root pruning may be possible, but sometimes the only option is to remove the tree.

Drainage is a huge issue because of its potential to wash out your path. "Pay attention to where water is going," Ulmer says. "Take into consideration downspouts or low areas." Bury downspouts under the walkway, bring water to a pop-up emitter in the yard, or redirect water to a rain garden.

It's always a good idea to place conduit beneath walks, too, in case of the installation of low voltage lighting or a fountain later on. "Even if a client doesn't want to do anything right now, I always suggest this so they won't have to tear up the whole walkway someday," Fontaine says. "Use PVC, not black corrugated plastic that will collapse eventually."

When designing, remember that a 3-to 4-foot wide path is most comfortable for walking. For stone, select pieces that are about 2 to 3 feet in width so you don't have to watch your footsteps, says Fontaine.

ESTABLISH YOUR FOUNDATION. Every paver manufacturer offers installation specs, but there are general guidelines. For starters, excavate a minimum of 4 to 6 inches of topsoil. If you're dealing with rich organic matter, excavate more deeply. All organic matter must be removed because it keeps decomposing and will cause the path to sink over time, Ulmer says. Excavate a few inches beyond the width of the path, too.

Next, compact and fill the excavated area with crush and run (also called crusher) gravel; check with your vendor to be sure you're using the right product. A geotextile layer may be necessary to enhance stability with some soils. Spread and compact in 2- to 4-inch increments, creating a minimum 4-inch deep paver base.

Top with a layer of concrete sand of not more than 1.5 inches thick, not stone dust or regular sand. "This is where a lot of contractors go wrong by using the wrong sand," Fontaine says. "You need angles in it so it locks in place. Regular sand is too round and erodes over time." Use edge restraints to prevent

pavers from shifting. As you work, level the path with a slight pitch away from the house for drainage. "We use a transit level and constantly shoot levels throughout the project," Conway says. "Other methods are not accurate enough."

Finish by dusting with polymeric sand, vibrating the sand into place with a plate compactor. Lightly spray with water, and let cure.

Dry laid natural stone paths are constructed in roughly the same manner. Wet laid stone walkways require the additional step of pouring a concrete pad with a layer of mortar, then the stone, then decorative grout. Most companies subcontract this type of work.

"I've collaborated with a stonemason for years, with both of us helping on each other's jobs," Conway says.

For a more casual path, stone pieces are dug around to create a shallow bed, then concrete is laid and the stone placed, rocking it back and forth and checking the level.

OFFER MAINTENANCE WORK. Because properly installed walks are trouble-free for many years, most companies don't offer maintenance packages. However, some companies do provide repair services.

"We do a lot of repair work, especially on older walkways that didn't have a proper foundation," Fontaine says.

Companies also offer periodic power-washing services to remove and replace old polymeric sand, which typically weathers away after three to five years.

Some companies seal walks to enhance the look of the pavers with a slight sheen. "We have some clients who just like that glossy look," Ulmer says. "We feel it also prevents staining and preserves color."

These add-on services vary widely in fees, ranging from a few dollars per square foot to a flat fee.

STAY UP TO DATE. No matter how long you've been doing it, re-educate yourself about the latest technology. Organizations such as the Interlocking Concrete Pave-

ment Institute (ICPI) also offer classes and certification that can be a valuable way to set yourself apart from the competition

"We take paver classes and webinars

frequently and always learn a new tip, like using a different saw or how to optimize your crew," Conway says. **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in the Northeast.



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For more information: Deere.com



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- A wide range of attachments are available for the trencher, promising companies versatility on the job.

For more information: Ditchwitch.com



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For more information: Kioti.com



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BANG FOR YOUR BUCK

You may not be getting most of your design software.

By Katie Tuttle

WHETHER YOU'RE MAKING THE LEAP from hand drawing to software, or simply switching from one brand to another, Phil Ogilby, CEO of Stack, says it's important that once you make a commitment to a design software, you stick to it.

"The tendency is when they run into something they don't know how to do ... a lot of times folks will move back to what they used to do, he says."

David Sloan, marketing director at Drafix, says you need to make sure you and the relevant team members are trained on it, similar to how your crews would be trained on the in-field equipment you use.

"It's a tool just like anything else, he says. "It just needs to be used properly."

IN-ACTION USE. One technological advancement people may not realize is available is in-field use of the software.

"What I hear from a lot of contractors is they're using new technologies in their designs," Sloan says. He means things such as Google Earth and drones.

"It's more difficult to start a design from scratch, and there's other technologies that allow you to bring in plot plans or drone shots to calibrate images," he says.

MAKE THE SALE. Once you have your software, and understand how to use it, it's important to also recognize how it can improve your sales presentations.

Finding a software that can work as a mobile application, allows you to use it on a tablet in the field.

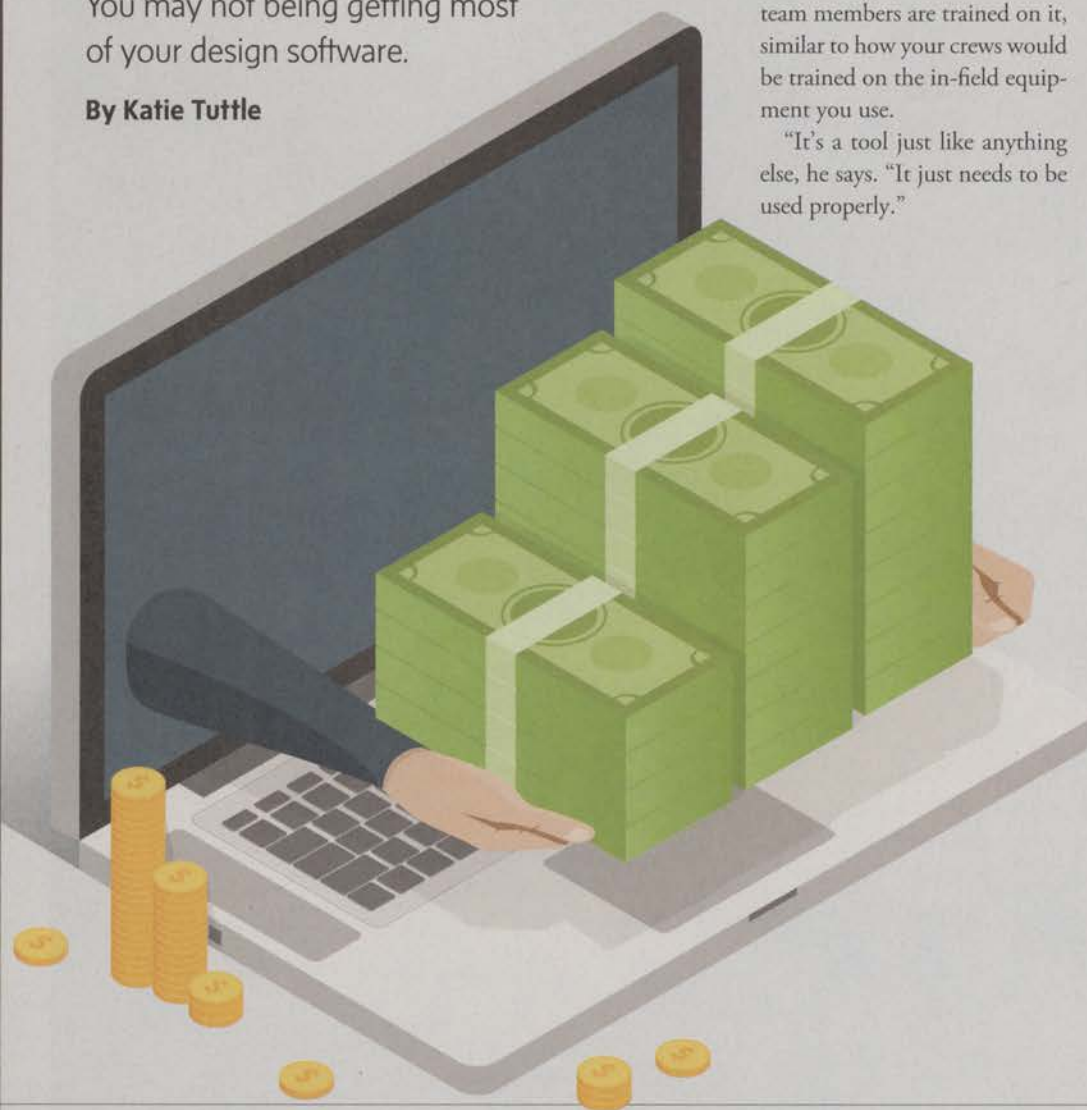
"It gives him the ability to interface with the customer on site – being out there and doing a basic sketch, a basic drawing on site while walking around with the customer," Sloan says.

Another technology that can impress clients is 3-D modeling.

"The integration of 3-D modeling really is the future of landscape software for presentation purposes, and something people are really starting to get into in a big way now – 3-D modeling with photo-realistic rendering," says Joe Salemi, product marketing manager with Dynascape.

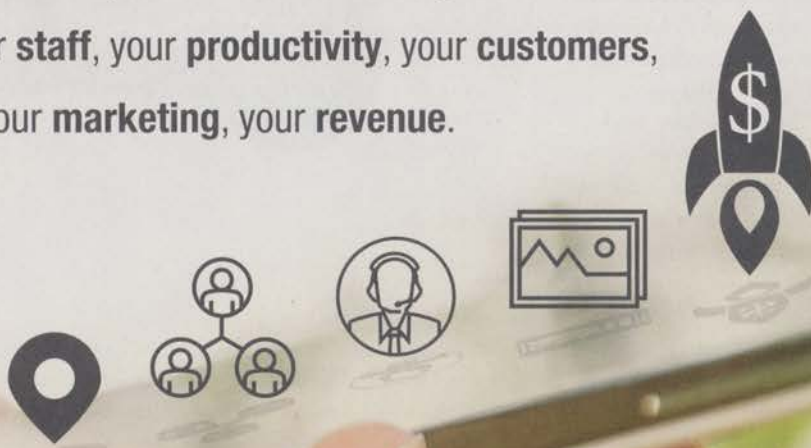
Salemi suggests landscapers look into 3-D rendering options now, because with things such as shows on HGTV, the ante has been upped on what homeowners expect out of their designs.

"Adding 3-D to your reper-








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toire – to your toolbox – is really important,” he says. “It’s going to be the standard in three to four years, so if people don’t jump on that now, they’ll be left behind.”

Along with the design being impressive, accuracy is always key. Sloan says some of the design software products out there are created to properly know how to calculate how much material is needed for a specific space.

That helps you keep track of how much the design will cost to create, so homeowners aren’t surprised or given incorrect numbers.

Leveraging these options to your benefit comes down to what you and your crews know and understand of the software you’re using.

“No matter what they’re using, they need to be comfortable,” Sloan says. “Don’t just buy a piece of software and then not learn how to use it.”

AN EYE ON UPDATES. You probably know when your favorite equipment companies update or release new lines of mowers or trimmers, but do you know when your software companies does?

One automation option Dynascape has added a tool that counts the symbols in the drawing, meaning the designer doesn’t have to go through and count by hand how many sprinkler heads need to be installed.

“It’s a tool that can detect a unique symbol,” he says.

The company has also worked to streamline the integration between the CAD software and SketchUp.

“We thought about building our own 3D software,” Salemi says. However, research resulted in them realizing Sketch Up offers a solid program, regardless of industry.

So Dynascape shifted its focus and put a lot of effort into a request they’d received from people in the landscape design profession.

“They want a color-rendering plan that replicates what they do by hand,” he says. The updated software is “able to turn someone that’s not an artist into a landscape artist.”

Drafix Software upgraded Pro Landscape to version 23 this year. The company is also doing an asset purchase in 2016.

“Part of that is we added a lot of better images in our library,” Sloan says. “Normally the company adds around 1,000 new images to the system each year, but this year it tripled with 3,000.



Design software allows a rendering to have the look of a hand drawn design, but can be finished faster than someone drawing it by hand.

Pro Landscape 23 has also been updated to work better with upgraded 4K monitors and Windows 10.

“Some of the newer monitors on laptops and desktops are 4K monitors, which is a higher resolution,” Sloan says. “Some older pieces of software have a harder time running on those.”

As far as design updates, Pro Landscape 23 users are now able to identify and color code zones for irrigation plans right in the design.

Stack is actually a blueprint designing software, which is useful for commercial contractors, as well as multi-family areas.

A major update Stack did was move the whole design process to the cloud, making it mobile for users.

“It’s immensely convenient to a contractor,” Ogilby says. “They can use the software on Mac and PC, but can take it out in the field as well. As long as they’ve got access to the internet, they can do a blueprint measuring.”

When uploading drawings into the system, Stack also automatically names the files and renders the images so a 200-page PDF is displayed as thumbnails which are easy to look through for a specific page. The system also automatically counts items – for example sprinkler heads – so customers can see where they all are, and know how many are needed.

Stack is also set to roll out a new Excel add-in feature, which will populate an Excel sheet with all the data from the blueprint design.

“It (also) links the data, so later if they go back in and makes changes, those changes are updated the next time they open the Excel sheet,” Ogilby says.

With any software, you’ll want to make sure the updates will remain compatible with your system.

“Technology constantly changes,” Sloan says. “Find somebody who changes with it. It’ll cost money, but there’s value in it.” **L&L**



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KEEP OUT



By Kristen Hampshire

BAMBI'S CUTE, BUT KEEP HIM OFF THE LAWN.

That goes for his relatives, too. Rabbits are awfully fun for the neighbor children to watch, but who wants to replant the landscape bed that Thumper destroyed?

The urban landscape can be a wild world, especially when surrounding areas are wooded, protected sanctuaries, open green space or parkland. Deer aren't hunting for a cozy place to hang out on a cul-de-sac. They travel from surrounding areas. "People

have to anticipate potential wildlife damage by assessing not just their yard, but what land is around them," says Scott Craven, professor emeritus in the department of forest and wildlife ecology at University of Wisconsin.

Deer are "a big animal with a big diet" and can be a big problem in the landscape, Craven says. Equally troublesome are rabbits and meadow voles.

For property owners, the thought of losing hundreds or even thousands of dollars of plants after a thorough grazing sparks interest in protection services, says Gary Eichen, BioTurf manager at Mike's Tree Surgeons in Troy, Michigan.

"The aesthetic value of what deer can destroy is mind-blowing," Eichen says. "They will literally eat plants right to the ground, so people are interested in protecting the value of their landscape and the perceived impact it could have on their property value."

When are deer and other wildlife most likely to damage the landscape? What control methods can be used to prevent damage, and how landscape firms selling the service? Lawn & Landscape talked to some field professionals to learn how they keep the wild things away from clients' landscapes.

IDENTIFY GRAZING TIMES. Eichen was out applying a deer repellent product on a client's property last spring. "There were two baby fawns—the mother had placed them down in the taxus, and they did not run," he says. "They stayed right where they were and the mother was 30 yards away. They watched me spray."

Deer pressure is a year-round ordeal in the Detroit, Michigan, market Eichen serves. "We have urban herds that are out of control and have lost any fear of humans, so they'll stand there and look at you," he says.

Burke finds the same thing where he does business in Door County, Wisconsin. "Someone will be eating at a picnic table and the deer will walk up within 10 feet and start eating plants in their yard," he says.

However, there are certain periods of the year when deer might cause more of a problem in the landscape. That's when there are fewer green-and-growing snacks in parks and open land. Woody material and perennials are most vulnerable beginning in late fall through winter, Craven says. Prime



NOT SO BUNNY

Rabbits will eat the bottom 8 to 12 inches of a plant, and they'll chew right through bark.

time for annuals is immediately after planting.

Meadow voles are persistent and can cause a great deal of damage in the landscape—and these guys burrow under the snow and dig into mulch. "Once they are under the snow, you can't get at them," Craven says. "They'll tunnel around, find a burning bush or another preferred woody plant, and they can completely debark it and it's a goner come spring."

Voles also tend toward heavily mulched areas of the landscape. "Landscape contractors are prone to use a lot of mulch, and if you

LAWN CARE

are putting mulch around foundation plantings then you are inviting a high vole density because they'll use that for shelter," Craven says.

As for rabbits, Craven says fluffy-tailed mopsies tend to fall off people's radars. "But they are everywhere all of the time, and they are around all the time."

An optimum control schedule is a preventive campaign in fall, including a repellent or fencing for individual species that call for protection. Protective barriers such as plastic tubing around tree trunks can deter deer and animals from the bark.

As Craven points out, woody plants are not only vulnerable for their evergreen "salad," but trunks offer a handy place for bucks to polish their antlers during rut season.

What are signs that a deer is scavenging plants vs. a rabbit or other nuisance wildlife? Deer tend to eat the green leaves from the tips down to the stubble, Burke says. "They'll eat arborvitae from the ground up to 6 to 7 feet high. Rabbits will girdle the bottom 8 to 12 inches of a plant, and they'll chew right through the bark."

In Florida, some homeowners

deal with wild hogs that can root up grass and sod, says Tony Young with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. "To a lesser degree, armadillos can also be destructive by digging holes," he says.

PREVENTION CAMPAIGN. Fencing is the most sure-fire way to reduce damage and prevent animals from entering the property, Young says. This is not always possible in homeowners' associations where covenants prevent barriers.

However, individual plants on properties can be protected, and this is a wise strategy for keeping deer and other hungry wildlife away from prized plants.

Eichen uses repellents that he says are up to 90 percent effective at preventing deer damage. DeerPro winter repellent can be applied in October and lasts up to six months because of a latex bonding agent that keeps the active ingredient thiram (a fungicide) on foliage, even through ice, snow and rain.

In spring, he uses a DeerPro spring/summer repellent that is an egg-based odor deterrent spray designed for commercial

use. "Once it dries on the leaf tissue, it lasts three to five weeks," Eichen says.

Taste- and odor-based repellents steer deer away from the food source, and since they are creatures of habit they tend not to return.

Of course, the idea of selecting plants that deer don't find so tasty seems like an ideal way to plan a landscape. The problem is, Eichen and Burke find that if the deer are hungry enough, they'll eat even the plants on the "safe list."

In Florida, deer tend not to munch on evergreens like juniper and ivy, or prickly roses and sego palms.

Local extension services can provide recommendations. But, hungry deer are brave and not so selective about the greens they graze on, Eichen says.

"I have seen roses listed as plants that deer do not eat, but I have roses in five different cities we service that were taken down a foot (by deer), thorns and all."

Noise deterrents are available, and some find that a dog that spends lots of time outdoors can be a great help in keeping wildlife away from plantings, Young says.

ADD-ON SERVICE. Eichen began offering deer control as a service three years ago and treated about a dozen properties. That first year, the revenue base from that service was about \$4,000. "Now, we are doing in excess of \$100,000," he says.

Eichen markets the service by including information in customers' annual renewal contracts in February. He tucks information in with summer mailings, too because clients want to protect the investment in their landscaping, they're keen to the option.

Once a deer takes down a mature plant, the damage slows down growth. "Plants might not have the energy to recover from an extensive feeding, so you have to replace a shrub," Eichen says.

Burke sells deer and rabbit protection as a separate service, sharing information with customers during tree work visits.

"We deal with so many customers in our everyday tree work that it's real easy for us to talk about deer damage and what can be done to prevent it," he says. **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Ohio.



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AN EYE FOR DEFINITION

Contractors discuss when to use curbing or edging for a landscape bed.

By Holly Hammersmith

"For a landscaper to add it on they probably could add it on and pay it off in a season, but it's something that takes more time away from what they already do and it depends on how big they want to grow," says Kyle Weber, founder of Beautiful Borders in Castle Rock, Colorado.

FROM TRADITIONAL SPADE EDGING to metal edging to plastic edging to concrete curbing – the options for creating a defined outline around landscape beds are endless.

For most customers, selection will come down to two factors – cost and permanence, says Matt Bakker, senior landscape architect for Landscape Design Services based in Holland, Michigan.

The company provides spade edging and metal edging – either aluminum or steel. With the latter, there is an added cost of materials, Bakker says.

"A spade edge does allow you more flexibility. As

the plants grow out or if there's an adjustment to the bed, it can be more easily changed," he says. "With any kind of metal edge, once it sets it sort of determines its shape. It's difficult to adjust it once it's been in place."

Another factor for consideration is the ease of long-term maintenance, says Ryan Wolfrath, president of Wolfrath's Curb, a concrete curb installation company based in Hortonville, Wisconsin. Wolfrath also owns The Curb Depot, a company that manufactures the machinery used to create and install curbing.

"Business owners are seeing the benefits. It's less maintenance as far as for mowing, weed whacking and



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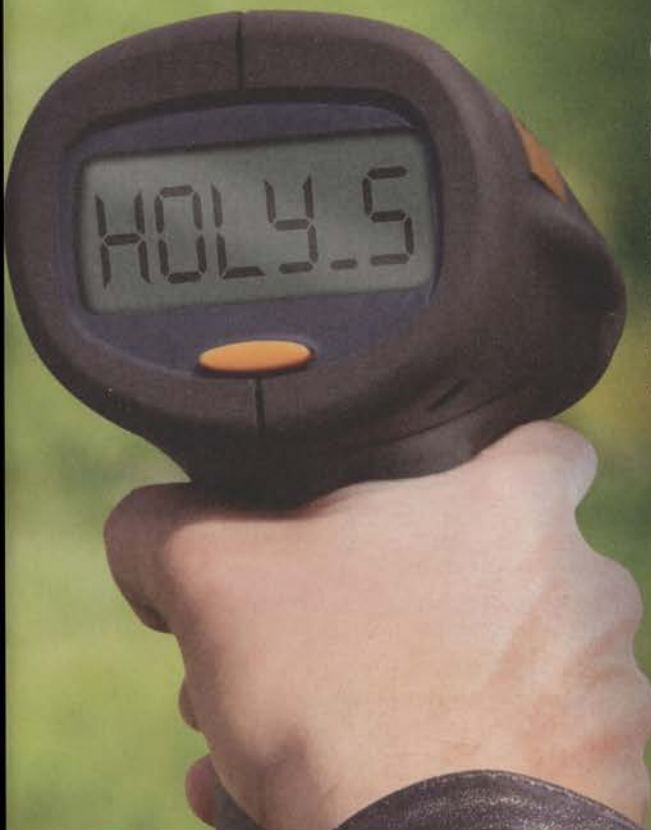
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“...there are other ways to defeat goosegrass.”

spurge. So if you miss the ideal time to apply pre-emergent goosegrass control, don't fret: healthy turf and the right post-emergent have you covered.



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for holding in stones," he says. "It's definitely one of the more expensive options but once you get it done, there's not a better product in my eyes."

CURBING CONSIDERATIONS.

Curbing is made from concrete with steel cable and nylon fibers running through it to minimize movement during freeze and thaw cycles, says Matt Marschall, president of Curb-It Design, serving the Twin Cities region in Minnesota.

Every curbing job is unique and curbing is custom made to match each property, says Kyle Weber, founder of Beautiful Borders, based in Castle Rock, Colorado.

"The color options basically are unlimited," he says, adding that he can also customize texture and appearance.

Curbing can help prevent mulch or rocks from washing away, Marschall says.

"The product itself is extremely heavy, so it's not like it's going to move. I have clients that run ATVs over it without any problems," Weber says.

Curbing can be installed almost anywhere, but some regions prove trickier, Wolfrath says. For example, in Florida, soil is mostly sandy and more prone to shifting if the curb is not reinforced.

"I try to stay away from tree roots," Weber says. "The roots are going to try to stress on that concrete and move it."

In addition to a higher cost, curbed landscape beds cannot easily be moved or redesigned, which can be a disadvantage.

"Once you put it down, it's down. There's no moving it. If someone wants to consistently move the beds, you can't really



A properly installed curb can prevent mulch or rocks from washing away.

do that, unless you ripped up the whole section and repoured it," Wolfrath says.

EDGING UP THE COMPETITION.

Ideally, metal edging is level with the turf. "We set it on the initial installation on the top of the edging about three quarters of an inch above the soil line, so the turf will grow up and over," Bakker says.

Because of the growth, maintenance is long-term strategy for both metal edging and spade edging. Beds are typically re-spaded, or a new edge is cut every year, Bakker says.

"The disadvantages to the hand edging is that you have to have a good eye for it every year when you maintain that edge," Bakker says.

Severe elevation changes on a property can be a challenge with metal edging, as can frost heaves. Metal edging works best on sandy sites, Bakker says.

"As long as it's a gentle slope, it's typically not a problem. If (the bed is) curving horizontally and vertically at the same time,

that adds to the difficulty. Other than that, it could be used on any site," he says.

PRICE POINTS AND LIFESPAN.

The average cost for curbing a residential property is \$2,000, or \$10 per foot, Marschall says. "Stone style" curbing is made with rubber matting and is a little more tedious to make. It can sell for \$15 to \$20 per foot, he adds.

Maintenance for curbing consists of re-sealing the concrete every two years. The cost is about \$300 for the average residential property, or a customer can buy sealer and do it themselves. The process and product is the same sealing stamped concrete – such as for patios, Marschall says.

Through his Curb Depot business, Wolfrath works with "curbers" nationwide and says some charge as little as \$4 per foot, while others can net \$16 per foot – depending on the region, competition and how the product is marketed. The average, however, is \$8 to \$9 per foot. Black plastic edging averages \$4

to \$5 per foot, he says.

At Landscape Design Services, Bakker says metal edging runs about \$4.50 to \$5 per foot installed. Spade edging costs a little less because no materials are involved for installation.

Bakker says metal edging usually succumbs to damage before deterioration, but he has seen metal edging last 20 years without needing replacement.

"Typically, it's more like they've been abused or hit with a mower," Bakker says. "On a clay site, more often the edging might push up with the frost heave in the winter. If it pops up it could be subject to physical damage by a mower."

Curbers say their product lasts at least a decade – maybe more.

IN YOUR SERVICE MIX. Landscape contractors can opt to add curbing to their line of business with an initial investment of about \$20,000, Marschall says.

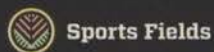
"For a landscaper to add it, on they probably could add it on and pay it off in a season but it's something that takes more time away from what they already do and it depends on how big they want to grow," he says.

Bakker says edging is typically included in a landscape installation package.

"If (the customer) was concerned about price point, it might be something we just don't even propose to keep the cost down," he says.

"If we feel like the client will accept that as part of the proposal, but then, that is something we can use to negotiate out if they want to save." **L&L**

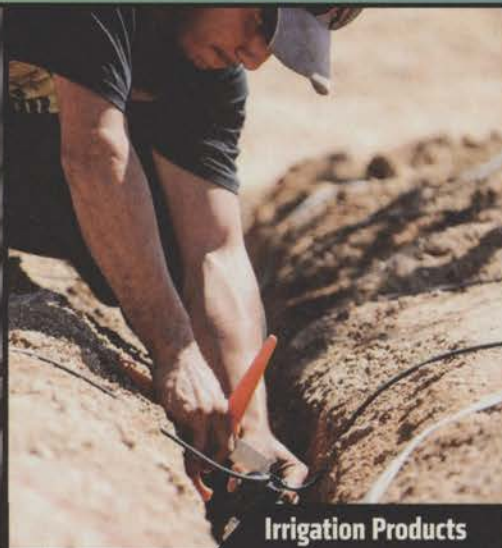
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For more information: Stihl.com

ECHO PE-2620 EDGER

The pitch: The PE-2620 has a flex cable drive that allows for a curved shaft design for better sight lines and more ergonomic tool positioning.

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- 2:1 gear ratio produces high-performance torque to power through tough, overgrown grass.
- Contoured aluminum debris shield features an open face for reduced clogging and captive wheel mount hardware for easy height adjustability.

For more information:
Echo-usa.com

GREENWORKS GT 160 STRING TRIMMER

The pitch: The GT 160 String Trimmer combines the Greenworks Commercial 82-volt lithium-ion battery with brushless motor technology to power through every job with a 16-inch cutting path.

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- Features a die-cast gear box for high torque, aluminum shaft for reduced weight, durable easy wind head for less down time.

For more information: Greenworkstools.eu

HONDA HHT35SLTA STRING TRIMMER

The pitch: The HHT35SLTA is designed to handle commercial applications, with strong low-end torque characteristics that allow many jobs to be performed at partial throttle-increasing fuel efficiency.

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- Comes with Honda's Quick Start system for easy starting.

For more information: Hondapower.com

35% → According to our 2016 expenditure survey, that's the percentage of contractors who plan on purchasing trimmers/edgers in 2017.



STAY BUSY

Snow plowing isn't a large part of Summit Lawns' service mix, but it's enough work to keep some employees working all year. **86**





A CHANGING OF THE GUARD

This past winter I hired my replacement.

It has been my dream to find a way to remove myself from the day-to-day operations of my company.

That dream started with me finally deciding to relinquish the control of my company and hire my operations coach.

With this changing of the guard, I have faced three specific challenges and learned a number of lessons along the way.

LACK OF PRIOR EXPERIENCE. You probably wouldn't believe me if I told you I hired someone with no prior experience in the snow removal business to run my entire snow operation, but that is exactly what I did. In fact, my replacement was a fertilization technician who was usually laid off each year come winter. He was looking for a company to grow with, so we worked collaboratively to achieve success.

First, we focused on learning

storm scenarios. Role playing countless scenarios he would face during a snow and ice event was crucial to creating a great foundation for his ability to problem solve during future storms. In addition, he engaged in multiple ride-alongs with myself and key employees to learn first-hand how to handle different situations during storms from a management standpoint.

Next, we reviewed the properties in our portfolio. This includ-

ed studying both residential and commercial plow routes online and in-person. During these visits, we focused on the layout of each property, the quality guidelines and possible problem areas that may present during a snow and ice event.

We also reviewed satellite images of each site and further discussed problem areas and where to stack snow. We then reviewed the priority level of each property (level A, B or C) during a snow and ice event.

Finally, we focused on how to manage the fleet and the team. Due to his lack of prior experience and know-how to operate several pieces of equipment, he

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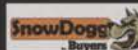
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did not immediately gravitate to fill gaps in labor when they existed like I had in the past. Instead, he was able focus on strategy and solve the problem from the office while managing the phones and monitoring the team and the weather.

His strategic decisions were based strictly on data from GPS, radar and forecasts online, and job completion reports through our CRM system. His ability to remove the emotion from his decisions led to better support for our team during a snow and ice event.

LETTING GO OF THE REINS. To focus solely on strategically

planning to grow my company and its infrastructure, I needed to support and mentor my new operations coach 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The hardest part about it for me was remembering to allow him to have wins and failures of his own that he could learn from.

I quickly learned micromanaging was not a great tactic. I discovered that the way in which the jobs are completed did not really matter as long as the desired end result was accomplished.

In fact, his approach in some cases was actually more effective because he did not have any preconceived notions about how things had been done in the past.

SELF-REFLECTION. This year was not my first attempt to hire a manager. This year is just the first year I committed to hiring and ensuring a successful transition for my replacement. I had no one to blame but myself for my unsuccessful attempts.

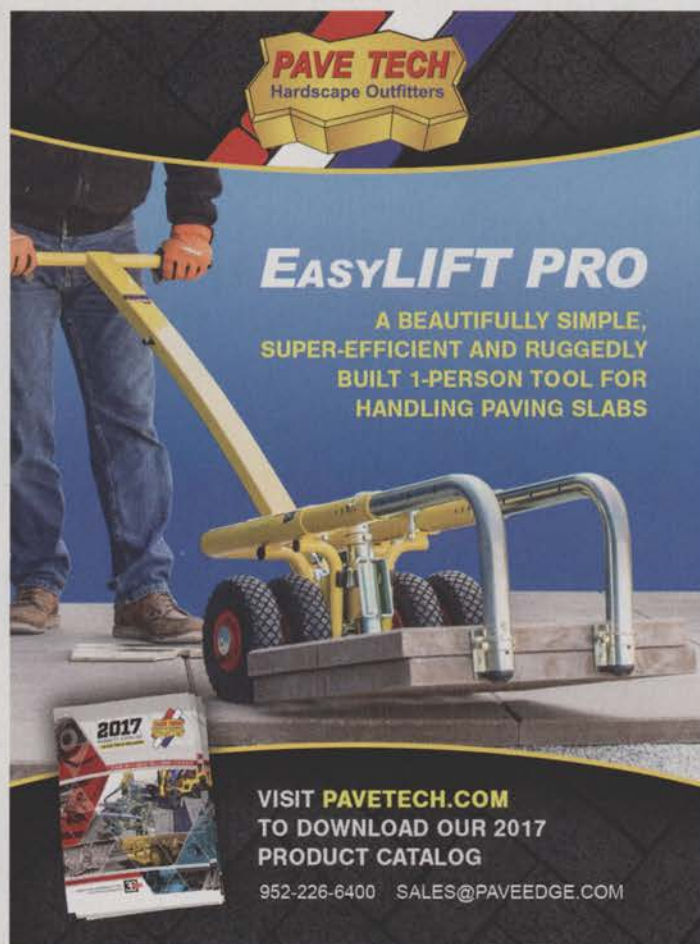
I failed them by not providing them enough support for long enough. I also failed to provide a support staff to assist with monitoring weather and dispatching crews overnight.

To help provide support, we drove a back-up truck together and worked to manage the event from a laptop and our cell phones. We also created a rotating night crew that monitored

the weather conditions by driving a predetermined geographic grid and submitting a mobile form that notified him when crews needed to be dispatched. This crew was a secret ingredient to success.

THE NEXT STEP. My operations manager has been dubbed an operations coach for that reason.

Although he was hired to manage our team, he has become an integral part of our team by providing ongoing support and training for our employees. He is also committed to his own learning and continues to push me to learn how to continue letting go. **L&L**



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CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

By **Kevin Gilbride**

**AT THE STATE
LEVEL, OUR ANTI-
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BILL HAS BEEN
INTRODUCED IN
A HALF-DOZEN
STATES AND
HAS BEEN
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Success in the professional snow and ice management industry is not possible without overcoming challenges, and that is as true for the industry as it is for the individual contractor.

Five years ago, in a hotel conference room, nearly 70 of the U.S. and Canadian Top 100 contractors openly discussed the challenges the industry was facing.

Those in attendance cited among their grievances the state of the market, rising insurance costs, unfair hold-harmless agreements, lack of respect from customers, lack of understanding of the industry from the outside world and companies that take advantage of unsuspecting (or uneducated) contractors. While insurance was the clear winner to come out of this discussion, many of the issues deemed "problems" could trace their origins back to the same root.

After a year of thorough investigation and due diligence, we determined the root of the problem was not any of the issues named above, rather those were symptomatic of a much larger problem. This problem was multifaceted:

- The industry had not done enough to represent itself properly to the outside world.
- Many property owners/managers didn't respect snow contractors.
- Property owners/managers and snow contractors had (and many still have) an adversarial relationship.
- Insurance carriers had little knowledge of the snow and ice management industry.
- Legislative bodies had absolutely no idea how often snow contractors are getting claims filed against them.
- U.S. and Canadian laws are unfair and unsympathetic to our industry.
- Insurance carriers had little knowledge of the snow and ice management industry until they dug into things and found they were losing \$2 for every \$1 in premium they brought in.
- Some companies were using these issues for their benefit, and ultimately harming unsuspecting contractors, and the trickle-down effect resulted in increased claims and skyrocketing insurance costs.

The ASCA was founded to address and resolve these issues. To date, we have experienced tremendous suc-

cess. Member companies are performing well above the average snow and ice management contractor. Sales are increasing due to their ability to differentiate themselves from the competition.

Their certifications (ASCA-C and ISO 9001/SN 9001) helped them better managing their insurance costs (in some cases, just being able to be insured). They are getting more and more slip-and-fall claims dismissed. The ASCA and ASCA member companies have taken serious steps to improve the operating conditions for the professional snow and ice management industry. We have done so by:

- Developing the first ever set of industry standards, and getting the accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).
- ANSI is the first place attorneys go when they get a case. If they have a standard, it will help to defend those that have followed it, and it will likely hurt those that have not.
- Creating an educational certification, ASCA-C, that proves to the outside world you are educated on the industry standards and risk management
 - Currently, nearly 500 individuals have completed ASCA-C education.
- Creating a quality management system that ensures that you have the processes and procedures in place to ensure service quality, and that you have implemented the industry standards into your business.
 - ISO9001/SN9001 is helping improve companies' processes, increase sales, reduce risk and saving money on insurance.
- Initiating legislative change.
 - Nationally, we have lobbied for legislation to reduce frivolous lawsuits.
 - At the state level, our anti-indemnification bill has been introduced in a half-dozen states and has been enacted in Illinois.

That's why I'm asking those of you who haven't already joined to consider ASCA membership. Not only is it the first step in taking a greater part in improving your business operations, but it empowers you to get involved and to start taking part in changing our industry for the better. **L&L**

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The pitch: Available for winter 2017, the BOSS Forge is a stainless steel spreader model that offers both pindle feed and auger chain systems with the same hopper.

- Features 1/2-horsepower motor and proven VBX drive train.
- Motor covers protect both the drive and spinner motors from falling sand, salt and de-icing materials and it comes with a standard top screen and tie-down kit.
- Lights, tarp, vibrator and inverted V options for pindle chain systems, and lights and tarp option for auger systems. Vibrator and inverted V are standard equipment on the auger system.

For more information:

Bosspow.com



CATERPILLAR TRUCBRUSH

The pitch: Caterpillar's new TrucBrush is a polypropylene bristle attachment that quickly connects to and is powered by a front-end loader.

- The attachment is used to clear accumulated snow from truck, trailer and bus rooftops.
- TrucBrush allows companies to meet state transportation regulations and OSHA guidelines.
- It's manufactured with heavy-gauge steel and has a hydraulic system with dual rotation direction operation.

For more information: Trucbrush.com

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6	124	10003	100	\$2
7	125	49987	600	\$1,7
8	126	97825	454	\$1,3
9	127	44862	520	\$1,5
10	128	32511	125	\$3
11	19	9663	325	\$9
12	130	279	0	
13	131	5544	123	\$3
14	132	58962	0	
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PRO-TECH TURF PUSHER

The pitch: Pro-Tech's Turf Pusher is a containment plow designed specifically for clearing snow from turf sports fields.

- It now features a new pin-on coupler design to give customers increased versatility by allowing them to swap out different coupler plates to adapt to the required prime mover.
- Couplers for all compact machines (John Deere, Bobcat, Toro) including UTVs now available.
- The pin-on coupler will now come on the 6- and 8-foot Turf Pusher models.

For more information: TurfPusher.com

SNOWEX TAILGATE PRO SPREADERS

The pitch: The SnowEx Tailgate Pro spreaders feature more compact controls with fewer wires for enhanced functionality and simpler installation.

- Offers hopper capacities of 5.75 and 10.75 cubic feet, respectively, on the SP-575X and SP-1075X single-stage spreaders.
- The control has auxiliary functionality that allows any accessories plugged into the spreader to be controlled from the cab.
- A new, universal pivot mount, available as an option for the SP-1075X, allows the spreader to swing away from the tailgate for convenient access to the truck bed.

For more information: Snowexproducts.com



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Snow plowing isn't a large part of Summit Lawns' service mix, but it's enough to keep some employees working all year.

By Holly Hammersmith

STAY BUSY

Many landscape companies offer snow removal as a means to generate revenue during the off season. But Ted Glaser added the service to his company's book of business in 2013 to aid with employee retention.

Glaser, 26, is the president of Summit Lawns, based in Lincoln, Nebraska.

"We make a little bit of money on it, but the main purpose was to have a more predictable staffing situation in the springtime, so we could

hold onto more of our employees and not have to let go of some of the work force, and then just hoping they would come back again in the spring," he says.

Glaser has been in the lawn maintenance industry for a decade and founded Summit Lawns in 2011. The company's

core focus is landscape maintenance including mowing, lawn care and seasonal cleanup.

Snow removal service customers are primarily commercial with a few homeowner associations added in.

This past year about \$30,000 of the company's annual revenue of \$900,000 came from snow removal work, but it was a mild winter with only one major storm. Next season, the company's revenue goal is \$75,000 to \$100,000.

ABOVE: Ted Glaser added snow removal services in 2013 to employ some workers all year. Five of the company's 15 employees are on staff year-round and remaining employees are on call for snow removal.



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SNOW PROFILE

"At this point we set a goal, and then we move forward on what the next goal is going to be from a revenue standpoint," Glaser says. "We want to make sure it's attainable."

PRE-SEASON DRY RUNS. Quality control issues with snow removal work are kept to a minimum by implementing a few tactics.

"Before the snow season starts, for every property, we map out the property, we mark out where the snow piles have to go," Glaser says.

This is done in November. The snow season typically runs December through March.

"Any time we take over a new

contract, the first thing we do is find out if they've worked with another company, what their experience was, what problems they had in the past," he says.

This communication is vital in stopping potential problems before they can start, Glaser says.

"One guy might be sensitive about how a company was using snow blowers in an area that had rock bed. Or, it could be something like, they know ice tends to accumulate in certain areas."

This conversation happens during a walkthrough with the client on their property prior to the start of winter. When crews begin working the site, they have a checklist to make sure they don't

PARK THE PLOW

While some snow contractors use plows on residential driveways, this has not been a common practice at Summit Lawns. Instead, residential driveways, front steps and sidewalks are cleared using shovels or snow blowers – freeing up plows for larger lots, and keeping customers happier.

"If it's like a big wrap-around driveway, we're going to be putting a plow in there," Glaser says. "But if we're talking about a single lane, or double-wide driveway, we're using our shovels or snow blowers."

High-end residential customers usually don't want a plow used anyway because they have experienced plow damage left by other snow contractors in the past. And they pay a premium.

"They don't want to risk a plow catching the grass or scarring up the driveway," Glaser says. "We give them the option. If you want us to use snow blowers and shovels, then it's going to be a more expensive rate."

forget about any of these special requests or situations, Glaser says.

"After every storm, either myself or one of my other foremen views the properties to be sure everything was performed appropriately," he says. "It's better to do it that way than getting a phone call from the property manager or client."

As another quality control component, training is done before the snow season begins. Glaser buys training videos for the plow drivers and sidewalk crews to watch.

In addition to the videos, hands-on training takes place.

"We take them out to a property and teach them how to ap-

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proach a property, things that they need to be doing," he says. "If it's a plow driver, we take them out, make sure they've seen all their properties when it's dry, and in the middle of the night."

Sidewalk crews are also shown basic protocols for working each property – whether it's a home or a commercial site, Glaser says.

"We map everything out. We use satellite imagery and then highlight out the areas that they need to be addressing and they have that on their devices, in their trucks," he says.

"We use Service Autopilot as our software, so they have access in their trucks."

This year, the company experienced no quality control issues, Glaser says.

"Part of that is proper training, making sure they understand what the details of the job are," he says.

CREW STRUCTURE AND EQUIPMENT ALLOCATION. Even as a smaller snow removal operation, crews at Summit Lawns are still structured strategically.

"We have three plow drivers, and then we work with another company (subcontractor) that has two more plows," Glaser says.

In addition to the plow drivers, there are three groups of sidewalk crews. Each crew has two individuals.

Sidewalk crews are typically clearing sidewalks and driveways within homeowner associations, which can have as many as 40 or 50 properties.

"We try to keep those routes pretty dense and be as efficient as we can," Glaser says.

Sidewalk crews arrive separately from plow drivers and are equipped with two-stage blowers, one-stage blowers, shovels and push-spreaders for ice melt application. Plow drivers also keep shovels with them.

Workers are assigned one role and typically stay in that role all season, although some cross-over takes place when an extra hand is needed.

"Each plow driver has his truck with his plow and his

“**BEFORE THE SNOW SEASON STARTS, FOR EVERY PROPERTY, WE MAP OUT THE PROPERTY, WE MARK OUT WHERE THE SNOW PILES HAVE TO GO.**”

— Ted Glaser, Summit Lawns

ABOVE: Summit's plow drivers visit all of their properties in the middle of the night before the snow season hits.

route," he says. "They are responsible for maintaining their plow, making sure fluids are appropriate and also staying on top of their own properties. Consistency is our best brand in terms of quality."

EMPLOYEE MIX. Five of the company's 15 employees are on staff year-round. Remaining employees only work during the green season and are on call for snow removal.

"We basically just start making phone calls on a first-come, first-serve basis, whoever wants to work the storm, will come in for that individual storm," he says.

The on-call list contains a few contractors that work other jobs, but are available for snow removal work. That includes friends of employees or employees of other businesses looking for a job.

Summit Lawns also partners with a few subcontractors to help with snow removal work. About 15 percent of the company's snow removal work is subcontracted.

"We have a limited number of plows. We can only be in so many places, before 8 a.m.," he says. "A lot of (the subcontracted accounts) are maintenance accounts during the summertime."

Glaser says he tries to mark up the subcontracted work by 15 or 20 percent.

"The subs that we work with, we are pretty confident in their quality of work," he says. "They already do snow removal on their own."

About 95 percent of all snow removal customers are landscape maintenance customers, Glaser says.

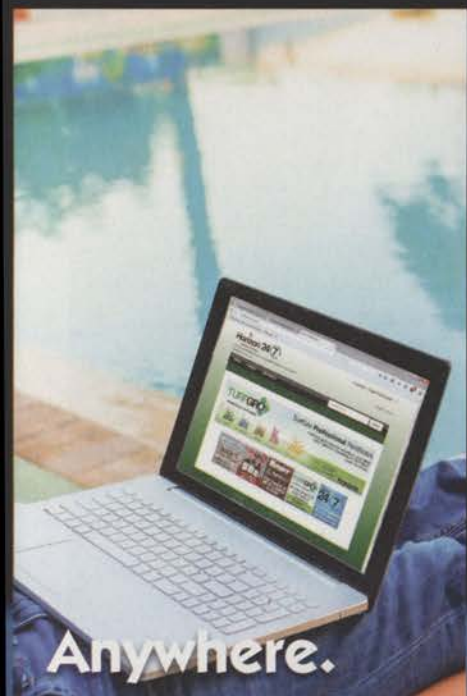
"We really try not to oversell ourselves with snow because snow is pretty unpredictable," he says. "You don't want to get so much work you can't complete it." **L&L**



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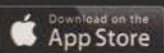
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The team at Xtreme Snow Pros has a "huge preventative program" in the offseason, which includes regular maintenance and power washing the equipment.

SPRING CLEANING

Don't let snow equipment maintenance pile up just because it's warm outside.

By Catherine Meany

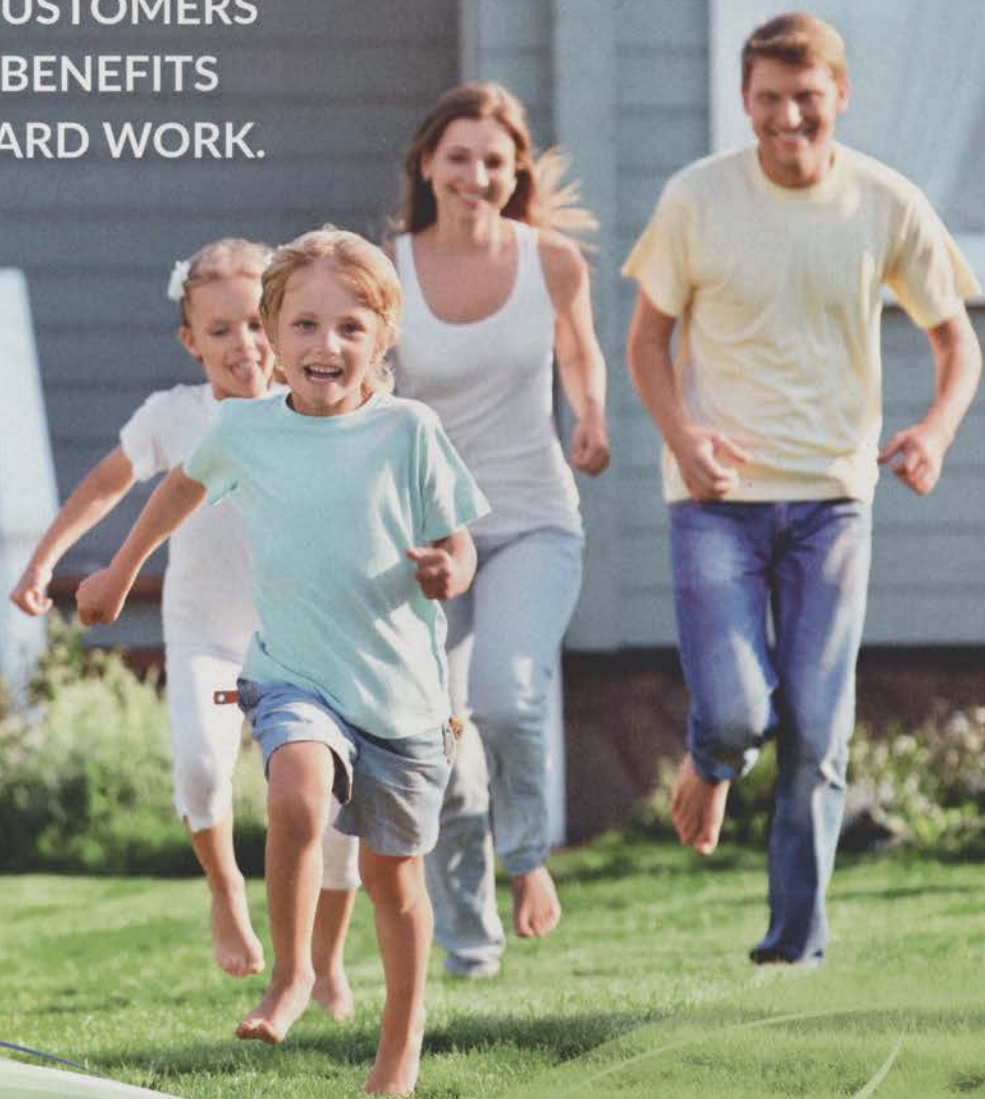
As warmer weather thaws your service area, it's likely freezing the use of your snow equipment. This lull in activity creates an important time to perform maintenance on your fleet so that it's in perfect condition for the next snowfall.

"The better preventative maintenance post-season plan you have in place, the better off you are for the next season," says Chris Marino, owner of Xtreme Snow Pros in New Jersey.

Likened to bringing a vehicle in for its 27-point safety inspection, Marino says Xtreme Snow Pros has its own inspection program in place to ensure their equipment is back up and running as efficiently as possible.

"Right now, we are systematically going through each of our pieces of equipment from headlights to fluid changes. The rust is what is going to kill you on any snow equipment, so we

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SNOW EQUIPMENT

also have a huge preventative program we do after every winter event. We power wash and apply a product called Salt-Away to everything from the undercarriage to the inside of the truck. Then, we apply Fluid Film to prevent rust," he says.

Similarly, Don Nelson, owner of Glacier Snow in Minnesota, stays ahead of salt damage by routinely cleaning his equipment with Neutro-Wash and uses the off season for more extensive maintenance.

"We park a piece in the main bay and it doesn't leave until its completely done and ready to roll for next year. We do a 'final final' detail with the loaders and the salt trucks where all the panels are opened up, we pull the mats out of the cabs, we wash every nook and cranny to make sure it is all clean of salt and debris, and then we polish up with a coat of wax. We also do oil changes and check filters, belts and any common wear items," Nelson says.

In addition to mechanical upkeep, Nelson brings any of his equipment that needs a fresh paint job to get sandblasted and powder coated to look brand new.

"How we keep our appearance there reflects the work we do on the lots. If (clients) see that we take care of our stuff, they know that we take it seriously and that we pay attention to detail and are going to take care of their lot."

Another aspect to an off-season maintenance routine should involve quick monthly check-ins with each vehicle to move them and let the engines run, Marino says.

"The worst thing is everything sitting around idle for however many months before the next season. When I was a smaller company and didn't have mechanics, September comes around and I'd have all these brake problems and rotor problems," he says.

For companies that also perform lawn care and landscaping in the summer months, finding time for snow equipment maintenance can become a balancing act, says Andrew Stachowiak, owner of Seasons Change Services in Michigan.

"We might work on a lawn mower one day and the next day we work on a snow plow. We try to fix anything we can at the end of the season so that in case we get a little behind the eight ball next year and we get an early snow, we know we can get that equipment



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out with minimal issues, if any," Stachowiak says.

KEEPING A RECORD. On the wall of Glacier Snow's facility, a large marker board lists all 35 pieces of equipment in big square boxes. Throughout the season, if a driver notices any issues from bald tires to burned-out headlights, they write it on the board, Nelson says.

"The cleaning, waxing, oil changes, all of the maintenance is marked on there. We want that box with nothing in it by the time mid-summer rolls around," he says.

With larger fleets like that of Xtreme Snow Pros, digital

“
WE MIGHT WORK ON
A LAWN MOWER ONE
DAY AND THE NEXT
DAY WE WORK ON
A SNOW PLOW.”

— Andrew Stachowiak,
Seasons Change Service

tracking has become an essential way to manage maintenance as well as simply locate their 150 pieces of equipment. Last sea-



Cleaning the salt off the undercarriage of a plow truck is part of maintaining a fleet in the off season.

son, Marino began using an app called Asset Panda that assigns a number and barcode to each piece of equipment. When the company drops off a vehicle or

loans out a tool, they move that item to the jobsite on the app. Users can also scan in work and take photos to add to a running report by hour and mileage for

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SNOW EQUIPMENT

each piece of equipment.

"I realized I needed (the app) when I forgot about our \$150,000 loader on a site. We were at the point where we need to track not only where our assets are, but the maintenance of the assets as well. It's a great way to easily see where everything is sitting," he says.

The seasonal transition is also a good time to weigh the options when it comes to adding new equipment or selling and replacing old pieces. Xtreme Snow Pros analyzes data they've collected after every winter event or storm and looks for any equipment that has given them trouble, Marino says.

"We have to minimize downtime, so if that piece has broken down too many times during an event, then it's time to upgrade," he says.

THE SALT PROBLEM. For contractors, there is a battle between the need for safe driving surfaces and the damage caused by the materials necessary to provide them. Landscaping companies see the harmful effects of de-icing products like salt not only in the rust damage to their equipment, but on their sites when they have flaking concrete and strips of dead vegetation along sidewalks come spring, Nelson says.

"I like to get on my 'salt box' because there are so many people in the industry that do not understand how salts work," he says. They don't even know what they are putting on. They know that they are paid by the ton or the yard, so there is no incentive to use less. Even though I'm a company that sells salt, I'm also a person that sees that we need to migrate away from so much salt usage."

Two years ago, Glacier Snow switched to non-chlorides for de-icing sidewalks. In addition to protecting his brooms and pushers, the product is not harmful to the landscaping or concrete and also prevents tracking issues on carpet or tile in buildings, Nelson says.

"For landscapers, I wouldn't use anything but non-chlorides on the sidewalk. You can sell the client on the idea that you don't have to come back later to fix the strips of grass or shrubs. The product costs a little more, but you'll save in the long run," he says. **L&L**

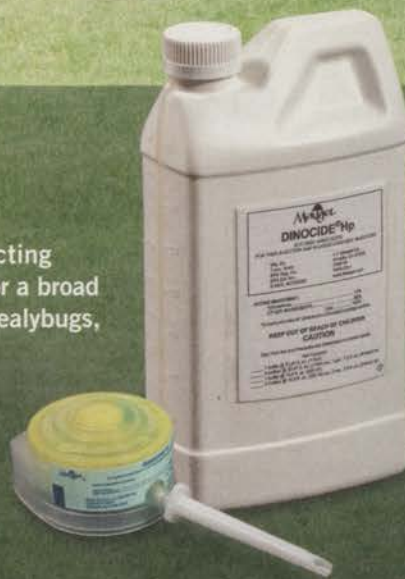
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For more information: Toro.com

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The crew size CONUNDRUM

Set up your maintenance crews to be efficient and profitable. **By Holly Hammersmith**

MOVING TO THREE two-man landscape maintenance crews from two three-man crews last year was an influential change to the bottom line at Capone Landscape, a full-service landscape company based in Wakefield, Massachusetts.

"The two guys work a little harder but everybody always has something to do," says Frank Capone Jr., owner and president. "If someone is not pulling their weight, it's really glaringly apparent when you go down to two-man crews."

THE CASE FOR TWO. Capone says he added a third crew to his landscape main-

tenance division and efficiency picked up "big time" in 2016.

The company employs 11 people, has an annual revenue of \$1.1 million and services primarily residential customers.

"What I was seeing was travel time expense," he says. "Certain days we travel more than others. It seemed like three men at some places were just too many."

Today the company has the three two-man crews that work five days a week performing landscape maintenance: mowing of grass, trimming, cleanup and some pruning of ornamentals. Each crew consists of a leader and a laborer.

Sending three men out on one job isn't out of the question, but Capone says he is now more strategic about when this is necessary. For example, for work at condominium complexes, where properties are larger and closer together, three men are more efficient.

At Omaha Landscaping Solutions, Owner AJ Kendall says he has reached the same conclusion and will run two two-man crews. Each crew consists of a supervisor and a laborer. The supervisor typically has more experience, drives the vehicle and carries insurance to operate the vehicle, Kendall says.

"We try to stick to two-man crews, but having a third guy in there allows us to get a little more work done," he says.

PERFORMANCE PREDICTIONS. Kendall says his company is poised for growth this year and the landscape maintenance side will likely grow 40 to 60 percent.

"On maintenance we grew at about 60 percent more over the previous year," Kendall says. "We had pretty steady business. We only had a couple of slow weeks in the summer and we had a really long fall."

This year looks promising in Omaha, Nebraska, as more Baby Boomers retire and the area's overall population continues to grow, making prospects plentiful, he says.

At Capone Landscape, landscape maintenance work makes up 60 to 70 percent of business.

"We are reviewing the numbers right now and I am liking what I see," Capone says. "We tend to grow our maintenance between 5 and 7 percent a year."

The company has been in operation for more than 70

years. In addition to increasing efficiency on crews, this annual increase in gross sales has been due to price increases and also a growing customer base, Capone says.

At Hartman Landscaping, based in Zanesville, Ohio, and primarily serving commercial customers, President Beau Hartman says the maintenance division is expected to grow gross revenue in 2017.

About half of the company's \$1 million in gross annual revenue comes from landscape maintenance. Other services offered include hardscaping, irrigation and snow and ice removal. Fifteen employees work at the company.

"The last few years we've kind of shifted gears a little bit," he says. "We have kind of gotten rid of the 'mow, blow and go' customers, and have moved onto the people that have full service."

These accounts are typically more profitable because in addition to maintenance, the customers are open to purchasing additional services such as sod installation, irrigation and landscape lighting.

"I feel that it's overall improved our business image, our clientele and profit," Hartman says.

ONBOARDING NEW HIRES. Typically, new hires will start as laborers on mowing crews, Hartman says. But, in other cases, hires are made for specific positions, he adds.

"Some prefer to just stick with mowing or just stick with landscaping," Hartman says.

At Omaha Landscaping Solutions, which posted \$190,000 in 2016 revenue, mowing is also

typically considered an entry-level position, with pay starting at \$13 an hour. Ninety percent of customers are residential and three employees work at the company. Those laborers can work their way up to be a crew leader. Each crew will mow about 30 lawns a day during peak season.

Regardless of whether the employee is new to the company or new to the industry, they undergo basic training before working in the field.

"They spend a few hours operating the equipment, even if it's on concrete, not in a yard," Kendall says. "We practice moving the mowers and the equipment, how to start them, what gas to use, how the gate goes down."

The idea is to take it slow once an employee is out in the field,

"We have them start with a smaller mower that's easier to maneuver, a 21-inch mower," Kendall says. "Then in the bigger

yards, we will give them more practice. After a couple weeks, they will be more comfortable using the (larger) equipment."

Training also begins in house at Capone Landscape. "We go over the lawn mowers and ease them into it at certain properties," Capone says. "We try not to roll someone out at a high-end residential property before they have the skills."

Typically, it takes a new laborer one season to become proficient on a maintenance crew.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS. Customers want to work with a company with crews that are both reliable and predictable, Capone adds.

"We really try to be at the same account at the same time, same day every week," he says. "If you start showing up different days every week, customers don't like that."

One of the biggest challenges Hartman says he faces with this

division is making sure laborers pay attention to detail.

"Treating the property as their own – we really try to instill that in our employees," he says. "If you were paying for this service, how would you want this done?"

He, or the operations manager, also perform quality site assessments on each property at least four times a season using a mobile app, Fast Field Mobile Forms. During the assessment, a checklist is followed for each property and photos document areas for improvement.

"We really try to catch an issue before a client notices anything," Hartman says. "It has been very beneficial to us in upselling enhancements to customers. If there is gravel rock bed that was rocked five years ago and it's packed in or washed out, we can make note of it and forward it to the customer." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Ohio.



Capone Landscaping won't let a new employee work at a high-end property until they are more seasoned.

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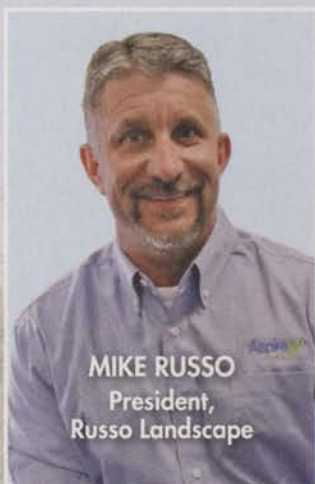
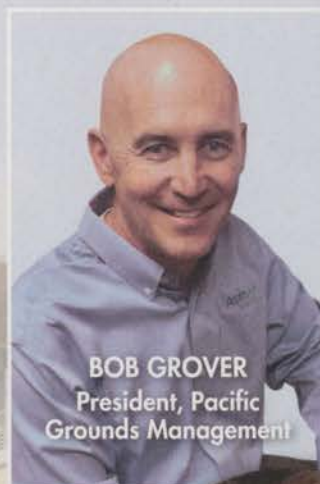
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THE MANY REASONS HIRING IS DIFFICULT



- **I'M RELATIVELY CERTAIN THAT** every recent article or interview where business leaders in the green industry are asked about their biggest challenges for 2017, they mention the struggle for attracting, hiring and retaining enough quality people.

This universal struggle is evident from the large number of webinars, training events and industry consultants advertising assistance with this problem. The struggle is evident for me personally because I have been fortunate to be highly involved with training teams in various parts of this difficult process for the past six years.

So why is the process of hiring and retaining employees so hard? Maybe because I treat the process as a seasonal event. Maybe because I turn down applications throughout the year because we're fully staffed, even though there are four employees I really need to replace. Maybe because I only hire referrals – without even really interviewing them.

Maybe because I was never onboarded so why do I need to onboard new employees – plus



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I have no idea what that word means. Maybe because I'm looking for the perfect landscaper when I do interviews. Maybe I don't even follow an interview guide (Who can blame me? My gut is superior to any guide).

Maybe because I only hire people who fit the mold of what I think a landscaper should look like. Maybe because my idea of sourcing is waiting for potential employees to show up at our door. Maybe because I love to prove new employees wrong when they told me they have experience.

Maybe because I like to hire twice

“THERE ARE MANY ASPECTS TO HIRING AND RETENTION AND THEY ARE ALL IMPORTANT. NOT SOME OF THEM, SOME OF THE TIME.”

as many employees as I need because half of them won't last a week anyway. Maybe because this is all too difficult so I just hired someone to do it all for me, which ironically isn't working out, either.

The point is there are many aspects to hiring and retention and they are all important. Not some of them, some of the time. Think about it from the perspective of a potential hire, which starts at the very first connection.

Did they call the office and get a warm smile over the phone? Did they talk to a current employee at the local nursery and hear about a great place to work? Or did they nervously walk into the office hoping to fill out an application and the first person they saw was welcoming to the stranger in the office?

This is only one of many critical connections between prospective employees and your company during the hiring and onboarding process, which includes:

1. **Sourcing** – The techniques used to search for employees.
2. **Prescreening** – Qualification questions done in person or over the phone.
3. **Interviewing** – Predefined questions intended to match core competencies per position.
4. **Hiring** – The official offer through day one, which ideally is not the same day.
5. **Orientation** – Defined first day on the job to orient new hires to the company, office, etc.
6. **Onboarding** – Day one through at least day 90 with defined touch points to build personal relationships.
7. **Success** – Another loyal employee that becomes your next sourcing champion.

To reach the last step, you need to be locked in on the steps preceding it. And unfortunately, this is not easy. You can't just do a few steps very well. Failure at any of the steps leads to a greater need for candidates or greater turnover.

All cylinders need to be firing all the time. Only then will you find success, which leads to lower turnover, which leads to hiring only for growth, which feels awesome when you get there. **L&L**

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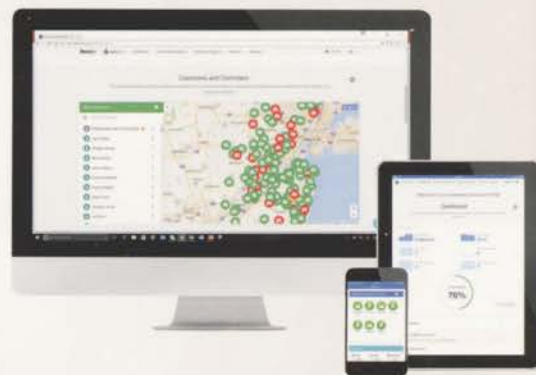
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