

AUGUST 2018

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Rodney Smith Jr. is mowing lawns across America to spread a positive message. In this issue, we explore how Smith and others in the green industry use their expertise to help local communities.

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LAWN & LANDSCAPE

BRANDSPOTLIGHT WITH DYNASCAPE

SOFTWARE AS A BUSINESS TOOL FOR LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS

EVERY PROFESSION HAS ITS SET OF FAVORITE TOOLS, and for most of them, the list now usually includes some software as well. This article explores the use of software as a business tool in the landscape design industry. For a growing number of landscape companies, software is now an indispensable part of their daily workflows, thanks to the availability and power of programs that are designed specifically for their needs.

WHAT MAKES THE BEST SOFTWARE INDISPENSABLE

When do you decide to buy a tool for your business? When it's clear that it will help you do your job better. For business owners, that ultimately means helping you to make more money.

In that respect, buying landscape business

software has become an easy decision for many business owners to make, because the best software brings many advantages. Among other things, it can:

- Save you time
- Make you more accurate
- Let you share information and work among many people on a team
- Be used to calculate costs, overhead and profits exactly, instead of "ballparking" or "guesstimating"
- Make your designs, proposals and presentations look professional
- Remind you of tasks and next steps
- Help you keep track of everything when things get busy
- Remind you to follow up with new prospects

"It really helps to know if we're making money on these jobs."

Bill Banford, owner,
The Sharper Cut



- Let you keep everyone on the same page on a project/job
- Automate and streamline your workday
- Help you follow your industry's best practices
- Let you reuse things that take time to make, like price books and kits
- Let you make revisions to proposals and invoices without having to start over
- Give you useful reports
- Help you to see trends and problems that might otherwise stay hidden
- Connect you to everyone else in your company
- Keep you informed when you're not at your desk
- Keep track of your expenses, income, overhead and profit margins
- Track everyone at every stage in

- your sales pipeline
- Help you to manage your staff

DYNASCAPE'S SOLUTION: MANAGE360

After years of developing specialized software (DSIDesign, DSIColor & DSISketch3D) to help landscape designers draw their plans, DynaSCAPE recognized an additional need in the industry: the need for a software tool that would help landscape business owners to run their companies, and to manage those aspects of the business that are specific to the landscape market. Things like preparing accurate estimates. Doing material takeoffs. Preparing proposals, worksheets, invoices, change orders. Recovering overheads. Tracking customers through the sales pipeline.

Not all of those tasks are exclusive to the landscape industry, but the combination and flow and details of all steps of the

landscape sales cycle are indeed unique. To be aided and improved by software, these tasks require more customized automation than any standard software can offer. That's the feedback that DynaSCAPE received from its customers, and that's the problem that it set out to solve.

USING MANAGE360 TO BE PROFITABLE AND COMPETITIVE

The benefits most often mentioned by Manage360 users are that it saves them time, and that it brings a whole new level of accuracy and reliability to their operations. Both of which translate, they say, into increased profits and growth for their companies.

On the question of using software as a business tool, Brian Shernce of BTS Landscaping in Flanders, New Jersey, says, "I don't think I could survive without it now. I don't think that it's an option." He now uses Manage360 to prepare his estimates and manage his sales, and says, "For me, estimating is the most time-consuming thing, and if you mess up the estimate, the whole thing is messed up, no matter how good a job your crew does. So you've got to put in the time necessary to do a thorough and accurate estimate. And with Manage360, the time-saving is huge. Absolutely beneficial."

Bill Banford, owner of The Sharper Cut in Cheltenham, Maryland, concurs that Manage360 is "very efficient for estimating." He likes the fact that the software is "geared specifically for landscape industry" and emphasizes that the benefits that it brings to his business are both in terms of time-savings and accuracy. "We use it for preparing our estimates, and for job tracking and job costing too. Which are really good. It really helps to know if we're making money on these jobs."

A user of DSIDesign as well, Mr. Banford says that "having the CAD software helps immensely for making changes to the design, storing them and making updates. And more importantly, it forces us to be more precise when we estimate, because when we get to the estimating feature, we know we're getting the proper information put in.

"And to run a business these days without having some kind of software, be honest with you, I don't know how people would do it."



GREEN GIVES BACK

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Lawn maintenance wasn't **Rodney Smith Jr.'s** intended career, but today he's constantly encouraging people to provide free maintenance services to those in need through Raising Men Lawn Care.

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BRANDSPOTLIGHT WITH DYNASCAPE

Software as a business tool for landscape professionals **2**



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Brian Horn

Editor | Lawn & Landscape

Not only is it good
for your company,
but it also shows
those in your
community
the importance
of the services
you provide.

Good deeds in the weeds

I recently returned from the 22nd annual Renewal & Remembrance. The event allows members of the National Association of Landscape Professionals and their families to tend to the grounds at Arlington National Cemetery and United States Soldiers' and Airmen's Home National Cemetery.

I use the word "allows" because everyone I talked to in Arlington is honored to work for free for a few hours for a good cause.

It's a personality trait of the volunteers at the event, and on a larger scale, it's the attitude of the industry.

That's a good thing because this industry is ideal for volunteer work. You have the talent and the equipment to help beautify landscapes.

Landscapes are a number one priority to this industry, but sometimes they fall down the priority list of homeowners if times get tough or they experience an illness or worse a death.

For some business owners spending time and money to work for free when they are already working 12 hours to make ends meet is difficult, and I get that.

But if you can carve out some time for volunteer activities and put aside some money in the budget, you'll find it has plenty of benefits.

That's why this month we wanted to focus on how different companies volunteer their services

and use their position as a strong business in the community to help those in need. The stories focus on providing services for free, but also dive into diverse ways a landscaping company can help a cause, like YardApes did by starting a charity golf tournament, which you can read about on page 32.

And you don't have to do it alone. There's nothing wrong with teaming up with the competition for charity events for the greater good of the community. Or, volunteer to be the landscaping part of a larger project.

One company we write about on page 34 is providing free services through a city run program. So, the weight of being the lead on a project doesn't have to solely fall on you.

Usually vendors are involved supplying materials, as well. So, whether you come to them for help or they come to you, it helps you build a better relationship with those vendors.

And let's be honest, volunteering and charity is great for marketing and generating business. It's OK to admit that.

So, as you plan for the end of the year and next year, think about some ways as a green industry professional that you can start volunteering or take on more opportunities.

Not only is it good for your company, but it also shows those in your community the importance of the services you provide. — *Brian Horn*

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INDUSTRY'S LARGEST COMPANIES **CONNECT IN DENVER**

Owners and business leaders gathered for Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 Executive Summit to learn and network.

By Lauren Rathmell, Megan Smalley and Kate Spirgen

LAWN & LANDSCAPE HOSTED ITS SECOND TOP 100 EXECUTIVE SUMMIT, an event for the highest-grossing lawn care and landscape companies in North America, which took place June 5-6. Industry leaders traveled to Denver to network, learn and receive their awards for making it on Lawn & Landscape's 2018 Top 100 list.

The following are some of the takeaways from the event.

ABOVE: Denver-based Metco Landscape was No. 28 on our Top 100 list. The company hosted a site visit during the Top 100 event.

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OUTLOOK ON M&A. Tom Fochtman, CEO of Ceibass Venture Partners, Brian Corbett, managing partner of CCG Advisors, and Ron Edmonds, principal consultant at The Principium Group, all agree that the market has never been better for those looking to sell their landscaping business.

"The market is frothy right now," Fochtman said. "We've had private equity, but not like this."

In Denver, the panelists shared a few important tips to consider if you're thinking about selling in the current market.

1) Don't wait. If you're in selling mode, you want to be on top of things right now. "Leveraging will be a little tougher; rates are up a bit. I think this run will last a few more years. Don't be waiting; be on it," Fochtman said.

In our May issue, we reported that the boom in the economy won't last forever, but the panelists all agreed there's still time to secure a decent sale. Right now, Corbett said the holding period for private equity firms is four to seven years, which will offer a cushion to businesses looking to sell before the projected 2020 economic recession.

2) Talk to your employees. If you're in the process of selling a business, employees may be concerned with how the sale will impact their jobs. The panelists all recommended being open with employees. "Your business is really only your employees and your customers," Edmonds said. "That's a major task that the buyer has — coming up with an action plan."

Corbett recommends sitting down with your employees once the sale is finished, and explaining

what you (the owner) did, why you did it and how it will impact them. He also said to wait a day or two to bring the new owner on board so that employees have time to process the change.

3) Do your due diligence. In prepping for a sale, it's your job to ensure all your ducks are in a row. "There's unlimited opportunity for hiccups. The biggest issue that comes up is inability to hold up to scrutiny," Edmonds said.

One of the biggest hang-ups when it comes to selling is ensuring your labor force and the paperwork that goes with that are legally sound. Fochtman said he sees buyers bring in a labor attorney and go through every single I-9 on file, and if there's ever a doubt, they may pull away from the deal. He would like to see every company using E-Verify to make it easier, and if necessary, using the H-2B process to find foreign workers.

ASSET PROTECTION MISTAKES. Asset protection means placing personal and business assets beyond the reach of any potential threat. Ariel Enisman, attorney with the Presser Law Firm, said the No. 1 goal with asset protection is to avoid becoming a target.

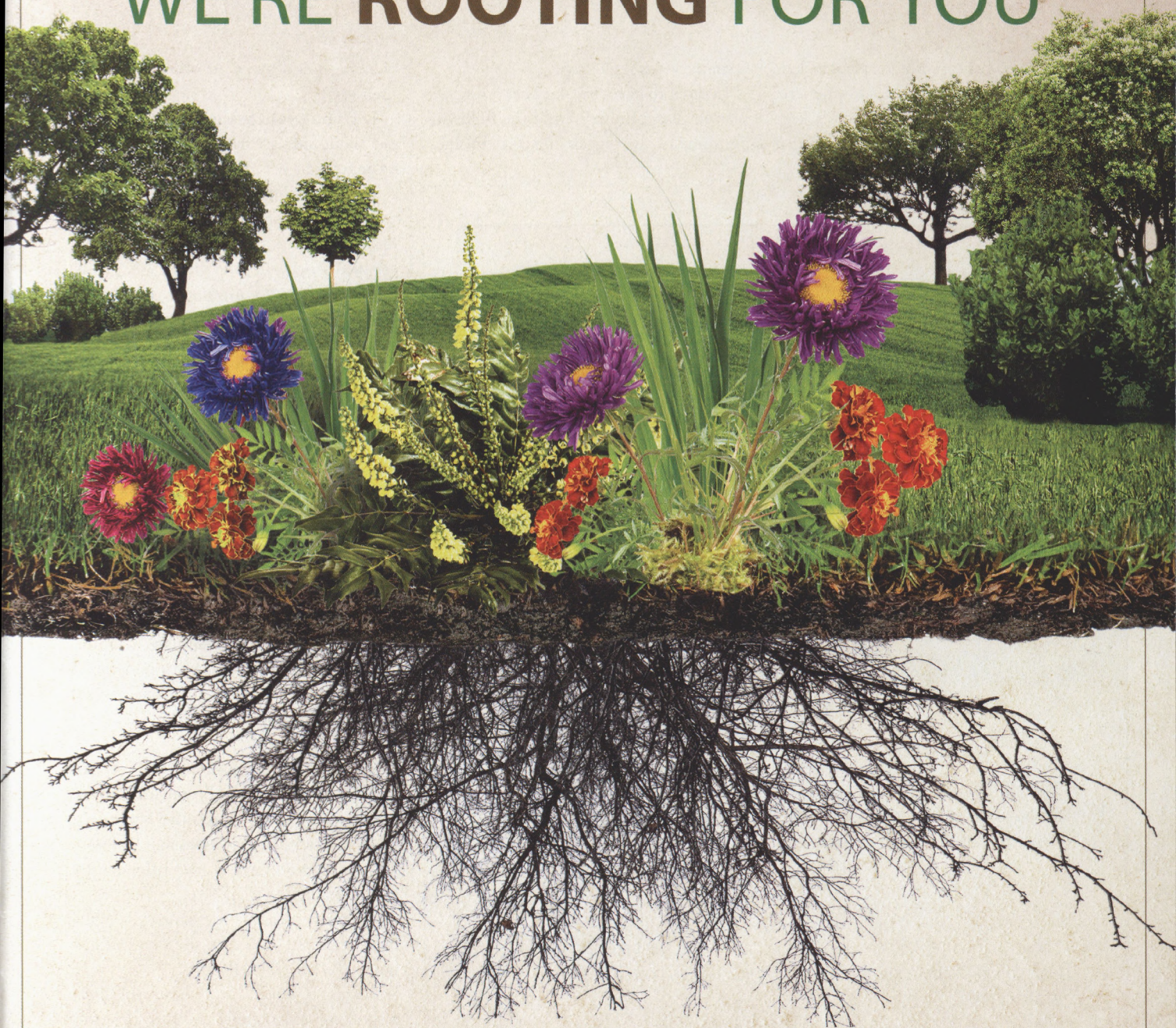
"Make yourself look like such a difficult target and so expensive for someone to come after you," she said.

During Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 Executive Summit in Denver, Enisman explained that a well-structured asset protection plan involves ensuring that business owners own nothing but control everything.

"Get ownership rights out of your name," Enisman said. "If you own something, you're exposed."

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EVENT COVERAGE

Keys to good asset protection plans include protecting every asset, make sure the asset protection plan fits with financial goals, keep the plan up-to-date and develop a plan that

is simple yet cost-effective.

In order to have a strong asset protection plan in place, Enisman said the following are some of the biggest mistakes business

owners should avoid in order to protect their assets:

1. Hiding your assets. Enisman said it's not about hiding what you have. It's better to be upfront with your assets so that they can't come back to hurt you in the long run.

2. Titling your assets to "straws." "What makes you think this person is less likely to get sued than you?" she said. Putting your assets in the name of someone else just to cover your bases is not the best way to protect what you have. Your friend or co-worker can get sued just as easily as you and lose their assets – and yours.

3. Titling your assets to a spouse. Similar to assets in the name of another individual, giving your assets to your spouse can be just as risky. Enisman explained that if you own a vehicle that is registered in both your name and your spouse's name, both the owner and the driver can be sued rather than just one party.

4. Don't break any laws. This may seem like a no-brainer but following laws to protect your assets will save you from devastating lawsuits. Make sure everything you do is 100 percent legal before taking action.

LEADERSHIP MEANS PARTNERSHIP. When Ty Bennett opened the keynote for Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 Executive Summit in Denver, he asked attendees a blunt question: Why in the world would anyone follow you as their leader?

"The answer cannot be because you're the boss," Bennett said. "People don't follow bosses. People follow people."

Bennett is the founder of Leadership Inc., a speaking and training company. He was previously an entrepreneur who built a direct sales business with his brother when he was 21 years old that achieved \$20 million in annual revenues. According to Bennett, being a leader requires much more than authority. He said it requires a concept called partner leadership.

With the unemployment rate low and keeping good labor a main problem in the landscaping industry, Bennett said it's important to win commitment from employees.

"People are not committed to jobs," he

EXPANDING INTO SPRAYING? DO WHAT JASON DID.



Jason Creel was already mowing and knew spraying would make his business even more profitable – if he did it right. Here's what he did and what the numbers say.

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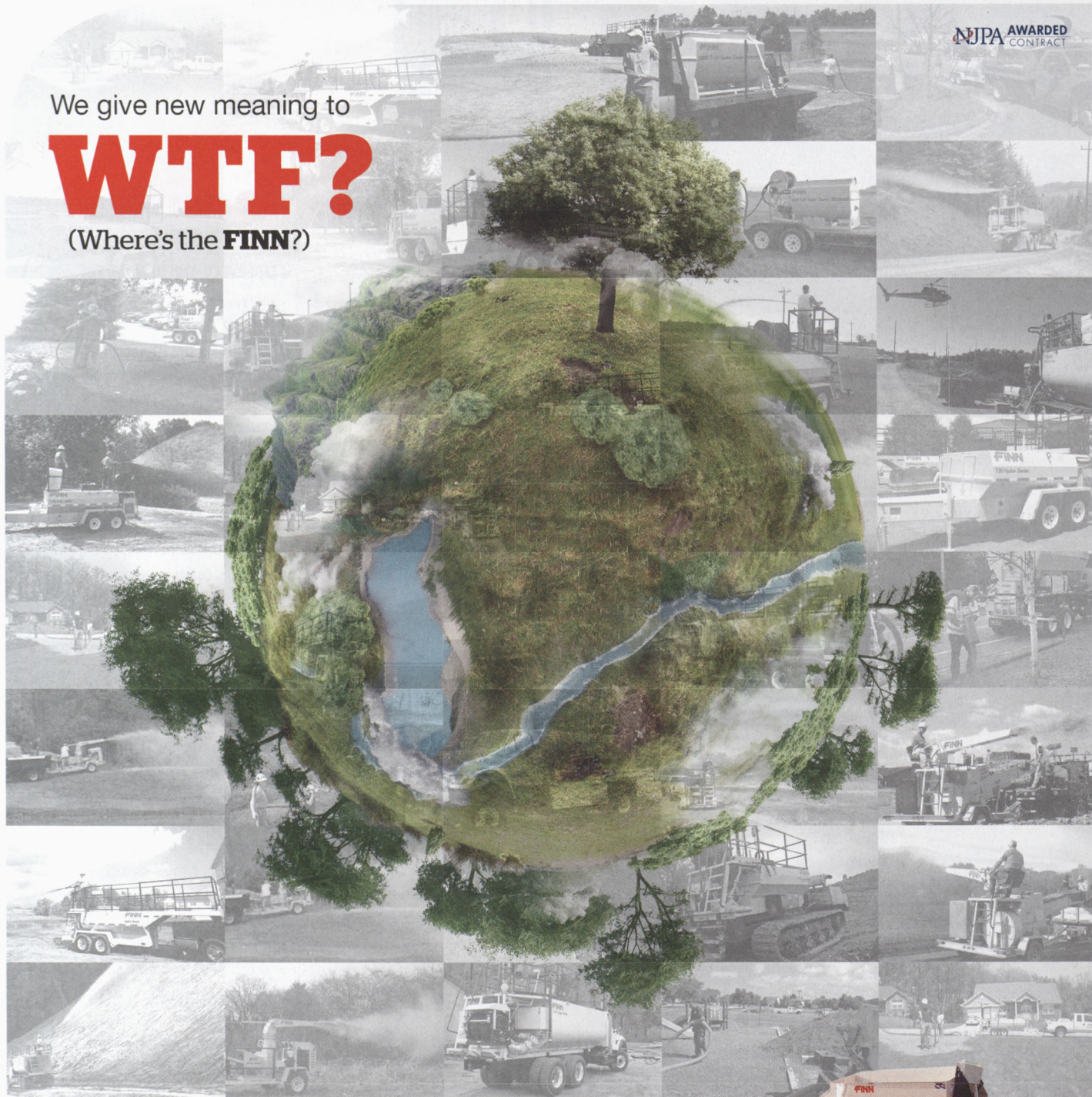
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GOOD LEADERS NEED TO BOTH MOTIVATE EMPLOYEES AND REMOVE THE OBSTACLES THAT KEEP THEM FROM DOING GREAT WORK.

said. "People aren't committed to companies. What drives commitment is people commit to people. The old adage was that people would commit to a person with a title, position and authority. But I don't think that's true in today's world."

Today, he said employees are looking for leaders who are genuine and invested in their employees – having relationships with employees is much more critical. That, he said, is part of being a partner leader.

Bennett offered these three tips on how business owners and managers could become partner leaders:

1. Build genuine relationships with employees. According to Bennett, all business owners are in the people business. One key to becoming a partner leader is investing in employees, which means being genuine with them and getting to know them. He suggested giving back to employees as a simple way to invest in them – make them breakfast, take them to dinner, meet their families.

"Our ability to build relationships is the currency of business," he said. "We need to become great at it. If you invest in your people, they'll want to invest in you. We're all wired that way. If someone punches you, you punch back; but if someone does something nice for you, you want to do something nice back."

2. Generate buy-in from employees. People support what they help to create. Bennett is involved with the National Speakers Association and when the association tried to change its name and logo without any buy-in from its members, there was a lot of

backlash from members. So, he said the association backtracked to get buy-in on a name and logo change from its members.

"Our goal is to get commitment from our people, so we have to involve them in creation, otherwise they won't commit," he said.

Although getting buy-in takes extra time when trying to make changes, things will take longer and be more costly if employees don't end up buying into the change made by managers and owners, just like it was for the National Speakers Association.

3. Know that motivation is important, but it's overrated.

It's good to motivate employees, but Bennett said partner leaders can't forget that the flip side of motivation is removing obstacles and inhibitors that keep employees from achieving goals set for them. Partner leaders need to do both – motivate and help remove obstacles.

Bennett shared the story of how his young son came to him one morning and told him he didn't know how to open the refrigerator while he had his hands full of toys. Bennett said he could have motivated his son to try harder to open the refrigerator, but the smarter option was to remove the obstacle and have his son drop the toys in his hands.

"Sometimes it's better to remove the obstacles than motivate," he said.



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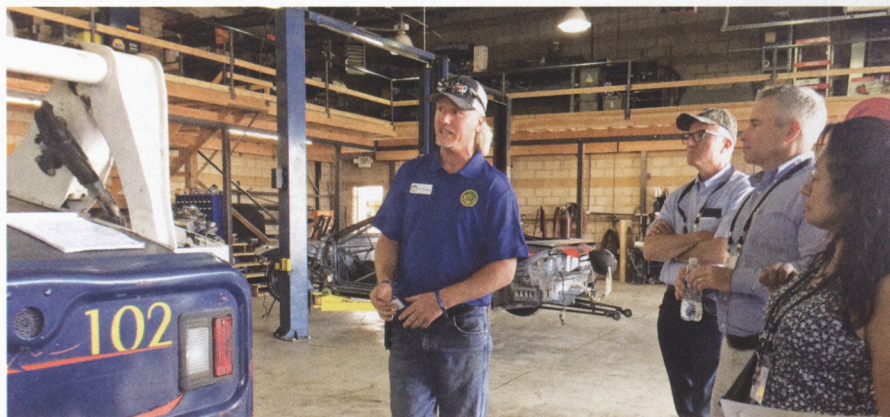


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EVENT COVERAGE



INSIDE LOOK AT METCO

AS PART OF THE TOP 100 SUMMIT, Metco Landscape invited attendees to visit its operation a few miles outside of Denver. Metco ranked 28th on the 2018 list with more than \$57 million in 2017 revenue and is focusing on growing its commercial maintenance division. The owner and managers gave attendees a look around its headquarters and shared stats.

FACTS AND FIGURES ABOUT METCO:

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amount bid to date with a 20 percent close rate for commercial construction

\$25 MILLION

backlog of commercial construction work at Metco

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square feet of sod Metco installs each year

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LEGAL PROTECTIONS

Q: We are thinking about hiring someone who has a gray area in their non-compete agreement. Are non-compete agreements enforceable?

A: Enforceability depends on the scope of the agreement according to state law. Often, an agreement that precludes an employee from working in the industry for a period of time is unenforceable. The aspect of a non-compete that is most likely to be enforceable involves an agreement not to solicit your customers or employees for a fixed period of time.

In some states, if certain provisions of the agreement are illegal, the court may enforce the lawful provisions. In other states, if any aspect of the agreement is illegal, the entire agreement is unenforceable.

In my view, the question to answer is what do you need to do to protect your business? Usually, it's the non-disclosure of confidential information and non-solicitation

ASK THE EXPERTS

of customers and employees. I generally advise employers to make the agreement as limited as is possible, yet still protect the business. This includes the duration of the agreement.

For example, perhaps the limitation on solicitation by your sales manager would be two years, but for a supervisor it would be one year. If you don't have a non-compete, nothing stops the employee from soliciting your customers the moment he or she quits. Be sure to consult with your business lawyer about drafting an enforceable agreement.

Q: How do I know if my company does enough to prevent and successfully defend a sexual harassment claim?

A: An industry where employees have contact with the public has a higher level of responsibility to



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train employees about behavior of third parties and other employees. The more training you do, the better shape you are in to prevent problems.

As a first step, develop a comprehensive policy that addresses harassment – not just sexual harassment. It should prohibit harassment based on protected class status (such as race and national origin) and harassment that may not relate to protected class status. The policy should prohibit any threatening, demeaning, abusive or taunting behavior. The policy also should prohibit retaliation for reporting harassment or participating in an investigation about harassment.

Review the policy during onboarding and at least annually thereafter. Members of the leadership team should lead the way in policy communication. Provide in-person training about harassment, what may constitute harassment, how to report it and what action will occur if it is reported, including protection from retaliation for either reporting the behavior or participating in the investigation.

Hold leadership team members to a higher level of accountability for their behavior. Require that employees report any behavior that they believe may violate the policy, even if they are not the recipient. Provide multiple options for an employee to report harassment. Whoever conducts an investigation about harassment/discrimination/retaliation should be trained on how to conduct a proper investigation. At the conclusion of the investigation, determine what action is appropriate. If it's to separate the accused and the accuser, be sure the accuser is not adversely affected by this approach.

Richard Lehr, Esq.
NALP Human Resources and Legal Advisory

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

IN THE NEWS

BRIGHTVIEW MAKES IT OFFICIAL

PLYMOUTH MEETING, Pa. – BrightView officially went public June 28 when CEO Andrew Masterman rang the bell on the New York Stock Exchange.

The initial public offering of 21,300,000 shares of the company's common stock was priced at \$22 per share, raising \$468.6 million. Shares of BrightView's common stock are being traded today under the symbol BV.

Masterman said the move is not only a positive for BrightView, but for the industry as a whole.

"This provides a platform for everyone to look to and say this is absolutely and unquestionably a very big and prominent industry," he said. "If your aspiration is to be someone who runs a smaller organization, that's great. If you have aspirations to be involved with a larger company, it all exists within the landscaping industry."

While some would say going public puts more emphasis on the bottom line and not the customer, which may be a stain on the industry, Masterman said that won't be the case.

"All of us in business, we are in it for several reasons; for one, we love the industry, we love being involved with our crews and we love making great landscapes out there," he said. "For those who have invested their own money to build their own enterprises or now in a public company like BrightView, we want to make some money. We are not misaligned. The only difference is now we have a vehicle where everyone can participate in BrightView's growth and the industry's."

BrightView will offer stock grants to crew supervisors who have been with the company at least 10 years and all salaried,

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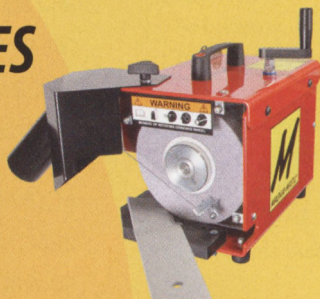
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"You can start as a gardener and if you make it to a crew supervisor and have been there 10 years, you get that grant," he said. "That starts today, so if you have been there 30 years, you get it now. It's about engaging our leadership and that's leadership at all levels."

In the fall, all employees will be able to buy stock at a discounted rate.

BrightView has acquired eight businesses with more than \$188.2 million in total revenue since Jan. 1, 2017.

Masterman said the company's approach to acquisitions won't change after going public.

He added that he doesn't have a set number of acquisitions in mind to make, he is instead keeping an eye out for companies that make sense to acquire.

"There is abundant room for us to continue to grow into the market and we have a great competitive landscape where we have really good competition growing out there as well," he said.

BrightView reported a revenue of \$2.3 billion last year, making it the highest-grossing landscape company in the U.S. and Canada, and No. 1 on Lawn & Landscape's 2018 Top 100 List. The company, based in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, employs 22,000 people.

Formed in 2014 when KKR, parent company of Brickman, acquired ValleyCrest from Michael Dell's MSD Capital, the combined companies rebranded as BrightView in 2016.

MSD is still a minority shareholder of BrightView according to the SEC statement.

OPEI HOSTS 66TH ANNUAL MEETING, ADDS BOARD MEMBERS

BONITA SPRINGS, Fla. — The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute held its 66th annual meeting, focusing on messages of innovation and industry advancement.

Chief among industry updates heard at the meeting, the trade association introduced its new statistics vendor, Vault Consulting, which showcased updates to the members-only program's capabilities and categories. OPEI staff also shared the latest forecast updates for key categories of equipment.

OPEI also rolled out a preview of a new television program sponsored by TurfMutt and produced in partnership with Hearst Televi-

sion and Litton Entertainment. The show, which highlights the importance of lawns and outdoor space to families and pets, will debut this fall on the CW.

Planning is already underway for OPEI's 2019 annual meeting, to be held June 18-20 at the Stein Eriksen Lodge in Park City, Utah. Members are encouraged to contact association staff with suggestions for topics or speakers.

The OPEI board of directors met in conjunction with the annual meeting, installing its 2018-2019 leadership. The board bid outgoing chairman Dan Ariens,

chairman and CEO of Ariens Company, a fond farewell and welcomed incoming Chairman Tom Cromwell, group president, Kohler Power, Kohler Company.

The board also has appointed Earl Bennett, president, Husqvarna Professional Products, to the board.

"Earl Bennett is a longtime advocate for the outdoor power equipment industry, and we welcome his perspective on the OPEI board of directors," said Kris Kiser, president and CEO.

The 2018-2019 OPEI board of directors comprises:

CHAIR

- **Mr. Tom Cromwell**, group president, Kohler Power, Kohler Company

VICE CHAIR

- **Mr. Bjoern Fischer**, president, STIHL

SECRETARY/TREASURER

- **Mr. Rick Olson**, chairman, president and CEO, The Toro Company

IMMEDIATE PAST CHAIR

- **Mr. Dan Ariens**, chairman and CEO, Ariens Company

DIRECTORS

- **Mr. Earl Bennett**, president, Professional Products, Husqvarna
- **Mr. Edward B. Cohen**, vice president, government & industry relations, American Honda Motor Company, Inc.
- **Mr. Tim Dorsey**, president, Echo Incorporated
- **Mr. Tom Duncan**, president and CEO, Positec USA, Inc.
- **Mr. Peter Hampton**, president and CEO, Active Exhaust Corporation
- **Mrs. Jean Hlay**, president and COO, MTD Products, Inc.
- **Mr. Tim Merrett**, vice president, Global Platform Turf & Utility, Deere and Company
- **Mr. Lee Sowell**, president, Outdoor Products, Techtronic Industries
- **Mr. Todd Teske**, chairman, president and CEO, Briggs and Stratton Corporation
- **Mr. Mark Wagner**, president and CEO, Club Car, LLC
- **Mr. Joe Wright**, president and CEO, Excel Industries

NALP HIRES VP OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

ARLINGTON, Va.—The National Association of Landscape Professionals hired Andrew Bray as its vice president of government relations beginning July 9. He will replace Paul Mendelsohn, who left the association in June.

Bray is a seasoned association advocate, having worked in a government relations role for the North American Meat Institute, the Grocer Manufacturers Association and most recently as vice president of public policy at the National Pest Management Association.

Early in his career, Bray honed his policy, advocacy and political skills working on Capitol Hill in a congressional office and while working on multiple federal, state and local campaigns. He earned his law degree in 2013 and maintains an active license to practice law in the state of Virginia.

"Andrew will be a huge asset to our members and to the industry," said Sa-beena Hickman, CEO. "He is not only a seasoned government relations pro, but he also has extensive experience working on key issues our industry faces, including pesticide regulation, proposed product restrictions and labor laws."

RCI ACQUIRES GPL LANDSCAPING

SLIDELL, La. — Rotolo Consultants Incorporated has acquired GPL Landscaping, a commercial landscape and maintenance company based in Miramar Beach, Florida. This represents RCI's third acquisition in the past year.

This acquisition establishes RCI's pres-

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ence in Florida. RCI also has branch offices in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Tennessee. RCI is now employing about 700 people.

"We are very excited about the acquisition

of GPL Landscaping," said Keith Rotolo, president and CEO of RCI. "They come with an experienced management team that has been at the core of their success. RCI will now

be able to offer our extensive landscape and construction scopes of work to a new client base while aggressively growing the existing landscape maintenance presence that GPL had established. We have wanted to be in this market for some time and GPL presented a great opportunity. Consistent with our long-term growth strategy, we will continue to explore acquisition opportunities in northwest Florida as well as in our core markets."

GPL has provided landscape maintenance services to premier properties in northwest Florida since 2006. The owner, Judd Lisenby, plans to pursue other business interests. The entire GPL staff, including all key managers, will continue employment with RCI.

SAVATREE ACQUIRES BROOKS AND BARBER TREE MANAGEMENT

BEDFORD HILLS, NY. – SavATree has acquired Brooks and Barber Tree Management in Bedminster, Pennsylvania.

Brooks and Barber was founded in 1986 by Craig Brooks. SavATree says that its highly trained workforce will merge well with the company's existing focus on sustainable tree care and preservation.

"We're really excited to have Brooks and Barber joining our team," said Daniel van Starrenburg, CEO of SavATree. "We share many of the same values and an unwavering commitment toward being the best in every market we serve."

This acquisition will expand SavATree's existing Bucks County branch with the aim of better serving landscape stewards throughout southeastern Pennsylvania.

"I couldn't think of a better partner for my team than SavATree," Brooks said. "I'm confident that this will be a successful relationship and beneficial for all of our clients."

Brooks will stay on to provide ease to current clients. Clients will benefit from an increased range of service offerings, including arboriculture and professional lawn care with organic options. **L&L**

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BUILD A BOARD

• **AT OUR ANNUAL GROW! CONFERENCE IN TAMPA THIS YEAR,** we were fortunate enough to have Clay Mathile, former owner of Iams, join us for our keynote session. A resident of my hometown of Dayton, Ohio, Clay purchased the now well-known pet food company for \$1.2 million in 1982 and 17 years later sold it to Procter & Gamble for \$2.3 billion. He was the only shareholder.

One of the lessons Clay shared with us is the unique value having a board can provide business owners, no matter the size of the company.

Now, for many of us, the notion of a board conjures up images of Fortune 500 companies, men in suits and heated discussions about shareholder value. It can be hard to imagine what a board could do for a small, privately held landscaping company, or to think you have the time or the resources to build one.

But as Clay likes to say, "If you ran a popcorn stand on the corner of Third and Main in Dayton, Ohio, I would still suggest that you have an outside board." In the months since GROW!, we've received a lot of questions about this topic, so I want to share with you my own thoughts and what's worked for me.

HONEST, OBJECTIVE FEEDBACK CAN BE INVALUABLE. Being the owner of a company is like driving a bus with your whole team in tow. Your team (rightfully) expects you to



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

know exactly where you want to go and the best way to get there. And if they suspect you're making a wrong turn along the way, they may not feel it's their place to tell you.

That's where a board of outside advisors can really help you. Not beholden to you for their careers, they have the freedom – and the responsibility – to ask you the kinds of tough big-picture questions all owners need to answer if they want to succeed.

Do you really know where you want the company to go? What is your vision, and are you truly and consistently taking the right steps to achieve it? Knowing that I have a meeting coming up with the board of my landscaping company forces me to take a step back and honestly

SOME OF THE BOARD MEMBERS WHO HAVE HELPED ME THE MOST ARE RISK-TAKERS FROM OUTSIDE THE GREEN INDUSTRY.

assess my own progress toward my company goals to a degree I probably wouldn't on my own. Peer groups drive this accountability, too. In my experience, the smartest people in business leverage both.

OUTSIDE PERSPECTIVE CAN DRAMATICALLY BROADEN YOUR VIEW.

To succeed in business, you have to get exceedingly focused on your own industry and all its intricacies, big and small. But doing this can also lead to a kind of tunnel vision that has the potential to close you off from innovation. By finding accomplished business people from other sectors to serve on your board, you can get fresh insights into solving the

problems that are in front of you, whether you realize they are or not.

Some of the board members who have helped me the most are risk-takers from outside the green industry. They're innovators, not followers, who have challenged me to rethink my own assumptions about what a landscaping company can be and how we approach recruiting, billing, marketing and sales. They are also running, or have run, companies as large or larger than mine. Through their insights, I've gotten regular access to talent I couldn't afford to hire on my own.

One other advantage: When particularly difficult personnel decisions arise at your company, it can be very hard as an owner to take the emotion out of it and do what's right for the company. Some years ago, when I faced a tough situation involving a family member on my leadership team, it was my board who provided invaluable perspective and helped me to see the larger impact of his actions.

CHOOSE YOUR BOARD WISELY AND DELIBERATELY. As CEO, who serves on your board is entirely up to you. Start by identifying established business leaders in your own community whom you admire and respect. Your local Optimists Club or chamber of commerce can be good sources for potential candidates.

You only need to find one person to start. Ask them to lunch and get a sense of their values and level of interest. Meet with them regularly over the next six months to a year and, if it works out, ask them to join your board. Then rely on that person to help you in selecting your next members, aiming for three to five members total.

Building a board takes work, but in my experience it's an investment that can pay tremendous dividends for your company and your professional growth.

See you next month! **L&L**



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NO MORE MORS

BILL HAD A LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION COMPANY in the Midwest. He knew his pricing for projects weren't keeping up with the cost of labor. However, he didn't know how to adjust his pricing to ensure that all his payroll taxes, insurances, general and administrative (G&A) overhead costs, and a reasonable net profit were covered.

He had a good handle on the production side of his business, but he had no idea how to handle the budgeting and pricing side of it. In desperation, he signed up for an estimating workshop where he hoped that he would learn how to address these issues.

FAULTY MATH ASSUMPTIONS. At the workshop, Bill learned the MORS (multiple overhead recovery system) estimating method, how to prepare a budget for the upcoming year, as well as calculate his material and equipment costs for jobs he was pricing. Then he was told that, to allocate his G&A overhead costs to his jobs, he should mark up his direct costs using four markup percentages as follows:



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

- Materials should be marked up 10 percent for G&A overhead costs plus a net profit markup.
- Equipment should be marked up 25 percent for G&A overhead costs plus a net profit markup.
- Subcontractor costs should be marked up 5 percent plus a net profit markup.
- Field labor to include labor burden should be marked up 48 percent for G&A overhead costs plus a net profit markup.

Bill left the workshop as confused as ever. However, he now had the

magic numbers to bid his work – at least he thought he did. Unfortunately, he was given faulty mathematical advice that could cause him to overprice or underprice his bids.

HOW IT WORKS IN THE FIELD. To illustrate why using percentages to allocate G&A overhead costs to your pricing is inaccurate, we will price three one-month jobs using Bill's entire labor force. His G&A overhead costs are \$10,000 per month and his field labor costs to include labor burden are \$13,000 per month. His equipment costs run \$7,000 per month.

ANALYSIS. We kept the cost of field labor and equipment the same for all three jobs as they were one-month

jobs requiring the entire field labor force. However, we changed the material costs on each job. Job A had a normal amount of material costs on it and the G&A overhead cost allocated to that job was accurate at just about \$10,000. The G&A overhead allocated to Job A was accurate in this case.

However, Job B was a material-intensive job and the G&A overhead costs allocated to it were \$11,990 or just about \$2,000 too high for a one-month job. Job C had no material costs because either the owner bought the materials, or it was a heavy labor job with minimal or no materials. The G&A overhead costs allocated to it were \$2,000 too low.

CONCLUSION. The primary objective of cost estimating is to calculate your costs accurately whether they be materials, labor and labor burden, equipment, subcontractor costs or G&A overhead costs. Using the MORS estimating method, Bill allocated roughly \$2,000 too much G&A overhead on Job B and roughly \$2,000 too little G&A overhead costs on Job C. In a competitive market, you'll usually get the jobs that you underprice and lose the jobs that you overprice. If you use percentages to allocate G&A overhead costs to your bids, you'll tend to overprice material-intensive jobs and underprice labor-intensive ones.

I understand the MORS estimating method pretty well. I taught it to landscape contractors for three years in the late 1980s until I realized how inaccurate it was. I even wrote a book about it, A Critical Analysis of the MORS Estimating System, where I describe how using percentages to mark up direct costs and allocate G&A overhead costs to bids is extremely inaccurate. If you disagree with me, I challenge you to show me mathematically where I am wrong. You may win a lot of work using the MORS estimating method, but I guarantee that you'll lose this argument with me every time. **L&L**

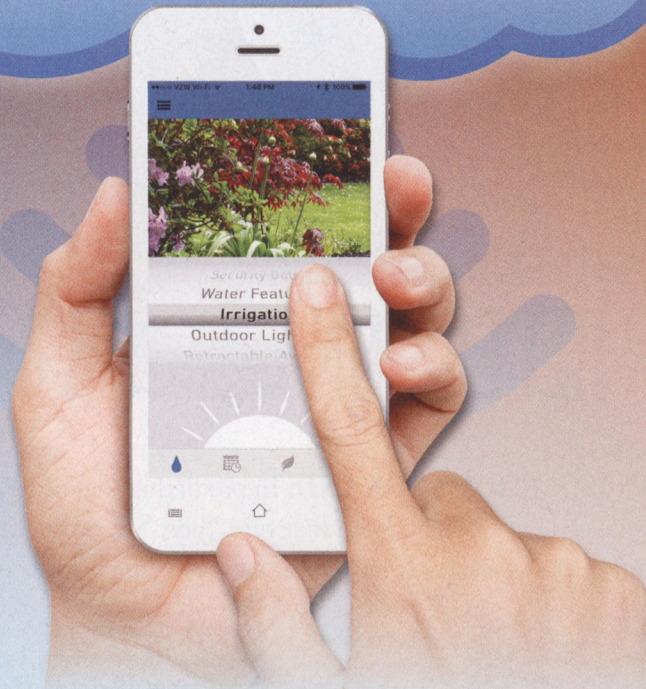
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READY FOR RECESSION

- **PROGNOSTICATION IS A FOOL'S ERRAND.** In predicting the future, we have only a 50 percent chance to get it right. With that said, there are two things of which we can be certain: (1) what goes up, comes down and (2) change happens.

From people who study these things to those of us in the trenches who live it, we share a common thought: at some point, the robust economy we've all been enjoying will shift.

Some experts point to the second half of 2019 or the first half of 2020. Some think that we aren't going to have an adjustment until 2022. While we can't plan for an exact pivot, smart CEOs know from previous recessions that it's never too early to plan ahead. Here are five ways to prepare for uncertainty:

SERVICE MIX. Do you have strong recurring revenue? How will an economic change impact your customers' need for construction or design/build? If you are overly reliant on a small number of customers or a project-driven business model, now is the time to strengthen your maintenance service and diversify



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

your customer base to reinforce your revenue streams and increase your business value.

CUSTOMER LOYALTY. If your customers remain loyal because your service is exceptional, your business is less likely to suffer if times get tough. What are you doing to develop brand loyalty, retention and relationship-building? One of the best ways to get your customers to remain loyal is by finding out how they feel about working with you. Invest in customer engagement surveys and feedback interviews, and develop retention and customer recovery plans as precautionary and proactive measures.

WAGES. In our strong economy with low unemployment, wages are accelerating – not only for field labor but also for managers. During the last half of the 2000s, manager salaries reached unsustainable levels. A similar pattern is happening again.

When the recession hit in '08, companies had to cut costs and high salaries became an issue. Alternatives were not good: cut pay or lay people off. Dismantling the team that made you a success is a wrenching alternative. Reducing staff and wages may yield short-term results but will cost in the long-run.

The search for talent in a tight labor market puts your high-performing managers at risk. The natural reaction is to increase pay. A better way is to create an incentive and performance-based compensation package. As hard as it may be, you have to hold the line one way or the other, or history will repeat itself

and you will face the difficult issue of cutting costs and compromising your talent backbone.

BALANCE SHEET RATIOS. Manage cash flow and cash flow projections, and make sure your balance sheet ratios are sound. I also recommend not purchasing new equipment unless it is absolutely necessary and seek concessions from current suppliers for value.

Improve receivables, offer discounts to shorten payment cycles, get deposits, issue invoices promptly and track receivables closely. Keep a lid on overhead.

I remember many owners saying after having to make significant cuts to overhead during the last recession that they would never let that happen again. Unfortunately, the lesson is wearing off as overheads are creeping up again. Think now about making smarter financial choices, preparing for multiple outcomes, and staying lean to help you respond more quickly and effectively when conditions change.

IMPROVE COMMUNICATIONS TO EMPLOYEES. Times of uncertainty breed low morale; low morale breeds distrust and weakened engagement. Step up your communication to alleviate stress, anxiety and to keep people focused on pulling together, no matter what. There's a reason for playing the long-game. Companies that pursue the big picture, versus companies that think transactionally, are companies that inspire loyalty and motivation in customers and employees – a potent prescription for good times and bad.

When you prepare your business for next year, include contingencies for slower growth. Invite your advisors, consultants and financial planners to bring context and strategic foresight to the process. Be prudent and proactive and have a strategy to manage change, regardless of what happens. **L&L**

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MAY 21	Indianapolis, IN	JUNE 8	COLUMBIA, SC	JULY 2	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 22	DETROIT, MI	JUNE 9	COLUMBIA, SC	JULY 3	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 23	DETROIT, MI	JUNE 10	JACKSONVILLE, FL	JULY 4	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 24	CHARLESTON, WV	JUNE 11	WINTON, AL	JULY 5	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 25	PITTSBURGH, PA	JUNE 12	JACKSON, MS	JULY 6	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 26	PORTLAND, ME	JUNE 13	SHREVEPORT, LA	JULY 7	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 27	PORTLAND, ME	JUNE 14	LITTLE ROCK, AR	JULY 8	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 28	PORTLAND, ME	JUNE 15	OKLAHOMA CITY, OK	JULY 9	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 29	PORTLAND, ME	JUNE 16	DALLAS, TX	JULY 10	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 30	PORTLAND, ME	JUNE 17	ALBUQUERQUE, NM	JULY 11	PORTLAND, ME
MAY 31	PORTLAND, ME	JUNE 18	DENVER, CO	JULY 12	PORTLAND, ME
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MOW ACROSS

**Landscaping wasn't
Rodney Smith Jr.'s
intended career,** but today
he's constantly encouraging
people to provide free
maintenance services
to those in need through
Raising Men Lawn Care.

AMERICA

Story by **Megan Smalley**
Photography by **Jake Gravbrot**

THE EDWARDS FAMILY in Laredo, Texas, started a new family tradition about two years ago: mowing lawns free of charge on weekends for families in need. The family of seven goes out to the Laredo community with mowers, weed eaters and blowers most Saturdays and Sundays to perform maintenance jobs for elderly or disabled people, veterans and single mothers. Charles Edwards, a firefighter in Laredo, says even their youngest daughter who is 4 years old helps by picking up debris or pushing a mower with mom or dad. Since 2016, he says the family has performed free lawn maintenance on at least 200 lawns.

"We've kind of lost count," he says.

Edwards says his family was inspired to give back to their community in this way after seeing a post on social media by Rodney Smith Jr., founder of Raising Men Lawn Care Service, about a 50 Yard Challenge. Smith regularly posts about this challenge, which encourages kids across the U.S. to mow 50 lawns for people in need for free. Kids who complete the challenge receive a free lawn mower and T-shirt from Raising Men Lawn Care, which is a nonprofit in Huntsville, Alabama.

"It sounded like a great idea," Edwards says. "It was pretty easy to get our kids involved in it, and it was a great service. This small service benefits people, especially the elderly, who have problems mowing lawns."

When the Edwards children completed the 50 Yard Challenge, Edwards says Smith visited them to give the kids gifts and a free weed eater, a lawn mower and a blower. He also helped the family mow lawns in the neighborhood. While the Edwards family completed the challenge, they decided to keep on giving back to their community. They started a chapter of Raising Men Lawn Care to encourage others to join them in serving people.

"Our kids told us, 'Why stop at 50? Let's keep going,'" Edwards says.

The Edwards family is just one group of many that have taken on Smith's 50 Yard Challenge in the past two years. Smith says there are more than 190 kids who have participated in the challenge since he first posted about it.

"We have kids who have done the 50 Yard Challenge in over 25 states, including one in Canada and seven in Bermuda and England," Smith says. "Today, 12 kids overall have completed this."

STARTING SMALL. The 50 Yard Challenge has gone viral in the past year and Raising Men Lawn Care is now a recognized nonprofit as of 2018, but Smith says it all started as a favor for an elderly man who needed help on July 25, 2015.



Whenever Smith provides lawn service to a family in need on his 50 States, 50 Lawns tour, his one request to the family is to take a selfie with them and post it to social media.

"Back in 2015, I was leaving school one day and I (drove by) an elderly man outside mowing his lawn," Smith says. "He looked like he was struggling, so I pulled over and helped him out."

Smith had no experience with lawn maintenance or lawn care. He grew up in Bermuda and came to the U.S. for high school and college to study computer science, but he says he knew he had to help that man mow his lawn. Later that day, Smith says he felt led by God to continue providing that same service to others free of charge in between his classes. He posted about this decision to Facebook that day:

"So today as I was driving, I saw an elderly man outside mowing his lawn. It looked like he was having a hard time doing it due to the extreme heat out here, so I pulled over and finished it for him. So I've decided that from today on, I'll be mowing lawns FREE for the elderly, disabled, single moms and veterans. If you know any of the 4 needing their lawn cut please contact me."

From that post, Smith's friends sent him names and contact information of people he could serve by mowing their lawns for free. He says he initially set a goal to mow 40 lawns by December, but he quickly achieved that goal and upped it to 100. One month later, he achieved the revised goal.

"That's when I came up with an idea," he says. "I came up with the idea of Raising Men Lawn Care Service, where I could still mow free lawns for the elderly, disabled, single moms and veterans, but I would also include kids ages 7 to 17 to show them the importance of giving back to their community with a lawn mower."

Smith saw this as an opportunity to teach kids how to give back to their communities as well as provide a free service to more people in need. Raising Men Lawn Care launched as a group for kids to get together to mow people's lawns for free in the Huntsville community. To keep the program going as

a nonprofit, Smith receives donations from people through websites like GoFundMe. He also posted the 50 Yard Challenge to social media to involve kids outside of Huntsville, as well.

“For the challenge, each kid has to mow 50 free lawns for their community,” he says. “If they accept this challenge, they make a sign saying, ‘I accept the 50 Yard Challenge.’”

To provide an extra incentive for kids to join the challenge, Smith mails T-shirts to kids who mow lawns for free, thanks to donations given to Raising Men Lawn Care. For kids who accept the challenge, he sends a white T-shirt. Once they hit 10 lawns, they receive an orange shirt. For 20 lawns, they receive a green shirt. For 30 lawns, they receive a blue shirt. For 40 lawns, they receive a red shirt. And finally, for 50 lawns, they receive a black shirt, a lawn mower and a visit from Smith himself.

Although Smith graduated in 2016 with his undergraduate degree in computer science at Alabama A&M University, he chose to refocus his career on Raising Men Lawn Care.

NATIONWIDE EFFORT. With a goal to expand Raising Men Lawn Care across the U.S., Smith came up with the idea to travel to all 50 states to mow a few lawns for people in need in each state. In 2017, he saw a documentary on Netflix about a man who traveled the world to share acts of kindness.

“I immediately thought, ‘50 states, 50 lawns,’” he says. “That summer, I decided to travel to all 50 states mowing free lawns for the elderly, disabled, single mothers and veterans to make people realize my foundation as well as get kids involved in the 50 Yard Challenge.”

Smith planned to spend the summer of 2017 traveling to all 50 states to mow. Like with the 50 Yard Challenge, he shared his plans on social media and received requests of people who needed help with mowing their lawns.

To fund the tour, Smith requested donations online through crowdfunded support. Raising Men Lawn Care also had a partnership with Briggs & Stratton since about 2016, so the company also helped with financial support for the tour.



Charles Edwards, his wife Liz and five kids started a chapter of Raising Men Lawn Care to serve people in Laredo, Texas.

They also provided him with one mower for the tour, which would be used in all 50 states.

“We helped alleviate some of the travel expenses for him,” says Lauren Vagnini, corporate communications manager at Briggs & Stratton. “(The partnership) has worked really well. We genuinely feel he is just a good guy. We like working with him; we like what he does.”

So last summer, Smith hopped in his car with lawn maintenance equipment and drove across the U.S. to perform free maintenance services in each of the 48 mainland states. He flew to do the same in Alaska and Hawaii. Smith posted pictures with the people he helped along the way to social media and shared details of his journey.

“I would encourage (people to) at least mow one free lawn a day. If mowing companies can mow one free lawn a day for someone, it would make a huge difference in their community.”

RODNEY SMITH JR.,
founder, Raising Men

Smith’s 50 States, 50 Lawns tour the past two years. Even the Queen of England recognized Smith’s efforts this past year as she had the Governor of Bermuda present Smith with an award for community service last November.

Edwards says Smith’s 50 States, 50 Lawns tour inspired his family to try to mow lawns in every state as well. While the Edwards won’t be able to do this in one summer, he says he hopes his family can do this in lieu of vacations, Thanksgivings or Christmases.

“How we’re thinking of doing it is instead of Christmas with family or going on vacation, we’ll visit a different state to cut grass,” Edwards says. “It will be a long process – a little here and a little there – but our goal is to reach all 50 states.”

Raising Men Lawn Care officially became a 501(c)(3) nonprofit in 2018, around the same time Smith received his graduate degree in social work from Alabama A&M. Smith says he hopes to expand his reach globally next year by traveling to different continents to provide free lawn maintenance to those in need.

Smith adds that he never imagined he would be providing free lawn maintenance to people in need when he was in college. Today, he says this is his main passion.

“There’s a lot of people who can’t afford (lawn maintenance), and it doesn’t take much to just go outside and mow someone’s lawn who needs your help,” Smith says. “I’m hoping to encourage more kids to do the same, just like me, one lawn at a time.” **L&L**

With the success of last year’s tour, Smith decided to do it again this summer. Briggs & Stratton helped him kick off this year’s tour on May 17 by having their employees work alongside him to mow 110 lawns in Milwaukee. They also sent him off with a new mower to use on this tour. For the 2018 tour, Smith added in a few meetings with kids in different communities to educate them on mower safety.

Many have taken no-



PAR FOR THE COURSE

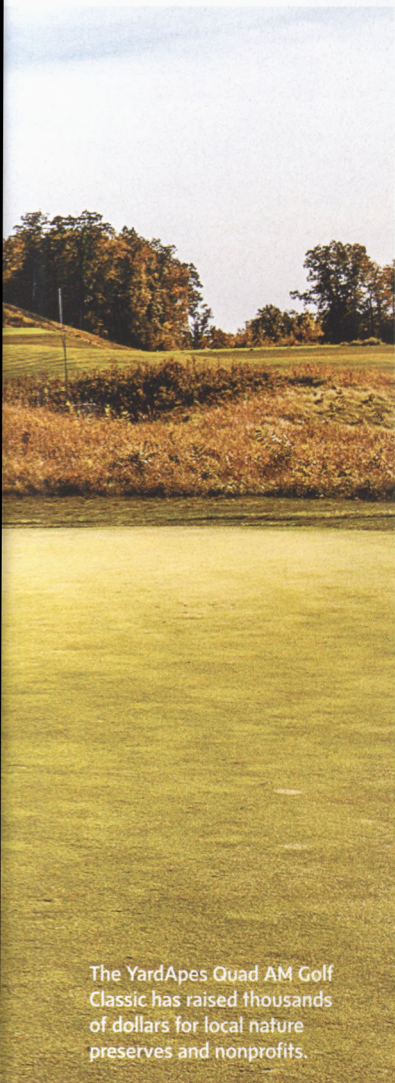
Volunteer work builds teams and goodwill for YardApes.

Story by **Kate Spirgen**

BACK IN 1999, WHEN YARDAPES was a small company, the seven or eight employees would get together about once a month to go golfing and let off some steam. “We used to call it the Hack Fest because some people could barely swing a club or hit the ball, so we’d just go have fun and then have a cookout afterward,” says Shayne Newman, founder and owner.

Then, an employee suggested turning the Hack Fest into a charity event, and after two or three years of talking about it, Newman decided to just go for it. Now in its 13th year, the annual YardApes Quad AM Golf Classic is a huge success, benefitting nonprofits in Connecticut to the tune of \$43,500 since 2006. “We’ve had a lot to learn but we’ve been really successful,” he says.

And that’s just one of many projects YardApes employees



The YardApes Quad AM Golf Classic has raised thousands of dollars for local nature preserves and nonprofits.

for their service time. “That was a big part of the concept for me because I wanted people to really know what it feels like to give back and to feel good when somebody appreciates what they did volunteering their time.”

And it really works. About 75 percent of employees sign up for volunteer events every month, including the annual golf outing.

FINDING FUNDING. The first year out of the gate, the golf tournament raised \$10,000, and Newman says he couldn’t believe it. Although there were some tough years during the Great Recession, the tournament has recently been back on the upswing. This year, the tournament will benefit the Pratt Nature Center, and it’s off to a good start, raising a few thousand dollars just a week after promotions started.

Employees donate their time to organize and run the event, but the whole idea is to break even on the player fees – the company aims for 100 registrants – and donate the money raised through sponsorships, raffles and a silent auction. Right now, entry fees are \$250, which covers the cost of renting the course, providing meals and some gifts for the gift bags given to each player.

YardApes starts off by contacting past donors and players to see who’s interested. The company also reaches out to some of the vendors they spend a significant amount of money with.

“My feeling is if we spend \$40,000 to \$100,000 with you, I would hope you could do a small donation to our charity golf event,” Newman says. “That’s kind of the concept.”

Some clients donate as well.



START GIVING BACK

SHAYNE NEWMAN, owner of YardApes, was intimidated when he first started getting his company involved in volunteer work, but he says it’s not as hard as you think. Here are a few things he’s learned along the way:

1. SAFETY FIRST. Especially if you’re involving volunteers from outside your company, make sure that you have enough personal protective gear like goggles and gloves. YardApes recently enlisted a group of volunteers from a local business networking group, but since they had never used some of the landscaping equipment before, the company had to take extra precautions.

“The last thing you want when you’re trying to do an event (is to forget) about safety and someone gets hurt trying to volunteer, so we definitely ramped that up during these events,” Newman says.

2. MAKE IT LOOK GOOD. If you plan to publicize your work make sure your trucks are clean and everyone is in uniform.

“We stress that on every property we’re working on but when you’re doing a volunteer event and you’re going to have some greater exposure in the public that’s important,” Newman says.

3. JUST GO FOR IT. If you’re thinking, “Where can I help?” you might not need to look as hard as you think. Start small and build on your successes, Newman says. “Just put it out in the community, whether that be word of mouth or an actual press release. There’s a lot of people out there who can use our expertise and our help,” he says.

“They gain even more confidence in doing business with us,” Newman says. “They see us doing a good thing for the community and they really appreciate that. I never realized that. I thought it was all about doing a good job on

their property and making their life easier, but it really means a lot to them and they take pride in having us as the landscaper that takes care of their property because we’re good guys in the community and we give back.”

For the silent auction and the raffle, YardApes asks local businesses to donate prizes. The more expensive items become part of the auction while the less expensive donations go up for raffle. At the end of the day, about 75 percent of the funds raised come from sponsorships and the other 25 percent of the funds come from the silent auction and raffles, Newman says.

PICK GOOD PARTNERS. YardApes switches beneficiaries about every three years, and while the company’s employees do 80 to 90 percent of the work, they ask the nonprofits to pitch in as well to show their support. The Pratt Nature Center was also the beneficiary of the golf outing last year.

The company also asks the nonprofits to help recruit golf teams to get the registration over the hump. Without some extra help, the expenses can have a negative effect on the bottom line.

“The Pratt Nature Center stepped up big,” says Newman, who is also a member of the board. “They were a huge help with the extra work and effort they put into it. They were very appreciative of the effort that we put in, so it was a good relationship. We’ll probably do them for the next few years and we want to try to help everybody so we kind of take it one year at a time.” **L&L**

take part in. Newman is a big believer in the idea that if you do good things, good things will come back around.

But once the company started giving back, he realized how much recognition the company would get from the community and the landscaping industry. Not to mention the team-building aspect of volunteerism.

“The one thing we didn’t realize is what a team-building opportunity it is,” he says, adding that employees are not paid





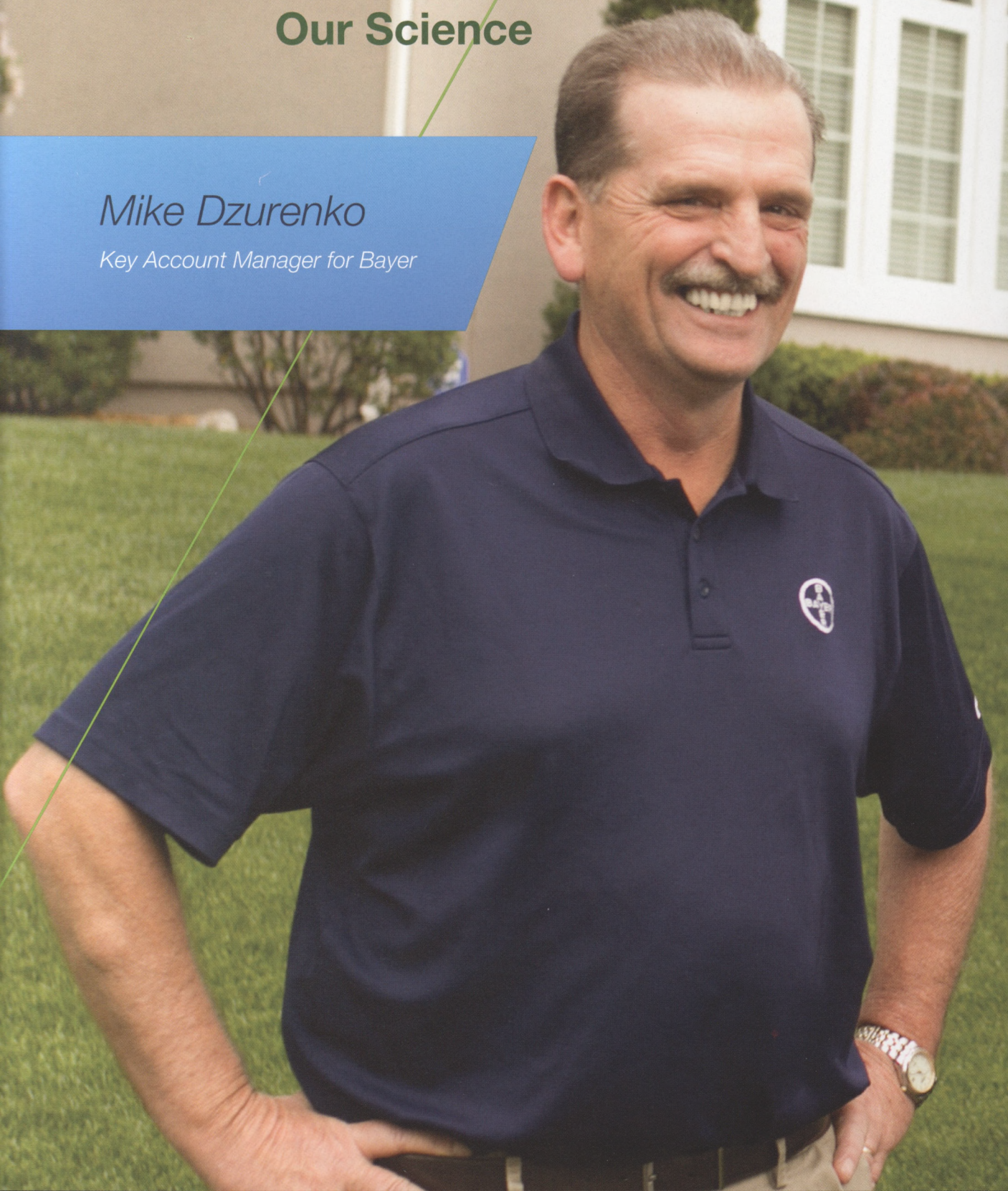
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Long Way*

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Mike Dzurenko

Key Account Manager for Bayer





Jon Cundiff

CEO of Weed Man Kansas City



A Little Care

Goes a Long Way

At its core, lawn care isn't about managing pests, combatting disease, controlling weeds or growing grass – it's about pride. When Jon Cundiff, CEO of Weed Man Kansas City, thinks about his business, he does it through a crafted lens, carefully tinted by what his customers care about – things like school plays, ballet lessons, work functions, washing dishes, paying bills and the constant need to just take a breath.

"Everyone's lives are so busy, and yet this [their yard] is a very important piece of their world," Jon says. "When it comes to helping people, that's a great mission...to nurture an enjoyable place to come home to and have a lawn and landscape look so good, they can sit down and enjoy it."

It's this kind of passion that is often unheralded in the world of lawn care, but it's also what separates a good business from a great one.

According to Jon, seeing franchisees achieve their dreams of building a business is what really gets him motivated. "You see people create their own opportunity," he says. "And it's exciting to be a part of that and to help mentor them as they grow their business acumen and get new houses, new cars and growing families."

Like many lawn and landscape professionals, Jon knows that family and business are closely intertwined. In fact, he and his wife, Vicky, founded a lawn care business together in 1987 and later joined Weed Man in 2000. And today, following years of well-earned, cultivated growth, their son, Cameron Cundiff, is General Manager of Operations for Weed Man Kansas City. It's a testament to the notion that great relationships are a foundation for success.

"There's a deeply-rooted, entrepreneurial spirit that runs from Weed Man's senior management through to their entire group," says Mike Dzurenko, Key Account Manager for Bayer. "And Jon's relationships within Weed Man and the industry are just phenomenal."

Jon sees relationships not as the icing on the cake, but the cake itself – they're just not optional anymore.

"As a business, you have to have an accountant, a lawyer, a banker. That's how I look at my involvement with Bayer," Jon says. "Mike has a genuine commitment to see us be better. It's not just about products. He wants our business to grow and be the best it can be – and I know he's a phone call away and a support system that we can lean on."

For Mike, helping businesses grow is the best part of the job.

"I'm all about relationships," Mike says. "This is a service business. It's about how we help businesses succeed for the long-term."

For Jon, finding like-minded people to help advance the industry isn't just a passion; it's a calling – and a primary function of his current role as Immediate Past President for the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP). And it's through his leadership with the NALP that Jon often finds himself talking with fellow board member Pete Farno, Lawn & Landscape segment manager for Bayer.

"You turn around, and there's a guy like Pete in the room. And that commitment to understand our world and to get in there and make it better, that shines through for Bayer," says Jon. "You can see that, and you know they're there for the industry as a whole. This industry is as important to them as it is to us."

In Jon's eyes, that degree of dedication and care is a crucial element of success in this industry.

"There's a passion for what we do. There's a commitment – commitment to helping and serving customers and passion about what we're meant to do and can achieve," Jon says.

So, whether it ends with the customer's source of pride in his newfound curb appeal, the thrill of growing a business or the comfort of a trusted relationship – a little extra care goes a long way in achieving, and then exceeding, expectations.

"I've been in the industry since I was 16," Jon says, "and I learned at a very early age what it meant to be disciplined and to be committed to being the best in the business. That discipline doesn't just all-of-a-sudden happen. It happens every time you step on the field. **And it takes a village.**"

Jon Cundiff is CEO and Vicky Cundiff is CFO of Weed Man Kansas City. Together, they are Weed Man Sub-Franchisors for Missouri, Kansas, Iowa, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Nebraska and Northern Texas.

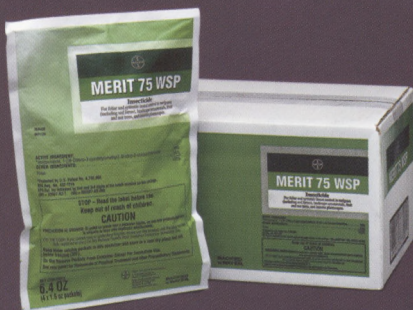


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According to Jon, the strength of Bayer innovations and its commitment to continuous improvement are well aligned with what Weed Man wants to do as a business. And because of that, he and his franchisees put a lot of trust in Merit® insecticide and Specticle® herbicide.

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To Jon, though, the benefits of Bayer products boil down to one concept: predictability. "When I look at Bayer products, I know that consistency is very important to me," he says. "I know they work. They're consistent in the way they're applied... and they're reliable in what we're going to get."

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Citywide efforts

After the success of one neighborhood's program, Pittsburgh launched an initiative to provide free lawn mowing services to residents in need.

Story by **Megan Smalley**

NOT LONG AFTER the start of the Great Recession, one district in Pittsburgh started a program to offer free lawn mowing services to help elderly, disabled and low-income residents. It started with one small neighborhood, and then spread to the entire District 2 area of Pittsburgh.

"The neighborhood had a tremendous amount of need," says Theresa Kail Smith, Pittsburgh City Council member for District 2. "They had tons of abandoned properties."

Kail Smith initially launched the grass-cutting program in her district after Shawn Maust, owner of Maust Landscaping, pitched the idea to her. She says he had been mowing lawns for the small neighborhood at discounted prices for a while and thought the service could benefit more people.

Although the city would pay Maust Landscaping to do these jobs, Maust says he bid the jobs for very discounted prices at about \$15 to \$20 per lawn. "It's such a small task from my standpoint to do something to make people happy," he says. "For the 15 minutes

it takes me with the amount of equipment I have, it's nothing."

However, Maust's contribution to this program wasn't "nothing." Kail Smith says Maust was able to save one resident's life when he came to mow his lawn.

As Maust drove up with his mower to an elderly man's home, he found the resident sitting in his car with the door open. Maust noticed the man was struggling to breathe because his oxygen tank had been disconnected and turned off when he went outside.

"He was turning blue," Maust says. "He was pointing to the oxygen, so I run up the steps, into his house, turn the oxygen on – which I'd never done before – then after he got oxygen, helped him up the steps, into the house."

Once he was breathing normally, Maust says he contacted paramedics to check in. "He helped save that person when he was there to cut grass," Kail Smith says. "He provided an opportunity to keep him alive."

Maust continued to help Kail Smith as a contractor for the service when it expanded to

17 neighborhoods. From there, they received numerous calls from all across Pittsburgh from individuals who needed help. Kail Smith says she had to turn down some people who lived outside the district. "Because I don't represent the entire city, I could not help some of the people who were calling in," she says. "Some of them were calling in crying. They were going to lose their home because they were constantly being cited for overgrown grass."

With the popularity of the program, Kail Smith says it expanded citywide in Pittsburgh this year and is now called City Cuts. This year, Pittsburgh budgeted \$150,000 to mow the lawns of elderly, disabled and veteran residents. The city found contractors like Maust to do these jobs for about \$25 per lawn with the budgeted money. Kail Smith estimates about 75 to 100 Pittsburgh residents applied for City Cuts in each of the nine districts of the city.

"There are so many benefits," she says. "There were so many stories of where people called and told us this helped them." **L&L**

BELOW: For 2018, KJK LawnCare is offering free lawn maintenance services to six families in need.

5 favors

Each year, KJK LawnCare gives free mowing services to five families in need.

Story by **Megan Smalley**

GIVING BACK is an annual tradition at KJK LawnCare. Each year, the company provides free lawn maintenance services from April to October to five families in the Omaha, Nebraska, area.

Much of this generosity stems from owner Josiah Cherry's upbringing.

"My mom was always giving back when I was growing up," he says. "She instilled that passion in me. So, I wanted to give homage to my mom and also to the community that's helping me to develop my company."

Cherry has worked in the landscaping industry for four to five years. He started KJK LawnCare about three years ago after getting some landscape industry experience at another company.

In Cherry's first year as a business owner, he decided to pick five residential customers to receive six months of free lawn maintenance services as a



PHOTO COURTESY OF KJK LAWCARE

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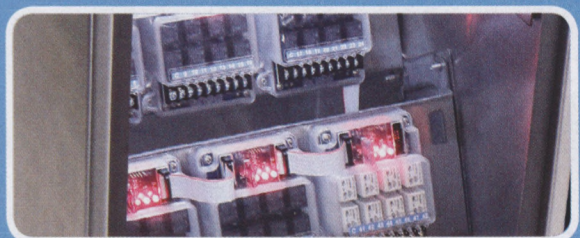


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way to give back and help people in need. He promoted the charity by word-of-mouth and sharing about it on social media.

Initially, he only selected families who had loved ones deployed in the military. He spent time in January during off-season selecting families who were in need.

"There's a big military base in Bellevue, just outside Omaha," he says. "Also, a small engine vendor reached out to us asking to help this way."

Although servicing a few families for free throughout the season can be time consuming, Cherry says each year he finds a way to mix the free accounts in with the company's regular service schedule.

"Give back projects can be easily looped into our regular schedules," he says. "Yes, it takes time and space from other clients we could take in and bill for. However, as a company, we feel it's just as important to give back to the community that supports us. So, we take care of these clients during regular hours."

This year, Cherry extended the charity to people who are experiencing health issues, as well. Part of that is a tribute to his mom, who was recently diagnosed with cancer. "She sparked my idea to expand the free service offering to individuals who wouldn't be getting help otherwise while battling severe illnesses," he says. "So, we want to take that burden off them



KJK LawnCare gives back to its community by providing free maintenance jobs to families experiencing health issues or with a loved one in the military.

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and help them focus on getting better health.”

For 2018, he partnered with the American Cancer Society to find some families to help locally. He also connected with local media to reach a broader spectrum. Because of the publicity, he says he received about 50 nominations for the service this year while he normally only receives 10. Cherry says his team spent extra time reading nominations for the service this year to determine who would benefit most from the services.

“There was a lot more this year, which made the selection process a little harder,” Cherry says.

Because of the increase in

TIPS FOR THE PROS

“I WOULD LIKE TO CHALLENGE

others in the industry to step back and think of others in the community. We have eight months to make our year, and it is very easy to focus only on billing and gross profits. However, with proper planning, it is very easy to plan and give back one day a year – such as a large Earth Day project – to monthly and weekly projects. The biggest piece is to find a way to help the owner look past the cost and more about the impact they are making.”

Josiah Cherry, owner, KJK LawnCare

nominations, he decided to help six families for the 2018 season as well.

While Cherry can only help five or six families on KJK LawnCare’s dime, he says he has encouraged others in the community to “sponsor” potential families he can help and pay for their lawn maintenance needs. Cherry then offers a discount for those individuals sponsoring a family in need.

“We wish to help everyone, but as a small business we can only help so many people in a year,” he says. “So, that’s one way we can help more families. We reached out to people asking them to adopt families this way. So, if you have a family who didn’t receive our free service, but you want them to

have that service, instead of paying \$30 a week to have a lawn maintained, we give it to you for \$25 or a reduced rate.”

He also encourages other small business owners in the landscape industry to find ways they can give back to their communities.

“The biggest piece of advice I would have for any lawn care company is to think about your community as a whole,” Cherry says. “Our communities are what drive our business. If there’s any way you can help someone out, be it a one-time project or like us taking five or six families a year, every little bit helps.” **L&L**

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The crew at AgriLawn utilizes their downtime to volunteer at the local food bank.

Invested in giving back

As an employee-owned business, AgriLawn's staff is dedicated to giving to causes they care about.

Story by **Kate Spirgen**

FROM PACKING food at the local food bank to revitalizing a women's shelter to landscape work for leukemia patients, the staff at AgriLawn is always finding ways to give back to the community.

"We're a family and that's one of the reasons why it's important to us," says Ann Lally, marketing manager and charity outreach coordinator. "Families help each other, so we want to help the community."

Volunteering also helps the company stay busy when the weather conditions make it

impossible to work. The company is located around the corner from the regional food bank, and so when the winds and ice make it hard to work, 15 to 28 staff members head to the food bank to pack meals or fill backpacks with school supplies for local students.

AgriLawn employees who volunteer get paid for their time, and they have the opportunity to help out the community at the same time, so it's a win-win, Lally says. "We want to make sure our guys get paid. It's not their fault they can't work. So we want to make sure they get that paycheck so we send them over to do some volunteer work."

Plus, it helps build camaraderie among the crews. The company has been volunteering for the past 10 years, and crews have started friendly competitions to see who can load the most pallets or pack the most backpacks.

Because AgriLawn is an employee-owned business, everyone gets a say in which charitable endeavors the company puts its time and effort into. Often, Lally will put out a survey to see what types of projects the staff wants to get involved with, whether it's focused on helping veterans, cancer patients, children or other causes.

"When we are working with anybody, it's always an input from everybody from the organization because we are employee-owned," Lally says. "So we want everyone's input on what we do."

GIVING GREEN SPACES. More often than not, the employees choose to help kids get outside. So, Lally will contact Ally's House, an organization based in Oklahoma City that works with children who have cancer, and get a couple of families that could use AgriLawn's assistance.

Then, around March, April and May, the company will go out and take a look at the properties, making sure not to let the families know in case the project isn't a good fit. "We don't want to get their hopes up," Lally says.

AgriLawn plans for its volunteer projects a year in advance, for the most part. It also tries to work with its vendors to help share in the cost of projects. For example, a sod company might donate some sod for a lawn renovation or a tree care specialist might donate his time and expertise.

Their first project with Ally's House was a large undertaking. The family, whose daughter was battling leukemia, had a tree growing into their house, and the landscaping was in shambles.

"The neighborhood was getting upset with them because they weren't able to keep up on their house or their yard or mow their lawn or anything," Lally says. "And so the neighbors were getting really upset, and it didn't matter that the family was going through this difficult time."

So the AgriLawn team came in and did a complete makeover of the yard and the flower beds. They also worked with an arborist to trim back the tree. They also put in new beds in the backyard so that the daughter could get outside and garden, as well as a patio area so that the family could enjoy their new landscape.

A couple of years ago, the company helped another leukemia patient, Keaton, get outdoors with a new trampoline and a treehouse.

"He got leukemia when he was 2 years old and by the time we had found him he was 4 or 5 and it was tough for him to get out and do things because of the

treatments and stuff making him really weak," Lally says.

So the company purchased the trampoline to help him gain strength in his legs. The treehouse was also specifically designed for Keaton's needs. Since the leukemia treatments meant he needed to stay out of the sun, the company put together a playset with a cover so that he could climb up into the treehouse on top or play in the sandbox in the shade underneath.

"He was a very bright little boy and over his fence was a little wooded area so when he would get up in that treehouse he would see all these different kinds of birds and animals on the other

side of the fence," Lally says. "We bought him a bird book and some binoculars so that when he got up in his little treehouse, he could spot the different animals and birds on the other side."

AgriLawn has kept up with Keaton's family over the past three or four years, offering their support and even getting T-shirts made. Unfortunately, Keaton passed away this past May, but the company continues to offer support to the family.

Other times, AgriLawn employees will nominate a cause that's important to them. This year, an employee who served in the military met a family while servicing their lawn and nomi-

nated them for the year's project.

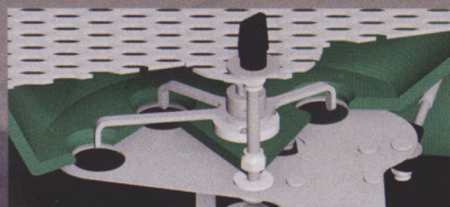
The veteran was dealing with PTSD from his time serving in Iraq, so the company redid his yard to thank him for his service.

And to make sure gifts keep giving, AgriLawn staff will continue to service the lawns and take care of the landscapes. "The employees are excited and they really get into it and they get into getting familiarized with the family," Lally says. "We're out there; we're servicing their lawn; we're doing the treatments for the yard for a year or so to keep it maintained. There's no sense in doing it if it's not going to be maintained for them and if they're not able to do it themselves." **L&L**

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SERVICE SALUTE

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Story by **Lauren Rathmell**

LEFT TO RIGHT: Tim Boyd, manager, Mike Boyd, owner, Rick Boyd, manager, and Joe Boyd, manager, of Kemko Lawn Services

AT KEMKO LAWN SERVICES in Loganville, Georgia, many employees have a strong tie to the military. Owner Michael Boyd is a veteran of the U.S. Army and served in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969. Now that he's done serving his country, his company sets aside time to serve other military families in the area.

Jaime Wright, office manager, is the daughter of a veteran. So, when the lawn care company found out about a program that would allow them to give back to families of service members, she knew they absolutely had to get involved. Through the Project EverGreen program, Kemko is able to provide free services to active military families.

STARTING THE SERVICE. In 2003, a group of green industry pros collaborated to start Project EverGreen, which initially focused on educating people about the benefit of green spaces.

"What we did in 2003 and what we do today

is kind of different," says Cindy Code, executive director of Project EverGreen. "It was really started to promote the benefits of green spaces. We wanted to share that message with people that don't work in those jobs day in and day out. So, it was kind of started as a PR initiative."

The organization revisited its mission in 2006 and GreenCare for Troops was born. Someone suggested the idea at a board meeting, and Code says the program has been running strong ever since.

The program matches landscaping companies willing to volunteer their time and resources with families who have an active duty service member in their home.

This can assist spouses who are caring for their household while their loved one is away, or even benefit returning service members who may be injured and need to readjust to civilian life.

"It was a good way for modern landscape professionals or superintendents or irrigation professionals to share the gift of green space or to give back to our military heroes who are



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serving our country," she says.

The program currently has volunteers in all 50 states and is managed through a database that works to pair landscapers with families in need of lawn services. A sister program was developed as well to help families in the winter months with snow removal.

"The military families register, and they list the services they would like to receive," Code says. "And the volunteers register for the program and they list what services they can provide and how far they're willing to travel. And then the database matches those two together."

Code says in some cases the program has more volunteers than families, and sometimes they have an abundance of families that could use the help.

So Project EverGreen launched an awareness week for GreenCare for Troops to

help spread the word to potential volunteers.

"We've been doing that for at least three or four years," Code says. "So it's just a great way to raise awareness of the program, recruit more volunteers and it gives existing volunteers a way to get the message out."

Recently, they also put forth a recruiting challenge for current volunteers. The program offered a limited-edition T-shirt to any volunteer who can recruit new volunteers. The recruit would also be rewarded with the T-shirt.



GreenCare for Troops allows green industry professionals to provide free lawn services to military families.

"Contractors love T-shirts," Code says. "We've seen a definite uptick in registrations. It runs throughout the month (of July)."

PHOTO COURTESY OF PROJECT EVERGREEN

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
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Executive Director Cindy Code encourages people to try to help at least one military family. The program is also accepting monetary donations to help match military families with volunteers.

SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE.

In Virginia Beach, Virginia, Ricardo Melgoza was looking for ways to get involved with the local military community. Melgoza's company, Melgoza Lawn Care, started in 2010, and he wanted to eventually be

able to give back to his community. When he was finally in a place to do so, he started exploring what his options may be.

He was in an area with a large military base, so after reaching out to Wounded Warrior Project to let them know he was willing to provide landscaping services for a few houses, he was contacted by someone at Project EverGreen.

"It's not always about making money," Melgoza says. "You have to give a little bit, too."

After he was contacted by Project EverGreen, he shared the information with a few friends he has in the military.

He wanted to be sure the work he was doing was benefiting service members, and that they would get it at no cost.

"Once we knew it was the real thing, we offered to do three houses per season," he says.

For Melgoza and his crew, they care for the lawn at each home until the service member comes back from duty. This means they may not have the same houses for the whole season and may go through more than four different families.

TIGHT BOND. A strong connection to the military led the team at Kemko Lawn Service to get involved with GreenCare

for Troops as well. Wright says Kemko saw an ad for the program through one of the software systems.

"The owner of our company is a veteran. My father is a veteran and it's something we didn't know existed," Wright says. "So, we thought, 'let's absolutely participate.'"

Kemko provides lawn care services to four families currently, and they have been able to work with GreenCare for Troops to extend their services to the families of retired service members as well.

"It's just a great program," she says. "I mean, we absolutely need to do what we can." **L&L**



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SHOP TALK

Take some tips from contractors who recently set up their own shops. **By Kate Spirgen**

A CONTRACTOR'S SHOP is more than a place to store and repair equipment – it's a basis of operations for the whole company. That's what Top Notch Lawn Care owner Brian Shain realized as his company started growing and adding employees.

For the first few years, Shain ran his operation out of the garage at his home in Kansas, but the company was outgrowing that space, so he decided to move the company into a professional shop.

Now in its fifth year, the company employs three to four crew members and runs two trucks and trailers to provide lawn care, flowerbed cleanup, tree and shrub trimming, snow removal and some landscaping, which Shain hopes to expand in the near future. "We're a little bigger than solo but not quite the big guys yet," he says.

The same happened to Martin Brigham, owner of MB Landscaping in New Jersey, which employs eight workers who staff

three lawn care crews.

While Brigham started off headquartering his three-man company in his own garage, he soon realized he was outgrowing the space and needed somewhere else to do business. "I have to admit, my wife was thrilled with the idea and I think at least some of my neighbors were too," he says.

And as he plans to expand into snow removal and some landscape services the future, the time was right to invest in a space where he could grow the company.

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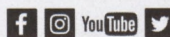
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READY WHEN YOU ARE

Any task or maintenance that you're doing just takes longer if you don't know where your stuff is."

BRIAN SHAIN, owner, Top Notch Lawn Care

GETTING ORGANIZED. After expanding his crew by two, Brigham decided to bite the bullet and get a separate space for his business to operate. "It was a scary move, but it

was time," he says. "We had too much stuff to stock at home and it was getting to be a mess of stuff just everywhere."

In early 2017, Shain bought his own

1,500-square-foot shop and got to work setting it up. He took on the project over the winter and enlisted the help of his cousin, who was also working at the company, to get the job done. "Obviously, I kind of feel like everything has to have a place. It needs to be somewhat organized to find tools and things you need throughout the day. If everything is scattered – which I'm not going to lie, sometimes it is – it just makes things more difficult. Any task or any maintenance that you're doing just takes longer if you don't know where your stuff is."

Now, everything in his shop is organized and up off of the ground where it won't be damaged. And everything is separated by type of tool so that there's no confusion.

One wall has hand tools like shovels, saws, rakes, bed edgers, scoop shovels and more. "You know you've got your mower equipment, you've got your wrenches, your screwdrivers all those hand tools and keep all them in one little area so you know where everything's at," Shain says.

Brigham and Shain both add that much of their equipment just stays on the trailers since they use it every day.

At Top Notch Lawn Care, there's a separate blade-sharpening station. The company keeps two sets of mower blades for each mower so once sharpened, one set goes up on the wall and the other goes on the mower. When those get dull, they switch them out.

Brigham keeps a stock of mower blades for his fleet and his part-time mechanic handles the sharpening as needed once a week. "He's a great guy who comes in a few hours every week to check things out, do basic maintenance and keep us on track," he says. "It's just one less thing for me to worry about and it's a small expense in the grand scheme of things."

STAYING STOCKED AND CLEAN. Brigham's part-time mechanic is in charge of stocking the shop and delivers a weekly report detailing what the company needs from trash bags to mower blades to belts and hand tools. Brigham says the company doesn't keep too much in stock because it's still small, but

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When everyone pitches in, it becomes everyone's responsibility to take pride in what we're building."

MARTIN BRIGHAM, owner, MB Landscaping

having a full list of what's in low supply cuts down on trips to the store. "It's just less wasted time for me," he says. "That way, I'm not just running back and forth every time I need to

grab every little thing."

He also involves the crew in keeping the shop neat and tidy, noting that it helps with team-building. "When everyone pitches in,

it becomes everyone's responsibility to take pride in what we're building," he says.

Top Notch Lawn Care puts aside an hour or two every week to clean up shop and put everything back in its place. Otherwise, crews are wasting time looking for tools and parts.

"It's definitely tougher than it sounds, but that's just the way we do it," Shain says. "We just try to put everything back to where we found it so we know where it's at. Because once it starts to get messy, it just sort of snowballs if you don't stay up on it."

Shain's number two in the company has some extra responsibilities as well. He runs the other crew at the company, and he's in charge of equipment maintenance and stocking.

"It's definitely helpful to have a second set of eyes because I can't remember everything myself," he says.

OUT OF HOME OFFICE. Moving from a personal garage to a separate shop has helped Shain and Brigham's employees feel more professional, too.

"The biggest thing for me as far as an owner is I think the employees think of the job as more professional now," Shain says. "The company is more professional because we're not working out of the garage of a house."

It makes interviews easier as well. Now, instead of potential hires coming to Shain's home, they come to the office. "I was always worried about interviewing people at my house," he says. "I don't really want people to know where I live, especially if I don't hire them and maybe they get upset."

Brigham would interview potential hires at a local coffee shop, but says it was always somewhat awkward. "Now I feel like I can establish myself as the boss right from the get-go. Guys can see that I'm a serious guy with a serious business."

And for Shain, having an office over the shop where he can take care of administrative duties helps him separate home life from work life. "Now when I'm done working, I come home and I'm not on my computer at home doing paperwork," Shain says. "I get that done at the shop, at the office and it makes home life a lot easier." **L&L**



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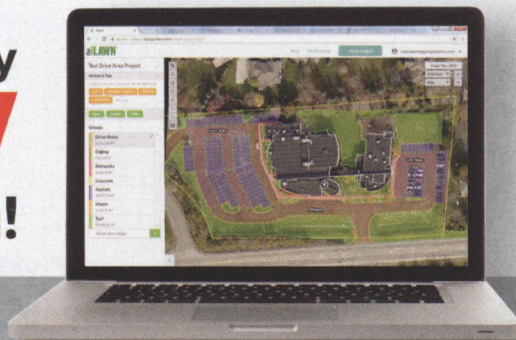
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aeration unplugged

A sleeper add-on can be positioned as a recurring service with a nice profit margin if you sell it right and perform it efficiently. **By Kristen Hampshire**

GERRY WHITE SEES AERATION as a way to give clients the healthy, green lawn they want – and produce a nice profit margin for his business, pH Lawn Care in Essex, Massachusetts. At heart, he’s an agronomist, after spending years working as a golf course superintendent. “The lawns we aerate are going to do better and so we’ll be more successful helping those clients,” White says.

When White took over pH Lawn Care earlier this year, aeration services amounted to about 3 percent of the company’s overall revenue. Now, sales are nearing 10 percent,

and White would like to see that number climb to as high as 20 percent. “It’s a recurring service in my book,” he says of the importance of annual aeration.

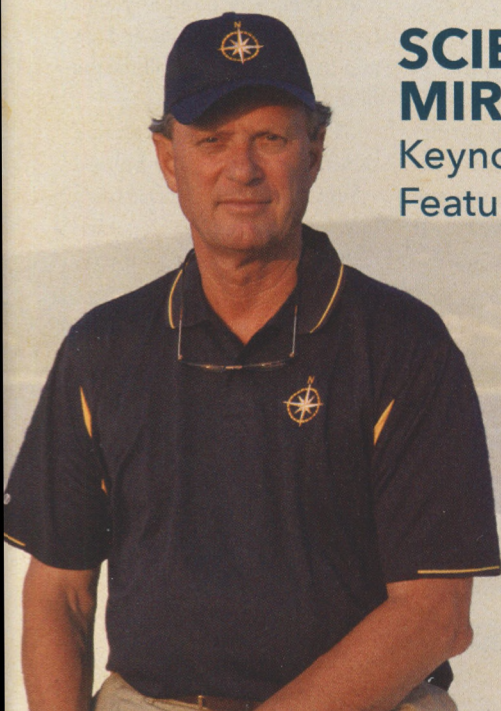
Not to mention, aeration yields a profit margin of 20 to 25 percent, which is higher than other lawn care offerings, he says. Why is the service such a financial win for pH Lawn Care? White attributes its efficiency and efficacy to ride-on aerators, which work for most of his properties. “It’s a specialty machine that I can’t say enough about,” White says. “It increases productivity.”

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In the first year, he paid off the machine in labor savings. For an acre property, he'd have to send two crewmembers and two walk-behind aerators to the site. "That doubles my payroll right there, and to price it competitively with other companies, I wouldn't be able to do it," he says.

With the ride-on, the job gets done with one machine and one technician. "You cut the time in half and one guy can do it," White says. "Getting a ride-on aerator was a no-brainer."

Ride-on and walk-behind aerators have a place in the equipment arsenal of an operator that wants to grow an aerating business. The add-on

service can be an after-thought for companies and customers – but when sold at the right time, and delivered with maximum efficiency, aeration is a win-win.

"Anyone who takes pride in their yard will want aeration for the nutrient factor," says Jim Caywood, owner of Green & Grow in central Kentucky.

SELLING, JUST IN TIME. Caywood says pride is a deciding factor for many customers who say yes to aeration. But first, they must understand the benefits the service will bring to their lawns, and that's where technicians come in.

Direct contact with clients is one layer of the sales effort at

Green & Grow. The company also sends out mailers and emails. By Aug. 1, the company is "selling it hard," Caywood says. Green & Grow can aerate from August through December, or when the ground freezes in their region.

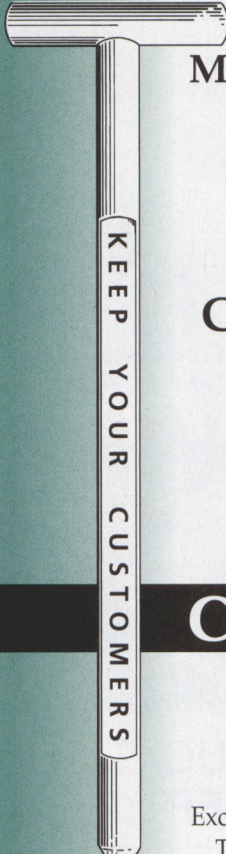
Matt Green, who owns Green's Lawn Care & Property Services in Indianapolis, talks to customers about aeration in spring. "For us, the key to sales is getting to them when they are excited about their properties in the spring," he says.

Right away in early spring, Green and his team assess clients' properties to identify any issues and needed services. "If their property needs to be aer-

ated, I make sure they know that, and I explain the services to them," he says.

The service is scheduled in August, and the sales effort continues, Green says. "We'll keep selling through August with email blasts, and by the end of that month, we pretty much have everyone lined up for service for the next two months," he says. This year, the company will try something different and do another sales push in fall for the next year's schedule.

Sales at pH Lawn Care are reinforced with leave-behind information that technicians tuck into service write-ups. "As each technician goes to a property,



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“(An aerator) is a specialty machine that I can’t say enough about. It increases productivity.”

GERRY WHITE, owner, pH Lawn Care

they leave an estimate for aeration and deep-root feeding for shrubs, too,” White says.

White treats the service as a necessary, annual part of an overall lawn care regiment. This mindset is communicated to customers when they sign a contract. “Aeration is important to do every year.”

pH Lawn Care ties in overseeding with aeration. “That way, we are integrating new grasses into people’s lawns,” White says.

PICKING A PLUG PULLER. This year, Green will invest in a ride-on aerator because Green & Grow is selling aeration to larger, estate properties in the In-

dianapolis area. “There is enough flat, open land where it makes sense to have the ride-on,” he says, noting that the investment is \$7,000 to \$10,000, so it’s a big decision.

However, Green expects to grow the estate business, and a ride-on aerator is the most efficient way to handle the job. Green likes the versatility of walk-behind aerators because they can fit through gates, be maneuvered around trees and work just fine for small yards. “You can also get on to hills,” he says. (A ride-on is best operated on flatter land.)

Caywood has been operating ride-on aerators for four years

and reports tripling production because of the labor-saving equipment. “It works best in larger, open areas,” he says.

Caywood recently demoed a new aerator that has a weight-forward device and hydraulic tines with a pressure gauge so he can control and monitor the pressure. “You don’t want too much pressure because it will bury the tines too deep and you could tear up the turf,” he explains.

Recently, he purchased a walk-behind aerator that has a split drum that allows the operator to turn the machine without pulling tines out of the ground.

Some landscape contractors weigh the decision: rent or buy?

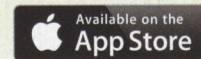
With aerators, White goes for the purchase every time. “It’s not cheap to rent – it can cost \$75 per day – and then you have to add that to your price, so your margins aren’t as good,” he says. White will rent “out of desperation” if one of his aerators in the fleet goes down.

Overall, an opportunity to increase aeration sales and perform the service efficiently (and profitably) makes this service a promising sleeper. White’s advice: “Don’t be afraid to spend more for a better piece of equipment that will produce a significant amount of revenue. The less downtime you have, the better.” **L&L**

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PRICE CHECK

Take stock of seed prices now and in the future. **By Kate Spirgen**

S EED PRICES can rise and fall, depending on production rates, so we spoke to some industry insiders to see how things are shaping up.

Lawn & Landscape: What are seed prices looking like this year compared to last?

Aaron Kuenzi, executive vice president, Mountain View Seeds: Other than poa trivialis, prices will remain at similar levels as they were in the spring. Compared to 12 months ago that means tall fescue is up about 10 percent, perennial ryegrass is down about 4 percent and Kentucky bluegrass and fine fescues are about the same.

Bo Lacy, production manager, Barenbrug

USA: Annual ryegrass has no change, perennial ryegrass is down 1 cent, tall fescue is up .095 cents and bluegrass has no change.

Russ Hayworth, national business development, Pure Seed: Pricing on turf-type tall fescue is higher than last season as inventories are tight and demand remains constant. Perennial ryegrass pricing is stable compared to last season as we continue to work through last year's production carryover.

Chris Claypool, Jacklin Seed by Simplot: Prices will be similar to last season, but could be higher on tall fescue and some bluegrasses.

L&L: What does the carryover stock look like right now?

AK: The industry has very limited tall fescue, fine fescues and Kentucky bluegrass carryover. There's an adequate carryover of perennial ryegrass.

BL: Very little carryover for annual ryegrass and tall fescue, some carryover of bluegrass and 130 million pounds of perennial ryegrass.

RH: Kentucky bluegrass is in short supply due to poor harvest conditions and low yields from last year's production. We are experiencing strong demand for Kentucky bluegrass as customers are realizing the versatility of improved varieties and an expanded growing area. Fine fescue markets remain strong and we are seeing a rise in their usage and applications when mixed with other species of cool season grass seed.

CC: Only perennial ryegrass has carryover. All other species were sold out or only poor quality remained.

L&L: What does production look like right now? Is there an abundance of any particular species?

AK: We are about two weeks from getting solid production numbers for this year's crop but at the moment production looks pretty stable to slightly less than average due to our dry, warm May and June weather. However, acres of most species are similar if not higher than last year, so total

production should be adequate.

BL: Production looks to be normal. There's an abundance of perennial ryegrass.

RH: This year's production is progressing nicely and slightly ahead of schedule. Initial reports indicate yields are coming in slightly below average for every species.

CC: The only surplus has been perennial ryegrass. But the costs have not declined, so prices should be similar to last season. Other grass species are in strong demand and prices are the same or slightly higher.

L&L: Do you predict a significant change in the future for any particular species?

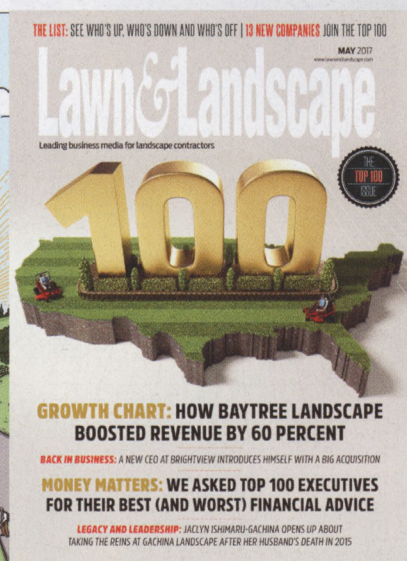
AK: Not sure if we see any significant changes, but (we) do see trends that will continue. Tall fescue continues to grow in market share replacing perennial ryegrass and Kentucky bluegrass in the northern regions.

BL: Not at this time.

RH: Cool season grass seed species are being bred and developed to enhance traits related to drought, disease, salt and traffic tolerances. Those traits are all important in our efforts to provide a better footprint and lower the inputs on our environment.

CC: For higher quality bluegrass and tall fescue, the prices must increase. Fine fescues will struggle more in production. Bermuda seed production has more competition now too with other crops for water. **L&L**





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WATER BY NUMBERS

Irrigation monitoring can do more than just save water.

By Kate Spirgen

WE'VE ALL SEEN IT—sprinklers running in the rain, erratic spray patterns, sprinklers pooling in a low spot on a lawn. Since irrigation technicians can't be everywhere at once, monitoring software is giving them eyes on the ground, even when they can't be.

With so many options on the market, we spoke to two irrigation contractors to see how they chose the right software for their businesses, and how they use it to streamline their operations.

SERIOUS SAVINGS. Beau Drumst, owner of Green Grass Lawn Care in Alabama, says software has helped him put together systems for his customers that he and his crews can monitor without even visiting a site.

Green Grass' clients are 80 percent apartment complex, condominiums and HOAs. He says the large footprint of the properties made them time-consuming to inspect in the past.

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ing weeks on end going out and figuring out where problems might be," he says, noting that he has been able to take one of his irrigation technicians part-time on a lawn maintenance crew since there hasn't been as much work for him on the irrigation side.

Drumst says that has helped him keep maintenance crews on track, especially when dealing with situations like callbacks or new clients.

The company uses a software platform that allows them not only to manage its irrigation systems from the office, but it also includes a mobile application for crews to refer to when they're out making service calls. The



app will even send out real-time notifications to let Drumst know if there's an issue with water flow.

John Bolan, owner of Aquatech Irrigation in Maryland, just started to use monitoring software two years ago, but says

even just the drive time he's saved has made his purchase worthwhile. Because traffic is slow in his area, it makes it hard for technicians to get out to sites in a timely manner.

"Now we don't have to go out

just to check on a system and see that nothing is wrong," he says. "And if something is wrong, we know we're not making the trip for no reason."

Aquatech's software lets technicians look at water flow remotely, using Wi-Fi to communicate. The software also alerts the company when there's a problem that needs attention.

Plus, the software has saved both companies' customers some money on their water bills. "It's not much, but we certainly aren't getting complaints," Bolan says. "And now we can use that as a selling point as well – we'll only be using the amount of water the lawn really needs."

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“They can actually get a sense of how much money they could save and take a look at the numbers themselves.”

BEAU DRUMST, owner, Green Grass Lawn Care

THE BACK END. Drumst says the consumption analysis he can get, among other kinds of reports like flow sensing, have helped him communicate with both current and potential customers as well. He can sit down with property managers at the end of the year and show them how much water they've saved compared to years past.

“It's a huge selling point,” he says. “Plus, I can show those comparisons to folks who are on the fence and it really helps get them on board. They can actually get a sense of how much money they could save and take a look at the numbers themselves.”

Bolan uses his reports to learn more about how the site works and recommend improvements and tweaks to his customers over the years. He says it not only saves his customers money, but it also gives him more interaction.

“It's a good reason to sit down with property managers face to face and remind them how important what we're doing is. I feel like it reminds them that they do need us and that they're getting good service for what they pay us for.”

PICK A PACKAGE. When searching for the right software for his team, Bolan wanted something streamlined and easy to use, without needing a lot of time to set up and learn. His small team of four was already stretched thin and he says he wasn't looking for something that would be “more trouble than it's worth.”

“I know a lot of people want all the bells and whistles, but I was really looking for the opposite,” he says. “I wanted the bare minimum to get started and see what this stuff can really do.”

Drumst was looking for a package that not only had the capabilities he needed, but also the right support.

“We demoed a couple of different plans and we ultimately decided to go with the company that we felt gave us the right training opportunities and support,” he says. “I'm not a real tech-savvy guy, and neither is my staff, so I kind of needed someone to hold my hand and show me everything.”

He's now looking to integrate his design software into the monitoring software to

streamline the process. While he may need to buy a whole new package, he thinks now is the time to invest the money into it.

“Where we are, and I think all across the

country, people are really looking at the more eco-friendly stuff,” he says. “I don't want to be the guy who's falling behind the curve. I want to get ahead of it.” **L&L**



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LIGHT DUTY

How to sell bright ideas for seasonal displays
– and year-round lighting displays. **By Kristen Hampshire**

THE OOHS-AND-AHHS OF HOLIDAY LIGHTING – watching clients' faces light up as brightly as their new displays – is what really does it for Jeff Krall, president of American Holiday Lights in Woodridge, Illinois. It's a feel-good service, and considered a luxury. Holiday lighting is also a year-round business for his team, and it includes installing permanent lights that can be customized with the tap of an app to change color and effect for every season and special occasion. (That includes rooting on your favorite sports team with lights in coordinating colors.)

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"It's so fun to see how these projects turn out and how happy people are with them – that's the biggest joy," Krall says. "This is what my guys do year-round," he says, adding that every year, the holiday lighting business "keeps getting bigger."

SELLING THE SERVICE. What Krall will say is, seeing is believing – and buying. American Holiday Lights uses visuals during sales visits to show people how their lighting ideas can look in real life. Technicians are equipped technology to make that happen. "If you say, 'I want roofline lights, some mini lights in the bushes and garland,' we go back to our

vehicle and we have computers and printers in the car," he says. "We take a picture of your house and overlay what you want on the house. Within 10 minutes, we can show you a picture of what it would look like."

THE PICTURE SELLS THE SERVICE. "People's reactions when you come back inside and everything they told you they want is pictured on their house – they can see what the project will look like, and it makes a huge difference," Krall says.

ALWAYS ON. American Holiday Lights offers a 24-hour response time guarantee. "If you notice a

strand or even one light is out, you can call the office and we have dedicated crews during the busy season to be waiting for those calls," he says.

A technician will come to the house within 24 hours of the call. "You're paying top dollar to have this service done and you want to set it and forget it," he says.

BRIGHT IDEAS. Holiday lighting has come a long way since Krall began in the industry. For one, permanent displays can take the seasonality out of the service. Rather than putting up holiday lights in fall and taking them down in the New Year, clients can opt for 12 months of color

they can control. And, Krall's crews can install those permanent displays during the "off-season," which keeps the company's schedule full. Also, lighting is getting more sophisticated, with RGB technology, Krall says.

Roofline lights, lit wreaths and garland, can be controlled on a customer's mobile device. "We can put up lights where you hold your phone up to your house and it scans every single lightbulb and you can change the light color," he says. Imagine a candy cane effect illuminating the front yard. "It's pretty cool."

With permanent lighting, Krall says, "The possibilities are endless. **L&L**



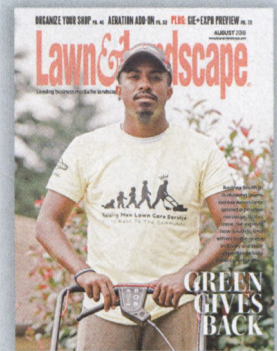
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WORTH YOUR SALT

Industry insider Rob English shares his predictions for stocking salt and deicers.

By Rob English

WINTER 2017-18 ARRIVED LATE much like the past few winters. Many regions experienced significant and prolonged cold in December and early January, but no appreciable amounts of snow in the population centers came during that cold stretch. While most apply salt during any snow event irrespective of whether it is truly needed or not, the demand volume knob was never turned beyond three on a scale to 10 this past winter. Yes, product did move, but in manageable amounts and at manageable velocity.

VELOCITY IS THE KEY. While the supply side of the business can keep pace with intermittent storms, problems arise when snowstorms come in back-to-back and on cold pavements. That weather pattern demands application of deicing products as the snow fighter shifts from a mechanical fight with plows and loaders to a chemical fight of salt and other products. If you want to see trouble coming, then pay close attention to weather patterns that stack up winter events in a tight delivery pattern as well as events that arrive late in the season when supplier stockpiles and inventories are intentionally driven down.

There is enough salt on this planet to fully treat a nuclear winter; however, not all of that is sitting in a stockpile around the corner. In fact, virtually all of it is in the ground and sea awaiting mining and harvesting. The supply side of the industry works hard to anticipate what will come for winter weather, then in a carefully orchestrated plan they schedule stockpile initial filling, then fill the market for pre-season demand. Then the tricky part comes – when to reload the stockpile and at what velocity. It usually takes a month or more to fill the market.

MANAGE RISKS. Long-range weather forecasting and risk-taking are hallmarks of the decision tree when it comes to bringing in more product for bulk salt stockpiles and packaged deicer warehouses. It's a big gamble and one in which there's more than \$100 million of products in play at any point in time. If we, the supply side, don't have it in stock, we can't sell it. However, the consumer market is averse to risk and refuses to purchase enough product to last the entire winter due to



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the uncertainty of the weather, so the burden of predicting the exact amount needed falls on the supply side. Generally, there's disbelief, frustration and anger directed towards suppliers when shortages occur, but they are caused by end users refusing to accept more risk.

Municipalities understand the risk and planning needs. Most have at least five to seven treatable events' worth of inventory in stock to start the season. As soon as the first event is done, they initiate reloading, hoping to stay ahead of the curve if things turn tight.

Private markets generally have one to two storms of inventory,

and then tend to wait until they are sure that a storm is coming to call for a delivery.

That's when trouble can begin. If they can hold on for a week or so before getting a delivery, the supply side can work them into a schedule and get product delivered in a manageable way. However, when everyone calls demanding immediate delivery and are told that cannot happen due to demand, panic tends to set in and the initial order for one is frequently doubled or tripled.

At no time in history has doubling or tripling demand on an unavailable product helped to improve availability. It only worsens it, and likely exponentially.

SEEING SHORTAGES. We generally declare our season over around Valentine's Day. Historically, the market tries to run out inventories and will use whatever they have on hand to manage storms that tend to begin diminishing in frequency and intensity as we get closer to the start of summer. However, the past few years have been counter-cyclical and delivered much of the snow after January. It becomes even more difficult to determine what stockpile volumes will meet demand in the early spring adding another layer of unpredictability to the equation.

This year, we saw exactly that happen as the late season storms

stimulated demand and, in some regions, created shortages as municipal supply trumps demand from the private markets. I've discussed the pitfalls for the salt suppliers in failing to supply municipal contracts as the penalty for supply failures are intensely costly and most suppliers will forsake spot market private supply to fulfill municipal. This is exacerbated by the late season where inventories are intentionally drawn down by all involved.

KNOW PRICE PRESSURE.

While the overall demand for product was generally flat for an average winter, prices have been hammered down by a rush of



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Overall demand for salt and deicer was generally flat, but prices have been pushed down by new suppliers.

new suppliers to the market that they believed was lucrative and short. In the spring of 2015 the market was very short. However, since then it has not been and now there is a bit of a glut of suppliers overall leading to continual downward price pressure.

That can only go for so long before the costs of holding inventory for extended periods coupled with ongoing shortages of truck drivers and new DOT regulations on electronic data logs drive up the cost of transportation, forcing recovery of those costs. I think we will see prices move up a bit in some markets.

For example, the private market in the Chicago area jumped \$10/ton in the spring as supplies ran out due to end-of-season syndrome. Salt and deicers are commodities like any other – price is driven by supply and demand, and demand was up and supply was down. It's hard to predict the future, but I expect we'll see some price recovery in bulk salt and possibly some bagged products as we move through the pre-season of winter 2018-2019.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURE.

This is a topic we all need to keep our eyes on closely. There has been a series of studies, reports and articles about rising levels of chlorides in North American fresh water. The rivers and lakes of the U.S. are beginning to show signs of the impact of what I will call excessive use of deicers.

This is a bit of a touchy subject, but we are routinely slathering surfaces with more deicing products than needed as fear of litigation drives that application. I am thinking that at some point, the EPA will likely regulate the busi-

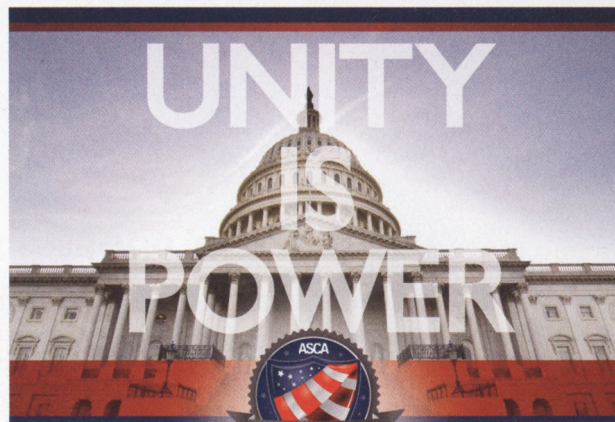
ness since every pound of deicing products purchased in the U.S. is "disposed of in the environment."

More attention is being directed at deicers for corrosion and chloride pollution. A recent article questioned if chlorides are the next phosphorus, referring to bans on phosphorus in detergents because of their role as a macro-nutrient to feed eutrophication – algae bloom in stagnant waters which chokes out ecosystems. There is real concern about the chloride impact in fresh waters, and this topic may drive a new approach to chemical deicing.

Generally, there is plenty of product available for the next season across the U.S. I expect to see a little upwards price movement in certain regional markets. As potential trade wars loom, their impact on premium deicers and salt may also play a role in increased costs. Environmental considerations and pollution from deicers will continue to grow as an issue and the industry will need to keep current with best practices.

Whenever I hear complaints that our products are ruining our waterways, I remind the complainer that if they would simply stay home until the storm is over and let the snow be cleared off and then have one application at the end, problem solved. Always remind people who say we're killing their [fill-in-the-blank] with our deicing products, that their insistence on driving in snow is what is causing that problem – not the people charged with treating the roads. **L&L**

Rob English is president of MeltSnow.com, based out of Massachusetts. He contributes a regular analysis of the salt and deicing industry for Lawn & Landscape sister magazine, Snow Magazine.



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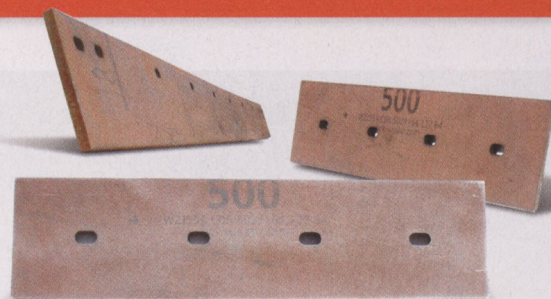


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EACH YEAR, PROFESSIONALS FLOCK TO LOUISVILLE

to see the latest and greatest new products and equipment all in one place. Once again, GIE+EXPO and Hardscape North America are set for Oct. 17-19 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville.



The event is already the largest trade show in the green industry and it just keeps getting bigger. Last year, the show featured more than 1,005 exhibits both indoors and out, and this year is shaping up to be even larger. Read on to see what's in store.



To register for GIE+EXPO, visit bit.ly/gieexpo.

To register for HNA, visit bit.ly/2018hna.

To register for LANDSCAPES, visit bit.ly/2018landscapes.

GREEN & GROWING

GIE+EXPO is on track to be bigger than ever.

GIE+EXPO and HNA 2018 will take place Wednesday through Friday, Oct. 17-19 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Kentucky. Early-bird registration is now open and costs \$15 through Sept. 6. According to Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, exhibit space sales are already running ahead of this time last year and organizers are topping 2017's record-breaking numbers. In addition, the Outdoor Demonstration Area is expected to meet or exceed last year's record-breaking 20 acres.

"This year's show is a must-attend event for industry members who are looking to move their businesses to the next level," Kiser said. "With the addition of trade show hours for contractors on Wednesday and an incredible keynote on the lineup, GIE+EXPO continues to be an extremely valuable business investment for exhibitors and attendees alike."

This year, a new format will be implemented, allowing contractors an extra day on the show floor. Following an earlier dealer preview on Wednesday, the indoor exhibits will open for the entire industry from 3 to 7 p.m., including a welcome reception on the show floor beginning at 5 p.m. The indoor exhibits and Outdoor Demonstration Area will be open Thursday and Friday for all industry members.

Admission to Hardscape North America exhibits – both indoors and out – is included with GIE+EXPO registration. This co-location gives landscape professionals the opportunity to see a range of related new products and explore ways to tap into the growing hardscape market. In addition, a \$50 upgrade will give landscape pros access to live hardscape demos in the HNA Demo Arena tent, where experts will demonstrate techniques in a continuous build format.

Back by popular demand, the GIE+EXPO workshops will feature 10 sessions to help landscape pros grow their businesses. This year's lineup will include two hardscape sessions with insights and tips for contractors interested in tapping into that market. Other workshops, which are sponsored by the National Association of Landscape Professionals, include topics such as marketing strategies, safety programs, developing a new generation of professionals and more.



UNCHARTED TERRITORY

Undersea explorer Dr. Robert Ballard will share his stories of discovery and leadership with GIE+EXPO attendees.

World renowned undersea explorer Dr. Robert Ballard is kicking off this year's GIE+EXPO as the keynote speaker.

The associations that sponsor GIE+EXPO and Hardscape North America have added a new keynote for their 2018 event specifically for landscape and hardscape contractors. The session is set for Wednesday, Oct. 17 from 1:30 to 3 p.m. Admission to the keynote, which is sponsored by John Deere, is included with show registration.

One of the greatest undersea explorers of our times, Ballard is best known for his 1985 discovery of the RMS Titanic more than 70 years after it sank in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. He has conducted more than 140 deep sea expeditions, including the first manned exploration of the Mid-Ocean Ridge, and he is credited with discovering many key chapters of human history, such as German Battleship BISMARCK and President John F. Kennedy's PT-109. He is a well-known author, a film producer of documentaries, an Explorer in Residence for the National Geographic Society and past host

of their TV program "Explorer."

In Ballard's presentation, the oceanographer and former U.S. Navy officer will share his stories of exploration, environmental discovery and leadership. With a passion for the last great uncharted territory, Ballard will entertain and motivate as he discusses his discoveries and adventures, which include the 1985 discovery of the Titanic wreckage.

This is the first time that the GIE+EXPO/HNA partners – the Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute, National Association of Landscape Professionals, Outdoor Power Equipment Institute and the Professional Grounds Management Society – have joined together to co-host their keynote, bringing all of their attendees together in one place to listen to Ballard.

"We are thrilled to be supporting the first ever joint keynote address, with GIE+EXPO and its partners, OPEI, NALP, PGMS and ICPI," said Ken Taylor of John Deere. "The keynote address promises to be a major highlight of this year's event and we look forward to welcoming such a distinguished American icon, Dr. Robert Ballard, to the GIE+EXPO stage."

Tuesday, Oct. 16, 8 p.m.

Headliner: The Crashers

Wednesday, Oct. 17, 8 p.m.

Opening Act: Kelleigh Bannen
Headliner: Colt Ford

Thursday, Oct. 18, 8 p.m.

Opening Act:
MacKenzie Porter
Headliner: Jana Kramer

CHART-TOPPING SHOWS

This year, nightly concerts at 4th Street Live! will bring GIE+EXPO attendees a mix of country, pop, rock and rap music.



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After a long day on the trade show floor, attendees can head to 4th Street Live! for the annual live concert series. Back for the fourth year in a row, The Crashers will take the familiar stage, this time on Tuesday evening. The band has been together since 2008 and established national credibility when they performed as the official pre-game band for NBC at Super Bowl XLVI.

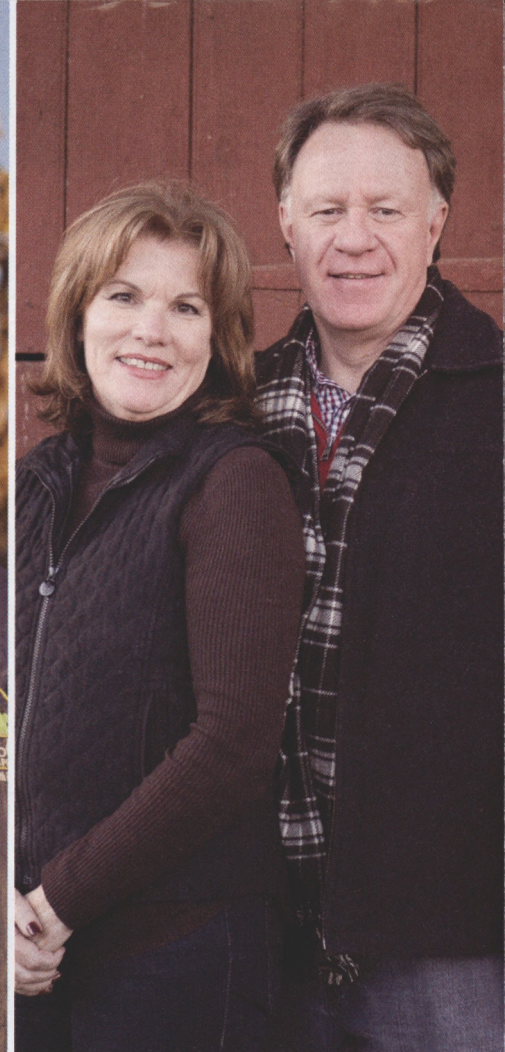
The Louisville-based band has become a GIE+EXPO crowd favorite since their first GIE+EXPO performance four years ago.

On Wednesday, country singer Kelleigh Bannen will open for Colt Ford. Bannen has a new EP, "Cheap Sunglasses," which joins a catalog that already includes a career-launching indie album, "Radio Skies," and a handful of singles, from "Smoke When I Drink" to "Famous."

Colt Ford will bring a hybrid of country music, blues, rock and rap to the stage Wednesday night. He recently released his sixth studio album, "Love Hope Faith." The artist built a following that started with mud trucker events and graduated to arena status sharing the stage with country stars like Toby Keith. Ford co-wrote and originally recorded the song "Dirt Road Anthem" for his debut album "Ride Through the Country." It was later released by Brantley Gilbert, who co-wrote the song.

The final night of live music kicks off Thursday with the winner of the Nashville North Star competition, MacKenzie Porter. Porter is a musician, actress and singer from Canada. After touring with her brother Kalan Porter, winner of Canadian Idol, as a family band, Porter launched her solo career in 2010 and her debut album, which includes "I Wish I'd Known" and "Never Gonna Let You," in 2014. She has opened for Kenny Chesney, Doc Walker and Trooper, among others.

Closing the concert series this year is Platinum-artist Jana Kramer. Her debut single, "Why Ya Wanna," hit No. 3 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart and No. 52 on the U.S. Billboard Hot 100 chart in 2012. She was also the most played new artist of that year. **L&L**



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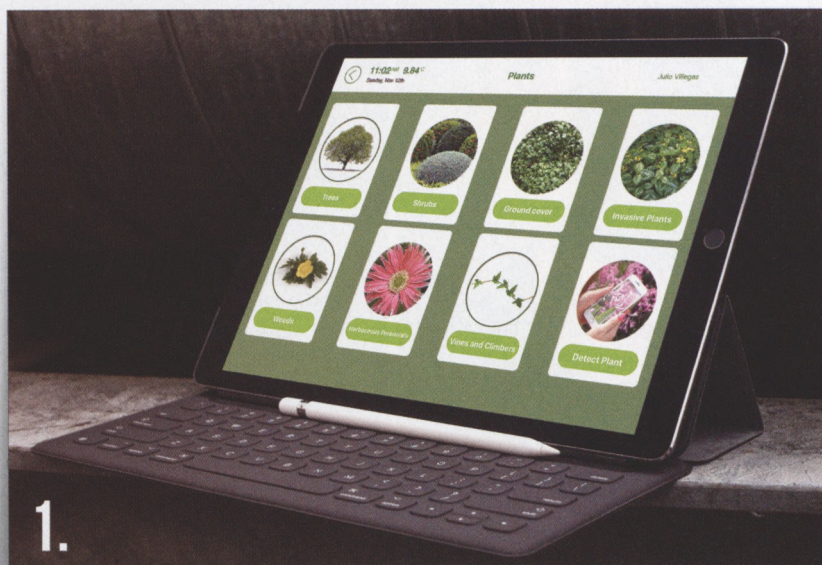
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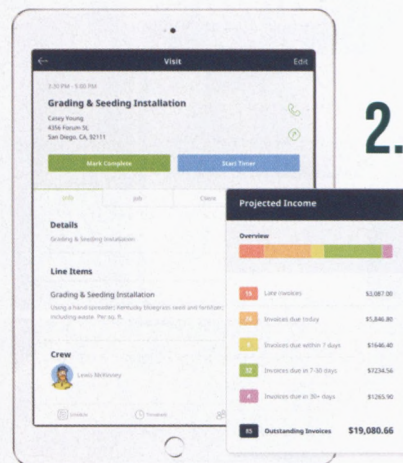
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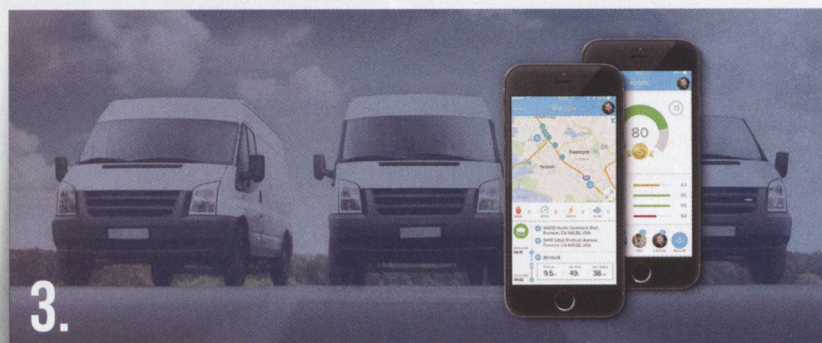
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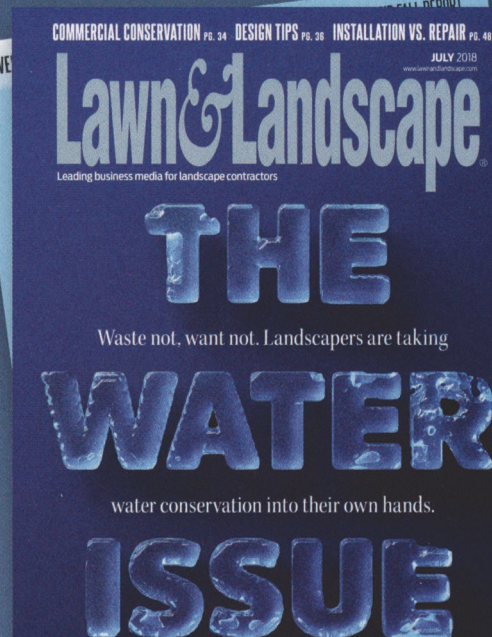
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In today's world of transient workforces and social media job postings, the old adage of "hire for life" is getting harder to find and believe in. Companies that want this to be their model for employees need to understand the role that onboarding training plays in having the new hire learn about their environment. This, in turn, helps the organization



CHRIS SCHNEIDER
is director of employee development at Ruppert Landscape.

learn about its new resource as well. Onboarding is indeed a two-way street and this is where many businesses fail to seize the opportunity. Onboarding presents the largest opportunity to learn about a new hire: their talents, ambitions and dislikes. This immediate interest in them as a person helps build a sense of job security that encourages them to buy in or bond with their role and the company.

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ONBOARDING PRESENTS THE LARGEST OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN ABOUT A NEW HIRE.

to instill a sense of belonging and job security into a newly hired person. Activities that build relationships, increase work-related skills and incorporate their unique skills into our jobs, culture and routines are the training activities that make a difference to newly hired individuals. We often have new office staff members shadow someone in the field for a day or sit in on our monthly financial meeting to learn more about what drives our business. We also try to spend some time with new employees outside of work, whether it's going out to lunch or making sure they

feel welcome at the next employee appreciation event. It is as simple as spending time, teaching them a new job skill, taking an interest in their life outside of work, or understanding and helping them with personal and professional goals. These simple acts that traditionally cost next to nothing generate loyalty and commitment. If you invest in them, they will invest in you. Businesses should plan to find time to make their new hire part of the organization.

EDUCATE EMPLOYEES. Onboarding should be progressive, interactive, employee focused and teach job-relevant skills. Have a structured plan for how to develop the skill set of your new resource and share that plan with them. Plan on educating the other members of the team about the personality, hobbies, history and personal background of the newly hired member. One way we do this is by sending out an email to all employees during a new hire's first week to formally introduce them, briefly detailing their work history, hobbies and family life. This gives other team members the opportunity to welcome them and initiate conversation based on their shared knowledge of that person's likes and interests.

Onboarding is a process of discovery and sharing for both the managers and employees. If your process is a one-sided conversation or full of videos and paperwork, you may want to rethink your approach. When a business wants to "hire for life," they need to invest time, energy and emotion into growing that resource and bringing them into the fold. Onboarding is that first impression with no second chance. **L&L**

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ECHO® String Trimmer Technical Study, September 2016. AMSOIL SABER® Professional Synthetic 2-Stroke Oil resisted deposits and maintained power better than ECHO Power Blend® XTended Life® Universal 2-Stroke Oil.

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Programs A

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