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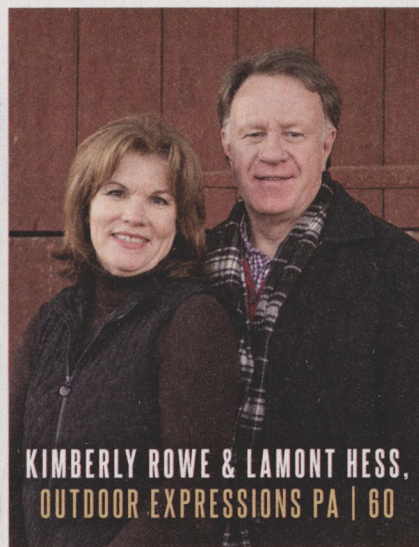
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GABE LOBATO,
LA CHOLLA LANDSCAPING | 48



MICHAEL MOULD & TIFFANY TUCKER,
NEW VISIONS LAWN & LANDSCAPE | 54



KIMBERLY ROWE & LAMONT HESS,
OUTDOOR EXPRESSIONS PA | 60



BACK ON THE ROAD

MEET THE THREE COMPANIES ON THE TURNAROUND TOUR. | 45

DEPARTMENTS

4 Online Contents

6 Editor's Insight: Perfectly imperfect

8 LL Insider

28 Grunder: Be the best

30 Huston: Baloney detector

32 Wilson: Think to link

122 Hire Power: Attractive workplace

2018 SPRING PREP PLAYBOOK



66

FEATURES

The queen of green

34 Laurie Broccolo has diversified, expanded and streamlined her lawn care business with an environmental focus.

Sweat the small stuff

78 Everyday accidents can add up to big costs, but prevention is the key.

Drop by drop

88 The may not look like much from the surface, but these drip irrigation products will keep lawns healthy and green.

Take a stand

90 Adding a stand-on mower to your fleet can add to your productivity and keep you crews comfortable.

Seasonal bloom

96 Contractors experience some ups and downs in the annual services segment.

Software solutions

100 Try these three tips for finding and implementing software to make jobs easier.

Hire the best

102 Recruitment expert Larry Fish shares his tips for finding and keeping staff you can count on.



108

Top social media platforms FOR THE GREEN INDUSTRY

With many social media platforms to choose from, contractors should focus on the top three. **By Lauren Rathmell**

TODAY'S WORLD OFFERS MANY SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS TO CHOOSE FROM:

Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and more. During the Real Green Solutions 2018 conference in St. Petersburg, Florida, Jennifer Peitz and Tim Romisch of Real Green shared what they thought serve as the best social media platforms for green industry professionals.

"Social media takes time and energy," Peitz said, who serves as the digital marketing manager at Real Green. "And you have to put it in to make it effective."

Here are their top social media platform picks for the green industry:

1. FACEBOOK. With more than 2 billion social media users, your business has a great chance to thrive on Facebook. Peitz said creating a business page on Facebook comes with features like an option to get reviews from customers.

"Don't be afraid of bad reviews," she said. "Turn (the review function) on."

Peitz said Facebook is also being used as a search function for users to find more information on companies and businesses.

"Using Facebook allows you to have a dialogue with your customers," she said. She also recommends companies post to Facebook two or three times a day on average.

Popular and engaging posts include community involvement, employee bios and welcomes. Visit bit.ly/GreenIndustrySocial to read about how you can use YouTube and Instagram.



TELL US ABOUT YOUR OPERATION!

If you're interested in being profiled by Lawn & Landscape, writing a story for the magazine or just have a good story idea for us to look into, visit bit.ly/companysubmission. Our editorial team will review it and see where you might fit into our upcoming coverage.

REMEMBER WHEN?

Visit our archives to dive into some vintage issues of Lawn & Landscape. Find out what industry technology looked like a decade ago, or read about some tried and true business tips: bit.ly/backissuesll

LISTEN UP!

Check out our podcast with Bob Mann, director of government relations for the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Mann shares his thoughts on recent pesticide and leaf blower bans here: bit.ly/PesticidePodcast



NOMINATE
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LAWN & LANDSCAPE MAGAZINE is once again looking for the best employees in the industry and we need your help. If you have an employee who has gone above and beyond in their position and should be acknowledged, now is your chance to have them publicly recognized in our publication.

Send us two to three paragraphs explaining why your employee should be chosen. Your entry should include concrete examples/stories

of how this person has improved your company either culturally or financially, and how they have set a good example for other employees. Please include the employee's title and number of years at the company.

Email submissions to Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net. Please use Employee of the Year as the subject of the email.

DEADLINE: Monday, March 12

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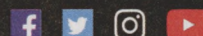


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Brian Horn

Editor | Lawn & Landscape

It's hard to swallow, but the sooner you close the book on that C+ project, the sooner you get to start fresh on the next job.

Perfectly imperfect

One of the most exciting projects we've done in the past few years at Lawn & Landscape is our Turnaround Tour.

This is the second year we've done it with Bill Arman and Ed Laflamme from the Harvest Group and you can learn more about it on page 45. While it's a fantastic project, it's also one of our most time-consuming. I traveled to visit each company with Bill and Ed, and I follow up with the companies throughout the year, so it's high on my priority list.

But with that comes the added pressure to make it perfect – or at least that's what I tell myself. As I kept going back to each Turnaround Tour story to make them all home runs, I was reminded of one of my favorite sayings: "Don't let perfect be the enemy of good."

I don't know who said it; I don't know where I heard it first and I don't know if it means what I think it means. But as someone who has been driven by deadlines my whole professional career, it's something I can always tuck away when the fruits of my labor fall short of sometimes too lofty expectations.

Because, like many of you have to do on a jobsite, no matter how hard you try, you won't be able to make it perfect. Plus, your idea of

perfect might be subpar to someone else and vice versa. In my newspaper days, sometimes the perfect story was a finished story. And sometimes an A+ effort churns out a C+ result.

It's hard to swallow, but the sooner you close the book on that C+ project, the sooner you get to start fresh on the next job.

I find that the stories I spend too much time on usually have one glaring item missing when I go back to review them. Maybe if I wasn't so focused on every minor detail, that glaring omission would have been avoided.

As I turned in the three profiles, which I'm happy with overall, there is some relief in knowing that I'll be writing more about these companies throughout the year. So what I didn't accomplish this time, I can take a crack at again soon. Though, I have to remember that would have been the case even if this was a one-time deal because there are other stories to write.

As we get closer to the busy season, remember that perfect can be the enemy of good. You should always want the best for your company, your customers and yourself, but don't let that ultimate goal of perfection ruin a very good result from a very good effort. — *Brian Horn*

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FREE OF CHARGE

A landscaper in Estero, Florida, volunteered its services and equipment to clean up Everglades Wonder Gardens weeks after Hurricane Irma.

By Megan Smalley

When Hurricane Irma hit Florida in September 2017, cleanup work added to many landscapers' workloads. Companies like O'Donnell Landscape in Estero, Florida, transitioned from their usual landscape design work to tree care work to help perform cleanup jobs. For O'Donnell Landscape, cleanup work occupied most of their time for six to eight weeks after the storm.

"We went from a landscape company to tree care. Getting roads open for safety and medical professionals was job No. 1," said Al O'Donnell, president of O'Donnell Landscape.

While O'Donnell Landscape contracted most of the cleanup jobs it performed in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, O'Donnell received a call from a past client and acquaintance who needed help restoring Everglades Wonder Gardens, a botanical garden and zoo in Bonita Springs, Florida.

"Thomas Hecker, (executive director of Everglades Wonder Gardens), called us and asked us to help him," O'Donnell said.

Over half of the Everglades Wonder Gardens' trees were destroyed and almost all had broken limbs. So, O'Donnell Landscape donated time and equipment to the park about five weeks after the storm, free of charge.

"It's a local park, and they weren't getting anyone else to do the job and bring in

a crane to help move trees – that wasn't in their budget," O'Donnell said.

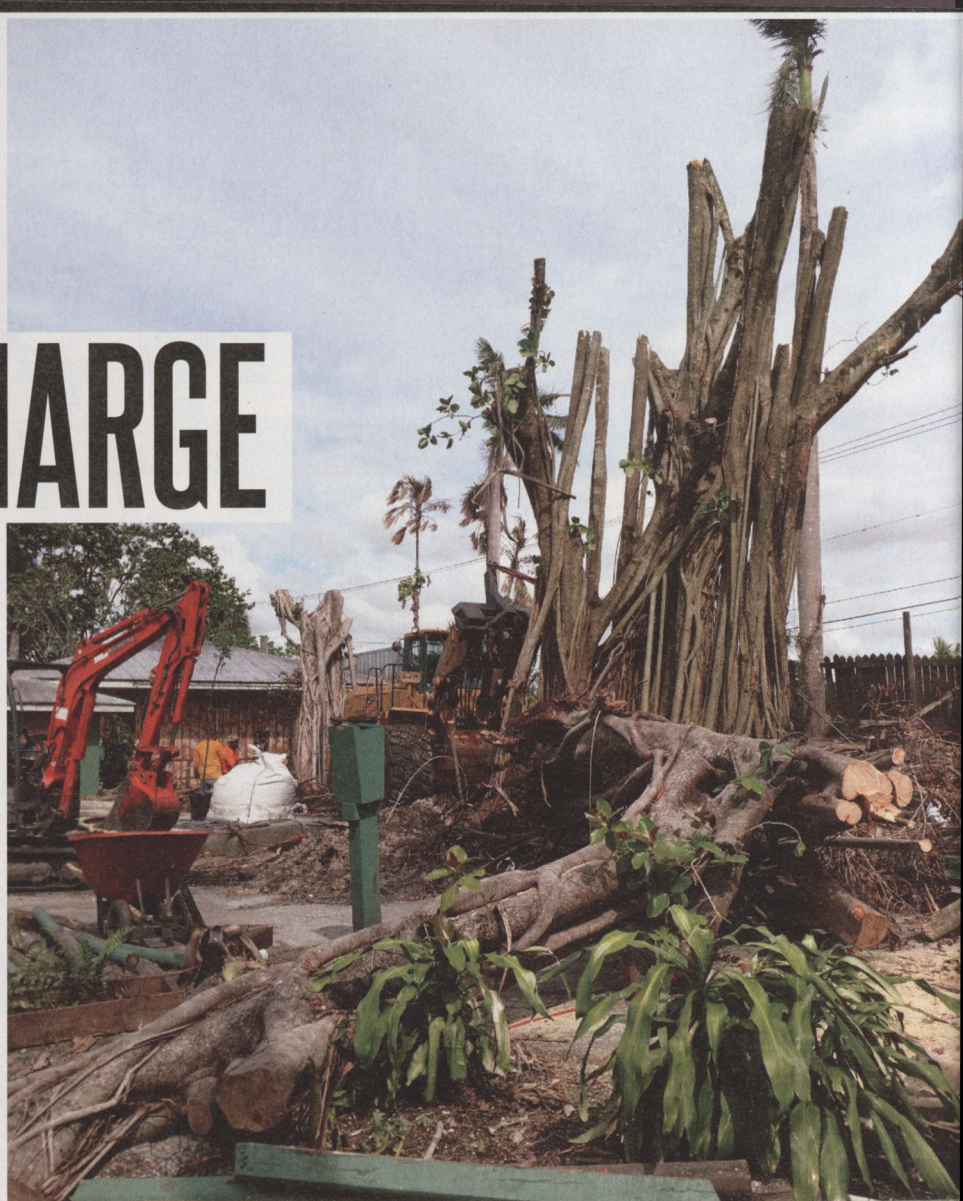
O'Donnell first came up with a game plan to salvage some of the trees that fell. He said he had to figure out how to maneuver equipment into the park and determine which trees would be able to stand up, even though many trees were lying on top of each other. He also ran into the challenge of trees breaking after trying to stand them up. "It was like going to a pile of pickup sticks and figuring out what to save," he said.

O'Donnell Landscape crews assisted with

cleanup at the Everglades Wonder Gardens for about 10 days. Other volunteers also helped with efforts at the park, and nurseries donated plant materials, O'Donnell said. Although the park looks "stumped back" now, O'Donnell estimates it will look as good as normal in two to five years. In the end,

O'Donnell's crews provided about \$31,000 of free services to Everglades Wonder Gardens. Had his crew not helped, most of the trees that fell would likely have died.

"This was a situation where professionally it was something we could do to make a difference," O'Donnell said.



When O'Donnell Landscape volunteered to help Everglades Wonder Gardens clean up, free of charge, one challenge was determining which trees to save.



GOOD WORKS

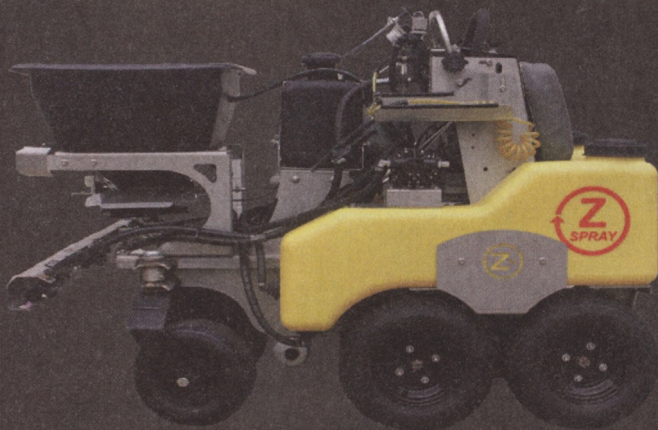
Have you completed a charity project you are proud of or helped out your community in another way? Email Associate Editor Megan Smalley at mssmalley@gie.net to be considered for coverage in a future issue.



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PESTICIDE PROFESSIONALISM

How LCOs can maintain professional personas to avoid scrutiny.

By Lauren Rathmell

With growing scrutiny targeted at lawn care companies, Bob Mann, director of government relations for the National Association of Landscape Professionals, said it's important for companies to do their best to maintain a professional persona. "We need to be trying to advance the professionalism in this industry," he says.

At Real Green's Solutions 2018 conference in St. Petersburg, Florida, Mann offered a few tips for lawn care companies to keep their operations professional and productive.

KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT. This might seem like a no-brainer, but understanding when to use what type of equipment will help

prevent an accident or damage.

"You need to make sure you keep your equipment properly maintained and calibrated for every application," Mann said.

He said it's important to keep up with small maintenance duties like scraping buildup off propellers and cleaning nozzles before or after each use.

"If you need to, take your

equipment to some asphalt to see what the spray pattern will look like," Mann said.

NOTIFY CUSTOMERS IN ADVANCE.

Mann recommends sending email blasts that include the date and time of the service, along with any important information related to the service.

KEEP PRODUCTIVITY IN MIND.

Try to keep operations consistent. Walking around the property to look for obstacles will enhance your productivity. Also, enforcing uniform operations such as always knocking on the customer's door to let them know you're there will build trust.



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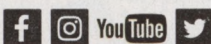


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Real Green Solutions 2018 took place Jan. 7-10 in St. Petersburg, Florida. Sgt. Keni Thomas talked about leadership in a keynote speech at the event.

BE PROFESSIONAL AND PRECISE.

"We always started our applications in the back and worked our way to the front," Mann, formerly an agronomist at Lawn Dawg, said. He also said to work in straight lines only to get the best-looking results.

"Don't get too close to the edge, either," he said. "We would always go in with a sprayer to do the edges."

Recording the work you perform will also come in handy in case any issues pop up with the property owner.

CLEAN UP YOUR MESS. Keeping those pesticides off areas like driveways and streets will portray a look of professionalism.

"If it's not turf, it needs to be cleaned up immediately," Mann said. "Spray it off and get it cleaned. When you don't clean it up, it reflects on all of us."

Using a deflector will control the flow and direction of the spray to make your cleanup easier.

BE AWARE OF 'DO NOT' ON LABELS.

"The two most important words on any label are 'do not,'" Mann said. Follow all label instructions word for word to avoid accidents and malpractice. The labels will have information regarding the amount of application, working

conditions and any safety information related to the product.

TRANSPORTATION. "Other people need to know what you have in your containers," Mann said. "They need to be clearly labeled." If there is an accident on a job site, first responders may need to know what type of chemical was involved to respond to the situation appropriately.

Reusing containers can also cause confusion for newer employees trying to learn each type of pesticide. Once the containers are empty, be sure to read the label for proper disposal.

When transporting your chemicals, make sure to keep them securely tied down to prevent spillage.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS. Anyone handling any sort of chemical must have the proper attire. Long sleeve shirts, long pants, long gloves and eye protection are necessities. Nitrile gloves are easy to find, but read the labels of the products to find out how thick the gloves should be.

For safe, chemical-resistant shoes, Mann recommends hiking boots for comfort while walking as well as rubber impervious boots to put over them during application.

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RCI ACQUIRES MASSENGALE GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

SLIDELL, La. – Rotolo Consultants Inc. (RCI) acquired Massengale Grounds Management, a commercial landscape maintenance company with operations throughout south Louisiana. The acquisition helps RCI to expand its footprint in Louisiana. RCI has operations in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee. It employs more than 600 people at its nine locations.

This marks RCI's second acquisition in the past year. The

IN THE NEWS

company also acquired Greenscape Grounds Management, based in Lafayette, Louisiana, in June 2017.

"We are excited to include Massengale as part of the RCI family," said Keith Rotolo, president and CEO of RCI. "They have an exceptional management team that brings a tremendous amount of experience and knowledge to RCI."



"(MASSENGALE HAS) AN EXCEPTIONAL MANAGEMENT TEAM THAT BRINGS A TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE TO RCI."

—Keith Rotolo, president, RCI

Massengale has provided landscape maintenance services to customers near Baton Rouge, Louisiana, for decades and RCI will continue to provide those customers with services there.

"We are very excited about the possible opportunities when two great organizations join to leverage their strengths," said Toby Massengale, Massengale owner.

Rotolo said RCI plans to make other acquisitions in 2018 in its core geographies as well as expansion in adjacent markets.

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MAINE CITY COUNCIL PASSES SYNTHETIC PESTICIDE BAN

PORTLAND, MAINE –The Portland City Council approved an ordinance on Jan. 3 that prohibits the use of synthetic pesticides for outdoor pest management on public and private properties, the Portland Press Herald reported.

Councilors voted 9-0 to approve the ordinance after a one-hour workshop that was followed by a debate on 10 proposed amendments to the pesticide law. Two amendments passed, one of which set the ordinance's start date for July 1, 2018.

According to the Portland Press Herald, the ordinance was recommended in October by the council's Sustainability and Transportation Committee.

NALP OFFERS ONLINE BUSINESS COURSES FOR 2018

FAIRFAX, Va. – The National Association of Landscape Professionals partnered with Cengage Learning and ed2go to deliver online courses that can help develop staff skills. The online courses are each about 12 lessons and take six weeks to complete. There are more than 100 courses to choose from, including topics such as leadership, supervision, QuickBooks, accounting, Microsoft Office products and Speed Spanish.

"We know that the winter season is a key time for staff training and development, and we hope this low-cost solution for self-directed education offers companies a good resource," said Sabeena Hickman, CAE, NALP CEO.

The courses can be found at ed2go.com/nalp/. Most courses offered cost about \$115.

All questions about the course options can be emailed to NALP Director of Technical Education Rex Bishop at rex@landscapeprofessionals.org.

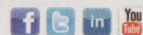
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LAYTONSVILLE, Md. – Ruppert Landscape expanded its operations to include a new branch in southern Richmond, Virginia. This branch joins four existing landscape management branch offices in Virginia located in northern Richmond, Gainesville, Alexandria and Fredericksburg. With the expansion, Dave Sharry has been promoted to serve as branch manager in southern Richmond.

“Dave’s work and performance was a major factor in Richmond’s growth and our ability to create the opportunity to split the existing Richmond branch into two,” said region vice president Fred Key.

Sharry has more than 26 years of green industry experience and is a Marine Reserve veteran. He joined the company in 2011 as an area manager at a time when Richmond operations were just getting off the ground, and he has since been instrumental in the growth of the Richmond branch.

As a branch manager, he will be responsible for the overall welfare of the branch, including the safety and development of his team, strategic planning and budgeting, training and day-to-day operations.

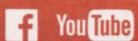
In addition, the company promoted Rob Groves to serve as the new branch manager for its branch in northern Richmond, Virginia. Groves has more than 15 years of green industry experience and holds a degree in ornamental horticulture from Pennsylvania College of Technology. He has been with Ruppert for over 10 years, having started his career with Ruppert as an enhancement field manager in the company’s Gainesville, Virginia, landscape management branch. Within a year, he was promoted to enhancement manager and after serving in that role for six years, he took a position as area manager.

As a branch manager, he will be responsible for the welfare of the northern Richmond branch, including the safety and development of his team, strategic planning and budgeting, training and day-to-day operations.

**OPERATOR RULE #1:
NEVER LET THE REST OF THE CREW KNOW HOW COMFORTABLE IT IS.**



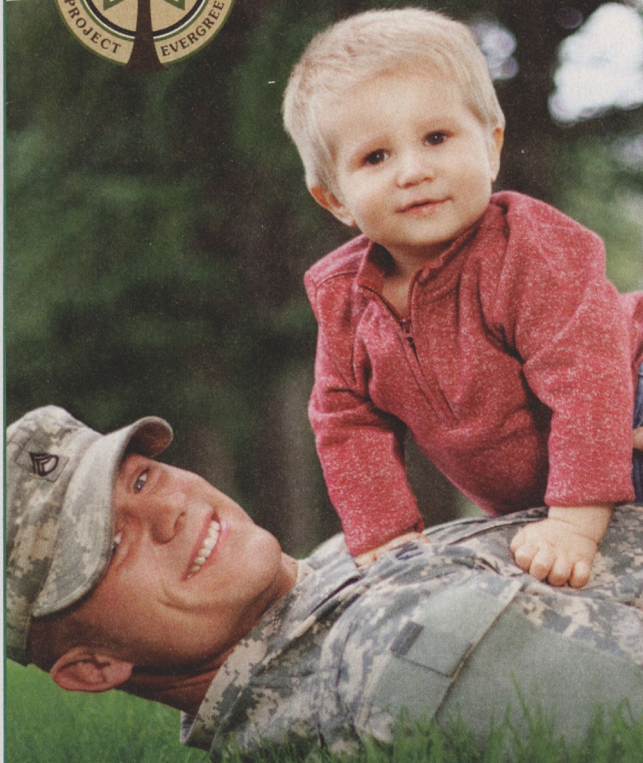
While a wider 36" cab entrance, optimized AC and full-suspension seat are just a few of the comfort-driven features operators won't talk about, the Kubota SSV75's hinge pin height of 128.3 inches, the proven 74.3 HP Kubota engine, and 5,884 pounds of breakout force will have them bragging all day long. Locate your dealer at KubotaUSA.com.



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The pitch: Oregon Outdoor Power Equipment's 70-Series EXL saw chain features:

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- Improved grind shape profile to better match the shape of the file, making it easier to file a precise edge.
- The Gold Loop Start Indicator makes sharpening easier with start-stop identification.
- An overall design that reduces the force applied by the operator.

For more information: Oregonproducts.com



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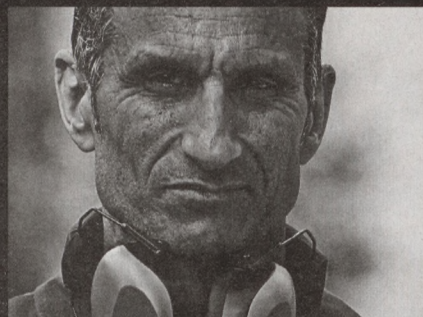


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MOWER-MOUNTED RAMPS - CURB COMMANDER

The pitch: These mower-mounted curb ramps from Curb Commander help lawn care companies with their bottom line.

- They allow easy curb access, saving repair costs.
- Designed to fit commercial walk-behinds, stand-ons and riding mowers.
- The universal mounting brackets will fit most commercial mower brands.

For more information: Curbcommander.com



L-SERIES COMPACT WHEEL LOADERS - DEERE

The pitch: The L-series models are built for tasks that require peak productivity in small spaces and over rough terrain.

- The 62 horsepower (46 kW) 204L and 67 horsepower (50 kW) 304L models are equipped with Tier 4 Final Yanmar engines and fuel-efficient hydrostatic transmissions to keep noise to a minimum.
- An optional ride control is now available to reduce material spillage.
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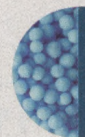
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THE ULTIMATE COMBO - BWISE

The pitch: The Ultimate Combo from B-Wise Manufacturing was designed with the serious landscaper, hardscaper and contractor in mind.

- An 8-foot enclosed v-nose box with 72-inch side ramp door and 30-inch man door provide storage and access for mowers, hand-held equipment and supplies.
- The 10-foot x 82-inch dump box with 47-degree dump angle can handle dirt, mulch, sand, stone and other landscape material.
- The Ultimate Combo is also equipped with a landscape ramp/gate, allowing for easy unloading and loading as well as transport of additional and larger equipment. The Ultimate Combo is manufactured with a B-Wise 4-inch power up / down cylinder and a Bucher pump.
- A 25-foot corded remote, wireless remote and 110V/5Amp charger are standard equipment, along with a B-Wise 10,000 pound Hyjacker hydraulic jack. Standard aluminum wheels complete the package.

For more information: Bwisetrailers.com

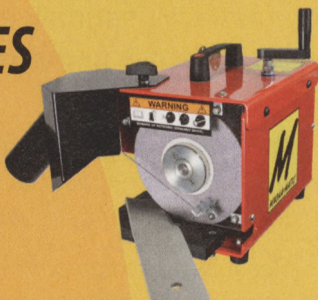
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GUIDELINES FOR SAFETY AND FINANCE PLANNING

Professionals offer input on OSHA safety guidelines and becoming stronger financially.

Q: We are looking for information for how to properly mark and secure our vehicles on the side of the road. Can you please advise where we can get specific Department of Transportation (DOT) requirements for our state? We have looked at the DOT website and can't find anything.



**NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
LANDSCAPE
PROFESSIONALS**

A: There are federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) guidelines on work zone safety that would be useful for landscape firms that may have vehicles operating near

their work sites that could create potential work zone hazards to themselves or the general public.

The best reference on the proper worker and site safety recommendations can be found online at bit.ly/OSHAworkzone – this is a helpful document that should provide the information needed to reduce a firm's liability in the event of a personal injury incident. I also would recommend that if your firm regularly

ASK THE EXPERTS

works on or near public right-of-way, and that you prepare and enforce a "written" Work Zone Safety Plan to be shared with employees at new employee orientation and during periodic safety training sessions. There are also guidelines and resources provided in an article written for National Associa-

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tion of Landscape Professionals (NALP) – bit.ly/NALPsafetytrucks – on how to safely park trucks and trailers at jobsites that would address your concerns. This article

has a checklist for employers and supervisors on how to prevent any incidents from occurring and includes links to resources such as “flagger training and certification

requirements by state” which can be found here: bit.ly/WorkzoneFlaggerTraining.

By meeting OSHA standards despite a possible lack of DOT standards your company will be proactively protecting the welfare and safety of not only your employees but general publics as well.

Sam Steel, Ph.D., NALP Safety Advisor

Q: We have been struggling financially this year. I need some help with financial projections/cash flow predictions. Do you have any advice?

A: I am sorry to hear about your financial struggles and please know that everyone has experienced the ups and downs of running a business. There are a few immediate things that come to mind that may help your situation.

First, if you aren't using one already, I would encourage you to look for a good landscape industry software that would provide you with tools for budgeting, estimating, scheduling and time sheets to name a few. You should look for software that will help you understand your numbers and what you should be charging or if you are charging enough.

I would also recommend that you price shop your commercial insurance package to possibly save some money for your landscape firm. Prices do vary, and shopping around can help.

Lastly, I would encourage you to offer customers a prepay discount at the beginning of the year with the discount coming back in the form of a gift certificate for the client. This will help you with cash flow up front.

These are just a few ideas to get you started. Reaching out to others to network and get guidance on solutions for your business problems is always a good start.

Adam N. Linnemann, NALP Trailblazer,
Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping

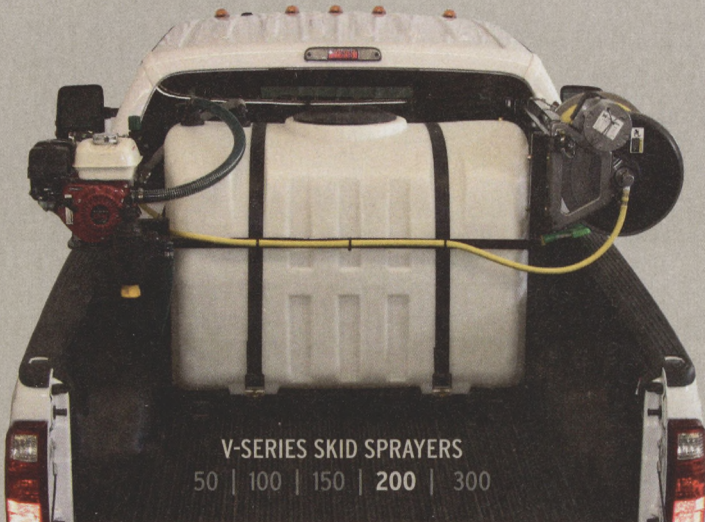
“PRICE SHOP YOUR COMMERCIAL INSURANCE PACKAGE TO SAVE SOME MONEY FOR YOUR LANDSCAPE FIRM.”

—Adam Linnemann, NALP Trailblazer



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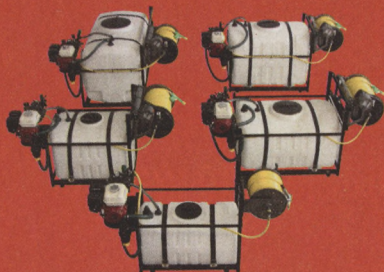


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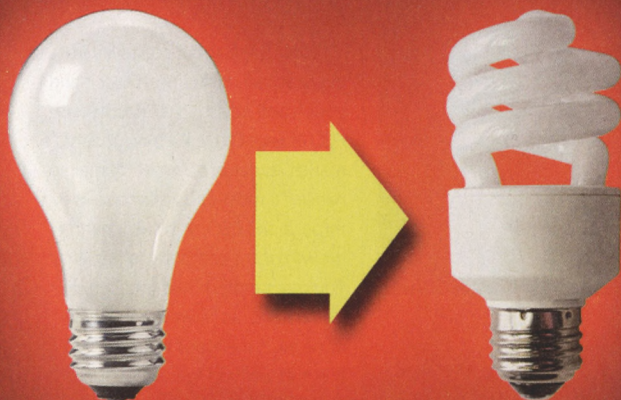
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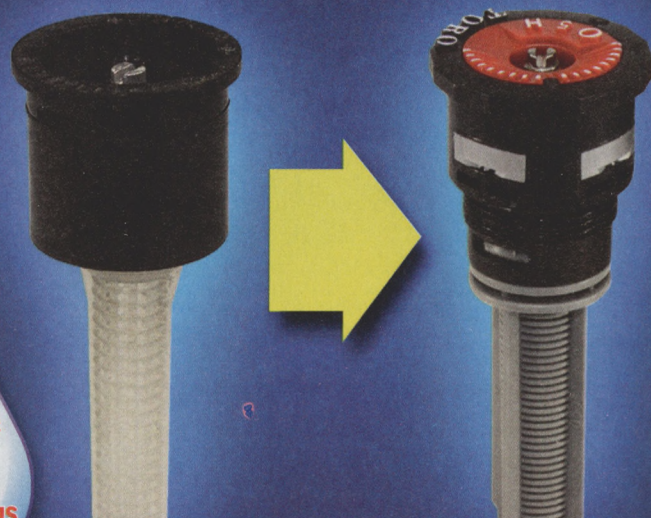
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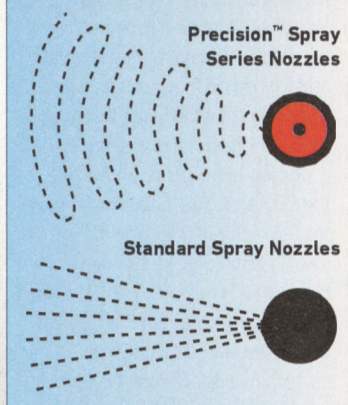
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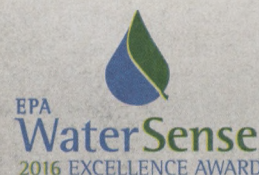
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RECENTLY, ONE OF OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL Marty Grunder! Inc. clients asked me what actions the CEO of a landscaping company should take on a daily, weekly, monthly and annual basis. The head of a \$5-million operation, this client is always looking for ways to improve and grow, as this question shows. And it's a great question. So I put it to three of the smartest green-industry CEOs I know. Here's what they had to say:

STRATEGIC PLANNING. It all starts with strategic planning, according to Frank Mariani, CEO of the largest privately owned landscape company in the country. "We look at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and then it's off to the races," he says. "This drives our budgeting process, identifies our people's needs and addresses our capital expenditures. Most important, we utilize (the International Organization for Standardization) so that all of this preseason planning is used daily, weekly and monthly as a living tool rather than as a report card where you just check your results at the end of the year."

On a monthly basis, Frank's management team gathers for a chart meeting, with everyone coming prepared to explain in detail



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

any item that may be 5 percent less or 5 percent more than what their budget had in place.

Frank also cites the importance of networking for new opportunities by taking part in civic, charitable, and industry events, and of taking the time to connect internally with team members.

"Lastly, very few days pass that I don't check out the competition," Frank says, whether it's local or it's national, to see who is a trendsetter and who is doing work of the highest quality. "Great competition

drives us all to higher levels."

GROWTH. On a daily basis, as CEO your primary focus is always growth, says Mike Rorie, who started GroundMasters in Cincinnati in 1979 with a pick-up truck and a lawn mower and parlayed that into a \$30-million operation that he sold to Brickman in 2006. Never one to sit idle, he now heads up GroundSystems in Cincinnati.

"Growth is the vehicle to provide opportunity to the entire organization," he explains. "There's a lot of areas that require attention, but strategic growth is paramount to the overall success and sustainability of the business."

But, Mike reminds us, with growth comes new challenges, which requires being staffed at key

levels of the business. You need a strong sales team, field leadership that can deliver to the customer, and well-planned account management and operations management. "Growth brings prosperity, but the demands it brings to manage and deliver are very real. If I'm doing my job well as CEO, I'm ensuring we've got the right people in place to do what we need to do."

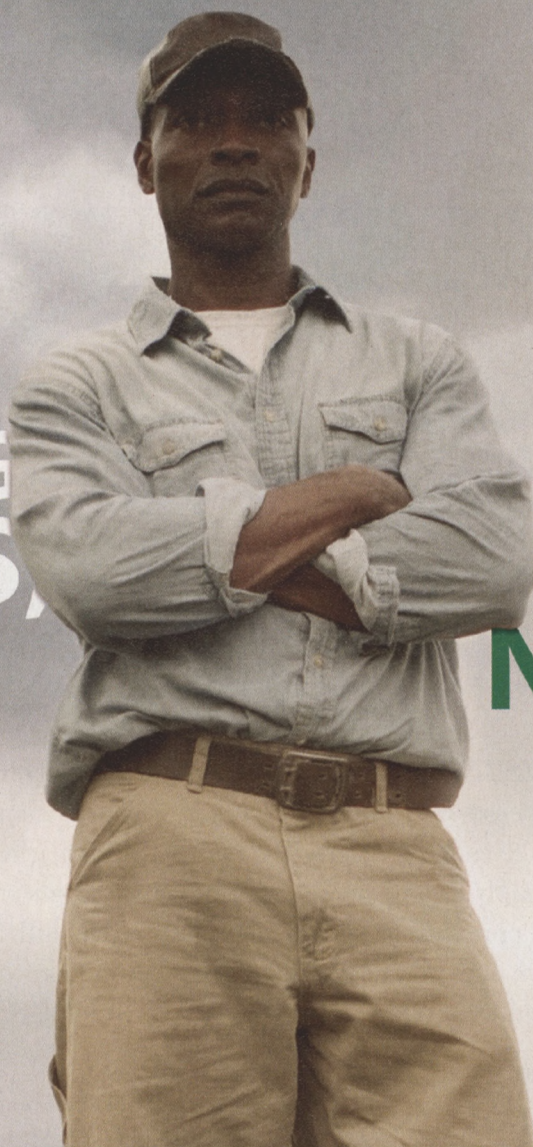
VISION. Think about scalability in every aspect, including yourself and your team, advises Jim McCutcheon, CEO of HighGrove Partners, Atlanta's market leader in commercial maintenance. "If most decisions have to run through the CEO, you will limit the growth of the company to just what you can handle. I have four senior leaders and, as I always say, I have done all of their jobs but I can't do them as well as they can do them individually. The team is stronger than any one person."

Jim says he spends most of his time as CEO focused on the vision and on motivating his team to build the mission and reach success. They have strategic planning meetings twice a year, which he leads, and they meet at least once a month to ensure they are on track with their plans. He's always got his eye on the future, too: What are the opportunities and risks? When do they need to make investments for the future that might have a short-term negative impact?

His last bit of advice on the role of the CEO is crucial. "I often call myself the 'Protector of the Culture,'" he says. "I want to make sure the actions, tone, words, look and feel are all commensurate with the type of culture we want at HighGrove."

And my advice? Wise CEOs do what I did here. They go and seek out guidance from other CEOs who are running larger and more successful companies than their own. They strive to learn from and emulate the best, because that's how you get better. **L&L**

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BALONEY DETECTOR

- **THEY'RE CALLED HOAGIES IN PENNSYLVANIA** and are usually filled with sliced country-cured ham, cheese, fresh shredded lettuce, tomatoes, onions and mayo. In Massachusetts, they're called grinders. The meatball with marinara sauce is perhaps the most popular. My favorite, however, is the Italian sandwich from Maine. It's loaded with ham, provolone cheese, onions, black olives, dill pickles and tomatoes, smothered in olive oil and sprinkled with salt and pepper – all on a delicious freshly baked foot-long roll.

Whenever I drive across the Piscataqua River Bridge from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, into Kittery, Maine, the only items on my menu are Italian sandwiches (and Maine lobster). While the name and inside ingredients might vary around the country, the sub sandwich is an enduring American tradition. The fresher the contents the better – no stale bologna in these delicatessen delights.

Like the sub sandwich, the name of your subs and their contents may vary (plumbing, irrigation, electrical, fencing, pools, etc.). However, by any other name, a sub is a sub.

HOW IT WORKS IN THE FIELD. Mike called from Pennsylvania, asking how much he should mark up the subcontractor costs on one of his projects. The sub was going to clear and grub a property, then soil prep and seed it. Finally, he was going to cover it with jute netting. The cost for



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

the sub to do this was \$100,000.

I asked Mike how much he was thinking of marking up the cost of the subcontractor. He had been taught the multiple overhead recovery estimating system (MORS) and to mark up subcontractor costs by adding 5 percent to cover general and administrative overhead costs and 10 percent for net profit. He replied 15 percent. I asked him how involved he'd be supervising the subcontractor. He replied that he had worked with this very good sub on many occasions and that all he'd have to do was to make a phone call to tell the sub when to start and send an invoice to the client when the work was done.

Me: "So you want to charge \$15,000 to make a phone call and send an invoice?"

Mike: "Well, I guess so."

Me: "How about if I either make the call or send the invoice and we split the \$15,000?"

Mike: "Chuckles."

Me: "If you can get it, by all means charge \$15,000 to make a phone call and send an invoice. However, would you be willing to take \$5,000 for doing so?"

If the market would allow him to charge \$15,000 (15 percent), by all means do so. He might want to lower the net profit percentage. He should also lower the 5 percent (\$5,000) to cover G&A overhead costs.

INDUSTRY PRICING BENCHMARKS.

The market will usually allow you to apply an all-inclusive 10 to 20 percent margin to subcontractor costs. Occasionally, a higher figure is used

and in extremely competitive situations, subcontractor costs are simply passed through, not marked up at all. The 15 percent margin is intended to cover some G&A overhead costs and net profit, but not necessarily costs associated with direct supervision of and coordination with the subcontractor. These costs are often added to the cost of the sub.

Just as a supplier gives you a discounted "re-wholesale" price for the materials you buy, so should a subcontractor give you a discounted re-wholesale price for the work that he does for you. A subcontractor should give the homeowner a retail price and you a lower price.

Think of it like a nursery or supplier that buys plants at a wholesale price, sells them to the homeowner at a retail price but sells them to the contractor for a discounted re-wholesale one. The contractor usually brings much more business to the supplier than does a single homeowner. Also, the contractor does the selling for and requires less advertising from the supplier. Viewed from the subcontractor's perspective, he should give you a re-wholesale price because you are doing the selling. Similarly, the sub should pay you an 8-10 percent commission for selling the jobs in the form of a discount. An additional 5-10 percent discount is warranted to help cover some of your G&A costs.

Remember these pricing levels:

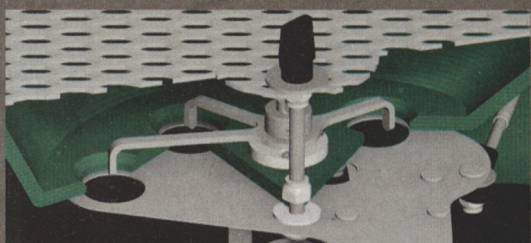
- **Retail (or list):** The price paid by the homeowner to the supplier.
- **Re-wholesale:** The discounted price the contractor pays the supplier.
- **Wholesale:** The price the supplier pays to the grower.

BALONEY DETECTOR. When you work with your next subcontractor, get out your baloney detector. Show him this article if you have to. But don't allow your subs to feed you a bunch of baloney in the form of an inflated price. **L&L**

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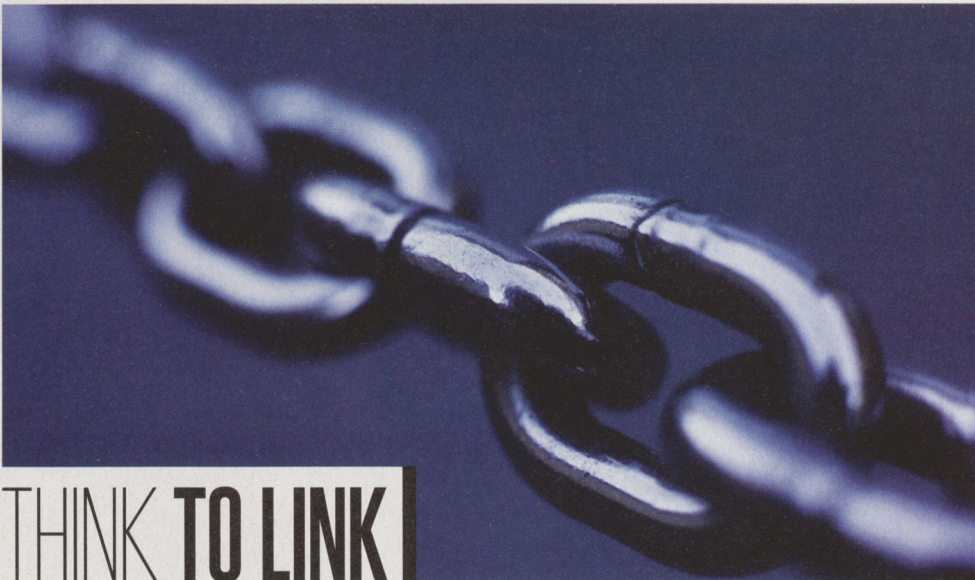


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THINK TO LINK

- **IF YOU INVESTED IN A NEW MARKETING INITIATIVE** or rebrand this year, did you include a parallel plan to align your organization with your strategy? If not, your business and your brand may be working at cross-purposes. Here's why:

Transforming your logo, truck wraps, website, customer materials and messaging to drive new performance goals requires the support of everyone in your company to walk the talk. Based on our years of experience helping companies accelerate growth, we've learned that owners often underestimate the many moving parts that are needed to deliver new brand value propositions.

Tom Oyler, my partner at Wilson-Oyler Group, and I stressed the concept of "think to link" – that means systems, processes, organizational structures, job roles, and critical functions such as marketing/sales and operations must be linked at the hip. Operations must be built to execute what marketing is driving and what sales is selling.

Here's how to achieve the "think to link" concept:

LEADERSHIP: Involve your executive team in the creation of your new



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

brand so they can better inspire your team to become invested in the process and have a stake in the result.

BRAND BEHAVIORS: Make on-brand behaviors part of your culture's desired norms by defining expectations for performance and measure accordingly. For example, if your brand promise is "customer first," then behaviors that drive this message become individual performance metrics. Identifying desired behaviors will help maintain internal alignment through all levels of your company.

IMPLEMENT TRAINING: Provide training around your new brand messaging and positioning goals. Cover the key components of your strategy

“FROM THE FRONT DESK TO THE BACK OFFICE, EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW YOUR NEW BRAND STORY AND BE ABLE TO GIVE THE SAME ELEVATOR SPEECH.

and help your employees understand the role they play in your brand story. Provide cross-functional training to ensure that sales, operations and production teams are aligned with new ways of selling and delivering.

RESEARCH: Gather customer intelligence through surveys to better understand your customer. This has two advantages: 1) you can use the data to close the gap between your customers' expectations and the reality of what you deliver, and 2) it will make your brand customer-centric. Find out what your customers think of you, what they want and what

their industry trends and needs are. Then, build your brand and your services to meet those needs.

SALES STRATEGY: Create an actionable sales plan to move your brand forward. Engage, empower and train your account managers and business developers to promote your new marketing and brand goals. From the front desk to the back office, everyone should know your new brand story and be able to give the same elevator speech.

SYSTEMS/PROCESSES: Make sure your company can support your new goals by auditing and updating your systems, processes and your organization's ability to deliver, track and manage customer experience. If as part of your new branding you consolidate your service lines to eliminate ambiguity, then you need to reorganize and sync internal systems to manage the consolidation in the delivery channel.

CULTURE: Implement a plan to manage change. This includes getting your whole organization excited about your new direction. Operations must be able to adapt to new promises. Sales must be fluent in your new messaging. If not, your customers will let you know that your service isn't living up to what you're promoting.

Whether you are pursuing a comprehensive rebrand or continuous improvement in brand messaging, getting your team involved in the process will drive ownership. When the whole organization is aligned, briefed and trained to support your growth goals, everyone benefits from its success. The confidence of your sales people and account managers grows, and the customer retains confidence in your credibility.

In other words, new brand, old culture is just window dressing. New brand, new culture will bring your values to life. **L&L**

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The queen of GREEN

Laurie Broccolo has diversified, expanded and streamlined her lawn care business with an environmental focus. **By Brooke Bilyj**



S A CHILD, Laurie Broccolo never dreamed of starting her own lawn care business or becoming the go-to environmental consultant in Rochester, New York. She just knew she wanted to be outside.

Her passion for nature led her to study ornamental horticulture at nearby Finger Lakes Community College. After graduation, she was recruited by a local company, Ted Collins Tree & Landscape, as a tree and shrub technician. As lawn care companies sprouted up during the '70s, Broccolo spotted opportunity in lawn care and worked with Collins to launch a program.

"I not only started the lawn care program, but I also changed the attitudes of customers and the sales staff by only doing integrated pest management," Broccolo says. "It was perfect timing, because there was an explosion about pesticide concerns in the mid-80s."

Broccolo began establishing her reputation around IPM, which her website defines as "combining chemical treatments, cultural practices, and biological controls to manage pests." She got involved in what was then the Professional Lawn Care Association of America and served as the first president of the New York State Lawn Care Association. As she worked her way up the company to vice president, she leveraged



Laurie Broccolo's passion for nature led her to study ornamental horticulture and join Ted Collins Tree & Landscape after graduating from college.

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her position in the industry to educate people about more sustainable ways of managing lawns and landscapes.

When Collins sold the business, Broccolo decided to apply what he taught her by starting her own company, Broccolo Tree and Lawn Care, in 1990. With IPM lawn and tree care as its focus, the company added new staff and capabilities as clients requested more services. As environmental consciousness has continued expanding, so has Broccolo's business.

RISE OF ENVIRONMENTAL WORK.

Stormwater management regulations drive Broccolo's envi-



Laurie Broccolo worked her way up in the industry by being involved in industry associations and by promoting sustainable ways of managing lawns and landscapes.



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ronmental work. It started in 2005 when a local developer, who knew about the firm's environmental focus through the Chamber of Commerce, asked Broccolo to bid on a wetland protection project that involved the Army Corps of Engineers and the Department of Environmental Conservation. The development required moving a DEC-protected creek to carry stormwater off-placement from the construction site.

"They chose us because we were the only ones that were passionately concerned about the environment and had already taught DEC classes for IPM and pesticide certification," Broccolo says.



A growing interest in environmental conservation has bolstered the business Laurie Broccolo created in 1990. Hers was the first company in Rochester to become certified green roof installers.

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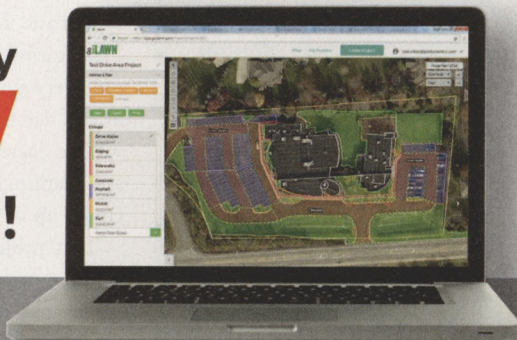
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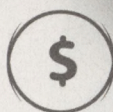
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Laurie Broccolo's installation methods helped preserve protected wetlands from storm water during Hurricane Katrina.

Broccolo worked with a civil engineer, who designed multiple storm check dams with jute mesh – items she had never installed before.

“Everything was going really well – and then, Hurricane Katrina came through,” she says. “The stormwater surge was so intense that it blew out every single check dam, and got to the last line of defense of silt fence. Because of the way we had installed all the storm detention dams and plantings, no silt from the construction site ended up in the protected wetlands.”

That project established Broccolo's reputation for wetland installations and other stormwater management projects like swales, rain gardens and green roofs. The first company in Rochester to become certified green roof installers, Broccolo held green roof workshops at her home to educate architects and engineers – which helped build more relationships, resulting in more work.

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Outsourced growth

Environmental projects still represent a huge growth opportunity for Broccolo – not just on the commercial side, but also for residential clients, who account for 80 percent of the business. Though “residential lawn care is still our bread and butter,” Broccolo says, “we’re not seeing big growth in that area. We are seeing big growth, though, in the design and installation of pollinator gardens, rain gardens, meadows and residential landscaping projects with an environmental focus.”

RETAIL DESTINATION. The more environmental projects that Broccolo bid on, and the more plant-

Several years ago, Broccolo did multiple landscaping projects for a local homebuilder, who invited her to his company’s holiday party. Based on the size of the party and the volume of houses the company built, Broccolo assumed it was a big operation – so she was shocked to learn that he only had 12 employees. When she asked him how that was possible, he shared a secret that has become pivotal to Broccolo’s growth.

“He taught us that, as we grow, we need more subcontractors,” Broccolo says. “Our construction manager has created a phenomenal group of subcontracting partners that we’ll call for mowing, plowing, edging and mulching. We don’t compete with them at all, and our customers benefit by bringing them into the mix.”

For large patio installations, Broccolo subs out excavation so her crew can focus on specialty stonework. If the client wants paver walkways, Broccolo brings in another landscaper that specializes in pavers.

“We find that we’re more competitive if we hire other landscapers, where all they do is mowing and leaf cleanup. They’re much more efficient than

my crews at those services,” Broccolo says. “That has grown our business, without adding labor challenges.”

Broccolo has 35 full-time employees and 10-15 part-time summer employees, supported all year by subcontractors. There’s a core group of about 15 subs that Broccolo works with weekly, and another 10 they call occasionally for water features, lighting and irrigation.

“Customers don’t care as long as it’s done to Broccolo standards,” she says, “so all the subs go through Broccolo training. Every spring, we have a kick-off where they learn how to edge at the correct angle, how to spread mulch so it’s not too thick, and those kinds of details. Our foreman has written out all of these specifications, and she personally goes out and trains them, along with our new employees.”

Before pruning season, the foreman works with the subs again on how to prune and what to hand-shear. Also, Broccolo says the construction manager makes sure the contractors are doing what’s required on each project to maintain quality control. “We like to say that Broccolo helps set the standards in our industry,” she says.

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ings that were involved, the less competitive and less profitable the company became – especially when bidding against larger landscapers with access to cheaper materials.

“I wasn’t getting projects because, with my plant costs, I could not compete with landscape contractors that had their own nurseries,” Broccolo says.

So, in 2011, she decided to purchase a garden center to supply her plant needs. She’d been buying materials there for years when the owners asked her to be their exit plan from the business, agreeing to stay on board for a year to teach her retail.

Initially, the biggest perk of owning a garden center was “being able to sell wholesale to ourselves,” she says. Within a year of opening Broccolo Garden Center, Broccolo became more competitive and profitable with commercial installations.

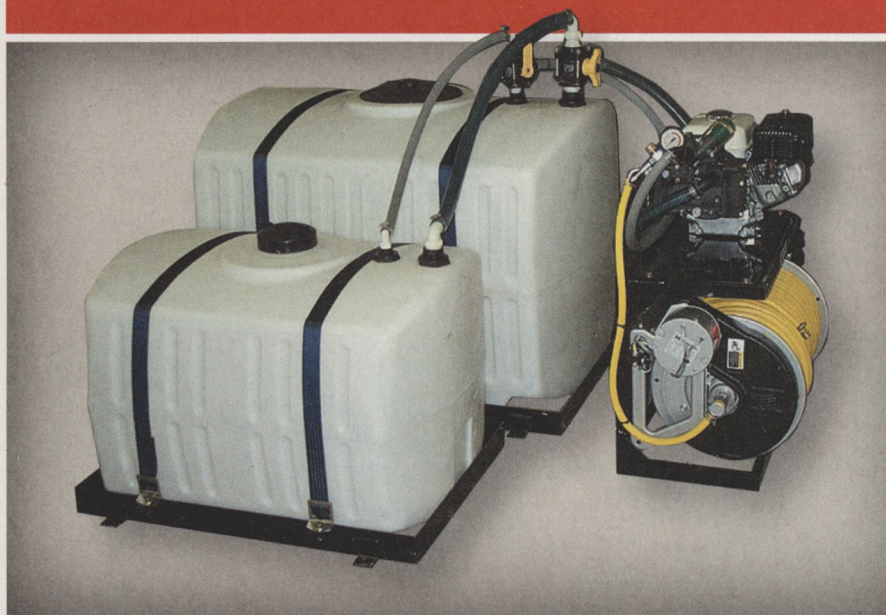
Now, Broccolo is focusing more on the retail potential of the garden center, with the goal of making it an educational eco-agritourism destination with classes and events. The garden center sits on a 40-acre farm, with about three acres dedicated to growing nursery stock, surrounded by woods and farmland.

Last year Broccolo enhanced the landscaping around the barn (which was built in 1900) and added a screened-in butterfly garden, green roof and chicken coop. A local beekeeper also maintains hives on the property, where pollinators thrive in a half-acre of wildflower meadows. At a grand opening last August, Broccolo invited



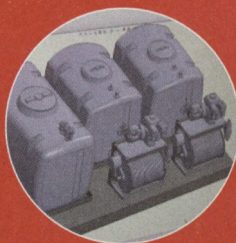
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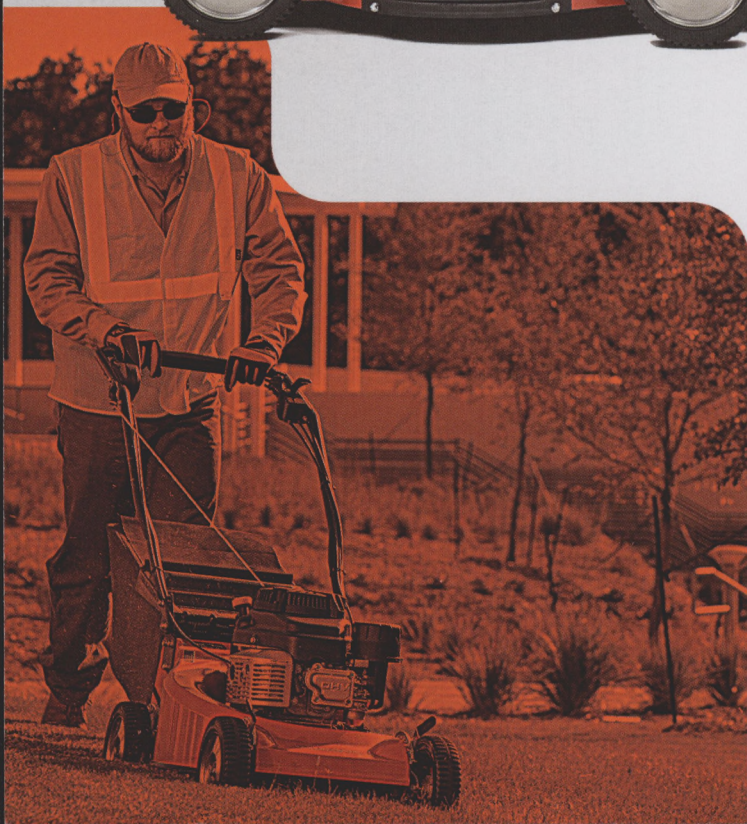


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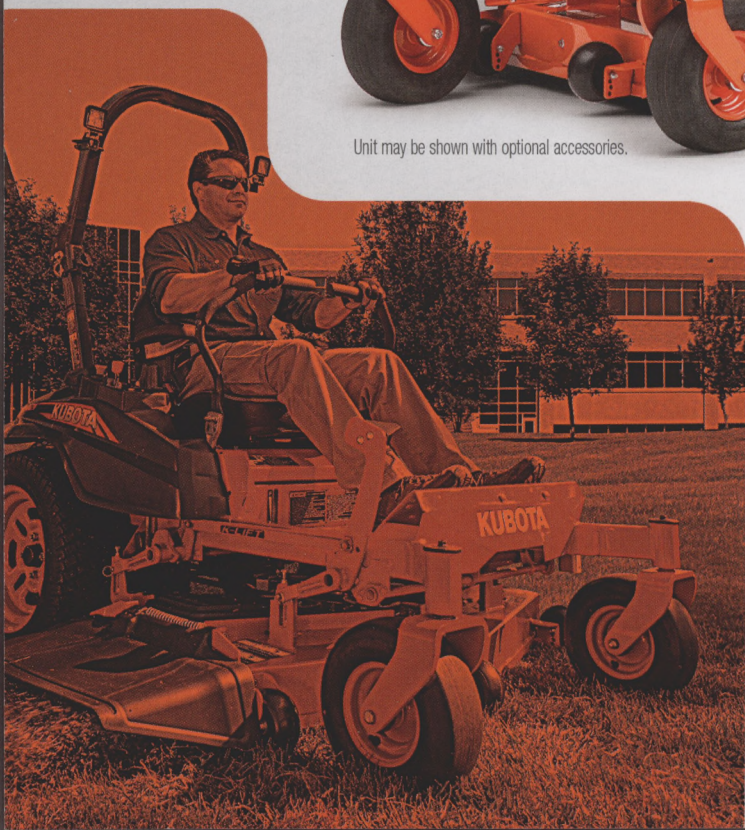
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people to explore the gardens via walkways made of recycled tires and permeable turf stone pathways—showcasing Broccolo Tree and Lawn Care’s sustainable landscape installations. Next, the company is installing small orchards as examples of edible plantings that customers can replicate at home.

Broccolo hosts engineers, architects and other local businesses at the farm. The local Chamber of Commerce holds a tour and luncheon there every summer. Groups from schools, clubs and other organizations are also coming out to learn about stormwater management, pollinators and other aspects of sustainable landscaping.

These classes, luncheons and events are “what’s really bringing in retail customers,” Broccolo says. “We want people to be immersed in the gardens and displays and, obviously, buy something on their way out.”

Retail customers directly benefit the other side of the business, too. Last year, “garden center leads brought in \$60,000 worth of lawn care programs and landscape projects,” Broccolo says. “That, by itself, is worth it.”

Broccolo’s gross revenue exceeds \$3.5 million – including \$1.5 million in IPM lawn and tree care, \$1.8 million in landscaping construction and maintenance, and half a million from the garden center. As she shifts more attention toward retail, Broccolo predicts even more growth.

“I’m doing more within the garden center and having fun with the community outreach. What a great way to blend learning about the environment and socializing with my customers,” Broccolo says. “As the business continues to grow in all the other areas, it’s allowing me to continue to learn and be challenged in different ways – always with that environmental focus.” **L&L**



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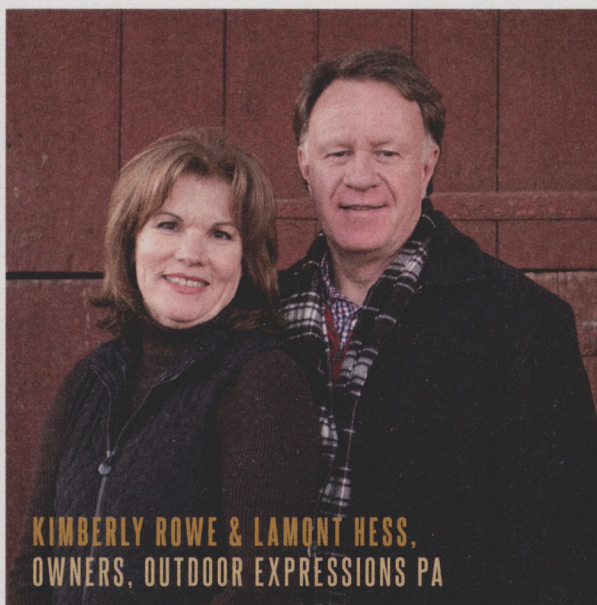


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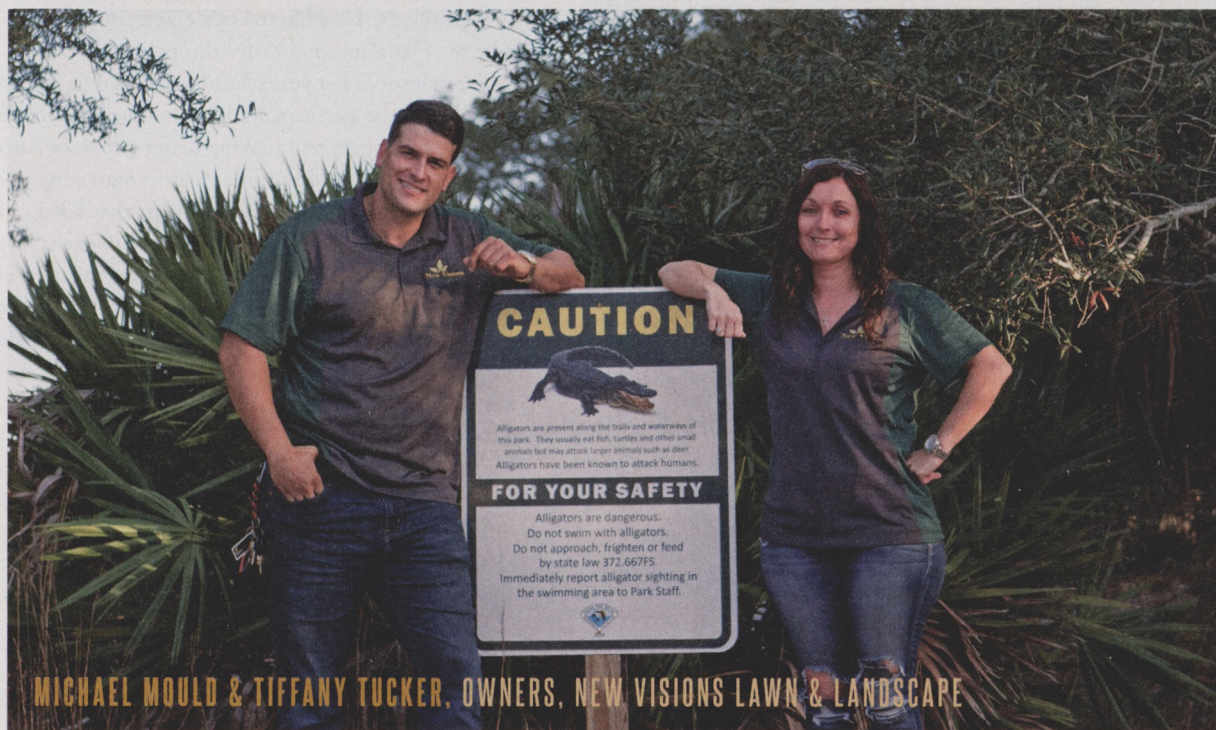
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BACK ON THE ROAD

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W E HERE AT LAWN & LANDSCAPE are thrilled to once again partner with the Harvest Group's Bill Arman and Ed Laflamme to bring you the Turnaround Tour.

This project allows us to dig in with companies just like yours, that have problems just like yours. Throughout the year, we'll be able to document the solutions Bill and Ed suggest and watch as the companies implement those suggestions.

After combing through applications solicited last year for the 2018 tour, we chose companies in Florida, Pennsylvania and California, that displayed strong characteristics of a growing company – a willingness to learn, listen and take chances.

Bill, Ed and myself were able to spend a few days with these companies in November and December, and that wouldn't have been possible without the help of our sponsors.

We are thrilled to have Fleetmatics, a Verizon company, once again be the Platinum sponsor for this project.

"As the sponsor of last year's Turnaround Tour, it was truly fulfilling to see the participants improve their businesses by adopting best practices and making better decisions based on data," says Todd Ewing, director of product marketing at Fleetmatics, a Verizon Company. "As a company that's dedicated to delivering vehicle and workforce data that drives that type of insight, Fleetmatics again is proud to sponsor this new group of growth-oriented landscapers on their journey to success."

In addition to Fleetmatics' support, we are excited to welcome Greenius and Exmark as gold level sponsors.

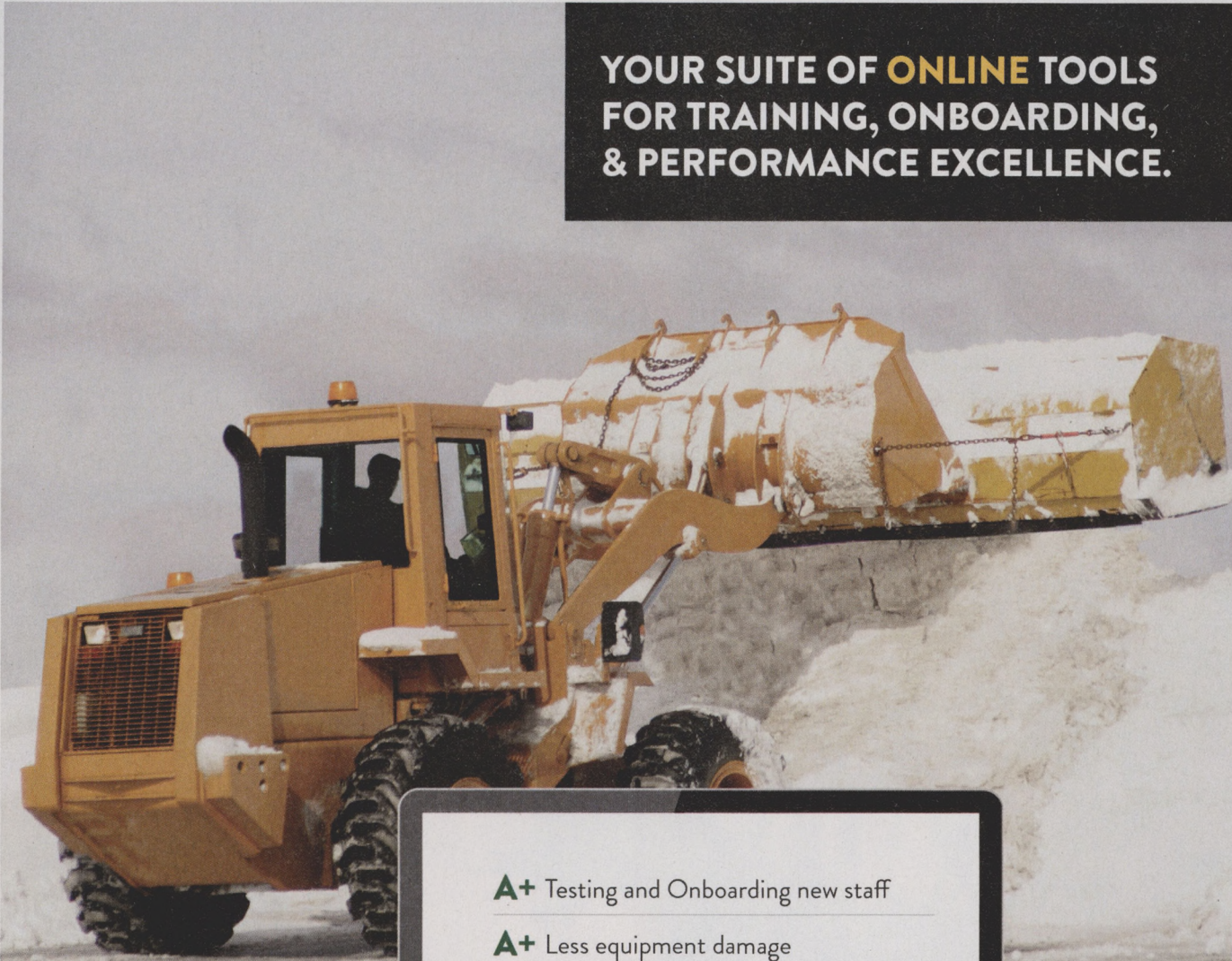
I know all of our sponsors are looking forward to watching these companies achieve their goals for 2018.

Throughout 2018, Lawn & Landscape will chronicle the participants' ups, downs and everything in between through our different multimedia platforms.

We hope you can pull tips from here that will help you turn a problem you have into an opportunity to grow your business.

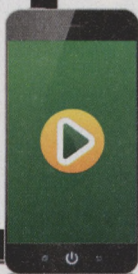
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GABE LOBATO, OWNER, LA CHOLLA LANDSCAPING

EYES ON A



**A career change after 9/11
has Gabe Lobato going
from a struggling landscaper
to one who wants to get
past the \$1-million mark.**

Stories by **Brian Horn** • Photos by **Jon Arman**

GOALS.

They can be very helpful if a business owner should have them and works to achieve them. But Gabe Lobato admits he has a fear of setting goals, so he's never set them at his company.

"I've gone for so long not knowing how to set goals and, as things came and progressed, setting those goals and realizing those goals has not been the most natural thing," he says. "The most natural thing is to push and do, and whatever comes, comes."

Yet, lack of goal-setting hasn't stopped Lobato from running a successful landscaping company in Tucson, Arizona. He started the company in 2004 after his lucrative career as an aviation instructor ended when layoffs in the industry occurred after 9/11.

After working on his own backyard landscaping project resulted in numerous trips to Home Depot where workers instructed him on what to do, he started to think about all the other people who were making the same trips.

With a daughter on the way, he and his wife began to think about starting a landscaping company that could help support their expanding family and allow his wife to stay home and raise their daughter. In late 2004, he opened La Cholla Landscaping and 14 years later has a company with 12 employees and \$750,000 in revenue.

But now Lobato has pushed past his fear of goal-setting and set a few – delegating some of his responsibilities, breaking \$1 million in revenue and eventually selling the company in five to seven years.

MILLION

“

**I'VE GONE FOR SO LONG
NOT KNOWING HOW TO
SET GOALS AND, AS THINGS
CAME AND PROGRESSED,
SETTING THOSE GOALS AND
REALIZING THOSE GOALS
HAS NOT BEEN THE MOST
NATURAL THING.**

Gabe Lobato, owner

TAKING OFF. Lobato can still remember his first year in the industry with “the piece of garbage trailer that I created for myself with my Chevy Blazer and tools in the back,” he says. “I remember spray painting our business name on the side of the trailer. I had no clue where it was eventually going to get me.”

Slowly but surely, and even without setting goals, he built his client base up and after a decade he was able to pay himself a dividend and still keep the bank accounts at a level that made him comfortable. He's also stopped working in the field to focus on estimating for design/build work and some administration duties.

Lobato was able to train someone from within to become a field manager and an estimator for maintenance work, and was also able to purchase a facility after owning the company for 11 years. Another major accomplishment for Lobato was hiring an office administrator to answer calls, opening opportunities for more business.

“It was a huge milestone for me to be relieved and not have to take every single phone call,” he says. “I knew I was missing 40-60 percent of the calls that were coming in because I couldn't take them while I was driving or meeting with a customer.”

Now, he has hit a ceiling and need helps getting through it.

He wants to grow his maintenance division, which he can do by selling a maintenance package to his one-time jobs. He'll also need to add more commercial maintenance work, which will be the job of his brother, Rick, who was brought on recently. Rick was a door-to-door salesman for a pest control company so he has some knowledge of the industry.

Lobato also has trouble collecting payments, so either he'll have to focus on accounts receivable, delegate that task or hire someone to do it.





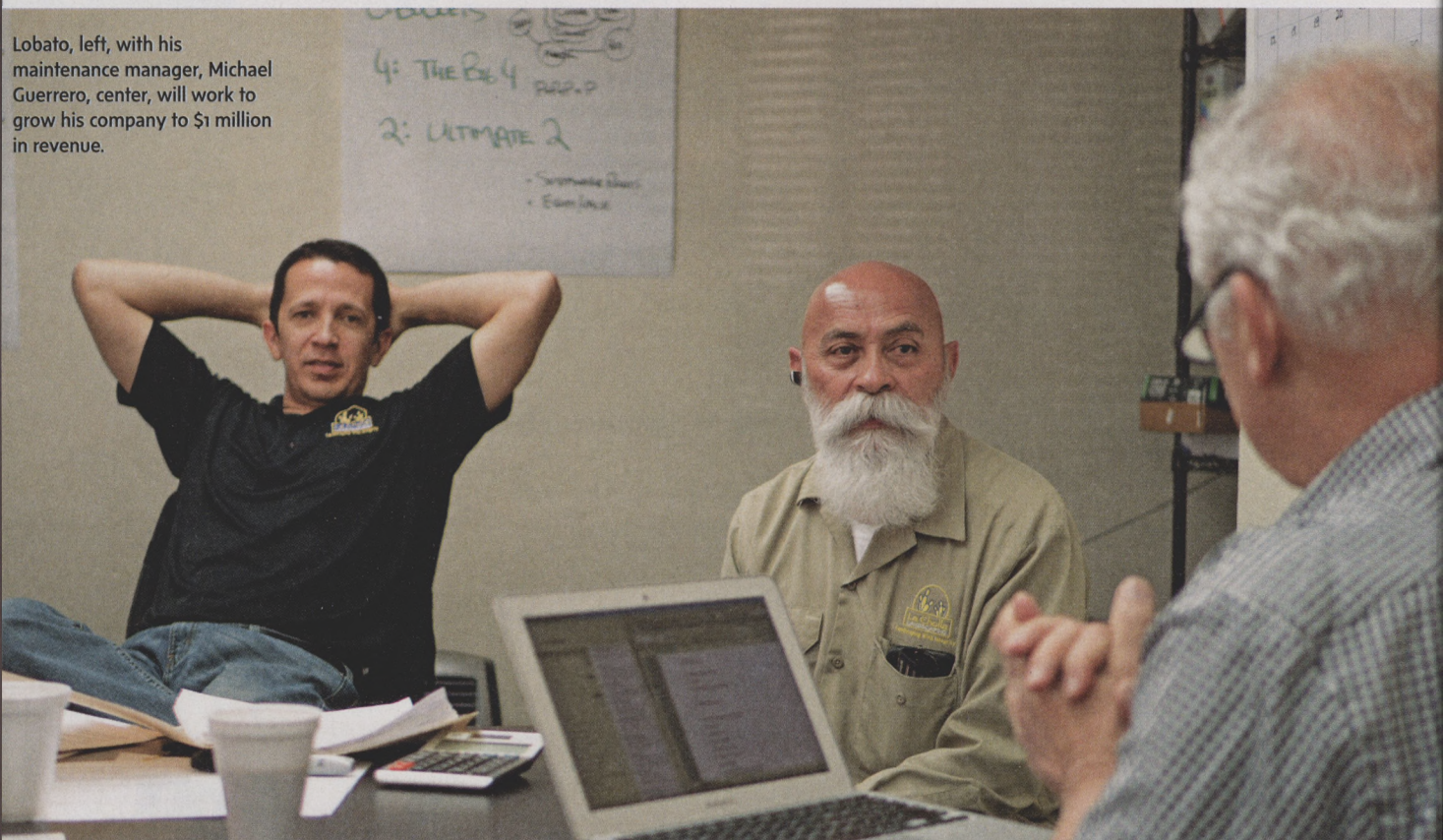
LA CHOLLA LANDSCAPING

- **Management Team:** Gabe Lobato, owner; Michael Guerrero, maintenance manager; Rick Lobato, commercial maintenance sales
- **Location:** Tucson, Arizona
- **2017 Revenue:** \$789,000
- **Service Mix:** Maintenance, tree care, irrigation, construction
- **Customer Mix:** 98% residential, 2% commercial
- **Employees:** 14 full-time

GOALS FOR 2018

- Increase overall revenue to \$1.1 million in at 48%.
- Add \$100,000 a year in new maintenance recurring revenue
- Sell more than 25% of recurring revenue in enhancements.
- Grow the commercial maintenance business and shift to 95% commercial in 3-5 years.

Lobato, left, with his maintenance manager, Michael Guerrero, center, will work to grow his company to \$1 million in revenue.



He'll also need to work on how he shows customer appreciation after a job is done. La Cholla customers do receive a survey after a job is done, and if the survey shows anything less than a four out of five rating, Lobato follows up to find out what went wrong. But other than that, customers don't receive anything to show that their business is appreciated.

SHARING KNOWLEDGE. Since starting his company, Lobato began to notice there were employees in the industry who had personal issues and needed some mentoring.

Sometimes it plays out with explosions in the field, or with a customer or at the office. He also saw employees who felt they would always be at the bottom of the totem pole. That's when he started sharing his own story to illustrate they can start with nothing and turn it into something – whether that's rising the ranks at La Cholla, another company or starting their own business.

"That's where we try and create or reshape or mold to become better, so they can start making improvements or stepping up in life and progressing forward or advancing," he says. "Because sometimes they feel stuck in just being a laborer for the rest of their life or being stuck in these dead-end hourly jobs."

While he wants to grow the financial side of the business, he also wants to become more of teacher to his employees, and someone they can look to as a positive example.

He would eventually like to become a SCORE advisor, but that can't happen until he makes grows revenue at La Cholla.

"There are certain cases with guys where I am inspired and where I have unique words for the struggles they encountered," he says. "I feel something rise up inside."

HARVESTER'S TAKE:

• **First impression:** The yard and building are very organized and the operation seems to be under control. Gabe seems to have it together.

• **What they are doing well:** The branding of the company is great. There is good delegation of duties among staff. Gabe is very organized and works systematically to accomplish each task.

• **Immediate areas for improvement:** The company has limited reoccurring revenue of only 20 percent, which limits the value of the company and considerable work must be done to see all of the one-time jobs. Gabe will need to explore more commercial work because residential work is very small sales per month and considerable drive time. The company needs a business developer. While they have weekly safety meetings, there needs to be an official program on record. ()

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



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**MICHAEL MOULD
& TIFFANY TUCKER,
OWNERS, NEW VISIONS
LAWN & LANDSCAPE**

FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Michael Mould and Tiffany Tucker have experienced rapid growth since acquiring New Visions two years ago, and now need to control that growth before they burn out.

W


HEN A YOUNG MICHAEL MOULD wanted to buy a pair of cleats and shin guards, his dad wasn't going to front him the money. Instead, he recommended Mould use the family lawn mower to cut the neighbor's grass for some cash. But Mould's dad would get a cut since he was using the family mower.

"It taught me that everything I get isn't always mine," says Mould, who is president of New Visions Lawn & Landscape in Panama City, Florida. "I was counting that money, but it really was owed to my dad."

That was Mould's first introduction to owing a landscaping company, and it wouldn't be his last because in June of 2016, he became co-owner of New Visions.

And while Mould's dad used his cut of the profits to buy Mould a basketball hoop, he knows as an adult business owner there will be no basketball hoops waiting for him at the end of the day.

But Mould isn't going it alone. He's taking the lead on the labor side, but his partner and vice president of the company, Tiffany Tucker, is in charge of all the back office operations.



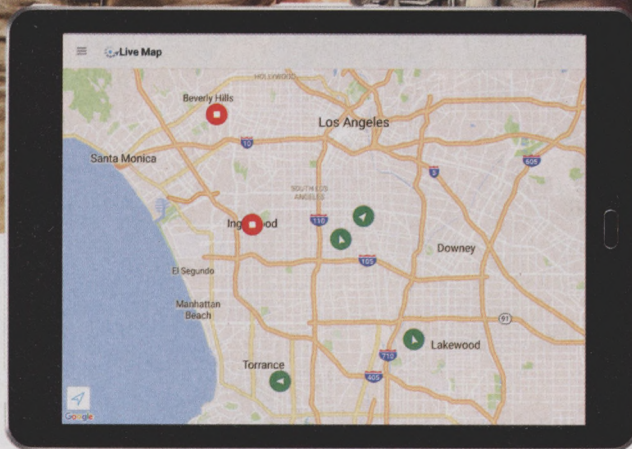
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“

**WE WERE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT,
BUT WE DON'T KNOW WHAT THAT THING IS.”**

Michael Mould, owner



FAST GROWTH. Tucker's husband previously owned New Visions, but became too busy with his job in construction, so he passed it on to Tucker and Mould. When they assumed ownership, they inherited 50 customers and \$35,000 in revenue.

After just two years, Mould and Tucker now have revenue of more than \$400,000 and achieved that by "Working and working more, and after that we worked again," Mould says.

Hard work definitely played a role, but so did the market, which Mould and Tucker say is doing well. Currently they are at capac-

ity but will add another truck on the road this season. They have hired two experienced crew leaders with plans on hiring more crew members to run three trucks with two-man crews this season.

Mould especially wants to find someone who can handle installations since he's been taking the lead on those jobs. He's also enrolled in college part-time, taking business administration classes, so he has a full plate and would like to delegate some tasks.

"The day gets full pretty fast," he says. "Every hour counts."

Mould and Tucker also need to get a handle on their financials.



NEW VISIONS LAWN & LANDSCAPE

- **Management Team:** Michael Mould, co-owner; Tiffany Tucker, co-owner; Michael Cox, property manager
- **Location:** Panama City, Florida
- **2017 Revenue:** \$413,000
- **Service Mix:** Maintenance, design/build, irrigation
- **Customer Mix:** 70% residential, 30% commercial
- **Employees:** 6 full-time and 3 seasonal

GOALS FOR 2018

- **Increase overall revenue from \$425,000 to \$600,000 at 48- 50% gross margin for 2018.**
- **Get Mould out of hands-on worker activities and replace him with a solid foreman.**
- **Develop a vision, mission, core values statements and success behaviors.**
- **Establish official maintenance agreements signed by customers.**

For example, they don't know if they are making more money off construction or maintenance jobs.

They were able to figure out their net profit margin, which shows they are doing well, but, as Michael wrote in his application essay: "We were doing something right, but we don't know what that thing is. A quality service? Sure, we offer a quality service, we all work extremely hard and love what we do, but as far as really being able to narrow it down in a category, I am lost."

Currently, the company is operating out of Tucker's home, but they hope to have a new building in three to five years. But first, Mould and Tucker need to get their growth under control to achieve that goal and the goal that motivated them to be business owners – "To work on our dream instead of somebody else's dream," Mould says.

HARVESTER'S TAKE:

• **First impression:** Michael and Tiffany seem to have a good working relationship with each having clearly defined roles and strong trust in each other. Michael has a clear vision of the potential of the company but is wearing so many hats he will restrict growth unless he hires and delegates. The quality of their jobs needs help immediately, and their equipment is old and worn and needs an upgrade for work and marketing purposes.

• **What they are doing well:** Along with the good partnership between Michael and Tiffany, they have a great culture and they have good relationships with their employees and as a result it looks like there will be little attrition. Michael and Tiffany are both ambitious and not afraid of growth, and have a good relationship with some of their major competitors.

• **Immediate areas for improvement:** They need to begin a weekly safety program to maintain a good safety record. They need to clean trucks inside and out and add safety equipment to improve morale and make for a better brand identity. Beginning a sales campaign will help reach both short- and long-term financial goals. A written vision, mission and core values statements needs to be developed to give direction for both the owners and their employees. They need to move toward more commercial sales, and begin the Harvest Quality Counts Program to maintain consistent quality on all accounts. ☺



KIMBERLY ROWE & LAMONT HESS,
OWNERS, OUTDOOR EXPRESSIONS PA

RETURN TO GLORY

**Outdoor Expressions PA
was once a multimillion-dollar
company in Pennsylvania,
and the new owners want to head
in that direction once again.**

EVEN THOUGH OUTDOOR EXPRESSIONS PA has been open since 1990, the new owners, Lamont Hess and Kimberly Rowe essentially have a clean slate, and want to restore the once multimillion-dollar company.

The husband-and-wife team purchased the company in July of 2017 after the business had suffered a significant downturn. What was once a \$3-million, award-winning company according to Hess and Rowe, dwindled to \$200,000 at the end of 2017. But Hess and Rowe say they have what it takes to turn the company around.

A BUSINESS BACKGROUND. Hess operated his own landscaping company in Idaho for about seven years from ages 12 to 19. He had a crew of three working for him, but it became too much to handle with schoolwork so he sold it.

He graduated college with a finance degree and had a career in the insurance business for 30 years. Rowe has a marketing degree and worked for Revlon in sales for 17 years. The couple met in Las Vegas in 2004, and later moved to Colorado where they opened a bed and breakfast. Hess had a great opportunity to start his own company in the insurance industry, which took the couple to Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, in 2013 with a stop in Cleveland in between. He eventually became tired of the insurance industry and sold his company with thoughts of returning to the service industry.

“It brought back memories of how much I enjoyed landscaping,” Hess says.

After a lot of deep thought, the couple took the jump and purchased Outdoor Expressions in July of 2017.

But just like taking over a job from someone, the couple has inherited a few problems – namely skeptical employees and old equipment.

“Our crew members, they haven’t had any supervision for the last four to five years,” Rowe says. “The first week that we were here they said,

A man and a woman are standing outdoors in a park-like setting with bare trees in the background. The man is on the left, wearing a dark jacket, a red sweater, and a plaid scarf. The woman is on the right, wearing a dark vest over a brown sweater. They are both smiling at the camera.

OUTDOOR EXPRESSIONS PA

- **Management Team:** Lamont Hess, owner/CEO/president; Kimberly Rowe, owner/CFO
- **Location:** Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania
- **2017 Revenue:** \$200,000
- **Service Mix:** Maintenance, design/build, snow removal
- **Customer Mix:** 50% Commercial, 50% residential
- **Employees:** 6 full-time crew members and 1 landscape designer who works as an independent contractor

GOALS FOR 2018

- Increase overall revenue from \$200,000 to \$375,000 at 48-50% gross margin.
- Increase recurring revenue from \$100,000 to \$260,000.
- Hire one new crew leader with a driver's license and one crew member.
- Achieve no lost time accidents

“

**OUR GOAL THIS YEAR IS TO MAKE THIS
A SUPERSTAR LANDSCAPING BUSINESS. IT USED
TO BE, AND WE WANT TO BRING IT BACK.**

Kimberly Rowe, owner/CFO

‘We have seen more of you guys than we have the previous owner in the last four or five years.’ They were just working unsupervised. It was like a breath of fresh air to have us come in and show them we are there to help them and to make their lives better. I think they really appreciated that.”

READY FOR BATTLE.

With Hess’ background in finance and, though it was three decades ago, his brief experience in the industry, and Rowe’s marketing background and resilient nature (she’s a three-time breast cancer survivor, last beating the disease in November of 2012), the couple says they have the foundation to succeed.

That wasn’t the case when they first bought the business,

partly because Hess and Rowe still owned the insurance business for a few months until that sale closed in October of 2017. That was one of the first lessons for the couple – you don’t take on a landscaping business when you own another business, Rowe says.

“We lost it a few times,” she says. “We stressed way beyond our point of comfort.”

After selling the insurance business, Hess and Rowe could focus solely on Outdoor Expressions. One factor in their corner for success is the area around them. Mechanicsburg is growing with new construction, the couple says.

“There is a lot happening in this area. Commercial-wise, they’re building warehouses all over south of here and trucking is expanding

in this area tremendously. With that, the service industry is going to boom,” Hess says.

“The economy is doing so well, people are looking at services,” Rowe says. “They don’t want to mow their lawn, they don’t want to take care of it, and so they are looking at landscaping business probably for the first time because they do have added income coming in because of all the growth.”

With work available, they need to add to their crews. Lamont received applications through a job posting on Indeed.com, and they have some workers who responded and are slated to start in March. When they are in a pinch, they’ve used a staffing company that Rowe says is more expensive, but available. “We keep hearing all about the labor



pool out there being horrible, but we haven't experienced that," Rowe says. "We need to increase the wage we pay them. We have experience interviewing to help find people, but now we feel comfortable with job descriptions and zeroing in on the right people."

An equipment update was also needed. Hess spoke with the current employees to get their feedback on what needed to be fixed or replaced.

They bought a 2004 Ford F450 dump truck when they first bought the company. Since then, they've also purchased a used zero-turn mower, a new walk-behind mower, which they've financed and recently traded in Hess' F-150 King Ranch for a 2017 work truck with a plow and salt spreader.

"We will need to purchase another walk-behind with the additional crew we are planning to bring on board," Rowe says.

While upgrading equipment and finding more quality employees is a good start, Hess and Rowe know they'll need to stay focused throughout the year to make Outdoor Expressions a top-notch landscaping company once again.

"Our goal this year is to make this a superstar landscaping business," Rowe says. "It used to be, and we want to bring it back."

Ed Laflamme, left, and Bill Arman, right, have high hopes for Lamont Hess and his wife Kimberly Rowe, and say they can have a successful 2018 and beyond by improving in a few areas.

HARVESTER'S TAKE:

- **First impression:** Kimberly and Lamont are seasoned businesspeople who are not afraid to invest money for immediate help, but they are also good long-term thinkers.
- **What they are doing well:** They are networking really well and have established strong relationships with successful business people who can refer considerable business to them. We call these folks the "influencers" and both Kimberly and Lamont understand how this works.
- **Immediate areas for improvement:** Their facility, which they are leasing, could use a good cleaning and paint job, even though they will outgrow it in the next year or two. A clean facility illustrates to employees that your company has a professional culture. They also need to analyze the gross profit margin on each job so we know which jobs to drop, raise the prices or reassess in other areas. They could also use some help finding and retaining quality, long-term employees. ☺

Lawn & Landscape®



LAWN & LANDSCAPE MAGAZINE is once again looking for the best employees in the industry and we need your help. If you have an employee who has gone above and beyond in their position and should be acknowledged, now is your chance to have them publicly recognized in our publication.

Send us two to three paragraphs explaining why your employee should be chosen. Your entry should include concrete examples/stories of how this

person has improved your company either culturally or financially, and how they have set a good example for other employees. Please include the employee's title and number of years at the company.

We will choose a few winners from the entries we receive and interview them for stories in a future issue of Lawn & Landscape.

You can nominate any employee who works for your company – crew members, office workers, foremen, etc.



Email submissions to Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.
Please use Employee of the Year as the subject of the email.

DEADLINE: Monday, March 12

2018 SPRING PREP PLAYBOOK



stop the spread

Arm your crews with the knowledge they need to win the battle against threats this spring.

By Kate Spirgen

WHEN THE SNOW melts and the grass starts growing again, so do weeds that can attack your customers' lawns and lead to costly callbacks. But pre-emergent applications and proper fertilization can help make a lawn the envy of the neighborhood.

COMMON WEEDS. Battling annual grass weeds like crabgrass is a constant struggle for lawn care companies throughout the U.S. whether you're dealing with warm- or cool-season grasses.

Summer annual weeds germinate as the weather gets warmer and a pre-emergent her-

bicide can stop them in their tracks. Warm weather and wet conditions facilitate crabgrass germination, and spring rains reduce the efficacy of pre-emergent applications.

Crabgrass and many other weeds germinate in the spring, grow throughout the summer and set seed in the fall. While the first hard frost of the fall or winter will destroy many plants, the seeds will pop up again the following year, so a pre-emergent is a good option in the spring to stop crabgrass before it starts. If you haven't used a pre-emergent, or if the heavy summer rains have thwarted your efforts, post-emergents can save your customers' lawns.

(continued on page 69)

FROM OUR SPONSOR

Customer satisfaction begins with weed control

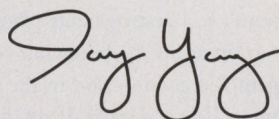
CLIENTS AND CUSTOMERS don't ask for much: just healthy, beautiful lawns. And why not? A healthy lawn reduces heat and noise, produces oxygen, stops soil erosion, and provides a safer playground than almost any other surface. An important part of growing that healthy, beautiful lawn is controlling the weeds. And that's why we're so good at it.

To help with whatever weeds 2018 throws at you, the employee-owners of PBI-Gordon are proud to be the exclusive sponsors of this Lawn & Landscape weed control guide. We're confident it will help you find all the information you need to find the best weed solutions for your clients.

This special section features columns and articles on controlling the weeds that threaten your clients' turf and your reputation. You'll find info on methods and products that will help you deliver the best service possible, from performance and turf safety combination products (We at PBI-Gordon are partial to Avenue™ South Broadleaf Herbicide for Turf) to client-pleasing speed (TZone™ SE is still the fastest triclopyr combo on the market).

We're honored to once again be a part of this special section. Thanks, and have a great season!

Sincerely,



Jay Young
Product Manager
Herbicides



JAY YOUNG
PBI-GORDON



But while killing the weeds might be the bottom line, we have to keep in mind what clients really want from us: beautiful, green, healthy lawns.

“Applications in January and February will serve you well moving into the middle and latter part of spring.”

CLINT WALTZ, turfgrass specialist, University of Georgia

(continued from page 67)

To find it fast, look in thinner or shorter grass areas since they warm up first, making it easier for crabgrass to take over. Look for plants with coarser and wider textured leaves that are lighter green than the turfgrass, and look for matted areas.

“The color difference is especially pronounced in cool-season lawns,” says Dr. Jim Brosnan, associate professor of turf and ornamental science at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. “Both smooth and large crabgrasses grow via stolons and thus can form mats within a lawn.”

The earlier you can treat it, the easier it will be to control because as it matures, more applications will be necessary. “Being aware of the growth stage and life cycle is important,” Brosnan says. “The larger plants grow in size, the harder they become to control.”

But beware that removing a mat of crabgrass will leave a bare spot in the lawn where other weeds will invade. “Once plants are removed, something needs to be done to introduce plant competition in these bare areas,” Brosnan says. “This is particularly true with annual weed species like crabgrass that produce an abundance of seed.”

In the Northeast, some common weeds are henbit, chickweed, deadnettle, annual bluegrass and wild mustards. “I call winter annuals the forgotten lifecycle because in the fall, people are praying for the end – and there are weeds there, but at that point, it’s time for fall cleanup and fertilization,” says Randall Probst, University of Massachusetts Extension weed specialist.

In the Southeast, henbit, chickweed, dandelion and Carolina geranium crop up early in the year.

“Applications in January and February will serve you well moving into the middle and latter part of spring,” says Clint Waltz, turfgrass specialist at University of Georgia.

Northern states in the Midwest region may better relate to weed pressures experienced to the Northeast, while closer to the transition zone in Kansas, spring’s “entrance” can vary up to six weeks and has a significant impact on what turf and ornamental issues LCOs will experience.

During the first quarter, warm-season turfgrass can use a “winter weed cleanup” with a non-selective glyphosate to treat winter annual broadleaf weeds. It’s safe because the grass is dormant, says Jared Hoyle, extension turfgrass specialist at Kansas State Research and Extension.

Dry conditions in the West can drive plants into “stress mode,” says James Baird, turfgrass specialist at University of California Riverside.



Dandelion infestations and other common weed problems can be prevented with applications in early months to protect lawns moving into mid and late spring.

It also affects the efficacy of herbicides since the chemicals must be absorbed up into the weed. Dust can also be a factor when it coats the plant. The University of California’s Division of Agricultural and Natural Resources says it may be worthwhile to water lawns a few days before making an application to make sure weeds are actually growing.

PREVENTION. For a faster green-up in the spring and healthy plants that can withstand weed and pest pressure, fertilizer applications are key. Key times to fertilize are early spring, late spring and late summer or early fall to promote root growth that will keep grasses strong.

Knowing what’s under the grass is the key to figuring out how much fertilizer to apply and when to do it. While you can check the pH of soil without conducting a full test, there’s no other way to find out how much phosphorus or potassium are in the soil.

Typically, when doing soil testing, Jeff Carroll, owner of Jefferson Sustainable Landscape Management in Woodinville, Washington, finds that the soil has way too much nitrogen as a result of over fertilizing.

Nitrogen will give you a nice, green lawn, but not long-term plant health, so it’s important to look at pH and other nutrients, he says.

And it’s not just the existing nutrients that dictate the schedule. Sandy soil leaches fertilizer faster than clay. “There aren’t as many nutrients in (sandy) soil so it will need more fertilizer applications each year closer together,” says Henry Velez, enhancement manager at Green Acres Landscape in Salem, Oregon.

Tyron Jones, president of Deans Pest Control in Fruitland Park, Florida, conducts numerous soil samples when enrolling new clients in a program. “We have done hundreds of soil samples over the years, and if I was starting a brand-new company, I’d run out and do 50 to 100 soil samples to get a good idea of what you’re working with on your lawns,” he says. •



SET FOR SPRING

Kick off a successful lawn care program.

By Kristen Hampshire

LAWN TECH HAS ABOUT 3,000 CUSTOMERS, and every property is different, so every yard is prescribed a version of the company's program, based on its history of weed pressure and nutrient needs. Heading up to spring, Cory Dennis and his team call every client, after reviewing notes from the previous year.

The idea: Thank customers for their business and collect other insights that might not be in the technician notes.

Is there a new baby or a pet in the house now? "They might ask us to not spray their yard with weed control," says Dennis, general manager of the Avon Lake, Ohio-based company. Does the client have plans to add landscaping or otherwise alter the property? This changes the service area.

These client conversations combined with notes about the property, which are included on every invoice, provide a basis for starting spring off strong, Dennis says. "We note any special instructions, so our technicians know how to service every property," he says. "Everyone wants their property done a certain way, and our job is to apply products correctly."

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ABOVE: While it may change with the weather, the timing of your applications is critical for the success of the treatment.

CONTROL OUT OF THE GATE. Timing that first spring application is everything. “Right out of the gate, we want that first pre-emergent application out by April and no later than May,” Dennis says, relating that a lingering winter in Ohio could push back the first application. Often, there’s snow in April.

In Connecticut, it’s the same story with predicting spring. Some years, the first application goes down in March, and other years, the weather isn’t ideal until May.

“Timing is the most critical piece for Round 1, because if you put that down too early it will break down before it can create a barrier,” Vaughan says.

At YardApes, Round 1 consists of a granular crabgrass pre-emergent weed control along with a three-way herbicide to control early signs of weeds that can crop up in areas where soil is warmer, such as along sidewalks. Getting that first pre-emergent down is important because crabgrass germinates earlier than

Lawn Tech has a base program that it tweaks based on customers’ needs and wants, and depending on a property’s tolerance to products. For example, a lawn with significant crabgrass pressure will require a different formulation of that first pre-emergent application than a property that doesn’t tend to see much activity.

The key for creating the ideal lawn care regimen for every property is to make modifications while maintaining the consistency of a proven program. For Giles Vaughan of YardApes in New Milford, Connecticut, success begins with a soil analysis. “That’s the first step that dictates any treatment we do,” he says. “Before we even deal with weed control, we need to balance the pH of the lawn, otherwise it won’t absorb nutrients and you’ll fight an uphill battle.”

Vaughan adds, “We try to work hand-in-hand with Mother Nature. We are constantly monitoring soil temperature and germination timelines.”



“

“We try to work hand-in-hand with Mother Nature. We are constantly monitoring soil temperature and germination timelines.”

GILES VAUGHAN, YardApes

nitrogen pre-emergent fertilizer. “I usually make two granular applications, first starting at the end of February or the first of March, depending on the weather, and then again six weeks after that,” says Patrick Haller, president.

Haller will change the pre-emergent product he uses – the active ingredient – from year to year. Dennis follows the same practice. “If the crabgrass was crazy last year, then we may up the formulation to put on more active ingredient,” he says. The application rate stays the same, however.

What helps assure that the first application really “sticks” to a lawn?

Vaughan combines the broadleaf pre-emergent with a spreader-sticker product. “That has been a huge help because we deal with a lot of broadleaf weeds here that have a waxy outer shell,” he says. “To make the most of our applications, we find adding a spreader-sticker is a lot more effective than not using one as far as getting the product to (adhere).”

Dennis also uses a spreader-sticker with weed control applications. “The chemistry allows it to go down the front and back side to kill the weed,” he says.

APPLICATION SUCCESS.

That initial spring application is key to reducing weed control effort throughout the year, Haller says.

Dennis says the first lawn care application kicks off a lawn for a healthy season – and the second application can prevent damaging grubs, if clients elect the fertilizer with grub preventive. (Lawn Tech also provides a fertilizer-only application for the second round.)

Educating clients about the products and why each step matters also helps with the success, because how a lawn is maintained in between lawn care applications plays into the program’s success. “We try not to treat lawns that we don’t maintain,” Vaughan says, adding that the lawn care and landscape maintenance crews’ schedules are organized to ensure “a happy balance.”

“If we’re applying a product, it’s super important that there is no (maintenance) activity on that lawn for a week to two weeks, depending on what we’re putting down,” Vaughan continues. “So, having the ability to schedule maintenance around treatments is really important. If you put down a treatment and the lawn is mowed the next day, the chances of a product being successful aren’t that great.”

Vaughan and his team talk to clients about integrated pest management and curative practices (aeration, mowing height, watering) to prevent weed and disease. “We are not doing blanket lawn care applications unless they are necessary,” he assures clients. Spring pre-emergent happens to be one of those necessary times, though. “And, we do lawn checks at no additional charge, so if a client is in between applications, our lawn crews are trained to identify problems, so we can stay on top of turf problems, insects, disease and weeds. We can address those quickly, which is the key to control.” ●

turfgrass, Vaughan points out. “Usually, 50 degrees Fahrenheit is the key temperature in terms of crabgrass starting to germinate, whereas turfgrass germinates at about 60 degrees,” he says.

YardApes chooses a granular pre-emergent because Vaughan believes it provides more consistent control, and there’s less of a likelihood of run-off than with liquid. However, the company does use a liquid for spot-treating weeds.

At Haller’s Landscaping & Lawncare in Sparta, Tennessee, the first application is a slow-release granule sulfur-coated

Good to **KNOW:**

TRAINING 101

Prepare for the season by hitting on critical training topics – and making sure your team takes their knowledge to the field.

By Kristen Hampshire



“We come at training from many different angles throughout the year, which helps keep it fresh and top of mind.”

MARK UTENDORF, president, Emerald Lawn Care

SPRING TRAINING AT EMERALD LAWN CARE kicks off in February with a few days of dedicated, employee-led sessions that cover the gamut – weed and disease identification; turf, tree and shrub care; equipment and safety information. “It’s very much a group event, which keeps everyone engaged,” says Mark Utendorf, president of the Rolling Meadows, Illinois-based business, where training is a constant conversation.

Emerald Lawn Care’s culture is centered on professionalism and continuing education. About half of their field team is Landscape Industry Certified (LIC) in lawn care. “We come at training from many different angles throughout the year, which helps keep it fresh and top of mind,” Utendorf says.

There are pictures that make the safety topic real. “Occasionally, we show slides of scary things that happen – one showed guys who dumped a spreader and spilled fertilizer in a retention basin,” Utendorf describes. He also shared an image of a service truck in flames, after a technician put gas into a sprayer with a hot engine. “That really brings it home,” he says.

They also utilize industry events as training opportunities. “We pretty much attend every training opportunity in our area,” Utendorf says, pointing to the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association (ILCA) Turf Education Day and annual GIE+Expo in Louisville, Kentucky.

Beyond that, there are staff-run training sessions that keep employees tuned in and double as a development tool, Utendorf says. “If we see that a guy is not getting involved, we’ll figure out a topic for him to present – it’s good to push them beyond their comfort zone.”

Ultimately, a lawn care company is only as good as the service it provides, so investing in training the people who deliver it is just smart business.

“If you lose a customer, you have to sell two to get one back,” says Cory Dennis, general manager at Lawn Tech in Avon Lake, Ohio. “Training a lawn care applicator also makes them feel like you are paying attention to them, and they’ll do a better job because you took the time to train them.”

ON TOPIC. By recruiting experts to deliver training seminars, Utendorf can bring “school” to his team. He has reached out to vendors, the Chicago District Golf Association, ILCA’s Turf Committee and the Midwest Regional Turfgrass Foundation. “This season, we also added a defensive driving online course from the National Safety Council for everyone who drives a company vehicle,” Utendorf says.

When possible, Utendorf will get a turfgrass professor to conduct a lesson in the field. “If we can get them on a lawn, that’s invaluable,” Utendorf says. Though, he adds that it can be tough to carve time for in-depth training during the busy season, when technicians are focused on servicing customers’ lawns.

There’s always time for a morning tailgate meeting, and this is how Utendorf starts the day at Emerald Lawn Care. Procedural topics can’t be emphasized enough, he says.

“If we don’t follow a procedure, steps get forgotten,” he says. “So, we are always harping on the proper process for even standard applications. What do you do when you stop? What do you do when you get out of the truck? What do you do on the lawn? What about when you get back into the truck? We hit it hard.”

Utendorf adds that proper mixing and monitoring of mixing products is also a frequent topic for training. “I have a healthy level of paranoia – so we are always concerned about the possibility of spills and we talk about that a lot,” he says.

This year, Utendorf is formalizing tailgate meeting topics by following The Ohio State University Extension Service series, Tailgate Safety Training for Landscaping and Horticultural Services. Topics include pesticide exposure, preventing lifting injuries, poison ivy and heat stress, among others. “We have an entire season’s worth of sessions scheduled for every Wednesday,” he says.

TEST 1, 2. How do you know your investment in training is “sinking in?” You can spend the time, recruit professionals and beat the safety drum time and again, but how can you be sure technicians are retaining the information?

Giles Vaughan of YardApes in New Milford, Connecticut, uses an online survey program to send out post-training quizzes via email. His team receives a “survey” after a training session that is easy to complete and serves as one more way to emphasize the lessons.

“Training has to be part of your ‘winter work,’” Vaughan says, relating that he focuses on training during the off-season.

Aside from the post-training surveys, Vaughan says ongoing conversations among team members keeps training top of mind. And, to identify key topics to address, Vaughan reviews reports from his software system.

“We can look at our notes, the success rate of applications and general turf health to see any issues that came up that weren’t there the year before,” he says.

Those new issues are important training topics.

“This year, we had chinch bugs, and the year before they weren’t an issue,” Vaughan says. “So, we identified that problem and the timeline for those (pests) ... it’s preparation to make sure we hit the ground running, because that switch from snow to spring happens fast.”

Industry magazines are great training conversation starters, Utendorf adds. He circulates trade publications, so his team can read articles, and he might highlight a certain topic at a tailgate meeting.

Again, Utendorf says to maintain interest and be sure you’re covering all the bases, “You’ve got to mix it up.”

Because at the end of the day, training is designed to assure quality and safety – to develop a team and create a culture of continuous education that promotes accountability. Utendorf says, “We want our team to treat every lawn like it’s their grandma’s.” ●

KEEP IT **CLEAN**

Regular maintenance keeps equipment clean and clear of dirt and debris so applications go smoothly.

By Kristen Hampshire





“It’s easy to miss things when you’re trying to get to the next job or go home at the end of the day.”

ALLEN SANDERS, Sanders Brothers Landscaping

JUST LIKE YOUR TRUCKS, your mowers and your tools, sprayers and spreaders need regular maintenance. Without it, your applications can get sloppy, or even deadly for lawns. Hoppers and hoses need to be flushed to prevent corrosion, oil and filters need to be changed and parts need to be replaced.

To make sure your crews have equipment that’s functioning at its best, maintenance and repairs are part of the equation.

MAKE IT A ROUTINE. The best way to make sure you don’t run into unwanted surprises is to prevent problems before they pop up. “Every day, we flush out the systems to make sure we’re not leaving anything overnight,” says Mark Roth, owner of Roth Lawn Care in Colmar, New Jersey.

Every week, his crews take apart their nozzles and make sure nothing has gotten stuck inside. Everything is flushed out and then put back together. At Sanders Brothers Landscaping in Davie, Florida, this is done twice a week on Tuesdays and Fridays.

Maintenance also helps prevent issues like over or under application on customers’ lawns. Low tire pressure, creaking diaphragms and clogged hoses or nozzles mean equipment isn’t making an even application. That can lead to costly callbacks and wasted product.

“We replace nozzles every year,” says Allen Sanders, operations manager at Sanders Brothers. “We keep spares around just in case, but we make it a point to put new ones on at the beginning of every season just so we don’t have to worry about it and we know we’re doing it right from the get-go. We don’t want new customers to have a bad experience at the first visit.”

TRAIN YOUR CREWS. At Roth Lawn Care, crew members are responsible for checking their own equipment at the end of the day and reporting any issues to their foreman. After equipment makes it back to the garage, it’s up to the individual employees to give everything a once-over

before they head home for the day.

“We try to get them into the mindset that it’s part of their routine,” Roth says. “It’s not time to go home until everything is checked out and cleaned up.”

At Sanders Brothers, crews fill out a form when something is broken or needs to be replaced. Crew members hand them in at the end of the day and equipment is serviced the following morning before roll out. He keeps extra parts for all of his equipment, not just spreaders and sprayers, so that there’s no time wasted waiting for an order to come in or heading out to pick up missing pieces.

“I don’t want guys wasting time running errands,” Sanders says. “What should be a five-minute run to grab something ends up turning into a guy being gone for a half-hour most of the time.”

END OF THE YEAR. Before you stow your spreaders and sprayers, make sure you’re setting them up for success the next year. Step one is to empty your sprayer or spreader of all product and dispose of the chemicals properly, according to the label.

Then, be sure to rinse the sprayer or spreader thoroughly to make sure no chemical materials are left in the hoses or the tank. Sanders recommends adding a cleaning solution like a detergent to the tank and shaking it to remove any trace of chemicals.

“You don’t want any of that left over the winter,” Roth says. “You want it completely clean and dry so you don’t have any surprises when you go to use it again.”

Be sure to check the manufacturer’s recommendations or talk to your dealer about the best ways to clean, Sanders says. You’ll also want to make sure that equipment is completely dry to prevent rusting.

Then be sure to check for cracked or leaking hoses or loose seals. “We do check throughout the year too, but it’s always good to give a once-over at the end of the year,” Sanders says. “It’s easy to miss things when you’re trying to get to the next job or go home at the end of the day.” ●



SWEAT THE *small* STUFF

Everyday accidents can add up to big costs, but prevention is the key.

By Kate Spirgen

THINGS CAN GO WRONG AT A MOMENT'S NOTICE in the landscaping world. Sharp pruning shears, revving chainsaws, big trucks and heavy machinery can add up to disaster if workers aren't taking the proper precautions.

"We work in an environment where just about everything can go wrong if you are not paying attention," says Andy Sykes, owner of Garrett Churchill in the greater Philadelphia area.

But while those types of injuries can be devastating, smaller injuries are a threat every day, even if they aren't life-threatening. "It's not the hedge trimmer or the chainsaw because when people are around those things, they're already thinking, 'This could harm me easily,'" says Rudy Larsen, owner of Lawn Butler



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Donning reflective vests is part of the safety process at Lawn Butler because it's a conscious decision that reminds wearers that they need to be in safety mode, says owner Rudy Larsen.

in West Centerville, Utah.

Back injuries, pulled muscles and sprained ankles are common, so Lawn Butler encour-



ages employees to ask for help instead of doing everything alone. "I just think it's a He-Man culture. 'I can lift it and


I don't need any help,'" Larsen says. So he strives for a company culture where asking for help is applauded and encouraged.

CREATING A CULTURE OF SAFETY.

Safety culture is a continuous work in motion, says J. Lee Buffington, owner of Turf Tamer in Fort Payne, Alabama. "It must be something that you talk about with everyone in the company. It must be top of mind," he says. "You can't possibly think about every possible danger in the workplace every day. It has to be a culture that people feel that they can stop a process without recourse if they feel that something is unsafe."

At Lawn Butler, positive reinforcement is the key. Rather than punish workers for breaking safety protocols, he tries to focus on rewarding employees for



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exemplary behavior. "I think it's building a culture of safety over productivity," Larsen says.

The company holds a monthly pancake breakfast to talk about safety and each spring, all team members receive a new pair of safety boots.

They also sometimes do a High Five program where managers award \$5 to crew members spotted doing the right things out on the job like wearing safety equipment.

"We give you a high five and we give you five bucks," Larsen says. "If we're out on a large job, there might be a couple of crews there and it might cost us \$30 but at the end of the day, our workers'

comp is close to \$100,000 and if we can lower that by 10 percent, that's saving us 10 grand."

Garrett Churchill was recently awarded a National Association of Landscape Professionals award for most improved fleet safety. Sykes says Garrett Churchill has been involved in NALP's safety program for a number of years and they've consistently won awards for no vehicle accidents and no lost time due to injury.

A few years back, the company started really discussing potential hazards and now they have a standard routine to check jobsites at the beginning of the day, during the job and at the

"If we can turn a cut that required stitches into a cut that requires a Band-Aid, we have made progress."

ANDY SYKES, owner, Garrett Churchill

end of each day. "We don't know what went on while we were not there overnight," Sykes says. "We need to be cognizant of changes during the day, and we certainly don't want to leave any hazards overnight for our clients."

Cuts from pruning shears are some of the most common injuries Sykes sees, but he says they're not very severe. The company has also had some bad luck with back injuries and muscle strains, he says. "We always tell the crews, 'Get help when you need help,'" he says. "We constantly go over proper lifting techniques."

At Garrett Churchill, everyone is expected to look out for one

another. That means checking each other's personal protective equipment and participating in safety meetings. "We also share the expense of poor safety habits that include time lost at work, a crew being a member short for a day or two due to an injury (and) the expense of increased insurance costs," Sykes says.

And it's working. At Lawn Butler, the workers' compensation experience modification rate is only .6.

**VEHICLE ACCIDENTS.** It's important to start with the basics when it comes to vehicle safety. Obeying local traffic laws including

(continued on page 84)

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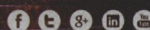
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# SAFETY CHECKLIST

**AT LAWN BUTLER IN WEST CENTERVILLE, UTAH,** each truck is equipped with a standard safety toolkit but in the winter, area managers are given an extra 'plow rescue kit.' "It's kind of like a go bag," says Rudy Larsen, owner. "It has a whole bunch of different stuff: safety tools, hoses, things like that so that if we have a truck that goes down or has an incident out within an area, we've got a driver that can quickly aid another truck in his area, and they're normally 15 minutes away at the most."

The bags each cost \$400 to \$500, and with 15 areas, the cost wasn't small but Larsen says at the end of the day, it's the right thing to do. Here's what else landscapers stock in their trucks:

- Fire extinguishers
- Safety triangles
- Traffic cones
- First-aid kits
- Spare fuses
- Spill kits
- Accidents reports with key phone numbers



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(continued from page 82)

speed limits is a good start. At Garrett Churchill, drivers are also required to maintain a safe following distance based on the vehicle they're driving and the load they're carrying.

At Garrett Churchill, there's also a strict no hand-held phone policy, although the company prefers no phone activity whatsoever to avoid distractions.

Larsen uses GPS tracking to monitor speeding and heavy braking to make sure drivers are being careful. "We've used that pretty aggressively," he says.

When someone is speeding, they receive a text message with the title, You are loved.

"And so it's like, 'Hey, we love you; we care about you; we don't want you to get in an accident and get hurt,' because at the end of the day our goal is to take care of our employees and get them home safely," Larsen says.

But sometimes things are out of your control. Last year, a Garrett Churchill truck was headed back to their offices with three crew members when a car crossed a center lane and hit the truck. "Fortunately, everyone was only shaken and there were no injuries," he says. "The truck was a total loss, but things like that can be replaced."

Once vehicles have gotten to the jobsite, both companies

“It must be something that you talk about with everyone in the company. It must be top of mind.”

J. LEE BUFFINGTON, owner, Turf Tamer

insist on using cones for parked trucks. But it's not just to alert oncoming traffic.

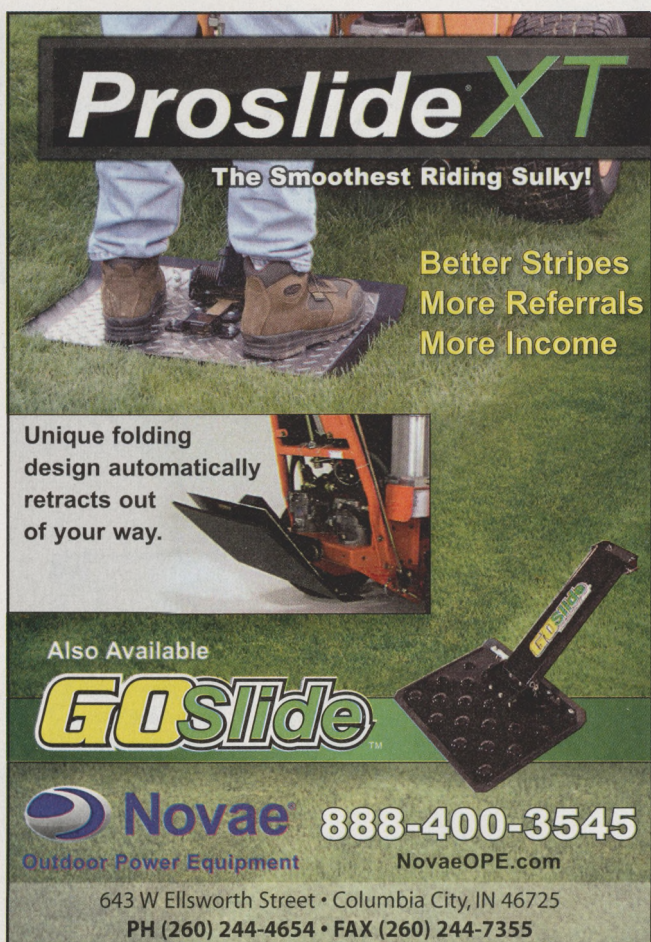
"We're not necessarily worried about somebody running into our vehicle but it really just creates a mindset of 'OK, I'm not going to walk around out from behind the trailer and potentially get hit,'" Larsen says.

**LEARN FROM MISTAKES.** Prevention is always ideal, but it's impossible to avoid every accident.

At Garrett Churchill, they do an accident report to determine what caused the accident, who was at fault and what can be done to avoid it in the future. "A lot of the findings turn into safety

talks and some into the team manual," Sykes says. "It's very hard to eliminate every accident so we are really trying to manage the severity. If we can turn a cut that required stitches into a cut that requires a Band-Aid, we have made progress."

Turf Tamer has a three-step program after an incident to prevent similar accidents from happening again. They'll visit the accident site to determine all of the contributing factors, discuss the findings with the safety committee and find preventative measures and tell the teams about the accident to make everyone aware of how they can be avoided in the future. **L&L**



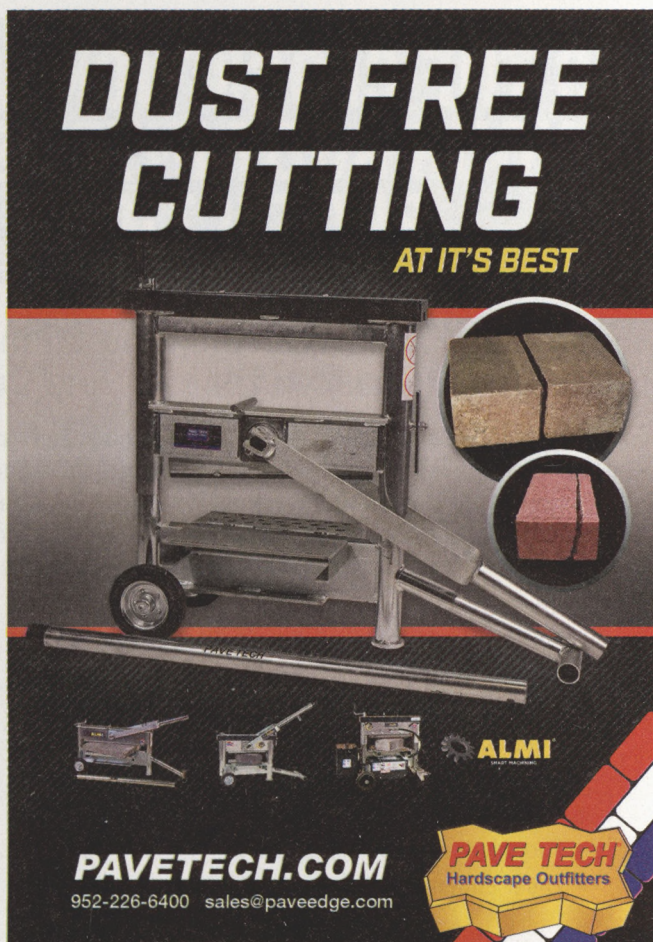
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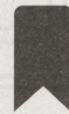
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**2. Understand it.** Simply having a consumer financing program isn't enough. Your employees must fully understand it and be able to promote it effectively, so your customers see the benefits and value of it. Treat financing as you would any other service you offer.

**3. Introduce it.** When and how are the best ways to introduce financing? Great question. Simply put: Offer it early and often — from initial conversations to delivering plans to discussing project costs to signing contracts. Everyone in your business who speaks

with customers should talk about your credit options. If your customers don't know about it, they won't use it.

**4. Promote it.** Consumer financing programs only work if people know you have it. Make marketing and promoting a priority. Promote your financing program everywhere you can, starting with online, social media, referrals, and point of sale.

**5. Enjoy it.** The right financing program offers more options to your customers which can help grow your business.

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- Patented Copper Shield Technology prevents XFS-CV Dripline from being damaged by root intrusion without the use of harsh chemicals or treated filters.
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**For more information:** [Rainbird.com/drip](http://Rainbird.com/drip)

## NETAFIM TECHLINE HCVXR

**The pitch:** Techline HCVXR landscape dripline infuses Cupron copper oxide directly into the mold of each emitter to provide a root barrier for subsurface drip irrigation systems.

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- The infusion of copper oxide means the root intrusion protection won't wash off, wear off or leach out of the emitter.
- Techline HCVXR has a 15-year warranty against root intrusion.

**For more information:** [Netafimusa.com](http://Netafimusa.com)



Cupron copper oxide

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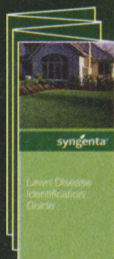
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# TAKE A STAND

Adding a stand-on mower to your fleet can add to your productivity and keep your crews comfortable.

By Lauren Rathmell

**A**RGUABLY ONE OF the most important tools for lawn maintenance, your mower endures a lot. Stand-on mowers can offer an easy ride for your crews and a tidy job for your customers.

Chant Singvongsa says for him and his three-man crew at Singvongsa Landscaping in Jackson, Minnesota, a stand-on mower was an easy choice.

"I liked the stand-on because it seemed more comfortable," he says. "Standing up lets us have the better visibility."

At Singvongsa's company, the crew mows about two or three days a week. They also operate with two riding mowers.

Hank Parker, president of Bay Landscaping in Mobile, Alabama, also has one stand-on in his fleet, with plans for one or two more in the future.

"Our guys were a little scared at first," he says. His crews had some less-than-ideal experiences with a different stand-on mower, and they were wary of learning to operate the new machine. Now, they love their stand-on.

**ACCESSIBILITY.** Singvongsa recognizes that his stand-on may not be the best choice when mowing steep hills, but the quick on and off capabilities make it a practical mower.

"It might only take seconds to get on or off, but those two seconds add up," he says. "You can just walk right off the plate and hop back on." Parker says the crews also love the amount of visibility they get with a stand-on.

Bay Landscaping focuses on maintenance and design/build, and they commonly maintain high-end residential and commercial properties. Parker says using the stand-on is easier on his crew members' knees and backs.





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"When we're mowing those properties that require us to get off and on, (the stand-on) really helps," he says.

The stand-on mower works well for Bay Landscaping crews when mowing smaller areas like yards or grass at strip malls.

"If the property doesn't have a double gate or fence, you're not going to get a mower with a large deck through it," Parker says. His crews use the mower for some of their larger properties as well since it's easier on the turf.

**DAMAGE CONTROL.** When you're running a machine almost daily, maintenance downtime is expected. Parker tries to make sure they have mowers ready to go if one of their machines is down. "It's more efficient that way," he says. "We don't want a crew to be left without a mower."

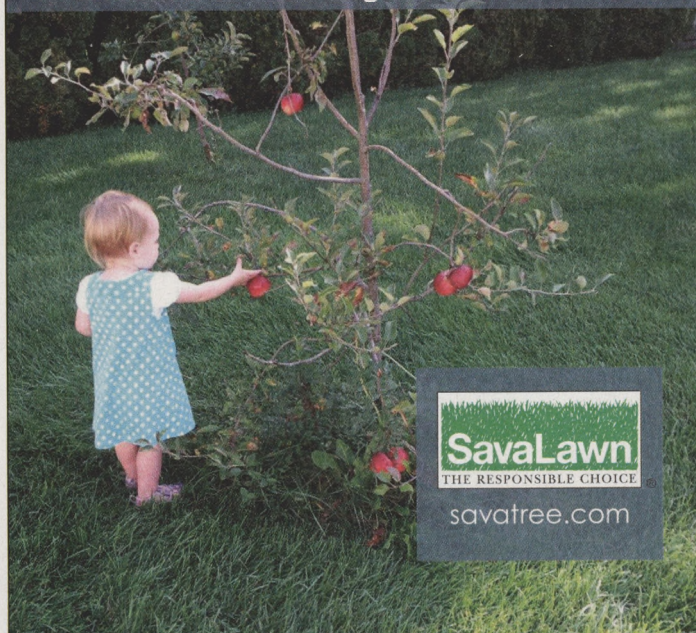
Most small maintenance jobs are done in-house at Bay Landscaping, but a dealer is located nearby for anything that is too large of a job.

"We have a dealer about 45 minutes away," Parker says. "We'll take the mower there for any damage re-

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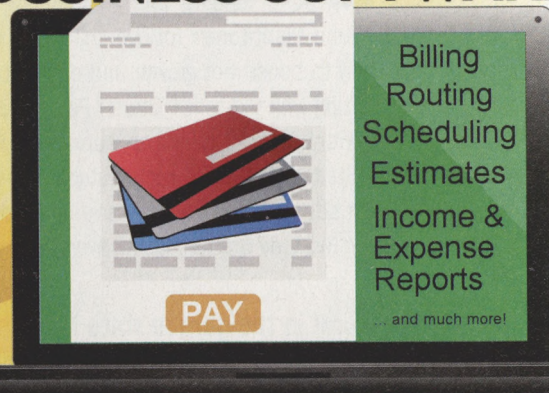


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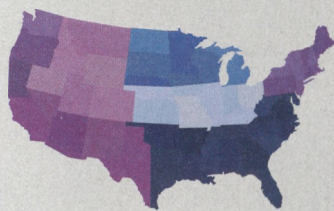
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pairs, anything under warranty or any recalls.”

Singvongsa has two other mowers to utilize if his stand-on is out for maintenance. Aside from regular upkeep like blade sharpening once a week, he’s only had to get one repair when one of the hoses went bad on his mower. “There’s good dealer support nearby,” he says, noting that the location to a dealer was important to him when purchasing.

When deciding how to handle a damaged mower, Parker says they consider two of Bay Landscaping’s core values: professionalism and safety.

“We want our crews to look

professional and be safe, so we don’t want them out there with a mower that’s damaged,” he says.

Crew leaders are responsible for checking the equipment and making sure it’s safe to use on the jobsite.

**MAKING THE PURCHASE.** With about 30 employees at Bay Landscaping, Parker says purchasing decisions are made as a team.

“We involve everyone,” he says. “I especially want to involve the guys out there using it.”

When Parker replaced his fleet and decided to stick with one brand, he took machine safety and crew opinion into consideration. After checking

“We want our crews to look professional and be safe, so we don’t want them out there with a mower that’s damaged.”

HANK PARKER, president, Bay Landscaping

out some mowers at a green industry event, Parker followed up with a company he liked. The mower company came to him and brought some mowers for the crew to test, and Parker says everyone loved them.

“I also talked to some people at (the conference) and told them what I was thinking,” he says. “And I asked what they liked and what they thought.”

Singvongsa recommends setting up a demo of any mowers you’re considering. He utilized the large selection of mowers on display at an industry event before making his purchase in 2017. Once he found a brand he liked, he kept in touch with

the company, getting a mower to try out shortly after.

“(When purchasing) I was focused on looking at what the machine could do for the prices I was willing to pay,” he says. “The stand-on cost us less than our other mowers, and the majority prefer to use it.” He expects to get about five years out of the new mower.

With a smaller crew size, Singvongsa doesn’t have many people to consult for new equipment purchases, but he does make sure his crew is comfortable with the decision. In the future he hopes to add a stand-on with a larger deck to replace one of his riding mowers. **L&L**



Paul Fraynd, Sun Valley Landscaping



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# Seasonal BLOOM

Contractors experience some ups and downs in the annual services segment. **By Megan Smalley**

**S**EASONAL COLOR AND ANNUAL plantings are Susie Dempster's focus at Blooming Designs in Akron, Ohio. Dempster launched Blooming Designs in 2001 as a business segment of her husband's lawn care and hardscape business, Summit Landscape, which started in 1985.

"I was a gardener and I was working a job that was something different and I liked, but I really wanted to work outside with plants," Dempster says.

Her husband's business received some requests for annual plantings, but the business wouldn't typically perform these jobs. So, Dempster saw an opportunity to launch Blooming Designs as a segment to complement the business and pursue her passion.

Her segment provides flower garden design, garden installation, flower maintenance, annual plantings, perennial plantings and outdoor decorations to name a few services. She serves both residential and commercial customers in Akron.

With annual plantings her focus, Dempster says demand for the service has remained steady over the years. However, in recent years, she has noticed her customers are requesting low-maintenance designs. She has tried to focus on finding annuals that require a little less work on the customer's part.

"Petunias, zinnias, you just put them in the ground, establish them and you're done with them," she says.

Other contractors have also noticed a similar push for low-maintenance designs.

"There has been that request for low-maintenance landscapes," says Clinton Dawson, vice president Dawson's Lawn Service in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Dawson's Lawn Service focuses on lawn maintenance for both residential and commercial customers.

Annuals tend to be more maintenance-intensive, Dawson says. So, he tries to recommend begonias to customers in the summertime, as they are a lower-maintenance annual for southeastern Tennessee's climate.

"Begonias outweigh all annuals in the summer," he says. "They are easy to maintain, and they provide a lot of color."



Check out this story in the digital edition for photos from Blooming Designs.





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**CONCERNS WITH FLAT SALES.**

Some contractors have noticed annual planting services have been flat the past few years, and reasons for this vary in different parts of the United States. John Puryear, president of Puryear Farms in Gallatin, Tennessee, says he noticed that same trend as well.

"We have found that the number of flowers we're putting in each spring and fall has remained constant, but that means it has not kept up with the growth of other services in our company," Puryear says.

So, he researched why that segment of the business wasn't growing and learned that some

of his customers were taking winter pansies plantings out of their contract.

"Surprisingly, the No. 1 reason people have taken (winter pansies) out of their contract is deer pressure," he says.

Puryear Farms serves primarily commercial clients northeast of Nashville, Tennessee – businesses, HOAs and large blocks of properties. The company makes about \$5.25 million in revenue annually with 75 employees, and it also performs maintenance, installation service and turf health care services.

Puryear says Nashville has a booming population and urbanization, which has reduced

availability of natural habitats for animals like deer.

"(In winter) there's a lack of availability of food sources," Puryear says. "At the time we're putting out the pansies, there's also a reduction in other fodder and food for deer to graze upon, so they turn to the pansies."

Summer annuals have remained popular for Puryear Farms customers, as deer tend to be less of a problem in warmer months, he says.

In other parts of the U.S., drought and weather patterns impact sales in this segment. Casey Rhoades, vice president of sales at Simpson Landscape in Plano, Texas, says a drought

a few years ago decreased the company's annual and perennial sales.

"From 2010 to 2014 or so, we had a substantial drought where our plantings went down substantially," he says. "We did a whole lot more rock and hard-scape applications."

Simpson Landscape focuses on serving commercial properties in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, such as multifamily housing and executive buildings. Rhoades says seasonal color is one of their more well-known services. The company achieves about \$3 million in revenue annually.

While more customers are starting to request annuals again

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“Begonias outweigh all annuals in the summer. They are easy to maintain and they provide a lot of color.”

CLINTON DAWSON, vice president, Dawson's Lawn Service

now that the drought has ended, Rhoades noticed that customers are still somewhat drought-conscious. Also, some communities Simpson Landscape serves still have water restrictions in effect.

“We’ve seen (annual plantings) come back, but it’s come back in a slightly different way,” he says. “They want more native, drought-tolerant material. We’ve shied away from some of the water-loving annuals like begonias, and we plant a lot more lantana and vinca because of their drought-tolerance.”

In addition, times of recession are not especially good for annual sales. Dawson says his company had fewer customers asking for annuals during the Great Recession. “When the market is a bit riskier, I think people tend to hold onto their money more,” he says.

Puryear notes that annual sales have gone up since the recession, but he hasn’t seen a dramatic increase in this segment, either. “There hasn’t been pressure to reduce this scope of work today, but I also haven’t had clients tell me they want to invest in a really impressive seasonal color display,” he says.

**ANNUAL OPPORTUNITIES.** Improving economic conditions have helped bolster the annual planting services for some landscaping businesses. Rhoades says this business segment has increased a bit at Simpson Landscape due to a growing market in Dallas-Fort Worth. More businesses are moving to the area, which has also increased the number of apartment complexes in the area. He says most apartment complexes tend to want annual displays to try to boost occupancy rates.

“On a whole, it’s an uptick for sure,” Rhoades says. “The properties in this area are competitive (for occupants), so a lot of times landscape could be a deciding factor in living space.”

Good economic conditions have also boosted this segment a little for Puryear Farms in Tennessee. The company has kept busy during the weeks it installs seasonal color in early May and October.

Dempster of Blooming Designs in Akron says annuals are still a popular demand in her area, but tastes in design have changed. Years

ago, she often planted annuals in blocks of color. Today, she says her customers are asking to mix annuals and perennials together.

“People have more of a focus on nature

now,” Dempster says. “That’s the way things grow in nature. And honestly, it’s easier for us, so we don’t need to be as exact either.” **L&L**



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# SOFTWARE SOLUTIONS

Try these three tips for finding and implementing software to make jobs easier. **By Kate Spirgen**

**W**ILLIAM SCHWARTZ was having trouble keeping track of how much time his crews were spending on jobs. As the staff at Schwartz Lawn Care in Springdale, Connecticut, grew from six to 40 seasonal employees, he had to find a better way to keep track of his crews.

That's where software came to his rescue. After researching and purchasing a new GPS and job ticketing system in April of 2017, he says he has a better handle on how much time his residential maintenance jobs really take to do.

**1. PICK THE RIGHT FEATURES.** Not all software is created alike, Schwartz says. For a company his size, paying for all of the bells and

whistles wasn't necessary. He says he and his operations manager looked at six or seven different options before settling on the right one for them.

"We didn't need the ability to track 40 trucks," he says. "We really just wanted to know, and be able to show, where our guys are and how much time they're spending on a job."

Schwartz says it was getting too tough to make sure everyone was turning in paper forms at the end of the day, so it's one less thing for his crews to worry about, and one less thing for him to organize.

**2. GET YOUR TEAM ON BOARD.** Having the software is only the beginning, Schwartz says. "You have to get everyone on board with the idea that this is going to make things easier. It's not just for us on the management side, it's for everyone."

He says a few of his employees didn't like the idea of constantly being tracked while on the job, but Schwartz says they're starting to come around. They've realized it's actually less work for them at the end of the day since there aren't paper forms to fill out before they can go home.

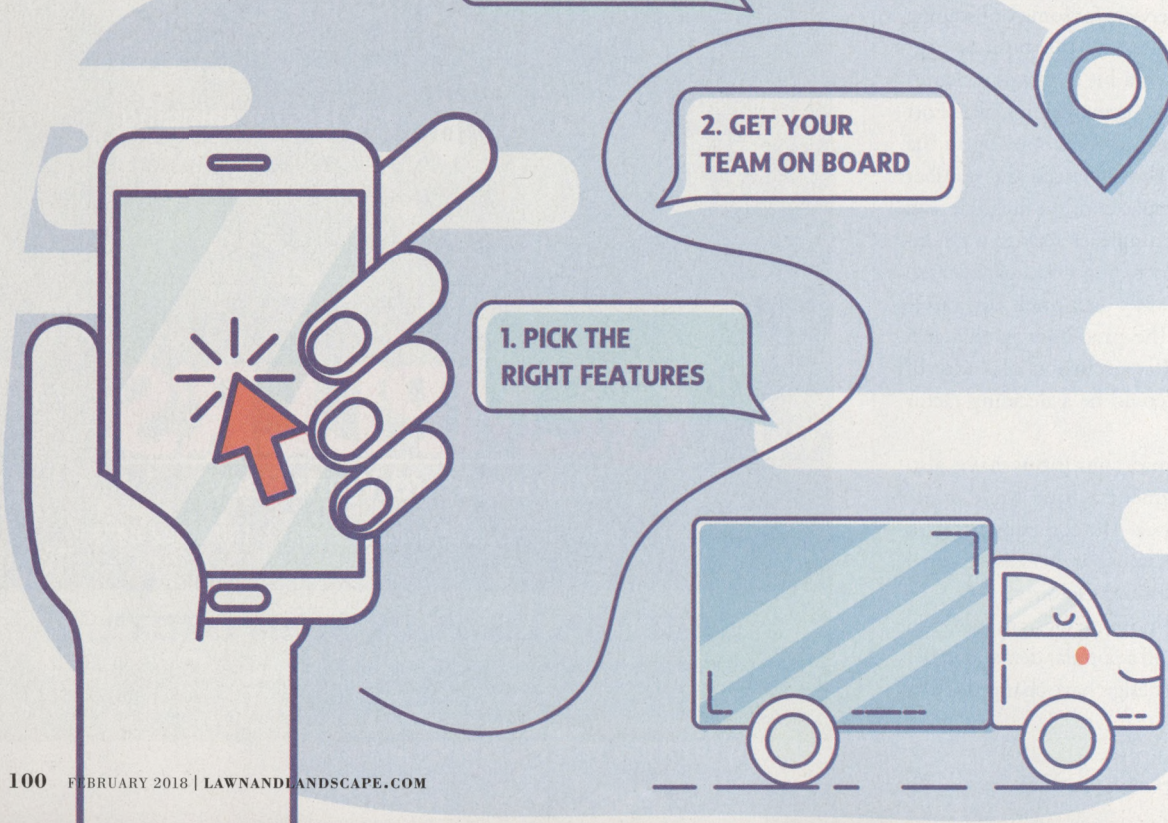
**3. DON'T WAIT.** Schwartz says he wishes he had implemented his new software earlier in the year so that his crew members could all be trained on it as seasonal employees came on board. "If I had moved on this sooner, it would have saved a lot of extra individual training later in the year," he says.

He says it also would have given him some more time to get familiar with the tracking software before he tried to explain it to his staff. "It takes more time than you think to train yourself," he says. **L&L**

## 3. DON'T WAIT

## 2. GET YOUR TEAM ON BOARD

## 1. PICK THE RIGHT FEATURES





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# HIRE THE BEST

Recruitment expert Larry Fish shares his tips for finding and keeping staff you can count on.

**W**HEN IT COMES TO STRESS for lawn care and landscaping business owners, finding and keeping good people is almost always front of mind. So we talked to GreenSearch President Larry Fish, who has spent the better part of the last two decades helping companies recruit and retain staff.

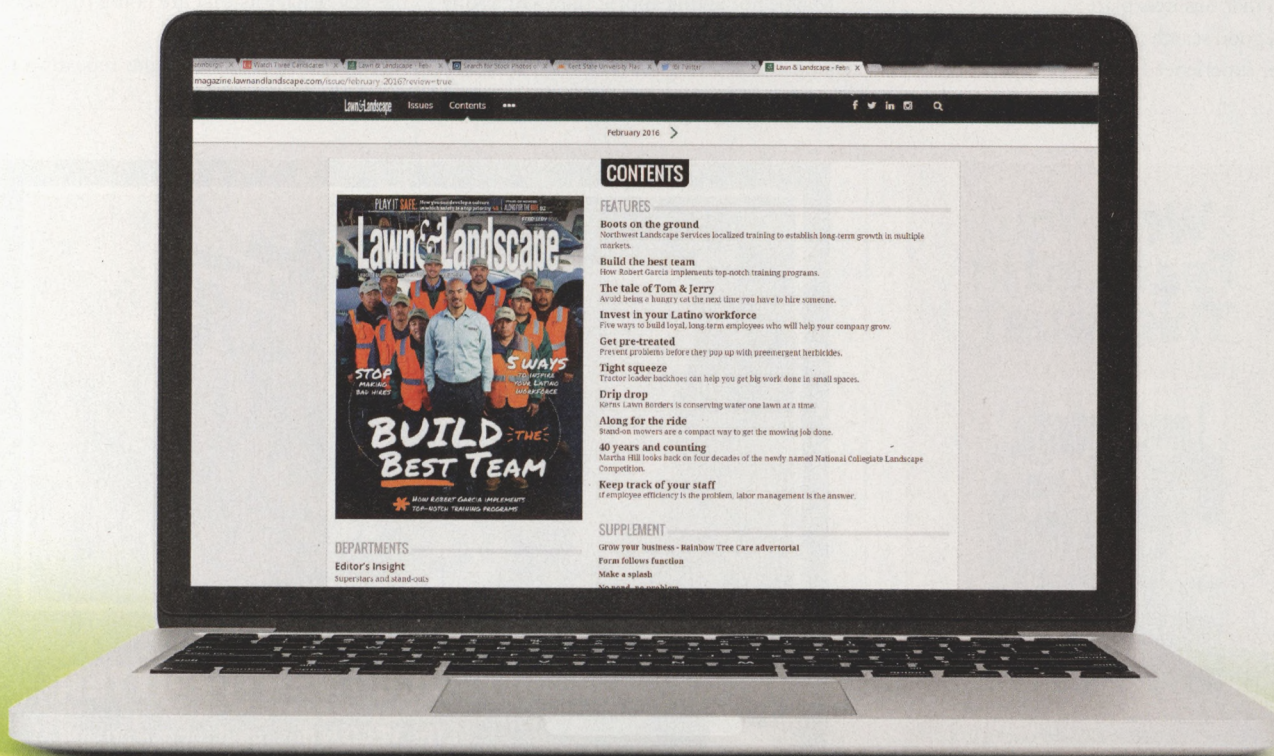




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**Lawn & Landscape**



# Lawn & Landscape: When is it beneficial to work with a recruiter?

**Larry Fish:** I would say all the time. The demand for talent persists throughout the business cycle. And the best recruitment companies I work with always stay in touch and often assist with the entire plan.

When you picture a typical green industry landscape organization, when they talk about a business plan, they talk about numbers. They very infrequently get into the whole man power planning aspect of their business planning.

If they're thinking in terms of a three-year and then possibly a five-year perspective, they're going to be better off in the long term if they're incorporating man power strategies into that business plan.

A good search partner will be knowledgeable, experienced and have a good basis to

get on the same wavelength as their clients and get to it as far as what your needs are. It's amazing what occurs at the end as far as business development.

So it's good to work with a recruiter on a more ongoing basis whether you have specific needs or not at that point.

# LL: What are some of the biggest mistakes you've seen people make?

**LF:** What I think people need to take a harder look at, first and foremost, is feedback I get from candidates that they have a poor interview experience. And that's not setting aside proper time and those courtesies that go along with interaction with people. You get interruptions and that sort of thing.

Maybe not asking appropriate – or asking probing questions, doing too much of the talking, not allowing the candidate to express

themselves, especially what they're thinking. It's one thing to go through a resume and say you've done this and this as opposed to finding out what's really going on inside of their heads. All of that contributes to a poor interview experience.

Another item worth noting that I see time and time again is that hires are made and there is a behavioral or otherwise cultural mismatch which results in a short-tenured hire. This is where an employer must do a better job as far as fact-finding and digging a layer deeper into what the person is thinking. Ask a more experience-related question and it makes them tell a short story. That is very revealing.

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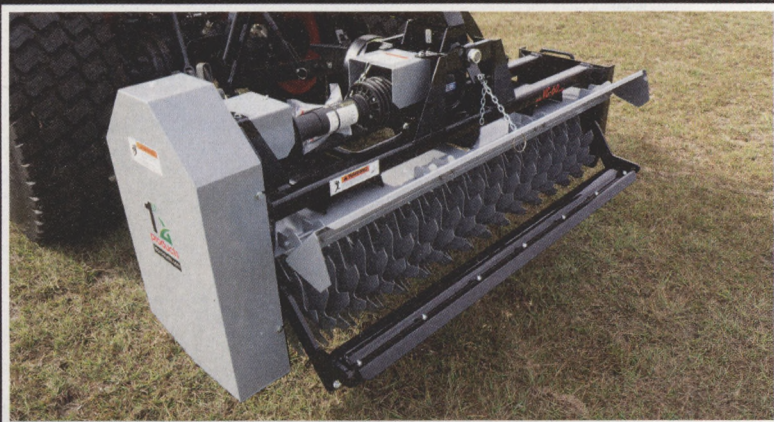
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“You know your culture best; you know the key behaviors that are going to result in the best hires.”

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same thing and expecting different outcomes. Time and time again, employers have this process in mind. Maybe they have a key administrator that sets up the interview and then they select individuals that maybe are not skilled in the process of interviewing. So there needs to be some training; there needs to be some experience before your hiring manager to do the interviewing.

There has to be some skill set as a basis before you allow someone to do that. It's repeating those types of things and then you wake up one day and you say, 'How come my turnover is 90 percent in this job category?'



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And finally, those gaps that occur once you hire someone. That onboarding experience has to be superb. You have to ensure that productive time is invested. That will engage the new hire to be productive quickly. That means, 'OK, I understand my role here. I understand the orientation period. I understand what my boss' expectations are, compensation opportunities, the benefit strategy, all that sort of thing, so I can get productive quickly.'

All of that lends nicely to investing an adequate amount of time and it's not like you can do it in one day either. I like onboarding that's more staged. The first couple of days, obviously you're taking care of all that administrative stuff but after that, there has to be a strategy where you're spending a good amount of time indoctrinating someone to the client base – to how we operate here and interaction with those folks within the organization that can influence my career.

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“Always make sure that you treat people decently as you would like to be treated.”

LARRY FISH, president, GreenSearch

**LL: What recommendations do you have for making a job posting?**

**LF:** Timely follow-up is very important. It sets the stage for better outcomes. So don't let the responses to the postings gather dust because there should be a strategy of following up with those parties that you're interested in speaking to, ideally within 48 to 72 hours. That's ideal based on the time of year but with all of the other business priorities, that might not be feasible.

But if you're going to invest time in soliciting candidates for a position, be prepared to have the resources available to treat those people properly. In particular, I've always felt that whether it be candidates I speak with or my clients, all these people are potential customers in that they know people.

One person has a bad experience and they'll tell 10 but it's the opposite with a good experience.

Always make sure that you treat people decently as you would like to be treated.

And have a script – maybe no more than five questions, kind of a screening sort of thing to ensure that those you decide to bring in for a face-to-face interview are properly screened based on those five or six questions.

It's a good effort to prescreen so there's minimal wasted time when you decide to bring someone in.

**LL: What can companies do to make the most of their time with a recruiter?**

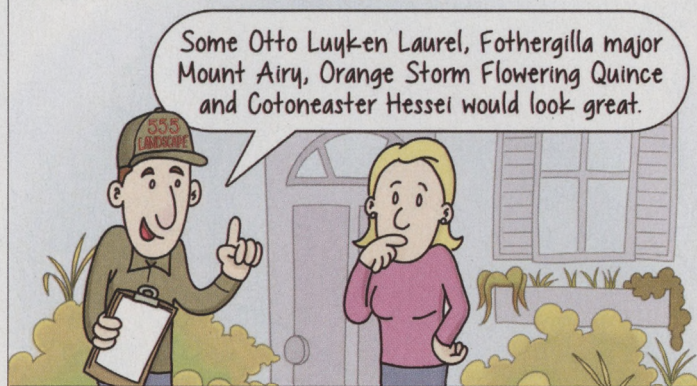
**LF:** I find it very, very helpful that if an employer, prior to contacting us, knows what they're looking for and has a clear understanding of the job requirements. They really need to have a good understanding of what the fit is as far as those cultural things that they know a person needs to possess that would demonstrate that they'll be more successful in their organization. It's that cultural fit.

I think an employer also needs to be prepared to discuss, candidly, the advantages and disadvantages of working with their company. It's refreshing when an employer can articulate the advantages and disadvan-

tages of working at their organization. It gets everyone on more of an even playing field because they're comfortable describing how it works at their organization.

And then they'll be better able to answer the question: What are the critical success factors for someone to do well at your organization? **L&L**

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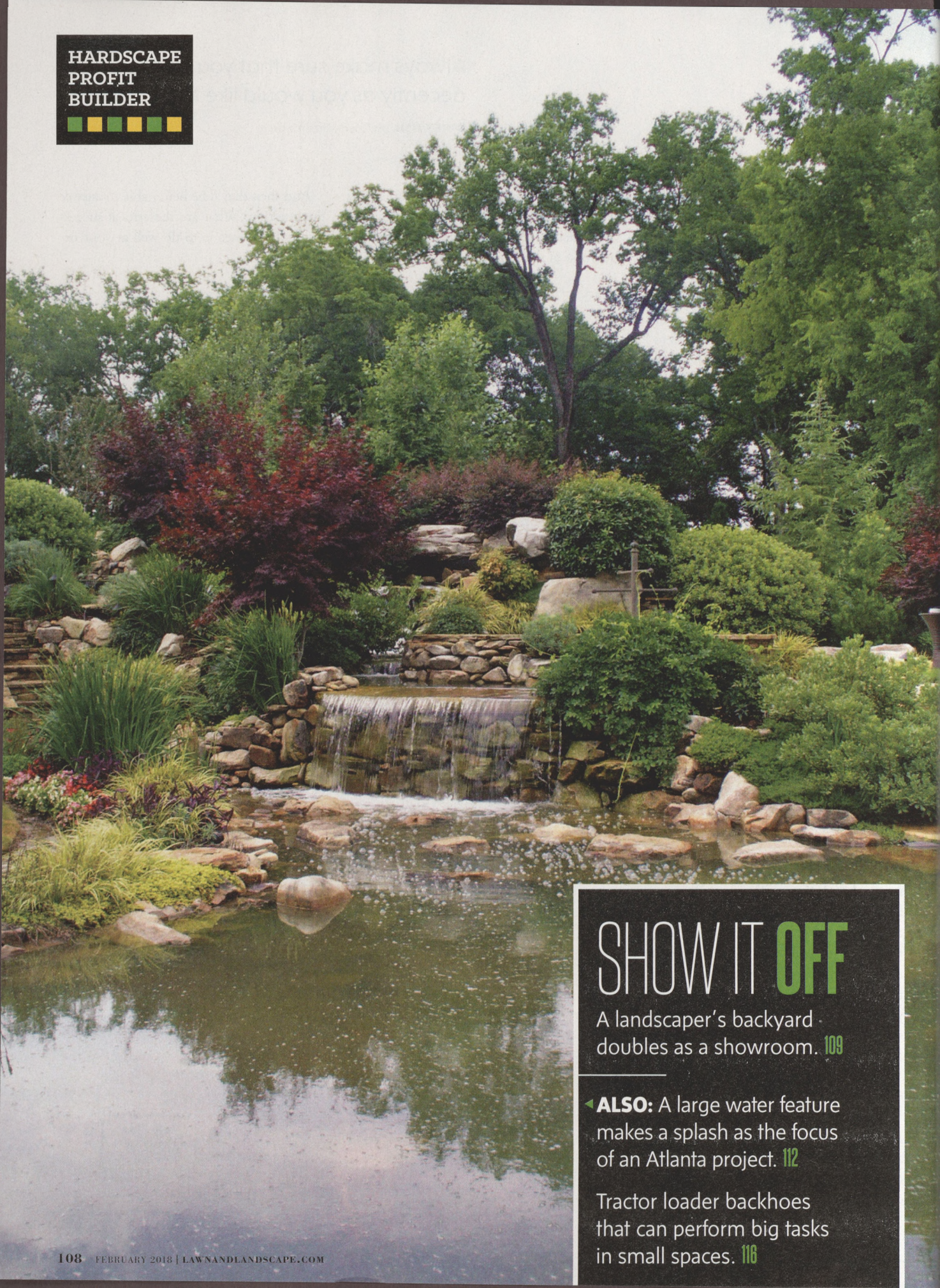
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## SHOW IT OFF

A landscaper's backyard doubles as a showroom. 109

◀ **ALSO:** A large water feature makes a splash as the focus of an Atlanta project. 112

Tractor loader backhoes that can perform big tasks in small spaces. 116





# SHOW IT OFF

Kevin Wilkerson built himself a backyard oasis that also serves as a showroom.

By Kate Spirgen

**ABOVE:** Kevin Wilkerson of Innovative Stoneworks and Landscaping took three years to design and build his dream backyard.

**K**EVIN WILKERSON FINALLY has the backyard of his dreams. For three years, the owner of Innovative Stoneworks and Landscaping in Kingman, Arizona, has been working on a huge, 4,550 square-foot project that he designed and installed with the help of his team.

"It's kind of like the mechanic's car is always broken down kind of situation," Wilkerson says. "I could never finish it because my company is so busy."

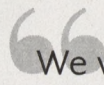
Innovative Stoneworks and Landscaping has about 40 employees working 50 hours a week, Wilkerson says. That made it hard to find time to finish the huge project that spans 4,550 square feet.

Including a pool, entertainment center, outdoor kitchen, fire pit and fireplace, the project took three years to complete. There are 14 speakers with subwoofers built into the benches (all controlled by phone or remote control) and an overflow pool. Wilkerson says the backyard contains all of his coolest ideas.

Wanting something a little different from the traditional Arizona backyard with palm trees and curvilinear lines, Wilkerson went with a nearly 100 percent evergreen plant and tree palette. "I just wanted to be different," he says. "That's why I went with a totally modular design with no palm trees. I wanted it to almost look more like a California backyard, not like palm desert, but a more modular, contemporary deal."

The total cost came to about \$110,000, not including Wilkerson's





We want to have that 3-D design available just to show people the whole process.”

KEVIN WILKERSON, owner, Innovative Stoneworks and Landscaping



time. He did pay employees to help out on the weekends, but says he put a lot of his own time in. He and his team were able to lay down 35 pallets of pavers over the concrete in just three days, but the brickwork was much harder. Incorporating more than 100 pallets of bricks into the project was the most time-consuming part.

He estimates that the total, including all of his labor, would be about \$150,000.

**EXPANDING GOALS.** While Wilkerson uses the patio for his own parties, he also uses it to show customers just what his company can really do. He says the project

has already helped him seal the deal on two pools.

“I think they were kind of sold anyway, but just showing them what we’re really capable of really helps,” he says. “It’s not that I want to brag but I love sharing my cool ideas. All of my top ideas are in this yard.”

Even though the job is already complete, he says he’s thinking of going back and redesigning the project to show customers how it’s done from start to finish. “We would be able to have them look at it and see the whole thing getting designed and built right in front of their eyes and then have before and after pictures,” he says. “We want to have that

3-D design available just to show people the whole process.”

And he doesn’t plan to stop there. He’s already hired a professional photographer and has plans to enter 10 to 12 of his projects into different contests in the area. “I’m looking at going in there and making a statement with the jobs that we do,” Wilkerson says.

However, competition is tough. Kingman has a population of about 29,000 and is up against companies in cities like Las Vegas and Phoenix.

Innovative is looking at doing some more traveling to get to larger commercial projects. The company has tapped out

commercial jobs in its area, but Wilkerson says the average job is about \$25,000. He recently submitted a bid for a \$1.2 million job that’s about an hour away. “It’s not that far,” he says, adding that the company already travels an hour in the other direction for commercial jobs in Lake Havasu. “We’re just limited here. There’s not that many people and not that much development.”

Wilkerson estimates that about 300 new houses are built every year in Kingman, and Innovative landscapes about 200 of them. “Other than that, there’s only a couple new commercial buildings that get built or re-modeled each year,” he says. **L&L**



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# A good flow

A large water feature makes a splash as the focus of one Atlanta homeowner's redesigned backyard.

By Megan Smalley

**G**IBBS LANDSCAPE COMPANY likes to incorporate water features to enhance outdoor living spaces. However, the company recently worked on an outdoor living space design where water features took center stage.

An Atlanta-based homeowner heard of Gibbs based on the company's reputation in the community, so they called the Smyrna, Georgia-based company and requested a design that included a very large water feature for their backyard.

"They wanted something big," says Peter Copses, vice president of Gibbs Landscape. The company ranked 84th on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list in 2017, with \$28 million in revenue.

The homeowner knew she wanted a backyard design with a water feature that would serve as an entertaining space, but Copses says they needed Gibbs' help to smooth out the details.





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The homeowner's backyard features a slope, so she wanted a waterfall to stretch from the top of the slope to the bottom, ending in a pool that measures 20 feet x 30 feet.

In addition, Gibbs suggested incorporating a spa next to the large pool at the bottom. By the end of the project, Copses says the water feature was 10 times larger than the average

water feature Gibbs installs. The entire project cost between \$200,000 and \$300,000.

"It was extremely large," Copses says. "I would say most (of our) water features are a tenth of the size of what we did there."

**GETTING STARTED.** When starting the project, Gibbs met with the client to come up with a design that would work well. The backyard, which measured about 1 acre, had a large, natural slope that leveled out at the bottom.

A staircase and thin brook stretched from the top to the bottom of the slope. There was a tremendous amount of natural stone of varying sizes for designers to work with. Copses says some stones were small enough to



Before Gibbs started the project, the backyard featured a lot of natural stone.

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## Tips for water feature installation

Water features are somewhat of a specialty for Gibbs Landscape in Smyrna, Georgia. Peter Copses, vice president of Gibbs, offered the following tips for landscapers when installing water features:

- **CONSIDER THE LOCATION.** The most important thing to keep in mind when installing a water feature is making sure there is the proper space to build the feature. This includes checking that there is the proper grade or slope to install the water feature, so it will blend in well with the landscape. Copses says water features need to look natural – like they were always there.
- **INSTALL AUTOFILL.** Make sure the water feature has autofill installed, which automatically refills the feature when water reduces to a certain level. That way, if there's a leak or water levels decrease over time, the feature remains full.



“You don’t want to build something that looks like it wasn’t naturally there. The natural look is best.”

PETER COPSES, vice president, Gibbs Landscape

fit in the palm of a person’s hand, and other stones were 2- to 3-ton boulders.

The end of the yard touched the edge of a river that flows behind the properties in the Atlanta neighborhood. “The river behind the project really tied it all together,” he says.

**AUTHENTIC LOOK.** Gibbs aims to achieve natural-looking designs that blend in well with the surrounding topography. Sometimes, Copes says the company has worked on landscapes that had features that seemed artificial compared with the native area.

“You don’t want to build something that looks like it wasn’t naturally there,” he says. “The natural look is best. In the end, that’s often what the customer wanted.”

With this project, Copes says a very large water feature looked natural because of the native elements already in place.

“The lay of the land and the way it slopes down would help to tie it together, making it look dreamily natural and like (any added water feature) has been there. The river works with it, pulling everything together to make it look extremely natural,” he says.

The slope and brook in the backyard allowed for a natural-looking waterfall to spill to the bottom. Gibbs placed a waterfall next to the staircase, designing it with four spills that fell into a large pool at the bottom.

The backyard also had lots of natural stone to mix into the design, but Copes says arranging the stones in a way that seemed authentic was difficult.

“When you get into smaller boulders and stones, it’s like putting pieces of a puzzle together just right to create that natural look,” Copes says.

Gibbs also placed a spa next to the pool at the bottom of the waterfall. Copes says the homeowner was unsure about this at first, but, after the company showed her some pictures of similar designs, she was sold.

“It was one of those ‘aha’ moments,” Copes says. “At the end, that was one of their favorite parts of the project.”

The spa is heated, so it can be used as a cooling place in the summer and as a place to keep warm in the winter. Next to the spa,

Gibbs installed a stone patio with a rustic fire pit and a few chaise lounge chairs. “The client can sit with family and friends at the bottom and look up at the water feature,” he says.

As a final touch, Gibbs installed plant material that blended with the design, such as irises, cat tails and other plants that can be found near rivers and streams. **L&L**



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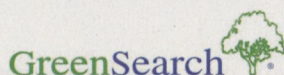
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| AM Leonard, Inc                                 | amleo.com                            | 36         |
| Anderson's, The                                 | andersonsplantnutrient.com           | 97         |
| Ariens/Gravely                                  | gravely.com                          | 37         |
| Atlantic Water Gardens                          | atlanticwatergardens.com             | 38         |
| Bailey Nurseries                                | firsteditionplants.com               | 93         |
| Bayer Cropsience LP                             | backedbybayer.com/lawn-and-landscape | 44         |
| Belgard Oldcastle APG                           | belgard.com/l&l                      | 7          |
| Case Construction Equipment                     | "casece.com/fromthegroundup"         | 123        |
| CLC Labs                                        | onla.org                             | 22         |
| Cub Cadet                                       | cubcadet.com/pro                     | 19         |
| Dig Corporation                                 | digcorp.com                          | 40         |
| Espoma                                          | espomapro.com                        | 91*        |
| Exmark                                          | exmark.com                           | 53         |
| Feed The Hungry                                 | feedthehungry.org                    | 105        |
| Ferris Industries, Inc                          | ferrismowers.com                     | 5          |
| First Products                                  | 1stproducts.com                      | 104        |
| Fleetmatics                                     | fleetmatics.com                      | 46, 56, 57 |
| Focal Point Communications                      | growpro.com                          | OUTSERT    |
| Gempler's, Inc                                  | gemplers.com                         | 99         |
| GIS Dynamics                                    | goilawn.com/new                      | 39         |
| Graham Spray Equipment                          | grahamse.com                         | 16         |
| Greene County Fertilizer Company                | greencountyfert.com                  | 106        |
| Greenius                                        | gogreenius.com                       | 47         |
| Gregson-Clark                                   | gregsonclark.com                     | 26, 42     |
| Hunter Industries                               | hunterindustries.com/hpc             | 124        |
| Husqvarna                                       | husqvarna.com                        | 11         |
| Jain Irrigation, Inc                            | jainusa.com                          | 98         |
| John Deere Company                              | johndeere.com/mowpro                 | 95         |
| John Deere Construction                         | johndeere.com/rentalsales            | 25         |
| Koch Turf & Ornamental                          | kochturf.com                         | 21         |
| Kubota                                          | kubotausa.com                        | 17, INSERT |
| Kuriyama of America                             | kuriyama.com                         | 20         |
| Lebanon Turf Products                           | LebanonTurf.com                      | 12, 13     |
| LT Rich Products                                | z-spray.com                          | 9          |
| M.H. Eby                                        | mheby.com                            | 98         |
| Magna Matic Corp                                | magna-matic.com                      | 22         |
| Mistaway Systems, Inc                           | mistaway.com/goodbiz                 | 10         |
| National Association of Landscape Professionals | bit.ly/landscapeprofessionals        | 94         |

| Advertiser              | Website                                                               | Page #     |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|
| Neely Coble Co          | neelycoble.com                                                        | 79         |
| Netafim Irrigation, Inc | netafimusa.com                                                        | 83         |
| Novae Corp              | novaeacorp.com                                                        | 84         |
| Nufarm                  | nufarminside.com                                                      | 18         |
| Otterbine Barebo, Inc   | otterbine.com/aerating_fountains                                      | 15         |
| Pave Tech               | pavetech.com                                                          | 20, 80, 84 |
| PBI-Gordon              | pbigordonturf.com                                                     | 85*        |
| Perma-Green Supreme     | permagreen.com                                                        | 31         |
| Pro Landscape/ Drafix   | prolandscape.com                                                      | 107        |
| Quirk Auto Dealers      | quirkcars.com                                                         | 24         |
| Rain Bird               | wifi-pro.rainbird.com                                                 | 29         |
| Real Green Systems      | realgreen.com/mobilegrow                                              | 82, 101    |
| Savalawn                | savatree.com                                                          | 92         |
| SePro Corporation       | stewardsofturf.com/labor                                              | COVER, 41  |
| SiBore Drill LLC        | siboredrill.com                                                       | 106        |
| STIHL                   | stihlusa.com/community/real-people-stihl-people-bud-jones-landscaping | 2          |
| Syngenta                | growwithsyngenta.com                                                  | 89         |
| Tafco Equipment Co.     | tafcoequip.com                                                        | 14         |
| Thurston MFG            | buygroundeffect.com                                                   | 80         |
| Toro                    | toro.com/dealer                                                       | 35         |
| Toro Irrigation         | toro.com/psn                                                          | 27         |
| Turfco                  | turfco.com                                                            | 23         |
| Unique Lighting Systems | uniquelighting.com                                                    | 33         |
| Wells Fargo             | wellsfargo.com/outdoorsolutions                                       | 86, 87     |

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|-----------------|-------------------|--------|
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|-----------------|-------------------|--------|

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|--------------------------|-----------------------|-----|
| Kichler Lamp             | landscapelighting.com | 114 |
| Permaloc Aluminum Edging | permaloc.com          | 115 |
| Takeuchi MFG             | takeuchi-us.com       | 111 |

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# ATTRACTIVE WORKPLACE

• **D.W. BURR LANDSCAPE AND DESIGN** has experienced significant growth over the years. Gaining new accounts affords us opportunity to invest in existing employees by increasing compensation and paying for more advanced training and licensing.

This growth has also meant we have been on the front lines of hiring, competing with other service providers in the area for talented individuals. To be innovative and remain relevant requires a workforce that is knowledgeable, creative and adaptive. We must look toward cultivating these qualities as we develop our next generation of workers.

Below are a few specific things I think we at D.W. Burr Landscape and Design are doing well to attract and retain talent. I am not suggesting that we are doing anything extraordinary. In fact, this is why we wish to engage in this conversation. We are offering our ideas and, in return, hope to gain ideas from others.

## DESIRABLE WORK SCHEDULES.

During the spring, summer and fall months, our landscape crews work four 10-hour days.

This shortened workweek is often



**JOEL W. POSKUS** is the horticultural crew foreman at D.W. Burr in Simsbury, Connecticut.

cited by employees as one of the things they like most about working at D.W. Burr.

This schedule was initiated to reduce overtime costs, which it has done. Also, if there is rain during the week, we can hold off on work for that day and bring the crew in on Friday, our "flex day," to make up for the lost time and keep our maintenance schedule on track.

By generally giving employees a three-day weekend, they have the option of spending more time with their families or working a part-time job. The millennial generation finds this particularly attractive, giving them more time on the weekends to pursue other interests.

**FLEXIBLE WORK SCHEDULES.** Our owner, David Burr, emphasizes it is necessary for employees to put family first. To this end, he is willing to be flexible and make reasonable accommodations to schedules and workloads to enable workers to meet the needs of their families or personal lives from time to time.

Some employees may need to put work on hold for a month to move their household or to deal with a natural disaster back home. This flexibility, coupled with a work-at-will policy recognizes people's need to leave by choice or circumstance with the understanding that they will be welcomed back at a future point.

**SHOWING APPRECIATION.** Loyalty is valued, especially because having a stable workforce contributes to our ability to offer a consistent level of service to clients. So, we

reward loyalty with budgeted annual raises and years-of-service awards. We also value performance, so we offer opportunity for performance-based raises when we conduct annual reviews.

For those members of our team who are willing and available to work on snow removal crews in winter, we offer the "snow incentive plan," which consists of two parts. The first part is a flat payment of \$250 (prior to tax withholding) for each month during the snow season that the individual is available to be on call for snow removal duties. It adds up to \$1,000 if an employee is available December, January, February and March.

The second part is a variable payment based on money left over in the snow damages account. Prior to the snow removal season, a certain amount of money is set aside to cover potential expenses for property damage that would be incurred as a direct result of snow removal operations.

The bonus is the balance of the snow damage account at the end of the season after covering the expenses for property damages such as turf repair, curb repair or garage door repair divided equally among each member of the snow removal team. This is a nice way of rewarding careful work.

We also offer tokens of appreciation for each employee with a turkey at Thanksgiving and a gift card in December at our holiday get-together. Another highlight of the year comes in mid-September when the company hosts a fishing trip on a charter boat on the Long Island Sound.

As I said before, we'd love to hear from you. Shoot me an email at [jwposkus@gmail.com](mailto:jwposkus@gmail.com) to continue the conversation **L&L**

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