

WINNER: LANDSCAPE CONTRACTING

Bruce Hunt

**Vice President, The Brickman Group, Ltd.,
Langhorne, PA**

BY JASON STAHL

Career highlights

1961

Hired by The Brickman Group

1968

Promoted to general manager

1980

Joins ALCA's Crystal Ball Committee

1980

Establishes design/build office in Philadelphia

1984

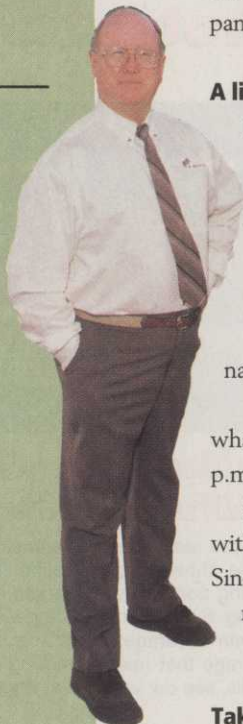
Establishes design/build office in Baltimore

1988

Elected president of ALCA

1994

Honored with ALCA's Landscape Service Award



When Bruce Hunt first arrived on the campus of Michigan State University in 1956, he didn't even realize there was such a thing as a degree in landscape architecture.

"I was more interested in business and design," Hunt says, admitting that his math skills were extremely weak but that design and drafting came easy to him.

His first interview with The Brickman Group, Ltd., happened by chance. His college roommate had scheduled an interview with the company, but had already taken another job and decided to skip it. Hunt and his wife, Cammie, who had just married in their last year of college, were planning to travel to St. Louis to visit friends, so he smelled an opportunity.

"I figured I'd take a short detour to Chicago and take my roommate's place in the interview," Hunt says.

Hunt was interviewed by Dick Brickman, and, in 1961, became one of The Brickman Group's five full-time employees. Little did he know that he would stay with the company for the rest of his career — in fact, he would eventually rise to vice president

A little bit of everything

Hunt was originally hired on as a landscape designer, but since the company was so small, he ended up performing many duties — designing, estimating, production management, supervision, and client contact, to name a few. "I've probably had every job that's ever existed in this company," Hunt says. Within five years, he became general manager, having evolved out of design and into project and people management.

Today, at 62, Hunt says he is as busy as he has ever been, but his focus is much more narrow — primarily on client development and large project sales and management.

Scott Brickman, Dick Brickman's son and president of the company, knows firsthand what kind of worker Hunt is. "He's still gets to the office at 6 a.m. and is here until 7 p.m.," he says.

Scott wasn't even born when Hunt was first interviewed — Hunt's first encounter with him was at the office, when Scott's parents brought him in shortly after he was born. Since then, Hunt has come to know him as a leader and a friend. "It was always Dick's mission to see the company grow and grow. He was a visionary," Hunt says. "Scott has taken on that ability, which is unusual in a third generation business."

Taking an active role

Hunt says Dick Brickman, a lifelong friend and mentor, was always active in Green Indus-

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try goings-on and encouraged him to participate in industry activities as well. Hunt took what Brickman said to heart — he's been a member of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America's (ALCA) Crystal Ball Committee since 1980, and served as ALCA's president in 1988. At the time, Ron Kujawa, who is currently chairman of the board of KEI Inc. in Cudahy, WI, was president-elect of ALCA under Hunt.

"We went through some difficult times in the association's early days," Kujawa says. "Bruce and I were the two oldest members when ALCA was restructured. We were able to add the resource of institutional and traditional knowledge — sort of like, 'Been there, done that.' Bruce coined the term 'ALCA magic' for what we had."

Hunt joined a national association like ALCA for a reason. "I was a little reluctant to join local associations because there were competitors as members," he says. "With ALCA, I could participate and contribute knowing I wasn't doing so with competitors."

And participate Hunt did. He was rewarded for his service and commitment in 1994 when ALCA bestowed its Landscape Service Award on him.

"He has a true love of the industry, and he's very much interested in education and the youth coming into the industry," says ALCA president Debra Holder, who noted Hunt's year-to-year involvement with the association's Student Career Days. "He has been instrumental as one of the leaders who helped to make ALCA what it is today."

Gary Thornton, an ALCA member and president of Slice Technologies, not only knows Hunt for his industry contributions but his sense of humor as well. One year, Hunt was in charge of the nominating committee, and Thornton was up for nomination to the executive committee. "He sent me a fax that said a whole bunch of people didn't want me nominated," Thornton says. "He followed it up with another fax that said, 'April Fool's!'"

A lifetime with the Brickmans

With 2000 revenues expected to be in the \$230 million range, The Brickman Group has come a long



Bruce Hunt has been with The Brickman Group since the very beginning.

way since Bruce Hunt first walked in the door in 1961. Originally a design/build firm, the company now offers a full range of landscape services. Recently, it established a West Coast presence for the first time with the purchase of two San Diego-based companies.

Asked why he stayed with the same company for so long, Hunt asked why not? "As long as a company fulfills your need for growth and motivation and stimulation," he says. "I've always had all I've wanted with them. I had a couple opportunities to leave or buy a family business, and I decided not to simply because I saw something in Brickman that was different."

As far as choosing the Green Industry to pursue a professional career in, Hunt has no regrets. He admits that it wasn't necessarily a love of nature that motivated him to enter the industry, but his ability to use his design talents. "What also attracted me was the ability to create something and, 20 years later, drive by a project and see something you've done," Hunt says. "Also, the people and competition in this industry are perceived to be a cut above other industries. The work ethic and integrity seem to attract good people."

WINNER: LAWN CARE

Terry Kurth

**Director of Development, Weed Man U.S.A.,
Middleton, WI**

BY SUE GIBSON

While many of his peers also came of age in lawn care's formative years, few have the impact of Terry Kurth.

Kurth developed a taste for turf on a golf course maintenance crew, then followed up by studying for a B.S. degree in Agronomy from the University of Wisconsin in Madison. He interned at nearby Nakoma Country Club. "It inspired me," he recalls.

After working for the State of Wisconsin through 1976, he was recruited as a technical representative for Scotts' Pro Turf organization by Bill Hoopes, now director of training and development at Scotts Lawn Care.

Terry Kurth spent many Saturdays inspecting lawns in the early days of his involvement with Barefoot Grass.



Moonlighting for Marvin

At the same time, Marvin Williams' infant firm, Barefoot Grass, was starting up in Marysville, OH. "There was a real chinch bug problem that summer of 1977, and he needed help making all the lawn inspections and sales. I spent my Saturdays doing that and really enjoyed the work," says Kurth.

Kurth and Barefoot struck a deal, and he moved back to his beloved Wisconsin to start one of Barefoot's first franchises, located in Madison.

Thanks to a \$5,000 line of credit for franchise startup money, Kurth and family resettled in Madison.

"I sold 94 out of 99 leads," he recalls of his first lawn care mailing. "Those were the days. I had about 275 accounts the first year and did about \$44,000 in business."

At the start, it was a one-man operation, he remembers. "It was me, myself and I doing the routes. I remember when my wife went into labor with our first child, I was in the hospital room with one hand on the small of her back and the other hand holding a phone on sales calls. That was motivation! She helped me incubate both the family and our business."

Kurth gradually added employees and opened other Barefoot Grass franchises in Appleton and Green Bay, WI, before expanding into the Austin, TX, market in the late 1980s.

Solving the brown grass mystery

At the peak of Kurth's Barefoot operations, he also owned franchises in Peoria, IL and Lexington, KY for a total of \$3 million in sales.

In 1987, that business was jeopardized by a mysterious epidemic of brown grass that plagued his customers' lawns in Madison and Green Bay. Company records pointed to a common denominator: all lawns received a granular fertilizer containing a fungicide. Once atrazine contamination was diagnosed, Kurth called his supplier, who agreed to pay for damage repair for 325 lawns.

During the emergency, Kurth's company educated customers, then enlisted outside landscape firms to repair the lawns. Kurth also sent customers boxes of meats to thank them for understanding.

Industry consolidation eventually came to call in 1997, when Tru-Green-ChemLawn bought Barefoot Grass' operations. Kurth sold his

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Career highlights

1975

Graduated from University of Wisconsin (B.S. in Agronomy)

1976

Joins Scott's Pro Turf organization

1979

Opens Barefoot Grass franchise in Madison, WI

1985-1992

Expands Barefoot Grass franchises in Midwest and Texas (reaching \$3 million combined sales)

mid-1980s

Becomes active in local and national industry associations

1996-1997

President of PLCAA

1997

TruGreen-Chem-Lawn buys Barefoot; sells Barefoot business

1999

Becomes Weed Man's director of development for U.S. business



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interests to TGCL, and he now has Badgerland Irrigation, a Madison-based firm he co-owns with Curt Winter and Bob Smith.

He also added local Christmas Décor franchises to Badgerland's service mix and is transferring majority ownership to Winter. In the past few years, Kurth managed his interests until he was asked to help Weed Man expand into the U.S.

The challenges are exciting to Kurth as he participates in Weed Man's move: "I compare it to the car rental business. TGCL is like Hertz without a consistent number two, but right now, Weed Man is trying to fill that void and so are several others."

Pay it forward

Although Kurth defines himself as a "typical entrepreneur who gets more fun from growth than from administration," his reputation as an organizational fireball goes back more than 15 years.

Kurth has been actively involved with several organizations, including: the Wisconsin Landscape Federation (where he is currently president elect); Grounds Management Association of Wisconsin (past president); Wisconsin Agri-Business Council (executive board member) and others.

Kurth initially joined PLCAA "for the education and networking," he says, but soon realized that active membership "was my duty, no question about it." He took over as PLCAA president in 1996.

Although he recalls it was a tough year to lead the organization (TGCL bought Barefoot and former executive director Ann McClure departed), Kurth saw it as a personal challenge. "PLCAA has given me opportunities for learning, lobbying and networking. The feeling of being 'family and friends' is huge and through it, I've made a ton of friends. I can never pay back what I've been given but I can pay forward."

It was also a time of uncertainty for PLCAA members and staff. He recalls, "The staff didn't miss a beat, but we were afraid of losing members



due to consolidation. Now, we have Scott's,

Weed Man and other former employees starting their own firms coming into PLCAA. I think there's a definite rebirth within the industry."

Working side by side

"He personifies volunteerism," says Lou Wierichs Jr., president of Pro-X Lawns in Appleton, WI, former PLCAA president and friend of Kurth since the late 1980s. Both men work together on GMAW and Wisconsin Landscape Federation projects, as well as PLCAA projects.

"He has a propensity for making money and is a smart businessman," Wierichs says. "He also shows unselfishness, is honest and is loyal. I trust him — we're close to being like brothers."

Kurth's strong leadership qualities made an impression on Karen Weber, PLCAA's associate vice president/communications director. "He always has the good of the industry at heart and is someone who cares," she says.

Those who show up

Once Kurth learned about the Ambassador speaking program started by RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment), he was hooked.

"I talked to Allen James, RISE president, and got PLCAA involved. We got funding and commitments to speak, then set up a training program," he explains.

Asked if he has trouble saying "no," Kurth admitted he continues to be involved with groups espousing the politics he supports, such as the NFIB's initiatives to limit government intrusion into small business. "Most entrepreneurs are autocratic at first, then they start delegating," he explains. "But I don't want someone who doesn't understand my business making judgments for me."

Despite Kurth's busy work with Weed Man, look for him to continue his involvement with PLCAA and other industry issues. The way he sees it, there isn't any alternative. "This world is run by those who just show up," he says.

WINNER: GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

Kevin O'Donnell

**Superintendent of Grounds,
Villanova University, Philadelphia, PA**

BY RON HALL

Thirty-nine down and eleven to go. That's how Kevin O'Donnell describes climbing, one of his favorite hobbies. He's a member of the Highpointers, a national club of 1,800 people whose goal is to climb the highest points in each of the 50 states. So far, he's made it to the top of 39 of them — from Florida's Britton Hill at 346 ft. to California's Mt. Whitney which rises over 14,000 ft.

Challenges? They come in all sizes for O'Donnell, Superintendent of Grounds for Villanova University, Philadelphia, PA. But we didn't select him to be our "Person of the Year" in grounds management because of his mountaineering. We're honoring him because of the incredible range of services he offers to a great university. We also felt his willingness to advance the profession of groundskeeping at both the regional and national levels should be recognized.

Life at Villanova

At Villanova, his professional responsibilities include not only maintaining the grounds at the 220-acre campus but also managing the university motor pool, overseeing road maintenance, trash collection/recycling and, within the past several years, roof maintenance.

"The diversity presents some unique challenges," O'Donnell admits.

"Kevin keeps a clear focus even when our environment gets chaotic," adds Chuck Leeds, one of several supervisors who work with Kevin at the university. "We share some responsibilities and we have a very close working relationship. Actually, we have to — three of us share a 20 by 30 ft. office."

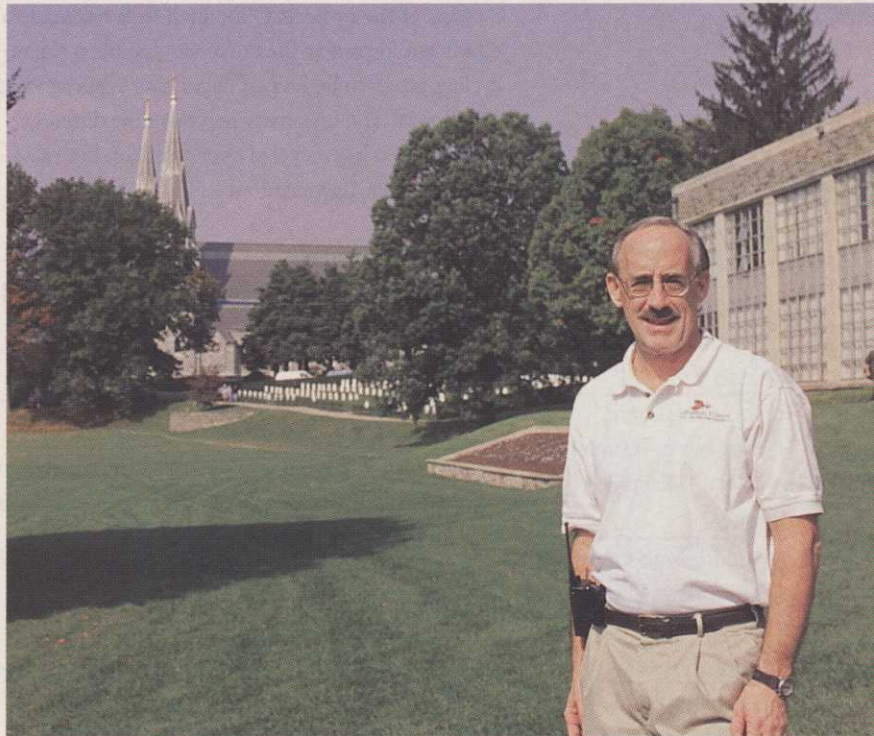
O'Donnell has been involved with many initiatives at Villanova, say university officials. One of them was serving on the Villanova Quality Improvement (VQI) council.

"The council originally had over 30 people on it from all walks of life and from all positions at the university," explains John Kelley, Ph.D., VQI Director. "We had a marvelous mix of faculty, administrators and staff of all kinds." Kelley said that O'Donnell embraced the positive suggestions arising from the VQI council and started self-directed work teams.

"The teams really got fired up and they took the initiative for many fascinating landscape projects," says Kelley.

"More recently, Kevin was a founding member of our environmental team of about 15 fa-

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Kevin O'Donnell on Villanova's arboretum campus.

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Career highlights

1977

Park Superintendent at Lower Salford Twp., PA

1983

Founding board member of Philadelphia PGMS Branch

1990

Superintendent of grounds at Villanova University

1991

Establishes recycling program at Villanova

1993

Establishes arboretum on Villanova campus

2000

Serves as president of PGMS

2000

Serves as president of GIE board



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cility administrators and staff. The team is looking at all phases of the environment here at Villanova," explains Kelley. "Not just grounds, but it's examining areas such as energy audits, resource conservation and emissions."

One of the projects O'Donnell feels has made a significant impact at the university has been the recycling program he helped begin nine years ago and still directs. The university recycles nine different products and has recycled over 5 million lbs. of products since its inception.

Working his way up

O'Donnell has taken a circuitous career path to Villanova, starting with his grade school days on Long Island, NY, and continuing as an undergraduate studying forestry at Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR.

"My plan was to go into parks management. I envisioned myself working out in the woods, maybe in a natural area," he explains.

In fact, after one year with a private landscape firm, that's what he did. His grounds career began as parks supervisor at Lower Salford Twp., a Philadelphia area community with about 500 acres of primarily rural parkland dotted with historical homes.

After three years at that position, he took a similar post at nearby Upper Dublin Twp. The new job brought more responsibility, including maintaining ball fields, picnics areas and walking/jogging trails. He was the supervisor for the parks maintenance program for 10 years before being selected for the Villanova University position just over 10 years ago.

Dedication to grounds professionals

It was during these years at the community parks that O'Donnell became involved with the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS), starting as a founding board member of its

Philadelphia branch. He served several years as president of this branch and eventually was named to the board of the national PGMS. His route to its presidency started six years ago when he served as Northeast Director of the national PGMS.

During his term as president this past year, O'Donnell set himself several goals including:

- ▶ offering greater opportunities for individual professional growth to all grounds personnel,
- ▶ spreading the word about the PGMS,
- ▶ developing a stronger relationship with PGMS branches, and
- ▶ strengthening the relationship with strategic partners such as the Association of Higher Education Facilities Officers (APPA) and the American Public Works Association (APWA).

"He's done a fantastic job of holding us together and bringing our branches and many of our members closer together," says George Van Haasteren, Jr./CGM, in describing the job O'Donnell has done this past year as PGMS president.

"I'm definitely fortunate in having Kevin ahead of me because he's making my job so much easier when I become the president," adds Van Haasteren, the PGMS president for 2001.

It's been O'Donnell's efforts as a grounds professional at Villanova, however, that excite us most about honoring him.

"I have worked with Kevin in a number of capacities for approximately the last 10 years. I have always found him to be very committed to the mission of Villanova," says Helen Lafferty, Ph.D., University Vice President. "He is generous with his time and he does whatever is necessary to enhance the beauty of our university."

"It's always a pleasure to work on projects with Kevin because he approaches them in a can-do manner. One of his greatest accomplishments in my opinion was the naming of the Villanova campus as an arboretum.

"We are not only a better place because of his presence, we are a more beautiful place," Dr. Lafferty concludes.