



## AT A GLANCE

**COMPANY:** Competitive Lawn Service, Downers Grove, IL

**FOUNDED:** 1982

**TITLE:** Owner/president

**NUMBER OF LOCATIONS:** One

**MARKET AREA:** Downers Grove, IL

**EMPLOYEES:** 45

**SERVICES OFFERED:** Lawn care, lawn maintenance, bed maintenance, landscaping/landscape renovation, spring/fall cleanups

**WEBSITE:** CompetitiveLawn.com

This past December, **Eric Hansen** drove to Livonia, MI, to receive the keys to a new, propane-fueled Ford F-350 from Jack Roush of Roush Performance. Over the past several years, Hansen has been converting his fleet of landscape maintenance equipment to propane power, which he believes offers better value for his energy dollars — while delivering more environmentally responsible service to his clients.

### What made you decide to become a lawn service business owner?

“I started cutting lawns and shoveling snow for neighbors when I was 10 years old. When I was 14, I worked with the next-door neighbor and his brother to start Suburban Lawn Service. We cut 50 lawns per week. When they went to college in 1982, I bought a trailer and some new mowers and started Competitive Lawn Service. I was 16. It was the easiest way for a high school boy to make money. I hired three employees in the first few years, and it paid my way through college.”

### After nearly three decades as an owner, what's the most important lesson you've learned about running a lawn service business?

“You can always train skills; you can never train attitude. Hire for attitude. Throughout our 28 years in business, we have hired hundreds — maybe even 1,000 — employees. Our best employees might not have the most impressive resume, but where they

shine is on attitude. Our people define who we are, what we do, and how we do it. We want to be a great attitude company defined by our employees.”

**What would you have done differently in building your company?** “I used to think no one could ever do a better job than me. I would sell myself, my work, my effort, my ultimate stamp of approval, and me at every job, estimate and task. Ten years ago, I realized what we need to sell is the company. We need to sell services that we could systematically supply to the client.”

**You offer services in basically one Chicago suburb, Downers Grove. Why work in such a small area, at least geographically?** “What we work to achieve is market share in this location. This reduces our fuel expense and employee travel time.

When we maintain a property 32 times per season, the drive time associated with that contract must be accounted for. All of our routes are literally minutes between jobs, and with GPS tracking and routing, we create efficiencies and cost savings to pass on to our clients. Expansion within our service area will be based on increased market share.”

### Why does your company use propane to fuel equipment and service vehicles?

“We experimented with propane for two years and studied the costs/benefits first. We started running lawn equipment on propane about two years ago. We initially wanted to see whether it was possible to run from early spring until late fall and what the costs were associated with it. We found there was less maintenance, reduced oil changes, and significantly

less fuel cost — especially when gasoline was \$4.50 a gallon. With 60% less emissions, we also were reducing our total annual output of carbon dioxide.

“We currently use about 35,000 gallons per year of unleaded gasoline and diesel. In 2009, we were able to use 1,500 gallons of that as propane. For 2010, our goal is to use between 5,000 and 10,000 gallons of propane and cut our usage of unleaded and diesel fuel to about 25,000 to 30,000 gallons. The heavy initial cost should pay for itself over the next few years.”

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