



John Gibson was well on his way to an electrical engineering degree when a summer job cutting lawns for Tom Garber, a former president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) changed his plans. Gibson joined Swingle in 1991, starting in ground maintenance. From there, he took over care/plant health care and eventually was named director of operations, overseeing acquisitions, geographic expansion and technology upgrades and implementation.

You became president of Swingle in the fall of 2008. What do you see as your chief responsibility within the company? My primary role is to lead and motivate our team to accomplish our goals in line with our overall strategic plan. This includes maintaining our strong culture, coordinating the activities of our executive team, overseeing our financial management and, of course, leading our team.

What changes have you seen in the Denver-area lawn care market since joining Swingle? The industry has matured dramatically, but there continues to be many new companies starting up in our market. Most of them are small, but the individuals running them are strong and some are entrepreneurial. Of course, there are more than a few not-so-professional operators, too. Swingle's focus remains — as it's always been — about keeping our promises. As our business

grows, we keep growing our highly trained, professional staff. We are capable of helping our customers with almost every service their landscapes require.

Describe the state of the economy in your market and its effect, if any, on professional lawn care services. The local economy started to slip in the fall of 2007, which continued throughout 2008 — and by the spring of 2009, it reached its lowest point. This spring, we're seeing modest recovery in our other services, especially tree work, but we think it will probably be the spring of 2011 before lawns start to pick up to the level we would like to see them.

Swingle's market, the Front Range of the Colorado Rockies, gets lots of sunshine and

mild temperatures, but is semi-arid with not-infrequent droughts. What does this mean for lawn care? Basically, it means we have to be aware of and educate our customers about any water restrictions we may currently have. It also means we have to focus on teaching our customers how to water for the best results over the long run, so restrictions don't dramatically change the look of their lawns.

You have served on many industry committees and taken leadership roles both in Colorado and nationally, as a past president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). What have you learned from these experiences? I was encouraged by the example of the mentor I work for at Swingle, Tom Tolkaacz. Industry involvement

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care

FOUNDED: 1947

TITLE: President

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: Two (Denver and Fort Collins, CO)

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Chair for the Irrigation Landscape Industry Certified Technician Test for the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado; director for the Green Industries of Colorado (GreenCo); past chairman of GreenCO's Water Efficient Leaders in Landscape Program; past president of the Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals; former VP of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (now part of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET)); past president, PLANET.

EDUCATION: B.S. business management from the University of Phoenix

WEBSITE: myswingle.com

has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my personal and professional development. It's allowed me to get to know and to learn from and share with the best people in our industry.

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