



Patrick Nibler along with partner Paul Bizon started out in 1978 pursuing lawn care customers in the Portland market right before ChemLawn came to the area. Over the years, the pair has added services to accommodate the customer base. Tree and shrub care began in the early '80s; residential maintenance and landscape construction/erosion control in the early '90s and commercial maintenance in the late '90s. *LM* talked with Nibler to see how the company has evolved and where it's going.

How has the business changed in the past few years?

In 2007, we added an interior maintenance unit in Portland. The Portland area was our initial starting point for new services, then we exported them to our branches in Seattle, Eugene and Central California.

The goal and the challenge is to be a resource for almost any landscape service that a residential or commercial customer — some are both — may need.

Where does lawn care fit into your company's services these days?

Lawn care is still a big part of what we do, but as a percentage of our business, it has been eclipsed by the growth of some of our other services — particularly, residential and commercial maintenance.

You've devoted a lot of your personal time to industry associations, especially the former Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA, now part of the Professional Landcare

Network, or PLANET), where you were a longtime board member. What did you learn from the experience?

Any time that you get a chance to meet other people in related businesses, you have a real opportunity to learn from their experiences. Everyone in this industry seems to be willing to share information about their own operations and programs, and that can be a big help. An added bonus is the friends that you make along the way.

Prograss stresses its local ownership, its Pacific Northwest roots, and its commitment to "common sense" sustainability. How does all of that fit together?

Our approach has always been to choose materials and methods that provide consistent results for our customers, and utilize low-impact materials. We look for options in application that permit spot spraying vs. broadcast application, or injection vs. spraying the entire canopy.

Integrated pest management (IPM) is the main focus of our ongoing in-house training. We favor biological

and botanical categorized materials for our tree and shrub program, and organic fertilizers blended with conventional fertilizers can benefit the soils in our lawn care programs.

When we looked at Prograss.com, we were amazed by the depth of the company's community service. How does the company find the time and the money to contribute so much?

Community service efforts are a small part of our marketing program, but whether it is a donation to a charity auction or a lawn makeover for an Iraq veteran, we feel that these help with our brand in the local area.

Can you share any industry trends you see developing in the Pacific Northwest?

One positive trend that I see in this economy is an opportunity to talk to more people about careers in landscape services. More talent is out there that will consider moving to another company, or young workers are looking at the industry as an option for employment.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Prograss Landscape Care & Design

WEBSITE: Prograss.com

FOUNDED: 1978

HEADQUARTERS: Wilsonville, OR

TITLE: Patrick Nibler, Operations Manager

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 33

SERVICE AREA: Portland, OR, and Vancouver, WA, metro areas, and communities along the I-5 corridor from Seattle to Northern California

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Longtime member of PLCAA and PLANET, served on PLCAA Board of Directors, Northwest Turfgrass Association Board of Directors

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 6

EMPLOYEES: 170 in season

SERVICES: Residential and commercial lawn and landscape maintenance; landscape installation; pruning and plant replacement; irrigation services; home pest control; interior/urban landscaping; athletic field maintenance; erosion control; and environmental services

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES: Golf

FAMILY: Wife, Cheryl, of 33 years, sons Blake, 27, and Andrew, 23