

ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

Like many Green Industry business owners, **Jon Dozier** and **Jarrett Martin** have a love of the great outdoors. The two began building Merry Acres Landscape & Lawn Maintenance nearly a decade ago, and they try to share their passion with their customers. The duo derives “immense satisfaction from being able to apply their creativity and vision to positively transform clients’ lawns and outdoor living spaces.” Dozier offers some insight into the Green Industry.

TRENDS

› **Propane-fueled equipment.** Merry Acres was one of the first in the region to adopt propane-fueled lawn mowers, and our propane provider has told me there are others in the area moving in this direction. Plus, I was just down at our equipment dealership recently, and they told me they have a propane-fueled model they are keeping in stock because they have guys who are interested. Companies are always asking themselves, “Is there a way I can operate more efficiently?”

› **Economically influenced changes.** One of the major trends we’ve seen since the downturn of the economy has been on the installation side of our business. Whether it is landscape, irrigation or hardscape, we have seen fewer of those projects since the downturn of the housing market, and we have had to investigate more projects on the commercial side of our business. But we haven’t really had revenue fall off in the maintenance business; in fact, we’ve ticked up percentage-wise on the maintenance portion of our business. It’s close to 50% of our business, and was down to 30% a year or two ago.

› **Cost-conscious customers.** People are looking to save a dollar in this economy, and also looking to receive the most value from the money they do spend. We’re not the cheapest guys in town, and if that’s what you’re looking for, we’re not your guys. But we offer a lot for what we do. We tailor the packages and options we have to meet our customers’ budgets. If our proposal is over what the customer is willing to pay, we will go back and rework the plan with their input instead of walking away.

OBSTACLES

› **Fuel costs.** Every day, it seems that the price of fuel, whether it be gasoline or diesel, is climbing. It’s hard to quote a job accurately when planning it six to nine months in advance, because you don’t know what the cost of fuel will be at that time.

› **Labor pains.** Labor is always an obstacle. As sad as it sounds,



Jarrett Martin (left) and Jon Dozier adopted propane early on.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Merry Acres Landscape & Lawn Maintenance, MerryAcres-Landscaping.com

Founded: 2002

Headquarters: Albany, GA

Key to being a maintenance leader: Our key is that we take advantage of every opportunity and phone call that comes in to our office. Our motto is that no one project is too big or too small for us to take on. Bigger projects are always needed, but at the same time, smaller projects help sustain the overall health of our business.

finding someone with a valid driving record and driver’s license is tough, as well as finding guys who want to come to work and labor. There are many factors to look at with a team of 25. We always try to promote our employees, and replenish our staff at the bottom. I feel very fortunate that we are able to keep such a great staff; the majority of our employees have been with Merry Acres for more than three years.

We have very little turnover. I think this year we’ve had two positions turn over out of 25.

› **Cultivating new clientele.** The economy has created an obstacle for us to overcome to create new business. Clients, primarily residential clients, are very hesitant to make a change and switch to a different company. People know how small businesses are struggling to retain clients and believe switching companies would be detrimental to the overall health of that small business. Clients have become more hesitant on finding another option.

OPPORTUNITIES

› **Cost management.** We have a fleet of eight propane-fueled lawn mowers, as well as a Ford F-150 work truck fueled by propane autogas. This equipment gives us the opportunity to better manage our costs, since we purchase propane for our on-site refueling station by negotiating an annual price. That allows us to lower our costs right now because we negotiate our propane price around June, and we’re locked in for a year. We use about 10,000 gal. of propane a year.

› **Diversification.** We pride ourselves on being a one-stop shop. We offer an array of services: landscape, irrigation, hardscapes, outdoor lighting and mosquito misting, which is similar to an irrigation system: You program the system to run about three times a day, and it fogs for about 15 to 30 seconds.