



THE HALLMARK

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Is this recovery different?

Being a world champion of hindsight and after some considerable reflection, I can now write at length about the housing market crash and resulting 2008 Recession. Anybody could have seen it coming, right? How about \$775,000 for a modest 3-bedroom ranch house on a canal in Cape Coral, FL.?

Yes, we looked at one, but it was way more than we could afford. Did we think the price was a tad high? Well, yes.

With that admission, let's look back at other recent economic crisis that slammed our industry. Perhaps we can tease some valuable insights from them about recovering from this latest debacle.

Some of you will recall the 1991 recession. Consumer confidence (and spending) plummeted in the face of high unemployment and worrisome inflation. All U.S. businesses suffered, including our industry. The poor state of the economy was generally blamed for George H. Bush's failed bid for a second term as President.

The go-go 1990s ended with the bursting of the "Tech Bubble." The U.S. economy was still mired in malaise in 2001 when 9/11 added a profound sense of rage and fear to the mix.

Head-on collision

The landscape industry grew robustly after both recessions. Revenues are estimated to have climbed by more than 30% from 1991 to 2008 when the the housing market tumbled like a house of cards and the financial services industry came to a near worldwide collapse.

The homeowner refinance boom evaporated within a matter of weeks, credit dried up and consumers panicked. Many landscape companies, blithely unaware of what was coming, hit the Recession going full blast.

Again in 2011 we're slowly recovering again. (Why does each decade start so ominously?)

Remarkably, mid-year 2011 the general makeup

of our industry remains remarkably similar to what it was in 1991 and 2001. This includes its basic core of services with pretty much the same laundry list of environmental and regulatory challenges.

But, in light of the severity of the '08 economic disaster, Washington's inability to fashion a believable recovery strategy is unsettling if not criminal.

Continuing demand

There's no question that, looking ahead, consumers will continue to appreciate their properties, including their lawns. And they'll count on professional services to keep them attractive and healthy. Turf care will remain the largest revenue producer for the industry thanks to:

- ▶ new species and cultivars of turfgrass that resist pests, require fewer chemical inputs (including synthetic fertilizers) and remain healthy and attractive with less water or by using recycled and lower-quality water;
- ▶ fuel-efficient mowers that are quieter, safer to operate and produce minimal or no emissions;
- ▶ more precise and efficient product/service delivery methods, and;
- ▶ a better overall understanding of the role and uses of turfgrass to capture and remediate runoff, and to recharge aquifers.

Beyond turfgrass, the industry will incorporate more native plants onto clients' properties, and can count on the discovery and commercial development of beautiful, new adaptive ornamentals. Terms such as nativescaping, wildscaping and birdscaping are starting to creep into the industry's language. That's great. We're environmentalists.

We will enjoy innovations in every product we use, and in every service that we provide clients, including services we have yet to imagine.

Once our nation digs out of this latest financial mess (Attention Washington: There's really no other option.), whatever we conceive in terms of outdoor services — both the familiar and the yet-to-be realized — we can achieve.