At Peabody Landscape Group in Columbus, OH, community involvement is as integral to the company’s success as self-sufficiency and customer satisfaction are.

“It’s important to try to give back to your community,” says company President David Peabody. “We don’t realize how fortunate we are in the United States, for all of the things we have available to us.”

Peabody Landscape Group has been involved in community service for more than 20 years, says Peabody, who enjoys supporting Boy Scouts of America service projects and often donates materials and equipment to them.

Peabody has a lot to say about the landscape maintenance business, and he took time to discuss with LM the pros and cons of what he’s seeing in the industry today.

**TOP TRENDS**

- **Our design/build segment is growing.** Outdoor living is becoming a trendy thing. People are moving away from water features and focusing more on outdoor living and pondless water fixtures. People are steering away from the ponds because of the algae and the maintenance.

- **Outdoor grilling is becoming more fashionable** as well, and there are more sit-up bars. The outdoor fireplace is a more trendy element than fire pits are these days, because it is a focal point of the landscape and it’s more elegant.

- **Lighting** is something people are doing more of. You see more lighting on the front side of a home. There’s an increasing focus on the architecture — enhancing the architecture through lighting. Probably 50% of our construction has become hardscape.

**TOP OBSTACLES**

- **Lowball bidders.** The industry is made up of anybody who wants to get away with something, who wants to make a buck. You’re essentially competing with Billy the kid next door who’s got a lawn mower. That’s what this industry is compared to. There’s a real misunderstanding from people who see Hispanics working for a landscape company. Their first thought is that the worker is an illegal alien, that he is being paid less than minimum wage, and that’s not the case.

**TOP OPPORTUNITIES**

- **We’re becoming more self-sufficient.** We’re on a parcel of ground that’s on 22 acres, and we have 12 acres of shade and ornamental trees. In all, we have about 3,500 trees. By growing the trees ourselves, we eliminate the need to buy them wholesale. Buying trees can be expensive, especially if I’m looking at a big project. It’s less expensive to grow them, and then we use them in our bidding.

- **Alternative fuels.** There are huge opportunities for companies if they explore eliminating the normal resource of fuel and look at opportunities in alternative fuels, which we’re doing now. Next year, we’re looking to decrease fuel costs by around 50%. Decreasing those costs provides me with one more way to be more competitive. We have six trucks dedicated to delivering materials to job sites so we can keep our crews working on the property continuously. Keeping fuel costs down will really have an impact on our bottom line.