

# RYAN LAWN & TREE INC.

**L**arry Ryan, president of Ryan Lawn & Tree Inc., Overland Park, KS, says one of the company's goals has always been that every person be committed to growth. That goal is made easier by the fact that the company is 70% employee-owned.

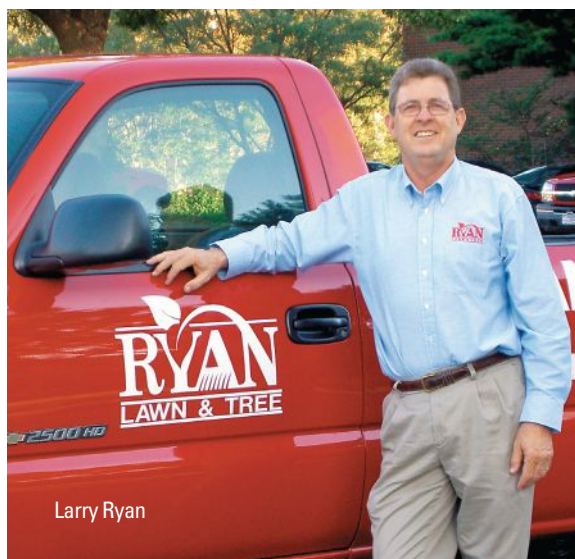
"The employees get an ownership letter each year that shows how many dollars of the company value they own," Ryan explains. "We almost doubled in value last year, so some of the people made as much money off the stock increase as they did off their salary. That really opens their eyes — and they become invested in selling the company to our customers."

Certainly all of that is paying off, as Ryan Lawn & Tree saw 18.5% growth last year. Ryan says that part of that growth has come from well-thought-out mergers with other companies.

"We really care about our customers and our employees, so in order to make a merger work, we have to find a company that has the same attitude as us," he says. "We want to merge with companies whose leadership still wants to work. We don't want anyone sitting around. That's not just our philosophy; we feel it's a principle of life. The American dream is working hard to get ahead, and that's something we believe in. In a great company, the owner never quits."

Ryan also says the company has a focus on continuous improvement.

"When you have growth-oriented people working for you, they're always looking to solve problems and find ways to move the company forward," he explains. "With the employees so invested in the company, it's not just me solving problems. It gives tremendous empowerment when you allow the company as a whole to be involved in problem-solving. They literally take control of their jobs. We're not just telling



Larry Ryan

everyone what to do. They're making their own decisions. I feel that our commitment as a group is what helps us to get ahead."

But Ryan says it wasn't always this way. There was a time, several years back, where there was some inter-department rivalry. However, he says that all it took was a bad ice and wind storm where the departments had to work together for them to realize each other's strengths. He says he now believes that departments working side-by-side is the solution to animosity.

"Having our departments really feel like a team and being willing to work together has been a great asset," he says. "We definitely have some wonderful people here."

"If you'd told me 25 years ago that I'd be privileged to work with 175 great people, I wouldn't have believed it," he concludes. "It humbles me to look at where we are today, and I give my people all the credit." **LM**

GROWTH  
WISDOM

**"Don't play to be second-best. We're an organization that plays to be a company that the competition admires."**