

HIGHGROVE PARTNERS, LLC

What did it take to grow Jim McCutcheon's landscape business this year? Not thinking like a landscape business, says the CEO of HighGrove Partners, LLC in Atlanta, who saw 18.3% growth this past year.

"I think a lot of folks are really focused on the horticulture aspect of the business, which is indeed important — but at the end of the day, that doesn't speak well to the difficulties our customers are facing," he says. "We have really developed our operations, services and products around the idea of trying to make our customers' lives easier, and that's paid dividends for us."

There's no question that the customers in this market are feeling the impact of tough times. Atlanta had the largest number of bank failures of any city in the nation, and that's largely because so many were invested in real estate. McCutcheon says that when he moved to Atlanta as a kid, he can still remember the day in 1959 that the population sign turned to 1 million people. Today, the city has approximately 4.2 million residents — and the Atlanta metropolitan area adds at least another million more.

"The crash of the housing market has really hurt us as a city," he says. "We were definitely hard hit, and that's scarred people."

McCutcheon says there are approximately 3,000 landscape companies in metro Atlanta, so competition has always been fierce: "I think those that really focused on differentiating themselves and positioning themselves in the new market are the ones that are still doing well."

One of the things that HighGrove Partners has done differently this year was to develop a



Jim McCutcheon

division called Land Services, which capitalized on opportunities the economic situation has created. To head up the division, the company brought back Craig Morris, a former senior member who had left to become a developer.

"This division enables us to become the adjunct staff for a lot of the developers we work for, because so many don't have staff available anymore," he says. "So instead of just being involved in the very beginning of a project, we are now able to bridge the middle and do a lot of the development services for them that we previously wouldn't have handled."

Of all the factors that came into play for a successful year, though, McCutcheon says he credits the leadership team the most. "Even through these difficult times, they never lost sight of the importance of our culture," he says. "We've continued to promote the same work culture we always have, and that's helped us get through this." **LM**

GROWTH WISDOM

"Never stop learning. There's always something you could be doing better or differently to grow the business."