



PROGRESS

Time to rock and roll

It's a sunny summer morning in downtown Cleveland. Phil Cavotta, clad in a hard hat, construction vest and jeans, is overseeing a landscaping project at the Cleveland Clinic.

The \$500,000 job involves planting 150 maple and pear trees and laying nearly 12,000 yards of special-blend topsoil. "The lawn area will be the size of a football field," says Cavotta, senior advisor at Cleveland-based Cavotta Landscapers.

Cavotta Landscapers has done many landscaping projects for the Cleveland Clinic over the last 30 years. It had a project in the works there even when *Landscape Management* first wrote about the company in 1995. But it also had another high-profile contract then—the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum. At the time, the Rock Hall was one month away from its grand opening.

"We saw people coming and going all the time," Cavotta recalls. "I met Yoko Ono, I met the Bee Gees, [Rock Hall architect] I.M. Pei, so many people."

In 1995, Cavotta recounted to *LM* meeting Wolfman Jack there three weeks before his passing. "I remember the Wolfman like I'm talking to you now," Cavotta recalls. "I imitated him, the way he spoke. He didn't mind. He just laughed."

Pei wanted the landscape surrounding the museum to be simple so it wouldn't overshadow the building's design. So the Rock Hall project was a "small job but a big honor," Cavotta says. "I was proud to work on that job, No. 1, because rock 'n' roll was coined here in Cleveland, Ohio.

A contractor recounts working on the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame grounds and tells what life holds now.



(Above) Cavotta's employees on the job in August at the Cleveland Clinic, where they're planting 150 trees. (Left) The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum at sunset.



"They had people from all over the world visiting," he continues. "It's one of those things, it was really cool to see them bringing in the Beatles' guitars, or memorabilia from Joan Baez. It was all part of Americana, and it's here in Cleveland."

Like any project, the Rock Hall job had its challenges. The heat reflecting off the museum's glass toasted taxus plants the Cavotta crew had installed. Workers had to replant them and redesign the sprinkler system to keep the plants moist.

"This is called the crunch," Cavotta told *LM* in August '95. "It will be done on time. But these last weeks are going fast

and everybody's push, push, pushing."

At the Clinic in August 2012, Cavotta's crew still is pushing—pushing to meet the project's Aug. 31 deadline. "You gotta get it done no matter what," Cavotta says.

He's worked in the family business long enough to know that; he started in it as a 14-year-old, mowing lawns.

Cavotta's grandfather Felix launched the company as a garden center in 1917. He grew it by gardening the homes of Cleveland's richest families, including the Rockefellers.

"My grandfather said, 'You hook up with these people and do an honest day's work, they'll give you an honest day's pay,'" Cavotta recalls.

The business survived the Great Depression and continued to grow. Phil and his sister, Marilyn Cavotta Pride, inherited the business from their father, Michael, in the mid-1990s. Today, Marilyn is company president, Phil serves as senior advisor and Anthony Gabriel—the company's heir apparent—is vice president.

Over the years, Cavotta Landscapers has grown to a \$1 million company offering commercial and residential landscaping services. Even so, for landscape contractors nationwide, in 2008 "the bottom fell out," says Cavotta. "I love what I do. But it's a tough field."

Despite the challenges, Cavotta, 59, plans to work for as long as there's work to do. "You keep on plugging," he says. "I stick with it. It's in my blood."