

An entrepreneur turns inventor

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Tom Del Conte had a problem. Since a ready solution wasn't available he did the only thing he could. He created his own.

"There are approximately 25 million controllers across the United States," explains Del Conte, the creator of Sprinkler Times. "Smart controllers are the wave of the future. Three percent of those controllers are smart controllers. What do we do about the 97%? If we're going to try to go 'green' and sustainable, how do we know how many minutes to program the other 97% of the timers until they get converted?"

The Sprinkler Times app, which sells for \$5.99 on the iTunes store, allows contractors to set irrigation plans for properties without performing time-consuming water audits.

"We're (into) the '100 days of hell,'" says Del Conte, founder and president

of Del Conte's Landscaping. "That's when we can save the most but that's when we're the busiest. Who's really going to be paying that much attention to the controllers?"

The app takes weather data from weather stations around the country (localized to zip code) and factors in a number of variables (soil, shade, etc.) and the ever-changing evapotranspiration rates to give technicians a yard's proper irrigation schedule.

Del Conte recognizes that the industry is headed down the smart controller route, which means his app is not a long-term solution.

"We think we'll be obsolete in 5 to 10 years — all those old timers will be out of there," he says. "Until then, we've still got a water crisis on our hands, and it's not getting any better. We're pumping water out of the ground like crazy."

It took Del Conte more than a year



SprinklerTimes offers contractors a way to set irrigation schedules for controllers.

to put the app together. At one point he scrapped the entire programming team and started from

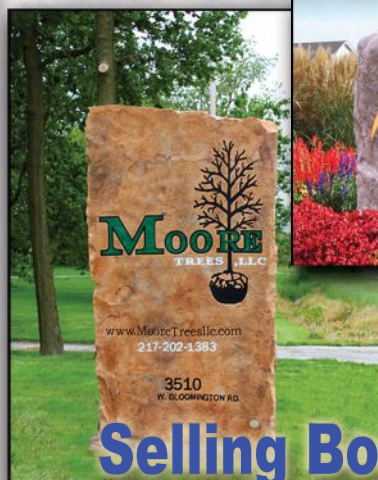
scratch. "It was every bit like building a house," he says. "You don't even know the decisions you have to make until you get there."

But now that he's there, he is happy with the results.

"We're looking for some cool stuff to happen out of this," Del Conte says. "We're excited about the idea we might make an impact."

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