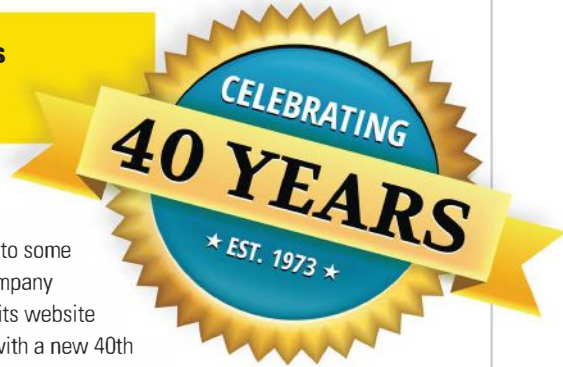


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Three **LM150** company executives reflect on 40 years in the industry and share how they'll celebrate their anniversaries.

BY **DAN JACOBS**



1973 was quite a year. Three of the industry's largest companies made their debuts then. Heads Up Landscape Contractors, Clintar Landscape Management and Denison Landscaping are marking their 40th anniversaries with a series of celebrations and activities.

› **Clintar Landscape Management**

Bob Wilton, president of Clintar, started like many other business owners — by working for someone else before he and a friend decided they wanted to head out on their own.

"We thought we could do it a better way, particularly on the customer service side," Wilton says. "We thought there was opportunity to do things in a more professional manner. It was a leap of faith and confidence."

Today, the Markham, Ontario-based company has more than 550 full- and part-time employees across 24 franchises doing more than \$50 million in revenue in the U.S. and Canada. But the company started rather small, with about a dozen employees that first year.

"The financial challenge was probably the bigger thing than getting customers," Wilton says.

Forty years later, Wilton has certainly learned something about running a business. And he's seen a lot of change along the way.

"The industry today is much more professional," he says.

"There are more educational tools. Certification was not even thought of in the 1970s. Today, we're real supporters of that."

Wilton plans to share the company's success with his employees and customers.

In addition to some parties, the company has revamped its website and uniforms with a new 40th anniversary logo. Presentations and proposals are now distributed on USB devices shaped like Clintar vehicles and the company will also be handing out packages of chewing gum embossed with the company's name.

"When you spend an increased amount on marketing you hope it comes back in customer revenue," Wilton says.

In other words, Wilton plans to continue to expand the company.

"Our intent is mainly focused on the U.S.," he says. "We're in 90 percent of the major markets in Canada. We've been cautious at not being too bold, yet. We see opportunities. If we do it right, we can do business anywhere."

› **Denison Landscaping**

John Denison found that a way to make money to pay for college became a passion. He had a pickup truck named "Chuck" and a mower.

"He decided landscaping was the thing for him," says Josh Denison, operations and human resources manager for the Ft. Washington, Md.-based operation and the son of the company founder. "His second year cutting grass, he had a customer ask him to plant some azaleas. He decided, 'I like this planting stuff more than I like this maintenance stuff.'"

Four decades later the company has more than 250 trucks on the road, trucks that drove a combined 24 million miles last year. Employees laid 18,197,000 square feet of sod.

Denison Landscaping has big plans to celebrate its anniversary. The company will complete 40 green initiatives that range from efficiency savings to community service.

"We can become the true green stewards that this industry truly is," Denison says. "Forty green initiatives in the spring is a tough thing to do. There are things that we've looked at. Some are long-term projects that we'll start this year and continue into the future."

Like Wilton, Denison is proud of the growth in knowledge and professionalism the Green Industry has undergone.

"A lot of the public still has that 'Chuck and a





STAYING POWER

truck' stigma," Denison says. "I believe the knowledge base and the professionalism of the mid-size and larger companies are changing. It's an uphill battle. It's a good uphill battle to have."

While the industry has changed for the better, there certainly have been some negatives.

"The biggest challenges are government regulations and labor," Denison says. "I don't believe it's a great business environment for small, medium or large businesses, with all the regulatory action that all the government agencies are taking, including immigration, H-2B, health care and insurance regulation. We are all having a hard time adapting."

But Denison will adapt like it always has.

"We're a production-driven, get-it-done landscape company," Denison says. "We get into the spring. We get into our seasons. We put our heads down and go. We have a great organization with great people. We've got laborers in the field that have been with us 15-plus years. I see us continuing to improve and continuing to get better."

"There's no secret to our success," Denison continues. "It's hard work and determination, knowledge and good people. We couldn't have gotten where we are every day without the people that work for us."

› Heads Up Landscape Contractors

Gary Mallory didn't know he was going to spend 40 years of his life working in the Green Industry, but he certainly isn't complaining.

"I've never been bored once in 40 years," says Mallory, founder and CEO of the Albuquerque, N.M.-based company. "Everyone has phobias and mine would be to be bored at my job."

Mallory and some friends started Heads Up (the name is a nod to a good sports play—"that was a heads up move") when they were in high school. Mallory worked at the business when he wasn't in class.

"I went to school for business," Mallory says of his college career. "I took all my classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays from early in the morning to late at night, and we worked on the business Monday, Wednesday, Friday, Saturday."

Today the company has about 240 employees and will post revenue of more than \$18 million this year.

Like Clintar and Denison, Heads Up is in the midst of its 40th anniversary celebration. The anniversary is getting play on the company's Facebook page, web site, even its stationery.

"We're planning a big event for our customers at the end of the year," Mallory says. The company also has a planting initiative called "40 Trees in 40 Weeks." While the name is catchy, Mallory says it's more like 110 trees in 42 weeks.

› WEB EXTRA

Visit LandscapeManagement.net and click on Web Extras for Gary Mallory's two cents on work/life balance.



Heads Up Landscape Contractors has adapted to trends in xeriscaping and irrigation since its inception.

"We're planting them for non-profits and charitable organizations," he says. "The community's been great to us for 40 years, and we want to give something back that will last for a long time."

Heads Up's charitable initiatives extend well beyond tree planting.

As part of the 40th anniversary celebrations, Mallory has committed his company to support the Ronald McDonald House, Habitat for Humanity and an orphanage in Santa Fe.

"We went and interviewed them and asked them what they needed help with," Mallory says. It wasn't necessarily money. The Ronald McDonald House wanted help dealing with its landscape issues. Habitat for Humanity needed irrigation system help.

Mallory confesses he considered letting the anniversary go by unnoticed.

"I thought it might imply we're on the downslope," he says. But ultimately he decided you're only as old as you act.

"We're 40 years young," he says. "We're embracing new ideas constantly."

One of the biggest and most important changes, especially for a company based in the dry Southwest, has been the focus on water technology.

"Forty years ago we put a lawn on both sides of the driveway, both sides of the front sidewalk, both sides of the house," Mallory says. "Now, we're very selective about where we put lawns. In Albuquerque we've come to appreciate xeriscapes, environmentally sensitive landscapes. The technology with irrigation is amazing."

And the rate of change for American business in general, and landscaping in particular, is accelerating and will continue to do so, Mallory says.

Heads Up, Clintar and Denison have a combined 120 years in the Green Industry. It takes hard work to survive, but as Wilton says, "It's a very respectable way to make a living ... It's a dedication of many years of effort—getting whacked, dusting yourself off and going at it again."

But the most exciting part of running a Green Industry business, says Wilton: "There's probably more opportunity now than there ever was." **LMI**

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