

LAWN/TREE CARE

# The grass master

Ohio's Applicator of the Year proves there's more to quality lawn care than fertilizer.

By BETH GERACI

**M**att Tyler takes out the trash. He rakes the leaves, mows the lawn, even brings in the groceries.

No, that's not life at home. Those are some of the extra steps Tyler takes for his lawn care customers on the job. And they're just a few reasons why the Ohio Lawn Care Association (OLCA) named him its 2012 Applicator of the Year.

The award is designated for a lawn care applicator who demonstrates professionalism on the job and leadership at his or her company, and there's no doubt Tyler embodies both of those things, says Matt Ellis, Tyler's boss at Grass Master Inc., who nominated Tyler for the award.

"Once he started working for the company, he raised the bar for everybody else," Ellis says. "He's humble. He demonstrates a level of professionalism that we consider old school now." For example, Ellis says, Tyler watches out for his older customers, knows his clients' dogs and even spent an hour repairing a client's lawn mower.

"I've blown out their garages for them, just little things like that," Tyler says of his old-school style. Why? "I don't know. If they need help, they need help."

Tyler, 49, has worked as a lawn care professional for 24 years, 10 of them at Grass Master, based in Canal Fulton, Ohio. He's both honored and humbled by his Applicator of the Year award. "It's

really, really appreciated," he says. "It's nice to be recognized as an individual who cares and works hard."

## THE VOTES ARE IN

Applicator of the Year nominations are voted on by a nine-person board consisting of chemical manufacturers, distributors and lawn care companies from around Ohio, including Ellis—who serves as the board's vice president.

At first, board members could not nominate their own employees for the award, but that has since changed. "We thought, 'We've got these fantastic nominees and it's really not fair that they wouldn't be considered,'" Ellis says.

Nominations pour in from any of 300 Ohio Lawn Care Association members statewide. The award also is advertised through the Ohio Turf Foundation and at John Deere Landscapes locations around the state so that non-members can nominate candidates.

Tyler is the fourth recipient of the award—a plaque in the shape of Ohio.

Through his professionalism, honesty and willingness to do more than his job requires, Tyler has acquired

quite a fan base on his route. Unfortunately for some of those fans, Grass Master recently changed up its routes to increase its density.

To some of Tyler's customers, it felt like a cruel joke. Says Ellis: "I told one customer, 'Tyler's not going to be your guy anymore. We're changing the routes.' And the customer said, 'No way!'"

## IN-HOUSE IMPACT

Tyler has made an impression not only in the field, but also at the office.

"He's great. He is a pleasure to work with," says Grass Master office manager Carolyn Swinehart. "He's very cooperative. If you ask him to do something, he will do it."

Swinehart is so impressed by Tyler's work ethic that she was eager to share a complimentary letter from one of his customers. "We have been customers of Grass Master for 14 years," the letter stated. "The great looks of our lawn are mainly due to your products and your service technician Matt Tyler."

Tyler takes such praise in stride, saying he's just an ordinary guy who listens to his customers and uses common sense.

"I mean, yeah, I work long hours some days and it's a little much sometimes," he says. "But if you pace yourself it's all right. It's satisfying. It's gratifying. It makes it all worthwhile." **LM**

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