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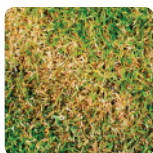
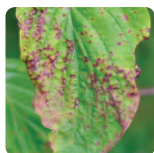
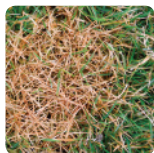


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ON THE COVER: PHOTO ©ISTOCK.COM/OJO_IMAGES



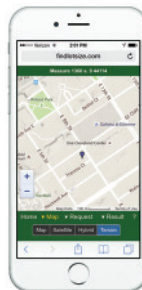
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→ Did you know *LM* co-produces a weekly web radio show? Landscape Live! is hosted by Jody Shilan, an award-winning landscape designer, former landscape design/build contractor, executive director of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association and industry consultant. He interviews landscape professionals and related experts on some of the industry's hottest topics. Check out all the episodes at **LandscapeLive.net**.

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SPRINTER

1 Driver is responsible for monitoring fluid levels and tire pressure between service visits. See Maintenance Booklet for details.
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FREIGHTLINER

EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

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The 99 percent

Small business is difficult to define. What do you consider to be a small versus large landscape company? A million dollars in annual revenue is a convenient benchmark because many entrepreneurs romanticize about making their first million. Others, anecdotally, peg \$3 million as a better benchmark of “making it” in this industry because one can apparently get to \$1 million or even \$2 million without much of a management team or sophisticated systems. Getting to \$3 million, they say, is a feat. So is \$3 million the big vs. small threshold? It depends who you ask.

Some would define many of the companies on our annual *LM150* list of the largest landscape companies, featured in this issue of *LM*, as small businesses. But, according to the Small Business Administration (SBA), not even the smallest company on our list, Green Lawn Fertilizing, is classified as a small business. Why? The SBA says \$7.5 million in revenue is the largest a landscaping services firm (NAICS 561730) can be to be considered a small business.

The SBA standard is used to determine eligibility for SBA financial assistance, other SBA programs and government procurement programs designed to help small businesses. Why \$7.5 million? Well, it's complicated. You can read the agency's 61-page explanation about how these determinations are made by industry if you'd like, but the short version is that \$7 million is an “anchor” size for the services, retail trade and construction industries, and the SBA adjusts up or down from there based on an analysis of many factors.


Maybe it's just me, but I think it's an interesting coincidence that the

LM150's basement butts up against the SBA's small company benchmark.

It's difficult to define the size of our industry, but some estimates peg the number of green industry service providers at as many as 400,000. (No wonder “fly-by-night competitors” are a recurring complaint in our *LM* reader surveys. There are tens of thousands of them, literally.)

Even if you believe 400,000 is an inflated number, and even if you acknowledge the *LM150* list is imperfect (considering some firms decline to participate and there are others we just don't know about), a back-of-the-envelope calculation reveals that 99 percent of the companies in the landscape industry are small businesses by the federal government's definition.

To me, that means despite years of consolidation and investors entering the industry, it remains to be highly fragmented and dominated by small businesses. It also means the majority of the readers of this magazine are among the 99 percent. We know you're interested in the happenings of the 1 percent because reader inquiries and Google Analytics tell us so. And we can infer that you want to know how these companies got where they are today, if and how they stay there and how they deal with the universal challenges of the industry.

That's what we aim to publish every year when we put out our June issue featuring the *LM150* list. It's not supposed to be a who's who list. It's supposed to be a guide to help the vast majority learn about how to overcome the obstacles that stand in everyone's way. 



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"Don't try to be cheaper; you'll never win that war."

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MORE ONLINE

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at LandscapeManagement.net.

"The best tool smaller companies have is their ability to connect with their customers on a more personal level."

"A personal service promise and demonstrated capacity/ability."

"Find and exploit the niches where customer service is critical or where the sales volume is lower but the profit is high."

"Showcase the many benefits of working with a smaller engaged ownership; actively more agile to meet changing needs, involved in the local community, etc."

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BIG PICTURE

FAMILY STAYCATION

LOCATION Central Ohio

COMPANY Hidden Creek
Landscaping, Columbus, Ohio

THE DETAILS The clients set out to create an at-home resort they could enjoy at their leisure with their special-needs child. The rear yard functions as a therapeutic space and also provides entertainment space for family and friends.

The Hidden Creek team had to marry the yard's different elevations to create an accessible space. Also, all utilities located in the back corner of the lot had to be screened from view but still accessible for service.

Accessibility was achieved by using non-skid materials, proper table heights, ramps where necessary and matching up thresholds to eliminate steps wherever possible.

The homeowner contracted all swimming-pool design and construction. All details, including tile and coping, were selected prior to Hidden Creek's involvement.

PHOTO The pool and its surroundings are the focal point of the project, but the hidden gem is a rainbow garden for the homeowners' son. Its goal is to provide as much color as possible, while keeping bee traffic to a minimum.

See more photos from this project, which earned a National Landscape Awards of Excellence Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals, at LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture.

PHOTO: TREVOR BOYLE STUDIO



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NEWS HOW-TO'S

LANDSCAPE
INDUSTRY
TRENDS,
VIEWS
AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

BRUCE'S VIEW

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

LET IT RAIN

Rain days often can be unproductive days for lawn care professionals, but at Weed Man Lawn Care in Middleton, Wis., rain isn't always a bad thing.

On a soggy day, as long as it's not torrential rain, the production team often switches gears to do grub control applications.

"They have to be watered in anyway, so the timing is perfect," says Brad DeBels, Ph.D, director of operations for Weed Man Lawn Care.

The approach works for both preventive and curative applications, although many curative applications are done as soon as possible, he says. Preventive applications in June are prime time for rainy day grub control.

"We'll try to time it with the forecast, either on a rain day or right before a weekend rain," DeBels says.

If applications aren't timed with rain, watering-in falls on the customers' shoulders, and you never know if it's done properly—grub apps need one quarter to one half inch of water—if at all. If these insecticides aren't watered in, the products may perform poorly, creating callbacks, which waste time and materials and drain profits.

“It's a fantastic approach because it's helping customers out in the long term.”



BROUGHT TO YOU BY



JOHN DEERE

RECOMMENDER

Vehicles for turf care

Which do you prefer and why?



Oasis Turf & Tree in Cincinnati uses customized Freightliner Sprinter vans. For more details, read the *LM* January cover story at buff.ly/1GHa9Z5.



RICK LANORE
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR, MRW LAWN
LA PLATA, MD.

"We use Isuzu NPR medium-duty trucks. They're heavy-duty enough to carry the volume of water we need for our liquid applications and also good for granular materials. The truck bed we use is BrandFX. They customize the trucks to our specifications, so we can custom blend our applications on-site."



SAM LANG
PRESIDENT, FAIRWAY GREEN
RALEIGH, N.C.

"We use Chevrolet, Dodge and Ford pickups with 300-gallon units from Graham Spray Equipment. The 300/100 split unit gives us enough capacity to run a residential route, so you can utilize pickup trucks more vs. buying cabovers. As long as you have an 8-foot bed, these 300/100s will fit just fine."

BRUCE'S VIEW


BY BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

PROTECT THE NEST

Arizona Cardinals fans use the phrase "protect the nest" to refer to winning at home. You can easily adapt this concept as an action plan to prevent your top employees from being poached.

Years ago, poaching was taboo. Most companies would never think of going to a competitor's job site or waiting for staff to leave the yard to approach them. Unfortunately, we've seen these courtesies fall by the wayside. By "protecting the nest," you'll increase the odds that your employees will resist poaching. Here's how:

- Make sure your pay rates and benefits are competitive.
- Listen to what your employees are saying and not saying to stay on top of any signs of frustration.
- Keep appreciation and respect top of mind. Employees who feel undervalued or unappreciated are easy targets. Group recognition events help. They're different from personal appreciation, but together they're powerful tools for loyalty.
- Show you're invested in their futures by offering opportunities for advancement. Offer training and professional development, and promote from within.
- Offer a healthy work/life balance: consider alternative work hours, flex time or other options to help valued employees balance their needs and stress.
- If employees leave, let them know they're welcome back. It may be hard to feel that way when it happens, but I've found we get back more than we don't. And when they come back, they're even more secure and better employees.
- Prevent temptation by incentivizing and encouraging your employees to "love the nest." 

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STEP BY STEP

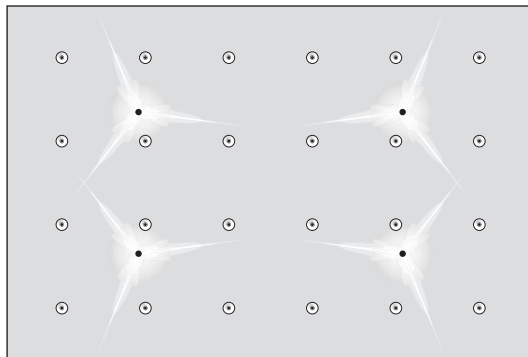
How to do an irrigation audit

An irrigation audit is a good opportunity to ensure clients' irrigation systems are working properly. Use the findings to create or tweak irrigation schedules for efficiency.

- Before testing the system, check that it is in proper working order and complies with local codes. Identify and correct any defects.
- While doing the audit, monitor the wind speed, and record it every five minutes. The wind must be 5 mph or less.
- Perform the audit during the same time of day irrigation normally takes place. Use the appropriate pressure-testing device at the beginning and end of each zone.
- Place the catchments along the edge of each zone 12 to 24 inches in from the edge. Use at least 24 uniform catch devices. Larger collectors give better repeatable results. Spacing and test runtimes should be consistent and appropriate for the sprinkler type and arc. Run the system for the same amount of time commonly used to irrigate the area.
- After the system runs, the water volume (in milliliters) should be one and a half times the throat area (in square inches) of the catch device. So, if the throat area of the catch device is 30 square inches, the average volume of the water should be 45 ml ($30 \times 1.5 = 45$). If the water catchment is below average, it will affect distribution, and you may need to increase the pressure. When the water level is too high, it means there's excessive pressure, which may damage the system.
- If there are several identical zones (same heads, spacing, pressure and more), you may test one-third to one-half the zones to get an average.

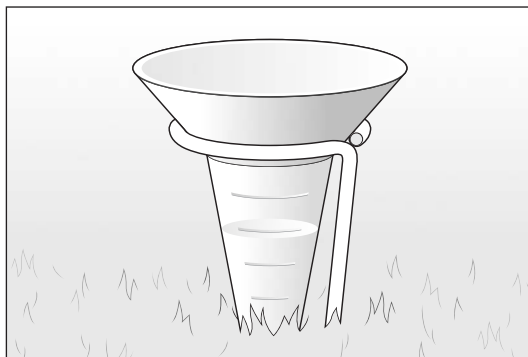
Don't forget to record the following data: head locations, head spacing, make/model/nozzle sizes, catch device locations, catchment readings, test run time, meter readings (if available), pressure readings with locations, wind speed readings, soil types, root zone depths and the date you tested. 📝

SOURCE: The Irrigation Association



STEP 1

Equally space at least 24 calibrated catch devices with metal support stakes throughout the zone. Run the irrigation system for the required time.



STEP 2

Multiply the catch device's throat area in square inches by 1.5. Check the water volume in milliliters in the catchments to make sure it equals the same amount.



STEP 3

Record and document your findings throughout the audit, making sure the wind speed stays 5 mph or less.



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NEW STUFF

**1. HSC18 PRO SOD CUTTER****COMPANY:** Classen**URL:** classenturfcare.com

The Classen HSC18 Pro Sod Cutter features a cutting blade on the bottom of the machine that cuts 20 strokes per second, designed for consistent cutting depth and smooth results. Classen offers two length options—52 in. or 55 in.—and four blade sizes—12, 16, 20 or 24 in. It's powered by your choice of a 5 hp Honda GX160 engine or an 8 hp Honda GX240.

2. PB-580 BACKPACK BLOWER**COMPANY:** Echo**URL:** echo-usa.com

The PB-580 features full-padded, upper-and-lower back support. The four-point vibration reduction system is designed to increase operator comfort and reduce fatigue, and the new grip design is modeled for all-day use. The machine weighs as little as 22.6 lbs. in tube-throttle configuration or 22.9 lbs. in hip throttle. It features a 58.2-cubic-cm, two-stroke engine that helps deliver air volume of 510 cfm and air speed of 215 mph.

3. QP RIMSULFURON 25 DF**COMPANY:** Quali-Pro**URL:** quali-pro.com

Quali-Pro's dry, flowable herbicide now comes in a new 5-oz. bottle. Rimsulfuron 25 DF is designed for weed control in spring transition and fall overseeding on warm season turf. The product tackles problem weeds, like annual bluegrass, ryegrass and more.



CHECK OUT MORE NEW STUFF ONLINE

To stay up to date on all the latest landscape industry products and services, visit LandscapeManagement.net/tag/product-news.

4. COOLTERRA

COMPANY: CoolPlanet

URL: CoolTerra.com

CoolTerra is soil designed to be highly porous, retaining water and nutrients at a plant's root zone like a sponge. The result is increased density and resiliency and decreased nitrate runoff on landscape applications, the company says. It's available in 1.3 cubic yard sacks to meet high volume needs of municipalities, professional landscapers and golf courses.

5. HT144 AIRSPADE SHRUB GUN

COMPANY: AirSpade

URL: airspade.com

AirSpade's HT144 Shrub Gun is a compact, compressed air soil excavation tool. Delivering compressed air at Mach 2 speeds, the machine removes soil and other underground objects without damaging tree roots, cables, metal or plastic pipes. The machine is compact, weighing less than 5 lbs. with a 2-ft. barrel. It operates at 60 cfm and can run on a 15-hp compressor or a standard 185-cfm, tow-behind unit.

6. SERIES 37000 HOSE REEL TRAILER

COMPANY: Reelcraft

URL: reelcraft.com

Reelcraft's hose reel trailer for Series 37000 reels is modeled for grounds maintenance applications requiring up to 1-in. ID by 100-ft. of hose. The trailer wheelbase matches typical work vehicles, and the wheels are mounted inside the bed to prevent snagging of trees or shrubs. The extra-long, 32-in. trailer tongue is designed for sharper turns and easier back up.

SAFETYWATCH

➔ This photo was staged to show several safety hazards or dangerous work habits. How many can you identify? Flip to page 69 for a list of potential hazards.

DOWNLOAD IT

Visit LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch to print a PDF of this page. Post it at your facility and encourage your employees to challenge their hazard-spotting skills.

Ed. Note: Thanks to Schill Grounds Management in North Ridgeville, Ohio, for participating in our SafetyWatch photo shoots. Schill and LM do not practice or condone the unsafe methods demonstrated during photo staging.



PHOTO: LAURA WATILLO BLAKE

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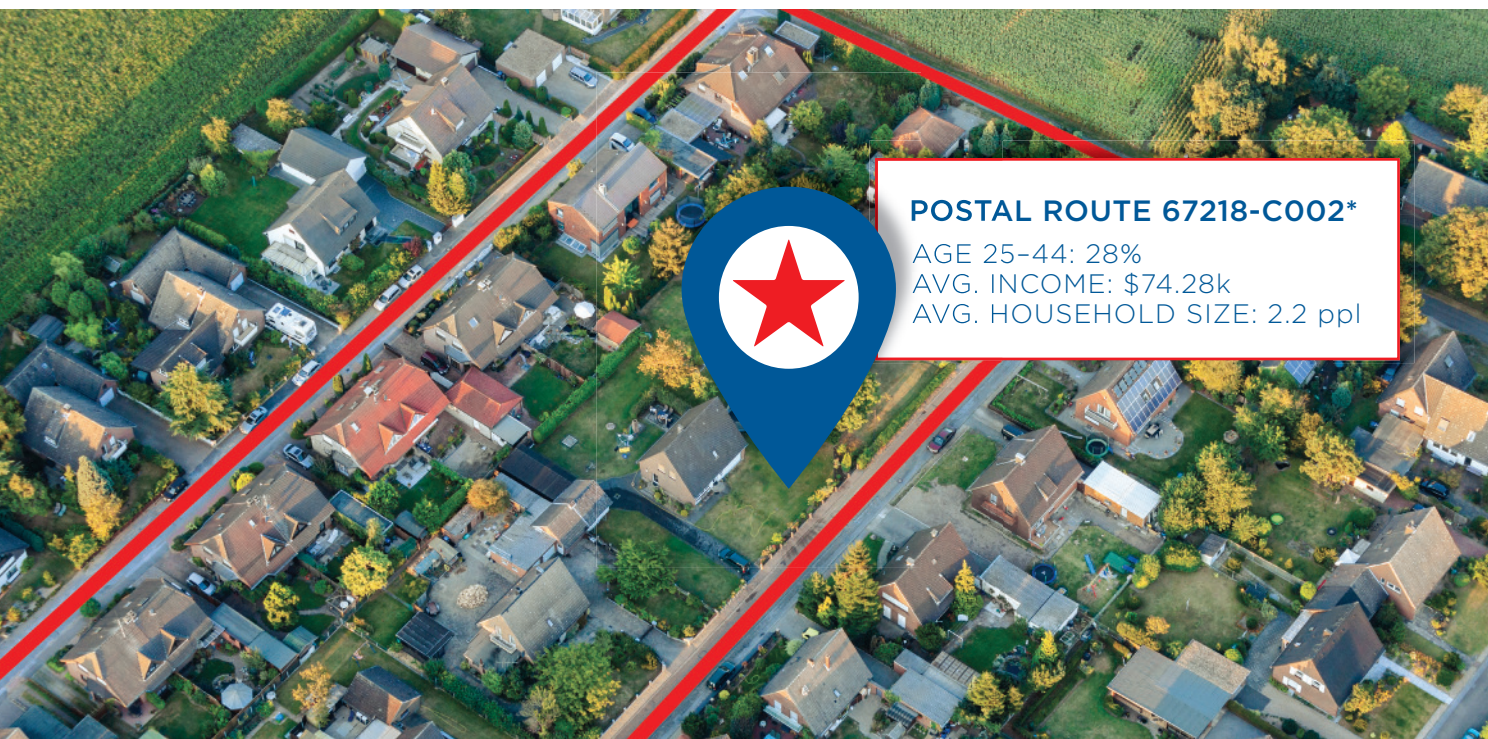
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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

[OPINION]

'Cosmetic' pesticide use crackdown

What you can do if local governments move to ban pesticides. **BY GREGG ROBERTSON**

Anti-pesticide forces are seeing some success in convincing local governments to ban "cosmetic" pesticides. Anti-pesticide activists define cosmetic pesticides as those used to make lawns and landscapes look better—or in other words, most of the pesticides used by the green industry.

In July 2013, Takoma Park, Md., passed the Safe Grow Act of 2013, which generally restricts the use of "cosmetic" lawn pesticides on both private and public property throughout the city. Takoma Park is the first local government in the U.S. in more than 25 years to take an action banning pesticide use.

The Takoma Park action was followed last November by the community of Ogunquit, Maine, which voted to prohibit the use of pesticides for turf, landscape and other outdoor pest management.

So how likely is it that this movement will spread to other communities in these states and around the country?

The industry pesticide group Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) reports that Montgomery County, Md., (where Takoma Park is located) has a bill under consideration similar to the Takoma Park ordinance. Final action on this measure isn't expected until this month, the *Washington Post* reports.

The anti-pesticide advocacy group Beyond Pesticides



reports that other communities in Maine are interested in passing ordinances similar to the action taken by Ogunquit.

NEIGHBORS TO THE NORTH

In Canada the forces against cosmetic pesticides were well organized and, in a matter of a few years, swept across the country. In 2009, the provincial government of Ontario followed Quebec in implementing a ban on the use of cosmetic pesticides. By 2010, according to anti-pesticide group Coalition for a Healthy Ottawa, 171 Canadian local govern-

ments had imposed laws regulating or banning pesticides, covering 80 percent of the country's population.

In the U.S., Maryland and Maine are two of only seven states that do not preempt local governments from regulating or banning pesticides. Other states are Alaska, Hawaii, Nevada, Vermont and Utah, according to RISE.

The other 43 states have some form of preemption law that prohibits local governments within their states from banning or regulating pesticides. So unless the 43 states

PHOTO: ©ISTOCK.COM/KIRBY HAMILTON

NEWSPEED

SWINGLE PROMOTES

Denver-based Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care promoted Fort Collins



Branch Manager Tom Lynch to the newly created position of Northern Colorado regional manager.

NEW PRODUCTS

Helena Chemical Co. introduced Receptor, a plant growth regulator, a new granular micronutrient mix called MicroMerge 5544ISP and On Deck, a herbicide with a con-



centrated formulation of dicamba and 2,4-D acids.

EXPANSION

The Andersons, a plant nutrient company based in Maumee, Ohio, purchased

Kay Flo Industries, a manufacturer of liquid starter fertilizers and plant nutrients. The Andersons said it expects the acquisition to expand its wholesale and specialty fertilizer business.



← IN THE KNOW

Stay informed about the anti-pesticide movement, use integrated pest management and communicate with your customers, Gregg Robertson says.

plethora of state preemption laws now on the books to prevent local governments from implementing pesticide regulations in the 43 states. Local governments already have the authority to regulate pesticides but for the state preemptions.

Cracks are beginning to appear in the state preemption laws themselves. In a decision that rocked Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in 2013 struck down the portion of a state law that preempted local governments from passing zoning ordinances that restricted gas well drilling. The high court held that the state constitution prohibited the state government from restricting local government actions that protected the environment, public health and safety.

There's concern this decision could be used as a precedent for challenging other state preemptions on local government action, such as the pesticide preemption. So far, such a case has not been

brought before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, but activists have said that they are looking for such a case.

As an industry, we need to be aware of what's happening in the communities in which we work. The anti-pesticide movement in Canada was well organized and moved simultaneously across the country to urge the adoption of the local anti-pesticide laws. The movement caught the Canadian industry and the provincial landscape trade organizations flatfooted.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you hear about local governments in the towns where you work considering anti-pesticide laws, attend public meetings and speak up for the responsible use of pesticides in the managed landscape. Alert other landscape companies in your area, your state landscape and nursery association and RISE. Your state association and RISE have science-based resources that you can draw upon to counter

the anti-pesticide forces, and they may have a grassroots effort to resist the regulation underway, as RISE does in Montgomery County.

Within your own company, be sure you're practicing integrated pest management (IPM). IPM will make your pest control efforts more effective and save you money, but it takes training and knowledge. Most state cooperative extension services provide this training at a reasonable cost.

Finally, let your customers know you're using IPM and applying pesticides in a responsible way that minimizes their use. The anti-pesticide activists will be going door-to-door spreading their message. Get ahead of them with your message before it's too late. ☺

Robertson blogs about government affairs for LandscapeManagement.net, where this article first appeared. He's a government relations consultant for the Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Association (PLNA) and president of Conewago Ventures. Reach him at gregg.robertson@conewagoventures.com.

change their laws or a court decision strikes them down, the anti-pesticide movement will have trouble taking hold in local governments outside of these seven states.

But will state preemption laws hold? The U.S. Supreme Court in 1991 held that local governments have the authority to restrict pesticide use under federal law. This decision led to the



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MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

Continuing to serve

Government contracts fuel former Marine's New York landscape and snow removal business. BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER



In 2010, Chris Dambach and his fellow Marines were sitting on the back of a vehicle, on the border of Syria and Iraq, talking about where life after the military would take them. Some of the guys mentioned they would go to college, while others talked about joining family businesses. But there, surrounded by desert, Dambach decided he would use the skills he learned previously working in the green industry and start his own landscape company when he returned home.

Knowing that Dambach was always full of ideas, his comrades challenged him to follow through with the plan. It turned out to be a challenge he was willing to take.

Later that year, after sustaining an injury, Dambach returned home to Syracuse, N.Y., and Veteran Lawn & Landscape was born.

"More than anything, I wanted to be my own boss," Dambach says. "I didn't want to have to answer to anyone—except for my wife—when I got back."

Veteran Lawn & Landscape is now a \$1 million company—on track to reach

\$1.5 million in 2015—with 17 employees and 23 subcontractors. Dambach's hard work hasn't gone unnoticed, earning him several awards, including the SBA Syracuse District's Veteran-Owned Business Achievement Award in 2015.

Keeping with its roots, 85 percent of the company's clients are government agencies, such as national cemeteries, military bases and Veterans Affairs hospitals, with commercial customers making up the other 15 percent. Lawn maintenance and snow removal comprise nearly 80 percent of the company's service offerings, but Dambach also provides waste management, window washing and janitorial services to his biggest clients. He finds and bids on most of his jobs through government websites, such as neco.navy.mil, which lists opportunities through the Navy. The amount of each contract ranges from \$5,000 to \$3.5 million, depending on the size of the job and what's involved.

"I served in the military, so getting to work on bases and in national cemeteries is very rewarding," he says. "In a way, I still feel like I'm serving,

just without the uniform."

While some might think that working so closely with the government would be a red-tape nightmare, Dambach says that overall he's had great luck. Along with finding the work so rewarding, he says it's "guaranteed money" as long as the job gets done. The contracts are typically five years, and the first year is guaranteed. After that, the contracts are evaluated on an annual basis, but "as long as you don't run anyone over with your lawn mower," Dambach says, the incumbent typically gets to fulfill all five years.

WORKING WITH THE FEDS

Despite the perks, government contracts also have drawbacks. They're paperwork-intensive, and each agency has its own invoicing systems, which are intricate and can be complicated to navigate. Dambach also has to provide

Continued on page 24

AWARD WINNER

From left: SBA Acting Associate Administrator for the Office of Veterans Business Development Barbara Carson, Veteran Lawn & Landscape owner Chris Dambach and SBA Syracuse District Director Bernard Paprocki.

PHOTO: U.S. SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION/SYRACUSE DISTRICT OFFICE

NEWSPEED

CONSOLIDATION TO COME?

One Rock Capital Partners, a New York-based investment firm, formed Monarch Landscape

Holdings to consolidate landscape companies in the Western U.S. Signature Landscape Services, based in

Redmond, Wash., was the first company to join Monarch.

MANUFACTURER MOVES

Briggs & Stratton Corp. acquired Billy Goat Industries, a Missouri-

based manufacturer of specialty turf equipment for approximately \$26 million in cash.

ON THE MOVE

Kubota Tractor Corp. will relocate its head-

quarters to Grapevine, Texas, from Torrence, Calif., by 2017. The manufacturer of turf and construction equipment also plans to build a new plant in Gainesville, Ga.

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Continued from page 22 any capital upfront, and he plans to start bidding on bigger projects that will require a substantial investment in materials, such as re-aligning gravestones and re-sodding a national cemetery to give it the “pristine look that the vets deserve.” Dambach also had a particularly tough time when the government shut down for 18 days in late 2013. With government agencies comprising more than 90 percent of his clientele at that time, he had to lay off about 14 crew members for six to seven weeks at a loss of \$25,000 in profit for that year.

“That was hard to tell your employees,” Dambach says. “And when they asked when they could come back to work, I didn’t know. It was an open-ended question. These guys have families and mortgages. It was really tough.”

The government shutdown made Dambach realize he needed to diversify to survive. He started going after more commercial clients, and in 2014 he also started a business entirely separate from Veteran Lawn & Landscape: a food truck called Bacon Bandits specializing in all things bacon. He had the truck at festivals nearly every weekend last year, but he’s currently in the process of selling it to focus on bottling and selling one of Bacon Bandits’ popular homemade burger toppings, Bacon Gold.

“With a food truck, people have to eat no matter what,” he says. “The goal was to offset any future government shutdowns so I could survive.”

To balance his two businesses, Dambach relies on the leadership of his managers and supervisors, and the skills he gained during his six years in the Marine Corps. His experience leading and working in small groups, such as the four-man Marine Corps fireteam, has been invaluable in managing his crews. Through the military, Dambach

Continued on page 26



“I still feel like I’m serving, just without the uniform.”

—CHRIS DAMBACH

WEB EXTRA

Chris Dambach won a 2015 Super Bowl commercial spot with M&T Bank. View it in the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net.



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↑ LIFE IS GOOD


"I'm having fun, enjoying life, and my family is growing," says Chris Dambach, pictured here with his wife, Meghan, and son Gavin, 4.

Continued from page 24

also learned to treat his guys the way he would want to be treated and not to ask people to do something he wouldn't do himself.

Another skill is punctuality: "Don't roll in five minutes late; be there 10 minutes early," Dambach says. The importance of looking your best and being prepared at all times "with your shoelaces tied, a pen and your business cards," and the ability to work long hours until the job is done are yet other military-

inspired traits Dambach has acquired.

"There are so many skills I learned, it's hard to narrow it down to a few," he says. "Everything I learned in the Marines I have carried over to the civilian sector." 

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

BY YOUR BOOTSTRAPS

One of the most important aspects to securing government contracts is a resume with proven performance, says Chris Dambach, owner of Veteran Lawn & Landscape in Syracuse, N.Y. To gain experience working with government agencies, Dambach bid on—and won—a maintenance contract for a New York Veterans Affairs hospital, even though it was based five hours away. Every other Friday evening, he and his crew would make the five-hour drive to the job site, sleep in their trailer to save money on hotel expenses, pack a cooler of food to save on food costs and complete the job on Saturday. After maintaining the property for two years, Dambach felt confident enough to put the hospital on his resume and in his portfolio.

"That allowed me to go and bid on bigger contracts," Dambach says. In fact, his performance on that contract allowed him to successfully win a \$3.5 million dollar landscaping contract with the Long Island National Cemetery in 2013, and he's acquired other contracts since. "You have to put in the work at the beginning and bootstrap it any way you can."

PHOTO: VETERAN LAWN & LANDSCAPE

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Lease or buy?

Use this chart to compare different options for acquiring equipment. BY MARISA PALMIERI

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Down payment or first lease payment		
Interest rate		
Length of lease or loan		
Monthly payment		
Purchase option		
Total of monthly payments		
Total paid if buyer purchases at end		
Trade value at 36 months		
Cost of extended warranty, if purchasing		
Total cost of lease or loan, including maintenance/warranties over lifetime		
CASH AVAILABILITY CONSIDERATIONS (YES/NO)	LEASE	LOAN
Is there sufficient cash flow to handle monthly payments?		
Are maintenance costs included?		
Are insurance costs included?		
For a seasonal business, does the lease or loan allow for flexibility to fit periods of sufficient cash flow better?		

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IN THIS YEAR'S LM150 issue we have an opportunity to learn how the leadership of the top companies effectively navigate and overcome business challenges such as recruiting qualified labor, employee retention, rising input costs and new regulations.

These challenges are probably similar to the ones you've faced, and will continue to face, as you grow your business. Whether it is finding and retaining employees, growing market share in the face of tougher competition or navigating in the world of government regulations, it is vital as business owners to have a strategy and surround yourself with trusted business partners.

When Deere & Co. first started in 1837 as a one-man blacksmith, we too faced similar challenges. From growing qualified staff and expanding our product offerings to battling competitors in the market, Deere & Co. grew from a small business to one of the most trusted brands in the landscape industry, all while maintaining our core values of integrity, innovation, commitment and quality.

As we have grown our business, we continue to evolve our business to provide you, our customers, with the solutions you need to effectively manage and grow your businesses. It is our job to support your business, both before and after the sale, to ensure that you have the support to grow.

It is vital for you to develop the trusted relationships with a supplier who can support your business now and into the future. Understanding this need, we strive to offer an extensive network of John Deere dealers that will be there for you and your business before and after the sale. The John Deere dealer network gives you access to factory-trained service technicians and knowledgeable staff to support your company's needs.

Equipment is only one part of the value proposition. Our GreenFleet™ Loyalty Rewards program rewards you for your purchases and provides an extensive list of business solutions to enable you to save money and time that can then be reinvested in your employees and business.

Even though we've grown a lot since our humble beginnings in 1837, we are still committed to providing our customers with innovative products, support and solutions that enable them to continue to thrive.

As your businesses continue to grow, undoubtedly you will face new challenges. Just remember that every challenge presents an opportunity to learn something new and grow.

Let's take this opportunity to learn from our peers and develop a strategy that will guide our businesses to succeed.

Have a prosperous 2015!

Ken Taylor,
Landscape Industry Certified
*General Manager,
Corporate Business Division*





150

RANKINGS

		Headquarters	2014 Revenue (U.S. Dollars)	% Rev Change from 2013	% Projected Change for 2015	FTE/ Seasonal Employees	% Comm/ Res/Gov
1	The Brickman Group / ValleyCrest Landscape Cos.	Rockville, Md./ Calabasas, Calif.	\$2,000,000,000	NR	NR	22000/NR	NR/NR/NR
2	TruGreen	Memphis, Tenn.	\$936,000,000	NR	NR	8500/NR	18/82/0
3	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	Kent, Ohio	\$789,000,000	11%	6%	8275/382	NR/NR/NR
4	Scotts Lawn Service^	Marysville, Ohio	\$316,800,000	2%	5%	600/1850	2/98/0
5	Bartlett Tree Experts	Stamford, Conn.	\$210,000,000	7%	8%	1500/35	NR/NR/NR
6	TruGreen LandCare	Ijamsville, Md.	\$205,000,000	8%	0%	2200/2500	90/0/10
7	U.S. Lawns	Orlando, Fla.	\$163,000,000	12%	10%	1350/650	100/0/0
8	Weed Man	Mississauga, Ontario	\$143,219,156	7%	10%	800/2700	5/95/0
9	Ferrandino & Son	Farmingdale, N.Y.	\$121,000,000	35%	30%	335/NR	100/0/0
10	Gothic Landscape	Valencia, Calif.	\$114,000,000	10%	9%	1100/NR	100/0/0
11	Ruppert Landscape	Laytonsville, Md.	\$110,000,000	33%	4%	1050/NR	85/0/15
12	Merit Service Solutions	Malvern, Pa.	\$101,446,000	22%	5%	300/200	90/0/10
13	Lawn Doctor	Holmdel, N.J.	\$101,278,707	5%	5%	50/2	5/95/0
14	Ambius*	Des Plaines, Ill.	\$101,000,000	1%	0%	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
15	Yellowstone Landscape Group	Bunnell, Fla.	\$95,688,000	14%	0%	1100/400	100/0/0
16	SavATree	Bedford Hills, N.Y.	\$85,000,000	13%	9%	674/100	20/78/2
17	Mainscape	Fishers, Ind.	\$75,304,000	27%	5%	800/350	100/0/0
18	Clintar Landscape Management*	Markham, Ontario	\$61,236,000	0%	NR	NR/NR	0/0/0
19	Marina Landscape	Anaheim, Calif.	\$61,000,000	5%	5%	690/0	30/0/70
20	Massey Services^	Orlando, Fla.	\$56,995,840	8%	12%	1650/0	12/88/0
21	Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper/ Greater Texas Landscapes)	Tucson, Ariz.	\$56,535,230	25%	9%	800/200	80/0/20
22	Naturalawn of America	Frederick, Md.	\$50,513,514	10%	5%	422/39	5/95/0
23	Meadows Farms	Chantilly, Va.	\$49,990,000	3%	5%	140/400	5/95/0
24	Lucas Tree Experts	Portland, Maine	\$49,000,000	14%	5%	525/0	86/7/7
	Acres Group	Wauconda, Ill.	\$49,000,000	13%	8%	110/700	94/5/1
26	Denison Landscaping	Fort Washington, Md.	\$47,200,000	4%	5%	210/180	75/15/10
27	Christy Webber Landscapes	Chicago, Ill.	\$46,600,000	30%	15%	500/NR	65/20/15
28	Spring-Green Lawn Care	Plainfield, Ill.	\$45,351,000	8%	10%	112/405	6/93/1
29	The Greenery	Hilton Head Island, S.C.	\$43,000,000	11%	8%	600/125	80/14/6
30	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	Tampa, Fla.	\$42,000,000	5%	10%	600/80	70/0/30
31	Garden Design	Farmers Branch, Texas	\$40,600,000	26%	15%	55/NR	40/60/0
32	Jensen Corp.	San Jose, Calif.	\$40,000,000	-4%	5%	329/0	60/32/8
33	Mariani Enterprises, Inc. d/b/a/ Mariani Landscape	Lake Bluff, Ill.	\$38,515,000	8%	12%	144/335	12/88/0
34	Rotolo Consultants	Slidell, La.	\$38,000,000	81%	0%	120/180	80/0/20
35	Sebert Landscaping*	Bartlett, Ill.	\$34,720,000	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
36	Dixie Landscape	Medley, Fla.	\$34,398,000	8%	10%	305/0	95/5/0
37	Terracare Associates	Littleton, Colo.	\$33,878,780	18%	38%	318/100	54/0/46
38	Cagwin & Dorward	Novato, Calif.	\$33,800,000	8%	8%	350/0	70/20/10
39	Mission Landscape Cos.	Irvine, Calif.	\$32,930,180	7%	10%	590/0	100/0/0
40	Girard Environmental Services	Sanford, Fla.	\$32,233,400	31%	14%	300/120	100/0/0
41	The Grounds Guys	Waco, Texas	\$32,000,000	76%	25%	400/92	62/28/10
42	Reliable Property Services	Eagan, Minn.	\$30,300,000	11%	10%	75/400	93/0/7
43	Gothic Grounds Management	Valencia, Calif.	\$29,414,450	3%	9%	430/0	97/1/2
44	Clean Scapes	Austin, Texas	\$28,591,124	32%	35%	254/100	88/0/12
45	Southern Botanical	Dallas, Texas	\$28,546,414	19%	5%	160/96	42/58/0
46	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	Woodbine, Md.	\$28,200,000	11%	20%	250/100	NR/NR/NR
47	Landscape Concepts Management	Grayslake, Ill.	\$28,100,000	18%	15%	70/300	NR/NR/NR
48	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping^	San Antonio, Texas	\$27,930,000	11%	-10%	250/200	40/10/50
49	McFall & Berry Landscape Management^	Annandale, Va.	\$27,521,340	10%	5%	125/165	98/0/2
50	D. Schumacher Landscaping^	West Bridgewater, Mass.	\$27,097,000	11%	10%	50/150	59/41/0

LEGEND NR = Not reported; ^ Indicates estimate, based on projected revenue reported in 2014; * Indicates a portion of reported revenue was removed (such as structural pest control, termite control or other non-green industry service)

		Headquarters	2014 Revenue (U.S. Dollars)	% Rev Change from 2013	% Projected Change for 2015	FTE/ Seasonal Employees	% Comm/ Res/Gov
51	Bemus Landscape	San Clemente, Calif.	\$27,060,000	5%	10%	425/0	97/1/2
52	Chalet	Wilmette, Ill.	\$27,000,000	7%	5%	162/127	0/100/0
53	Ryan Lawn & Tree	Overland Park, Kan.	\$26,703,859	5%	10%	217/0	5/95/0
54	Nutri-lawn Corp.*	Toronto, Ontario	\$26,092,500	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
55	Juniper Landscaping	Ft. Myers, Fla.	\$25,688,000	60%	30%	200/0	95/1/4
56	Gachina Landscape Management	Menlo Park, Calif.	\$25,119,347	14%	13%	335/47	80/0/20
57	Environmental Management (EMI)	Dublin , Ohio	\$25,000,000	18%	10%	85/210	70/2/28
58	James River Grounds Management	Glen Allen, Va.	\$24,760,000	14%	5%	140/255	100/0/0
59	Pierre Landscape	Irwindale, Calif.	\$24,500,000	20%	10%	197/0	NR/NR/NR
60	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	Middleton, Wis.	\$24,456,500	-2%	5%	86/242	80/20/0
61	Gibbs Landscape Co.	Smyrna, Ga.	\$23,583,000	9%	0%	283/30	63/37/0
62	Caretaker Landscape & Tree Management	Gilbert, Ariz.	\$23,550,487	66%	10%	252/NR	100/0/0
63	Scott Byron & Co.	Lake Bluff, Ill.	\$23,274,000	4%	8%	89/118	5/95/0
64	Russell Landscape Group	Dacula, Ga.	\$21,950,000	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
65	Naturescape	Muskego, Wis.	\$21,124,242	14%	10%	215/10	5/95/0
66	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	Denver, Colo.	\$21,046,399	10%	8%	215/50	33/67/0
67	Parker Interior Plantscape	Scotch Plains, N.J.	\$21,000,000	100%	30%	110/20	99/1/0
	Merchants Landscape Services	Santa Ana, Calif.	\$21,000,000	20%	18%	420/0	0/0/100
69	McHale Landscape Design	Upper Marlboro, Md.	\$20,600,000	0%	10%	195/0	0/100/0
70	High Tech Landscapes	Branchburg, N.J.	\$20,569,904	18%	10%	38/315	60/30/10
71	Landscape Workshop	Birmingham, Ala.	\$20,493,602	13%	10%	267/131	88/8/4
72	DLC Resources	Phoenix, Ariz.	\$20,100,000	0%	0%	310/0	100/0/0
73	Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping & Garden Centers	Portland, Ore.	\$19,832,000	8%	2%	201/63	49/51/0
74	Yard-Nique	Morrisville , N.C.	\$19,675,000	18%	22%	190/150	95/5/0
75	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	Germantown, Wis.	\$19,460,000	4%	6%	250/50	75/20/5
76	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	Albuquerque, N.M.	\$18,925,000	8%	6%	250/80	70/15/15
77	Lambert's	Dallas, Texas	\$18,875,000	28%	5%	180/0	7/93/0
78	Senske Services^	Kennewick, Wash.	\$18,720,000	5%	8%	220/130	25/70/5
79	Artistic Maintenance (formerly Landscape Specialists)*	Lake Forest, Calif.	\$18,564,000	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
80	Clarence Davids & Co.	Matteson, Ill.	\$18,500,000	6%	3%	75/175	90/5/5
81	Benchmark Landscape	Poway, Calif.	\$18,258,000	7%	5%	238/0	95/2/3
82	HighGrove Partners	Austell, Ga.	\$17,900,000	21%	5%	150/40	100/0/0
83	Stay Green	Santa Clarita, Calif.	\$17,853,162	107%	18%	263/2	91/1/8
84	New Way Landscape & Tree Services	San Diego, Calif.	\$17,500,000	42%	10%	205/0	75/0/25
85	TBG Landscape	Whitby, Ontario	\$17,245,000	-1%	8%	85/33	12/28/60
86	ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design	Venice, Fla.	\$17,000,000	10%	20%	190/30	80/20/0
87	Sposato Landscape Co.	Milton, Del.	\$16,500,000	11%	13%	268/60	80/20/0
88	Integrated Landscape Management	Tempe, Ariz.	\$16,244,515	4%	5%	229/0	100/0/0
89	Greenscapes	Naples, Fla.	\$16,200,000	15%	12%	258/0	NR/NR/NR
90	The Loving Group	Charlotte, N.C.	\$16,100,000	58%	30%	94/0	81/19/0
91	Munie Greencare Professionals	Caseyville, Ill.	\$16,081,282	7%	NR	125/100	96/4/0
92	Perficut Cos.	Ankeny, Iowa	\$15,800,000	26%	8%	80/75	85/10/5
93	LMI Landscapes	Carrollton, Texas	\$15,650,000	8%	15%	200/0	100/0/0
94	Hittle Landscaping	Westfield, Ind.	\$15,510,000	4%	5%	110/80	85/15/0
	ISS Grounds Control	San Antonio, Texas	\$15,000,000	0%	5%	235/0	85/2/13
96	Designs By Sundown	Englewood, Colo.	\$15,000,000	-5%	15%	90/50	5/95/0
97	Cleary Bros. Landscape	San Ramon, Calif.	\$14,800,000	5%	7%	202/0	90/5/5
98	Southview Design	St Paul, Minn.	\$14,761,000	32%	13%	45/90	4/96/0
99	Earthworks	Lillian, Texas	\$14,100,000	8%	10%	100/175	94/1/5
100	Harvest Landscape Enterprises	Anaheim, Calif.	\$14,000,000	10%	20%	400/0	90/1/9

		Headquarters	2014 Revenue (U.S. Dollars)	% Rev Change from 2013	% Projected Change for 2015	FTE/ Seasonal Employees	% Comm/ Res/Gov	
		Engledow Group	Carmel, Ind.	\$14,000,000	7%	6%	125/85	NR/NR/NR
		Earthtones Landscaping	Midlothian, Texas	\$14,000,000	6%	5%	60/30	85/15/0
103		Westco Grounds Maintenance Co.	Houston, Texas	\$13,800,000	8%	8%	125/50	93/1/6
104		Becker Landscape Contractors	Indianapolis, Ind.	\$13,600,000	0%	5%	35/120	90/9/1
105		Blondie's Treehouse*	New York, N.Y.	\$13,585,000	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
106		Ecoscape Solutions Group	Huntersville, N.C.	\$13,529,000	28%	18%	85/49	98/1/1
107		Andre Landscape Service	Azusa , Calif.	\$13,204,373	20%	20%	245/0	95/5/0
108		John Mini Distinctive Landscapes	Congers, N.Y.	\$12,877,000	6%	5%	76/62	91/6/3
109		Arteka Cos.	Minneapolis , Minn.	\$12,700,000	3%	5%	20/120	90/5/5
110		Santa Rita Landscaping	Tucson, Ariz.	\$12,600,000	4%	16%	125/0	65/30/5
111		Heron Lawn & Pest Control^	Apopka, Fla.	\$12,599,242	16%	18%	192/0	2/98/0
112		Greenscape	Holly Springs, N.C.	\$12,552,655	15%	15%	180/30	60/40/0
113		Complete Landsculpture	Dallas, Texas	\$12,485,000	19%	20%	95/55	45/50/5
114		Lawn Dawg	Nashua, N.H.	\$12,441,949	7%	13%	50/48	5/95/0
115		American Civil Constructors	Littleton, Colo.	\$12,100,000	0%	0%	260/80	100/0/0
116		Dora Landscaping Co.	Apopka, Fla.	\$12,000,000	10%	10%	30/30	80/20/0
117		American Landscape Systems*	Lewisville, Texas	\$11,990,000	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
118		Schultz Industries	Golden, Colo.	\$11,987,942	22%	6%	89/63	80/0/20
119		LegacyScapes	Groveland, Fla.	\$11,904,000	8%	-16%	60/76	90/0/10
120		Hoffman Landscapes	Wilton, Conn.	\$11,550,000	1%	9%	105/0	10/88/2
121		Pacific Landscape Management	Hillsboro, Ore.	\$11,300,000	0%	12%	130/45	100/0/0
122		Webb Landscape*	Bellevue, Idaho	\$11,227,000	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
123		Kujawa Enterprises (KEI)	Oak Creek, Wis.	\$11,100,000	4%	4%	41/80	85/5/10
124		Crystal Greens Landscape	Clackamas, Ore.	\$11,000,000	120%	20%	120/60	95/0/5
125		Signature Landscapes	Reno, Nev.	\$10,898,886	13%	12%	112/NR	72/26/2
126		C. Caramanico & Sons	Upland, Pa.	\$10,889,245	21%	3%	22/50	95/3/2
127		Joyce Landscaping	Marstons Mills, Mass.	\$10,735,000	14%	10%	70/55	15/85/0
128		Native Land Design	Cedar Park, Texas	\$10,605,777	17%	-12%	40/157	100/0/0
129		Gardeners' Guild	Richmond, Calif.	\$10,500,000	5%	7%	140/0	60/30/10
130		CoCal Landscape Co.	Denver, Colo.	\$10,319,000	2%	12%	95/100	60/0/40
131		The Spencer Co.	Houston, Texas	\$10,114,806	7%	8%	185/5	100/0/0
132		Canete Landscape & Snow Management	Wayne, N.J.	\$9,500,000	15%	20%	70/800	70/30/0
		Providence Landscape Group	Charlotte, N.C.	\$9,500,000	10%	10%	75/55	90/5/5
134		Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care & Landscape^	Lancaster, Pa.	\$9,445,000	5%	2%	95/0	18/82/0
135		Visionscapes	Tucker, Ga.	\$9,350,000	30%	0%	46/0	98/2/0
136		Carol King Landscape Maintenance	Orlando, Fla.	\$9,325,000	-2%	5%	131/18	67/4/29
137		Eastern Land Management	Stamford, Conn.	\$9,300,000	7%	10%	30/51	100/0/0
138		Emerald Isle Landscaping	Denver, Colo.	\$9,150,000	21%	30%	115/80	90/5/5
139		NJ Best Lawns Sprinklers & Fencing	Lakewood, N.J.	\$9,128,900	6%	10%	25/86	2/98/0
140		Mountain High Tree, Lawn & Landscape	Lakewood, Colo.	\$9,075,838	15%	15%	90/2	25/70/5
141		Nanak's Landscaping	Deerfield Beach, Fla.	\$9,000,000	24%	20%	125/0	100/0/0
142		Elizabeth River Landscape Management	Suffolk, Va.	\$9,000,000	0%	4%	58/66	80/15/5
143		Grant & Power Landscaping*	West Chicago, Ill.	\$8,910,000	NR	NR	NR/NR	NR/NR/NR
144		The Pattie Group	Novelty, Ohio	\$8,800,000	4%	4%	55/35	15/85/0
145		LandCare Innovations	Charlotte, N.C.	\$8,628,000	36%	25%	73/0	40/60/0
146		Coast Landscape Management	Napa, Calif.	\$8,285,000	8%	21%	96/75	45/0/55
147		Schill Grounds Management	North Ridgeville, Ohio	\$8,258,000	24%	8%	50/50	100/0/0
148		Arbor-Nomics Turf	Norcross, Ga.	\$8,068,213	15%	14%	47/13	5/95/0
149		The Landscape Partners	Fort Worth, Texas	\$8,055,000	2%	2%	70/70	95/5/0
150		Green Lawn Fertilizing	West Chester, Pa.	\$7,733,300	15%	12%	80/0	10/90/0
				Total: \$8,504,367,060	Avg: 16%	Avg: 10%		



Uptime
Solutions

JohnDeere.com/MowPro

**The NeverStop Loaner Guarantee from John Deere is only available on ZTrak™, QuikTrak™ and Walk-Behind mowers.

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RACE TO THE TOP

A look at the data and trends behind the largest 150 companies in the landscape industry. BY MARISA PALMIERI

Collectively, the largest landscape companies in North America grossed \$8.5 billion

in 2014—a 10 percent increase from the \$7.7 billion in revenue they generated in 2013. These firms, members of the LM150 list, reported an average growth rate of 16 percent in 2014 and they plan to grow another 10 percent this year.

As always, some companies joined the list and others fell off. But the biggest news is the merger of the top two companies on last year's list. The Brickman Group/ValleyCrest Landscape Cos.—soon to be BrightView—now share a spot at No. 1. Their combined \$2 billion revenue

COMBINED 2014 LM150 REVENUE
\$8,504,367,060

makes up nearly a quarter of the total revenue reported by all companies on the LM150 list.

The merger allowed Bartlett Tree Experts to break into the top five, and it bumped up The Davey Tree Expert Co. to slot three. Scotts Lawn Service fell to No. 4 and TruGreen remained at two.

To read the full list, see the gatefold section of this supplement, preceding this page. To easily find the ranking of a specific company, refer to the alphabetical index on page S20.


If you're looking to learn more about how some companies from the LM150 list are overcoming obstacles, read on.

No matter their sizes, LM150 firms face challenges just like the rest of the industry. In fact, our reporting shows they're often the exact same obstacles smaller companies are battling, albeit on a larger scale. In the stories that follow, we cover how some of the big guys are hurdling challenges surround-

ing hiring and retention, client relations and productivity.

METHODOLOGY

LM sought submissions from landscape companies via the magazine, Landscape Management.net, email and the phone from January through May. Companies submitted their details through an online form. LM editors compiled the results and, where applicable, removed non-typical green industry revenue sources from totals. For example, we omit revenue from structural pest control and termite services.

We estimated revenue for firms the editors couldn't reach if they participated in last year's list and reported projected 2014 revenue data. Additionally, LM editors calculated the figures for client mix, profit centers and regional charts based on the data submitted. 

WHO DID WE MISS?

Should your company be on the LM150 list of the largest landscape companies? Or do you know of someone else we missed? Contact Editor Marisa Palmieri at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net to be notified in early 2016 when the submission period opens. We encourage companies with \$5 million-plus in annual revenue to participate.



[HIRING + RETENTION]

FINDERS, KEEPERS

Strategies **LM150** firms are using to up their employment game. **BY CASEY PAYTON**

Finding and keeping good people are fundamental to success for any business, but in the landscape industry, companies are discovering these to be increasingly difficult tasks.

We spoke to several LM150 business owners who've been dealing with these challenges and are employing a variety of solutions.

One challenge landscape business owners say they face when hiring is the fact that the industry is labor-intensive.

"Most people these days do not want a labor-intensive job," says Alan Hales, operations manager for LandCare Innovations in Charlotte, N.C., a primarily design/build company that ranks No. 145 on this year's list. "If you stick with it, you can make a good living in this industry by working your way up through a company. But a lot of people don't get that far because they don't want to put in the labor. To become a crew leader you need to stick around for

several years, and that often doesn't happen."

Lebo Newman, owner of Reno, Nev.-based Signature Landscapes, which is No. 125 on the LM150 list, says horticulture schools aren't producing the same kind of qualified manpower that they once did. Newman also owns Napa, Calif.-based Coast Landscape Management, No. 146.

"There are a lot less people coming out of horticulture school," Newman says. "The younger generation appears to want computer jobs and office jobs. As a result, the trades are having a much harder time attracting people. That's true of all trades—roofing, plumbing, electric. It seems as though going into a trade job isn't looked at as successful anymore, and we have to work on ways to change that if we want to attract new people."

Unfortunately, the difficulty in finding workers can hinder growth. "We also want to expand, but that's very hard to do with-

out adequate labor force," Hales says. "You can buy all the trucks and trailers you want, but if you don't have the crew to put in them, you're out of luck. We do feel like we would have grown even more than we did had we not faced these labor concerns."

LandCare grew about 36 percent in 2014, and expects to grow another 25 percent next year, but that may not happen without the workers it needs. The company has had to pay for a lot of overtime hours, Hales says.

Matt White, owner and president of Caretaker Landscape & Tree Management in Gilbert, Ariz., has faced a similar challenge. He says the company, No. 62 on the LM150 list, had an annual revenue of \$23.6 million last year and grew nearly 66 percent over 2013. It's had trouble keeping up from a labor perspective. Jobs have been coming in, but manpower isn't available. The company expects to grow 10 percent in 2015.

HOW TO HIRE

The first step in finding good people is to search in the right places, and *LM150* executives say you need to get creative with the search process.

"It used to be that you put an ad in the paper and everyone was knocking on your door," Newman says. "Today we reach out every single way we can. We use social media, networks like Craigslist, we offer incentives to existing employees that help us recruit and we hang cards or Help Wanted ads everywhere—including the oddest places, if we think our demographic might be frequenting that establishment. We do our best to reach out and often even recruit from out of town. Basically we try a little of everything—except poaching. We would never poach an employee from another company."

Newman says he's been shocked by how gutsy other companies have been in trying to poach some of his employees. They'll even do it on a job site. Fortunately, for the most part, the company's

family-based culture and fair pay have kept crew members from going elsewhere.

Hales also has seen a lot of employee poaching in his area. It's something his company won't do, he says.

"This industry is built on reputation," Hales says. "We're friendly with many of our competitors and would never steal crew from them. In return, we hope they won't do it to us."

Tom Canete, CEO of Canete Landscape and Canete Snow Management in Wayne, N.J., says hiring a headhunter has been a successful strategy for finding good people. The company is No. 132 on the *LM150* list. The key is to find a headhunter who's well-versed in the green industry, he says. But be prepared to pay.

"It's not an inexpensive route to take," says Canete, who serves as president of the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association. "I'm currently using a headhunter for the second time and it will cost me a nice chunk of money. But it's worth



QUICK TIPS

"Clarity is the key to maintaining a positive company culture as your organization grows. As soon as the organization begins to assume what's happening or where the business is going, culture will eat strategy for lunch"

—Jerry Schill, president/CEO
Schill Grounds
Management, No. 147

"The H-2B visa program is definitely crucial to meeting our labor needs; however, it's only a bandage on the bigger problem, which is cultivating homegrown candidates that value working with their hands, have a strong work ethic and a desire to create and maintain beautiful landscapes. Partnerships with apprentice programs are other avenues we are currently pursuing."

—Amy Weldon, director
of marketing/sales
Clean Scapes, No. 44



Qualified employees, like this hardscape crew at LandCare Innovations, are hard to come by.



At Caretaker Landscape & Tree Management, employees have many training opportunities.

it if they find you the right person. With the right person, you can easily recoup that investment.”

Canete estimates headhunter fees to be 15 percent to 20 percent of the employee's salary.

RETENTION SOLUTIONS

The companies who've successfully retained good people all echo the same phrase: “company culture.” When it's so difficult to find quality employees, once you find them you don't let them go, White says.

“We do team-building events, get off-site together, have matching 401(k) programs—basically things that a lot of other landscape companies aren't doing,” he says. “We feel that being an employee-focused company that treats its people well is critical to our success. It's the reason people stay with us and want to make a long-term career out of this. You just need to show them the path they should follow to achieve the next opportunity and work their way up in the company.”

Newman agrees. He also focuses on building a strong company culture. Showing employees they have opportunities for long-term growth is key to retaining them, he says. Signature Landscape looks to promote

from within whenever possible and the executive team takes time to motivate employees and show them the track they're on, including what potential opportunities lay ahead.

“We don't struggle with retention,” Newman says. “If we do lose employees, it's to other industries—rarely to a competitor—and that's because we treat our people like family. We look at it like we're providing for 160 families, not 160 employees. We have parties, rewards and other incentives. We have a river float coming up where everyone will enjoy the day on inner tubes. We have a big Christmas party and several picnics a year. Basically, we try to have a lot of fun and make employees feel valued, because they are.”

At LandCare Innovations, training and promotion opportunities are key to retention, Hales say, but pay is the biggest factor.

“Pay is what keeps people with you,” he says. “You need to build a company culture and offer opportunities for growth, but you also need to pay well.”

Canete agrees. Paying fairly is important, but he says paying weekly is something his employees also value.

“A lot of companies pay every two weeks but we pay weekly,”

he says. “Some of our competitors may pay a little more, but a weekly check means something to our crews. They know they're guaranteed to be paid each and every Friday.”

Canete also considers overtime a perk. “Sometimes it's better to pay a crew that already knows what they're doing for time-and-a-half than to bring in a whole new crew right in the middle of busy season,” he says. “Our employees also really appreciate those overtime opportunities.”

Another thing many employees appreciate is education, which in turn helps build their passion for the industry and their investment in your company, White says.

“We spend a lot of money putting people through training and getting certifications,” he says. “To us, education is one of our biggest differentiators from competitors.”

It can be difficult to take people off the job to receive training, White acknowledges. But he says his company made education a priority about 10 years ago.

“Since then, we've seen a huge change in our employees' passion,” he says. “They have pride in their work and our company—and that's a huge benefit to all of us.”

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.



[CLIENT RELATIONS]

STRAIGHT TALK

Three **LM150** contractors share their customer relations efforts. BY LAUREN DOWDLE

Client relationships will make or break a company, landscape professionals agree. So it's important to listen, be proactive and meet expectations.

Three professionals from the LM50 list share how they've grown their businesses by focusing on client communication.

LANDSCAPE WORKSHOP

Birmingham, Ala.

To get a real sense for what clients want, J.T. Price, CEO of Landscape Workshop, reaches out to them directly. His full-service, mostly commercial-based company, No. 71 on the LM150 list, did about \$20.5 million in 2014 annual revenue. The company has been owned by investment firm McKinney Capital since 2011.

In the past, Landscape Workshop faced challenges with offering consistent customer service.

"The squeaky wheel tends to get the oil," Price says. "But we wanted to talk with customers even when they were happy. The biggest thing we've changed is that we now have an early warning system before they become unhappy."

That system is the Net Promoter Score (NPS) management tool, which Landscape Workshop uses to see why or why not their clients would recommend their services to friends or colleagues.

To get the score, the company surveys customers twice a year. The questionnaire

takes less than five minutes to fill out. It's provided Landscape Workshop with good data, says Shannon Vann, vice president of sales and marketing.

"It's given us a lot of open-ended feedback from customers," she says. "They tell us stuff they might not necessarily tell the account manager. We've been pleased with the response level. It shows us what to do and what not to do."

The company also uses the survey results to ensure team members are responsive to customer needs at all times.

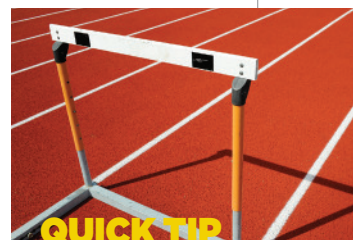
To keep from influencing survey responses, employees are instructed not to discuss it with customers. The marketing department emails clients a link to fill out the survey. When the results are in, marketing shares the responses with the account managers, so they can address any issues with clients.

Not only did Landscape Workshop implement a survey system, it also sought to change employees' mindsets about the importance of communication and focusing on relationships.

"Our employees always take pride in doing great work, and they thought great work should speak for itself," Price says. "That's a mentality we tried to change."

Of course, Price says, high-quality work and excellent communication go hand in hand.

"You can't have a bad product and good communication," Price says. "To win customers over in the long run, you have to have both."



QUICK TIP

"You have to have a good 'reason for being.' Making money is the end result of standing up for something in the marketplace. There are a lot of ways to be successful, but they all originate by having a team dedicated to your mission. Ours is 'We develop long-term relationships through team members committed to a culture of extraordinary culture service.'"

—Jon Georgio, CEO
Gothic Landscape, No. 10



Landscape Workshop, which has mostly commercial clients, uses the Net Promoter Score system to conduct surveys twice a year.

As for how the increased focus on customer communication will affect business, Landscape Workshop is going to exceed its budget this year.

"We've added more (revenue) in the first five months of the year than we added all of last year," Price says. "Retention has also gone up dramatically during the past two years. The average customer stays with us nine to 10 years."

To have a thriving business, Price says it's important to pay attention to what clients want.

"It's about where the industry is going and where our customers need us to be," he says.

RELIABLE PROPERTY SERVICES

Eagan, Minn.

Business is all about finding the perfect balance of customer satisfaction and profit, says Tom Hougnon, president/COO of Reliable Property Services.

The full-service company did \$30.3 million in 2014 annual revenue, ranking No. 42 on the LM150 list.

In the past, it was faced with disgruntled customers when team members didn't provide the level of service promised in the contract. Clients also became upset if they felt they were being overcharged. But, the company had to figure out how to balance meeting those expectations, while keeping an eye on the bottom line.

"Obviously, the customer must be satisfied with the service," he says. "However, over-servicing and providing service the customer is not requiring or is not in the contract will create unprofitable jobs and eventually lead to financial issues."

For example, time-and-materials contracts may lead to customers who believe they're being price gouged. On the other hand, some

seasonal contracts may not be priced for profitability, meaning the company may have to end its relationship with a customer.

Hougnon and his team overcame these obstacles by implementing additional tracking of quality, costs and labor based on the "customer-contracted experience."

"We have to provide the contracted service to maintain the profitability of the job," Hougnon explains. "The company must provide the level of service that is stated in the contract, and provide good communication at contract origination and throughout the contract. It's critical so that both parties are in agreement with the service specification."

To make sure clients understand the details, Reliability Property Services helps clarify each aspect of the contract. Hougnon points to email service blasts, mid- and end-season reviews, customer budget reviews and a call-tracking system as examples.

"The true understanding of the contract specifics is critical to both our internal team and managing our customer's expectations. Often, these can get lost in all the other legal verbiage in the contract," Hougnon says. "We have a better chance to satisfy the customer needs if we are both in agreement with the contracted customer experience."

He expects the firm's attention to contracts and communication will increase renewals and its ability to pick up additional work from current customers.

"Internally, we will provide the service the customer expects and meet the company's profitability goals," Hougnon says.

COAST LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

Napa, Calif.

For Lebo Newman, chairman/owner of Coast Landscape Management, his business is all about relationships.

His company, No. 146 on the LM150 list, did \$8.3 million in 2014 annual revenue. Newman also owns Signature Landscapes, No. 125 on the list.

There wasn't one defining issue that caused him to make communication changes at Coast. Instead, it came from listening to customer feedback over time—like hearing about a frustrated customer or someone whose call wasn't answered promptly.

"We didn't really have problems before, but we wanted to strive to be the absolute best," Newman says. "We're always working to step up our game."

To strengthen their bonds with clients, Coast Landscape Management expanded and improved the company's level of service. It implemented a plan that concentrated on quality, efficiency, productivity, safety and service—dubbed QEPS².

"We have expanded our customer care training of all employees from the frontline to office and support staff," Newman says.

Training for all employees covers how to handle phone calls. It included using some of their past calls as training tools.

"We recorded calls to review so they could hear themselves and how they handled talking to customers," Newman says.

Although, the company doesn't

typically script its calls because every situation is different, Newman says: "People will feel like they're filling out a questionnaire if you do that."

Coast Landscape Management also brought in a third-party group to help the employees learn how to better interact with clients. One element of that training was teaching them to tailor their responses to the questions clients asked.

For example, if a customer is detail-oriented with his questions and concerns, the employee should make sure the response is focused on the details, as well.

The team members also learned which manager was in charge of each area and how to dispatch work.

Newman and his team look at customer communication as an important element of the sales process.


"Every time a client calls in, it's an opportunity," Newman says. "If you can capture more opportunities and act on them quicker, it's

going to create growth and retention. We touch about 500 commercial clients a month, and we want to make sure when they call, someone is always available to handle their calls."

Now, customers can talk with anyone at the office if they have questions or an issue, instead of trying to reach the field manager directly.

"We've found clients feel like they're getting quicker results, and we're also getting fewer callbacks," Newman says. "It's been excellent feedback."

Newman expects Coast Landscape Management's 93 percent retention rate to further improve with the company's new customer service practices.

"Having the phones answered by a real person makes a huge difference," Newman says. "It's an overhead cost that some don't want to have. But the more you can do it, the better—it's all about the relationships." 

Dowdle is an Alabama-based freelance writer.

All Coast Landscape Management employees receive customer care training, including how to handle client phone calls.





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[PRODUCTIVITY + PROFITS]

HERE AND THERE

How three LM150 firms are becoming more profitable by being more productive. BY MARISA PALMIERI



“Doing more with less” has been a mantra among successful landscape company operators since the Great Recession. To some, it may feel like a cliché by now, but it’s not to companies who’ve seen their bottom lines improve.

At least three firms on this year’s LM150 list have good stories to tell about how they’ve made gains in productivity and, in turn, profitability.

For David Minor, CEO of The Landscape Partners, No. 149 on the LM150 list, the best advice is never to be satisfied with the level of profitability.

“A lot of people are at the assumption that they’ve maximized their bottom line, and they don’t roll up their sleeves and look for a little bit more here and there,” he says.

He is one to dole out tips on this topic. The Landscape Partners, based in Fort Worth, Texas, saw its revenue increase just 2 percent in 2014, but its net income was up more than 35 percent year over year.

So, where should other companies start? Minor recommends beginning with the biggest two areas of the operation: labor and materials.

LOOKING AT LABOR

Analyzing labor costs has been an increasing focus over the past few years at C. Caramanico & Sons, which ranks No. 129. The company implemented a productivity reporting system in its maintenance division with good results, and it began working the reports into its construction division this year, says Bill Caramanico, secretary/treasurer of the Upland, Pa.-based firm.

The company, which last year entered its fourth generation of family ownership, historically has been construction-heavy, but it will be 50/50 construction/maintenance this year. The productivity reports should help company leaders better identify which jobs are most profitable.

“We’d like to back off on the construction side and be more selective on what jobs fit us better,” he says. “The productivity reports have helped us track our hours as we go, so we can see how we’re getting close to our budgeted hours.”

Before using this system, which consultant Frank Ross helped set up, “the guys didn’t know what the hours were.”

“We were tracking hours, but we weren’t doing it properly,” Caramanico

**QUICK TIP**

“Watch your labor hours, especially the indirect time loading and unloading every a.m./p.m., as those can cost you dearly if not managed.”

—Shawn Stomp, vice president of finance/CFO, Heads Up Landscape Contractors, No. 76

says. “We weren’t looking at it every week. The reports force us to look at them every week and ask, ‘If we’re going over, why? If we’re under, why?’”

Caramanico says the reports are helpful for the management team, but the last piece of the puzzle is getting the information out to the crews. For his company, adding a full-time, bilingual production manager has been a big help.

“He’s been really great to work directly with the crews, equipment and schedule,” he says. “We didn’t have that before.”

Minor, too, emphasizes the importance of labor budgets and communicating the status from top to bottom.

“We’re very goal-oriented,” he says, noting field staff have daily production goals and are eligible for a bonus every two weeks if they meet those goals. “When you’re that way and you’re keeping those goals in front of people on a regular basis, it’s pushing them to improve.”

For Minor, improving production comes down to “talking about it a lot” so everyone understands it’s a priority.

“We’ve challenged the people on the maintenance side to work a little more efficiently,” he said. “We reduced the budgeted hours but increased their bonuses, and that worked out well.”

Caramanico expects to see even more efficiency later this year when the company changes from timesheets to time-tracking software that will send data from employees’ smartphones into QuickBooks.

MATERIAL-TRACKING

Visionscapes streamlined production over the past seven years, first due to the economic downturn and now due to regulations. In fact, the Tucker, Ga.-based firm, No. 135 on the list, generated 30 percent more revenue in 2014 than in 2013 with the same number of employees.

“When there’s a glut of business, everybody tends to be a lit-

tle sloppy,” says Frank Coleman, president. “When there’s not, you’re forced to work smarter, and that’s what we’ve had to do.”

Specifically, what’s strapping Visionscapes is the “Obamacare” provision that requires businesses with 50 or more full-time-equivalent employees to provide health insurance employees or pay a fee. Coleman says he feels like he’s being forced to stay under 50 employees because of the large costs associated with insurance. He estimates he’d have to double his revenue to be able to provide insurance and remain profitable.

Prerecession, Visionscapes had more than 100 employees and reached nearly \$12 million in revenue. It dropped down to half of that for a few years, and now is back to nearly \$10 million—staying under 50 employees.

Coleman expects to be flat in 2015. “There’s plenty to bid, but it goes in waves,” he says. “This is our 30th year, and it’s harder than it’s ever been.”

David Minor (right), CEO, and Rick Onstott, president, lead The Landscape Partners, based in Fort Worth, Texas.



PHOTO: THE LANDSCAPE PARTNERS

Regardless, these obstacles have prompted Visionscapes to become more disciplined and have upped the level of accountability throughout the company.

“The team sat down, looked at what we’d been doing and how we could improve things,” Coleman says. The result was nearly reinventing how the company did installation. For example, it became an “equipment-centered” company.

“Proper equipment helps speed up the projects,” he says.

One example is in material transport. The company added a fleet of nursery carts to use with its utility vehicles to cut down on the number of trips needed to carry shrubs and other materials on job sites. Visionscapes also invested in new, compact telehandlers to be more efficient when installing the large-scale construction projects it’s known for.

It’s all part of a strategy to touch materials only once, Coleman says. As much as possible, Visionscapes has its materials direct shipped rather than keeping items in a holding area.

“When we order trees, the holes have already been dug, they come off the truck and go into the hole instead of going into a holding area, re-picking it up and shuffling it into another area to be planted,” he says. “You can’t always do that, but we maximize doing that as much as possible.”

Other changes Visionscapes has made include an upgraded software program with a purchase order system, which helps track project billing; a central

Visionscapes, based in Tucker, Ga., specializes in large-scale commercial landscape construction.



control system for managing irrigation accounts; and a switch from hand takeoffs for estimating to on-screen takeoffs.

“We were old school a little longer there,” Coleman says. This move has allowed the company to keep its estimating department to two people. He estimates similar sized companies have three or four staff estimators.

DRAWING THE LINE

All these efforts are about being a bottom-line focused company.

“I’ve seen so many companies through the years that just

don’t focus on the bottom line,” says Minor, who is making his “second go-around” in the landscape

industry. He sold his previous company to TruGreen’s landscape division in the late 1990s. “You might be making 5 percent on a big top line, but I’d rather make 12 percent to 15 percent on half or a third as much business. There’s a saying I throw out to our president: ‘The bottom line is the bottom line.’”

C. Caramanico & Sons, based in Upland, Pa., is transitioning its business from mostly construction to be half maintenance.

TOP 25

A look at the **LM 150** list—sorted for top performers by client mix, profit centers and regions.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Not all companies report client mix, profit center and regional data. Dollar amounts were calculated by LM from data reported.

COMMERCIAL

1	TruGreen LandCare	\$184,500,000
2	TruGreen	\$168,480,000
3	U.S. Lawns	\$163,000,000
4	Ferrandino & Son	\$121,000,000
5	Gothic Landscape	\$114,000,000
6	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$95,688,000
7	Ruppert Landscape	\$93,500,000
8	Merit Service Solutions	\$91,301,400
9	Mainscape	\$75,304,000
10	Acres Group	\$46,060,000
11	Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper/Greater Texas Landscapes)	\$45,228,184
12	Lucas Tree Experts	\$42,140,000
13	Denison Landscaping	\$35,400,000
14	The Greenery	\$34,400,000
15	Mission Landscape Cos.	\$32,930,180
16	Dixie Landscape	\$32,678,100
17	Girard Environmental Services	\$32,233,400
18	Rotolo Consultants	\$30,400,000
19	Christy Webber Landscapes	\$30,290,000
20	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$29,400,000
21	Gothic Grounds Management	\$28,532,016
22	Reliable Property Services	\$28,179,000
23	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	\$26,970,913
24	Bemus Landscape	\$26,248,200
25	Clean Scapes	\$25,160,189

RESIDENTIAL

1	TruGreen	\$767,520,000
2	Scotts Lawn Service	\$310,464,000
3	Weed Man	\$136,058,198
4	Lawn Doctor	\$96,214,772
5	SavATree	\$66,300,000
6	Massey Services	\$50,156,339
7	NaturaLawn of America	\$47,987,838
8	Meadows Farms	\$47,490,500
9	Spring-Green Lawn Care	\$42,176,430
10	Mariani Landscape	\$33,893,200
11	Chalet	\$27,000,000
12	Ryan Lawn & Tree	\$25,368,666
13	Garden Design	\$24,360,000
14	Scott Byron & Co.	\$22,110,300
15	McHale Landscape Design	\$20,600,000
16	Naturescape	\$20,068,030
17	Lambert's	\$17,553,750
18	Southern Botanical	\$16,556,920
19	Designs By Sundown	\$14,250,000
20	Southview Design	\$14,170,560
21	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	\$14,101,087
22	Senske Services	\$13,104,000
23	Jensen Corp.	\$12,800,000
24	Heron Lawn & Pest Control	\$12,347,257
25	Lawn Dawg	\$11,819,852

GOVERNMENT

1	Marina Landscape	\$42,700,000
2	Merchants Landscape Services	\$21,000,000
3	TruGreen LandCare	\$20,500,000
4	Ruppert Landscape	\$16,500,000
5	Terracare Associates	\$15,584,239
6	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	\$13,965,000
7	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$12,600,000
8	Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper/Greater Texas Landscapes)	\$11,307,046
9	TBG Landscape	\$10,347,000
10	Merit Service Solutions	\$10,144,600
11	Rotolo Consultants	\$7,600,000
12	Environmental Management (EMI)	\$7,000,000
13	Christy Webber Landscapes	\$6,990,000
14	Gachina Landscape Management	\$5,023,869
15	Denison Landscaping	\$4,720,000
16	Coast Landscape Management	\$4,556,750
17	New Way Landscape & Tree Services	\$4,375,000
18	CoCal Landscape Co.	\$4,127,600
19	Clean Scapes	\$3,430,935
20	Lucas Tree Experts	\$3,430,000
21	Cagwin & Dordard	\$3,380,000
22	Jensen Corp.	\$3,200,000
23	The Grounds Guys	\$3,200,000
24	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	\$2,838,750
25	Carol King Landscape Maintenance	\$2,704,250

BY CLIENT MIX

MOWING + LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

1	TruGreen LandCare	\$143,500,000
2	Weed Man	\$143,219,156
3	U.S. Lawns	\$114,100,000
4	Ruppert Landscape	\$59,400,000
5	Ferrandino & Son	\$48,400,000
6	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$47,844,000
7	Mainscape	\$45,182,400
8	Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper/Greater Texas Landscapes)	\$32,225,081
9	Gothic Landscape	\$30,780,000
10	Merit Service Solutions	\$30,433,800
11	Mission Landscape Cos.	\$26,344,144
12	Girard Environmental Services	\$23,852,716
13	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$23,100,000
14	Gothic Grounds Management	\$22,943,271
15	Mariani Landscape	\$20,412,950
16	Terracare Associates	\$19,310,904
17	Acres Group	\$18,620,000
18	Marina Landscape	\$18,300,000
19	James River Grounds Management	\$18,074,800
20	The Grounds Guys	\$17,600,000
21	Gibbs Landscape Co.	\$17,215,590
22	The Greenery	\$16,340,000
23	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	\$16,288,140
24	Bemus Landscape	\$16,236,000
25	Gachina Landscape Management	\$16,076,382

DESIGN/BUILD + INSTALLATION

1	Gothic Landscape	\$83,220,000
2	Ruppert Landscape	\$44,000,000
3	Garden Design	\$39,382,000
4	Rotolo Consultants	\$26,600,000
5	Jensen Corp.	\$26,000,000
6	Christy Webber Landscapes	\$24,698,000
7	U.S. Lawns	\$22,820,000
8	Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper/Greater Texas Landscapes)	\$19,787,330
9	Southern Botanical	\$17,698,777
10	McHale Landscape Design	\$16,480,000
11	Caretaker Landscape & Tree Management	\$16,249,836
12	Mariani Landscape	\$15,406,000
13	D. Schumacher Landscaping	\$15,207,500
14	Juniper Landscaping	\$15,155,920
15	Meadows Farms	\$14,997,000
16	Southview Design	\$14,244,365
17	Scott Byron & Co.	\$13,964,400
18	The Loving Group	\$12,719,000
19	Acres Group	\$12,250,000
20	American Civil Constructors	\$12,100,000
21	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	\$11,400,000
22	Environmental Management (EMI)	\$11,250,000
23	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	\$10,219,500
24	TBG Landscape	\$10,002,100
25	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	\$9,782,600

TURF + ORNAMENTAL CARE

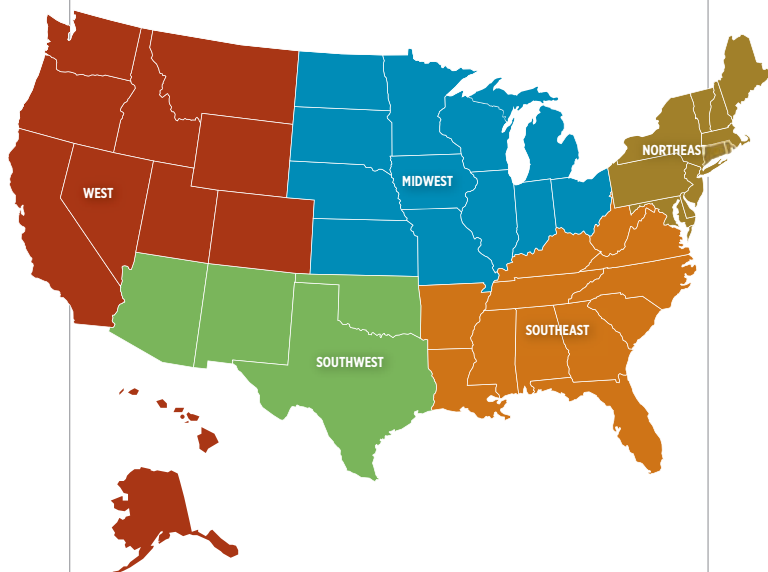
1	TruGreen	\$795,600,000
2	Scotts Lawn Service	\$316,800,000
3	Lawn Doctor	\$101,278,707
4	Naturalawn of America	\$50,008,379
5	Massey Services	\$49,871,640
6	Spring-Green Lawn Care	\$43,990,470
7	Ryan Lawn & Tree	\$18,692,701
8	Cagwin & Dorward	\$18,590,000
9	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	\$18,535,564
10	Naturescape	\$16,899,394
11	The Greenery	\$16,340,000
12	SavATree	\$14,450,000
13	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$14,353,200
14	Lawn Dawg	\$11,508,803
15	Heron Lawn & Pest Control	\$10,866,846
16	Senske Services	\$10,320,000
17	Arbor-Nomics Turf	\$8,068,213
18	Green Lawn Fertilizing	\$7,733,300
19	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$6,300,000
20	Mainscape	\$5,271,280
21	U.S. Lawns	\$4,890,000
22	Lucas Tree Experts	\$4,410,000
23	Ferrandino & Son	\$3,630,000
24	Merit Service Solutions	\$3,043,380
25	Gothic Grounds Management	\$2,941,445

IRRIGATION + WATER MANAGEMENT

1	Marina Landscape	\$41,480,000
2	TruGreen LandCare	\$30,750,000
3	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$14,353,200
4	Cagwin & Dorward	\$6,760,000
5	U.S. Lawns	\$6,520,000
6	Juniper Landscaping	\$6,422,000
7	Mainscape	\$5,271,280
8	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	\$5,130,000
9	Southern Botanical	\$4,567,426
10	Clean Sapes	\$4,288,669
11	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$4,200,000
12	NJ Best Lawns Sprinklers & Fencing	\$4,199,294
13	LMI Landscapes	\$3,756,000
14	Earthtones Landscaping	\$3,500,000
15	Merit Service Solutions	\$3,043,380
16	Complete Landsculpture	\$2,871,550
17	Environmental Earthscapes, (The Groundskeeper/Greater Texas Landscapes)	\$2,826,762
18	Westco Grounds Maintenance Co.	\$2,760,000
19	Bemus Landscape	\$2,706,000
20	Ryan Lawn & Tree	\$2,670,386
21	The Grounds Guys	\$2,560,000
22	Gachina Landscape Management	\$2,511,935
23	Ferrandino & Son	\$2,420,000
24	Dora Landscaping Co.	\$2,400,000
25	Terracare Associates	\$2,371,515

BY PROFIT CENTERS

BY REGION



NORTHEAST

1	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$98,700,000
2	Scotts Lawn Service	\$91,872,000
3	SavATree	\$62,900,000
4	Lawn Doctor	\$57,728,863
5	Ruppert Landscape	\$47,300,000
6	Denison Landscaping	\$47,200,000
7	Merit Service Solutions	\$45,650,700
8	NaturaLawn of America	\$39,400,541
9	Ferrandino & Son	\$30,250,000
10	D. Schumacher Landscaping	\$27,097,000
11	Weed Man	\$21,482,873
12	High Tech Landscapes	\$20,569,904
13	TruGreen LandCare	\$20,500,000
14	Meadows Farms	\$17,496,500
15	Sposato Landscape Co.	\$16,500,000
16	Parker Interior Plantscape	\$13,650,000
17	John Mini Distinctive Landscapes	\$12,877,000
18	Lawn Dawg	\$12,441,949
19	Hoffman Landscapes	\$11,550,000
20	C. Caramanico & Sons	\$10,889,245
21	Joyce Landscaping	\$10,735,000
22	McHale Landscape Design	\$10,300,000
23	Canete Landscape & Snow Management	\$9,500,000
24	Tomlinson Bomberger Lawn Care & Landscape	\$9,445,000
25	Eastern Land Management	\$9,300,000

MIDWEST

1	Scotts Lawn Service	\$91,872,000
2	Acres Group	\$49,000,000
3	Christy Webber Landscapes	\$46,600,000
4	Mariani Landscape	\$38,515,000
5	Spring-Green Lawn Care	\$30,838,680
6	Reliable Property Services	\$30,300,000
7	Landscape Concepts Management	\$28,100,000
8	Chalet	\$27,000,000
9	Ryan Lawn & Tree	\$25,101,627
10	Environmental Management (EMI)	\$25,000,000
11	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	\$24,456,500
12	Ferrandino & Son	\$24,200,000
13	Scott Byron & Co.	\$23,274,000
14	Weed Man	\$21,482,873
15	Naturescape	\$20,490,515
16	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	\$19,460,000
17	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$18,900,000
18	Clarence Davids & Co.	\$18,500,000
19	Mainscape	\$18,072,960
20	SavATree	\$17,000,000
21	Perficut Cos.	\$15,800,000
22	Hittle Landscaping	\$15,510,000
23	Merit Service Solutions	\$15,216,900
24	Southview Design	\$14,761,000
25	Engledow Group	\$14,000,000

SOUTHWEST

1	Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper/Greater Texas Landscapes)	\$52,577,764
2	Garden Design	\$40,600,000
3	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$31,577,040
4	TruGreen LandCare	\$30,750,000
5	Clean Scapes	\$28,591,124
6	Southern Botanical	\$28,546,414
7	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	\$27,930,000
8	Caretaker Landscape & Tree Management	\$23,550,487
9	Scotts Lawn Service	\$22,176,000
10	DLC Resources	\$20,100,000
11	Ferrandino & Son	\$19,360,000
12	Heads Up Landscape Contractors	\$18,925,000
13	Lambert's	\$18,875,000
14	Integrated Landscape Management	\$16,244,515
15	LMI Landscapes	\$15,493,500
16	Merit Service Solutions	\$15,216,900
17	ISS Grounds Control	\$15,000,000
18	Earthworks	\$14,100,000
19	Earthtones Landscaping	\$14,000,000
20	Westco Grounds Maintenance Co.	\$13,800,000
21	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$12,600,000
22	Complete Landsculpture	\$12,485,000
23	Native Land Design	\$10,605,777
24	The Spencer Co.	\$10,114,806
25	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$8,400,000

SOUTHEAST

1	Scotts Lawn Service	\$95,040,000
2	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$64,110,960
3	TruGreen LandCare	\$61,500,000
4	Ruppert Landscape	\$56,100,000
5	Massey Services	\$53,975,060
6	Mainscape	\$44,429,360
7	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$44,100,000
8	The Greenery	\$43,000,000
9	Rotolo Consultants	\$38,000,000
10	Dixie Landscape	\$34,398,000
11	Meadows Farms	\$32,493,500
12	Girard Environmental Services	\$32,233,400
13	Juniper Landscaping	\$25,688,000
14	James River Grounds Management	\$24,760,000
15	ABM Landscape & Turf Services	\$23,520,000
16	Lawn Doctor	\$22,281,316
17	Ferrandino & Son	\$21,780,000
18	Weed Man	\$21,482,873
19	Landscape Workshop	\$20,493,602
20	Merit Service Solutions	\$20,289,200
21	Yard-Nique	\$19,675,000
22	HighGrove Partners	\$17,900,000
23	ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design	\$17,000,000
24	Greenscapes	\$16,200,000
25	The Loving Group	\$16,100,000

WEST

1	TruGreen LandCare	\$92,250,000
2	Marina Landscape	\$61,000,000
3	Jensen Corp.	\$40,000,000
4	Cagwin & Dorward	\$33,800,000
5	Mission Landscape Cos.	\$32,930,180
6	Terracare Associates	\$30,490,902
7	Bemus Landscape	\$27,060,000
8	Ferrandino & Son	\$25,410,000
9	Gachina Landscape Management	\$25,119,347
10	Gothic Grounds Management	\$22,060,838
11	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	\$21,046,399
12	Merchants Landscape Services	\$21,000,000
13	Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping & Garden Centers	\$19,832,000
14	Senske Services	\$18,720,000
15	Benchmark Landscape	\$18,258,000
16	Stay Green	\$17,853,162
17	New Way Landscape & Tree Services	\$17,500,000
18	Scotts Lawn Service	\$15,840,000
19	Designs By Sundown	\$15,000,000
20	Cleary Bros. Landscape	\$14,800,000
21	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$14,700,000
22	Andre Landscape Service	\$13,204,373
23	Santa Rita Landscaping	\$12,600,000
24	American Civil Constructors	\$12,100,000
25	Pacific Landscape Management	\$11,300,000

WORDS OF WISDOM

Advice and insight from **LM** 150 list leaders.

"Don't be afraid to let go and be willing to change as a person and a culture."

Brian DuMont, president/CEO
Yard-Nique, No. 74

"The most difficult hurdle is getting to the point of removing yourself from actually performing the physical work required. Once you can reach the point where you have two or more crews generating enough revenue to sustain the business, it's critical that you act as an owner and manage the business. Once past that point, the basics of providing superior service at competitive pricing and surrounding yourself with solid employees who have the same values as you do can lead to growth and success."

Keith Rotolo, president
Rotolo Consultants, No. 34

"Do it right the first time."

Phil Berry, controller
Designs By Sundown, No. 96

"Maintain a positive, open and even fun environment for employees, who in turn provide better customer service and look for ways to improve the company. We have 35 employees who have been with us more than five years. It does make a difference for us."

Stewart Hanson, president
Arteka Cos., No. 109

"Smaller sometimes really is better; it's not the size of the company but its ROI that really matters."

David Hartzell, general manager
NJ Best Lawns Sprinklers & Fencing, No. 139

"Make sure you're accounting for replacement costs for your equipment, pay yourself a fair market price (or what it would cost to replace you) and make sure you do a good job in job costing."

Rory Lamberton, President/CEO
Emerald Isle Landscaping, No. 138

[FASTEST-GROWING FIRMS]

A BIG JUMP

Nearly half the companies on the **LM 150** list grew by 10 percent or more. Here's what helped some of them surge.

The Grounds Guys

This landscape maintenance franchise took the top spot on our fastest-growing companies list the past two years. It fell to No. 5 this year; still, it grew revenue 76 percent, adding 50 locations. The Grounds Guys is part of The Dwyer Group, a Waco, Texas-based parent company for eight service-based franchise companies.

James River Grounds Management

Technology—including a cloud-based training system for field staff—has been key to this Virginia-based, full-service firm's growth. It allows the company to track training by user, implement online tests and conduct training on mobile devices.

Growth Rank	Overall Rank	Company	% Revenue Change from 2013
1	125	Crystal Greens Landscape	120%
2	83	Stay Green	107%
3	67	Parker Interior Plantscape	100%
4	34	Rotolo Consultants	81%
→ 5	41	The Grounds Guys	76%
6	62	Caretaker Landscape & Tree Management	66%
7	55	Juniper Landscaping	60%
8	90	The Loving Group	58%
9	84	New Way Landscape & Tree Services	42%
10	146	LandCare Innovations	36%
11	9	Ferrandino & Son	35%
12	11	Ruppert Landscape	33%
13	44	Clean Scapes	32%
	98	Southview Design	32%
15	40	Girard Environmental Services	31%
16	27	Christy Webber Landscapes	30%
	136	Visionscapes	30%
18	77	Lambert's	28%
	106	Ecoscope Solutions Group	28%
20	17	Mainscape	27%
21	31	Garden Design	26%
	92	Perficut Cos.	26%
23	21	Environmental Earthscapes (The Groundskeeper/ Greater Texas Landscapes)	25%
24	141	Nanak's Landscaping	24%
	148	Schill Grounds Management	24%
26	12	Merit Service Solutions	22%
27	118	Schultz Industries	22%
28	82	HighGrove Partners	21%
	127	C. Caramanico & Sons	21%
	139	Emerald Isle Landscaping	21%
31	59	Pierre Landscape	20%
	67	Merchants Landscape Services	20%
	107	Andre Landscape Service	20%
34	45	Southern Botanical	19%
	113	Complete Landsculpture	19%
	47	Landscape Concepts Management	18%
	74	Yard-Nique	18%

Growth Rank	Overall Rank	Company	% Revenue Change from 2013
38	57	Environmental Management Services	18%
	70	High Tech Landscapes	18%
	37	Terracare Associates	18%
41	129	Native Land Design	17%
42	111	Heron Lawn & Pest Control	16%
43	150	Green Lawn Fertilizing	15%
	89	Greenscapes	15%
	112	Greenscape	15%
	133	Canete Landscape & Snow Management	15%
	141	Mountain High Tree, Lawn & Landscape	15%
	149	Arbor-Nomics Turf	15%
49	15	Yellowstone Landscape Group	14%
	24	Lucas Tree Experts	14%
	56	Gachina Landscape Management	14%
	58	James River Grounds Management	14%
	65	Naturescape	14%
	128	Joyce Landscaping	14%
55	24	Acres Group	13%
	16	SavATree	13%
	71	Landscape Workshop	13%
	126	Signature Landscapes	13%
59	7	U.S. Lawns	12%
60	3	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	11%
	29	The Greenery	11%
	42	Reliable Property Services	11%
	46	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	11%
	48	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	11%
	50	D. Schumacher Landscaping	11%
	87	Sposato Landscape Co.	11%
67	10	Gothic Landscape	10%
	49	McFall & Berry Landscape Management	10%
	66	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	10%
	86	ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design	10%
	100	Harvest Landscape Enterprises	10%
	116	Dora Landscaping Co.	10%
	132	Providence Landscape Group	10%
	22	NaturaLawn of America	10%

Ruppert Landscape

It wasn't a bad year for the Laytonsville, Md., full-service firm. It surpassed \$100 million in revenue and focused on improving operations in many ways. These included adding directors of field quality/efficiency in both the main-tenance and construction divisions; renewing its focus on employee evaluations and goal setting; and encouraging better communication among branches, divisions and new/seasoned team members by instituting weekly meetings.

Arbor-Nomics Turf

This Georgia-based lawn care company makes its debut on the *LM150* list. Efforts that got it here included adding tablets for its organic lawn care division, pursuing a commission system for all employees and analyzing credit card fees, which has resulted in a boost to the bottom line.

Landscape Workshop

Based in Birmingham, Ala., and owned by private equity firm McKinney Capital, this 30-year-old company is looking to continue its growth with an incentive plan to share profits with general managers and account managers across its eight locations.

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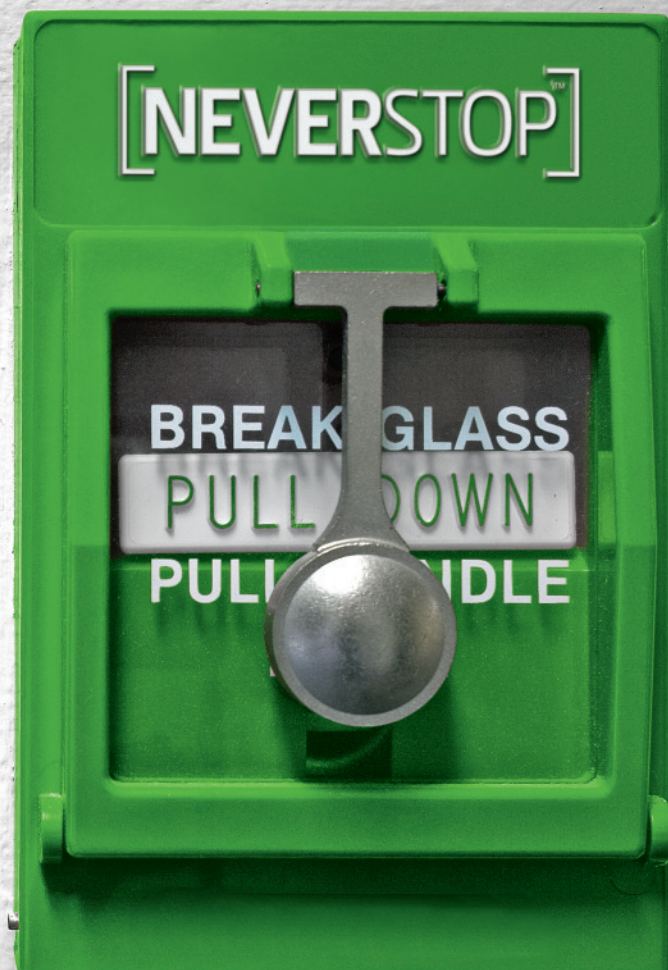
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63398

PROS + CONS

Leasing and buying are the primary ways landscape contractors add to their fleets, but don't forget about renting. Here are some pros and cons for each option.

BUYING

+PRO: Residual or resale value. You can trade it in down the road to offset the cost of the next equipment you buy.

+PRO: Asset depreciation reduces your tax obligation.

+PRO: Financing is an option, but cash purchases eliminate finance charges and interest costs.

-CON: Payments are generally high because you're paying for the full value of the equipment.

LEASING

+PRO: Payments are generally lower because you're only paying for the use and depreciation of the machine. Some leases allow for skipped payments during slow months.

+PRO: No down payments, so it's easier to replace aging equipment with minimal capital outlay.

+PRO: Helps structure a schedule for replacing equipment before maintenance costs become too expensive.



-CON: Lease agreements can be complex, heavy on fees and unbreakable, which increases the risk for companies.

RENTING

+PRO: It provides access to equipment you need occasionally.

+PRO: It allows you to try a machine before you buy it.

+PRO: Users typically aren't responsible for maintenance costs.

-CON: Daily or weekly rental costs may be high. Remember to figure them into your job costs.

SOURCE: biztree.com; empire-cat.com; Small Business Administration; Roy Brookhart, Caterpillar

NEWS- FEED

DEALERS ADDED

JCB expanded its U.S. network over the past several months, adding five dealers in Texas, New Mexico, Utah and Tennessee.

EDUCATIONAL GARDEN

The Fockele Garden Co., based in Gainesville, Ga., designed and built a sensory garden at the Northeast Georgia Speech Center in Gainesville.



RELAUNCHED LINE

ASV added three new compact track loaders to its relaunched Posi-Track line: the RT-30, RT-60 and RT-110.

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IRRIGATION+WATER MANAGEMENT

Gaining ground

Why two-wire irrigation systems are growing in popularity. BY LAUREN DOWDLE

It takes awhile for landscape contractors to trust new types of irrigation technology, so traditional ones have prevailed.

In the past five to 10 years, two-wire systems have steadily become a contender in the irrigation industry.

“Traditionally wired systems had been proven, and two-wire didn’t start to pick up momentum until the early 2000s,” says Sean Azad, product manager for commercial division, Rain Bird. “Now, it’s seen as reliable, and people are seeing the benefits.”

Helping spur this system’s popularity have been advancements in information technology.

“Two-wire systems started out as a way to save money on wire,” says Tom Shannon, water conservation adviser in the Eastern U.S., Ewing Irrigation. “Now, through technology improvements, they also provide a way to get more information.”

New technologies include updates to the microprocessors and communication methods, such as WiFi—which allows contractors to access these systems through the cloud.

“Recent trends show more and more companies developing web- or cloud-based control systems that can be managed from a home computer, tablet or smartphone remotely,” says Greg Parker, brand specification manager for Mirage and two-wire systems at Underhill. “More alert functions will appear to assist a property owner to proactively manage a system.”

Landscape contractors are also starting to use two-wire systems for smaller projects.



SMALLER SCALE

Two-wire systems, once only used for projects with 100 stations or more, are now used on jobs with around 30 stations.

“In the past, a contractor didn’t entertain the idea of two-wire for a typical commercial system until it was more than 100 stations,” Azad says. “Now, that number’s been brought down to below 30.”

TYPES OF PROJECTS

Two-wire systems can be used on a variety of sites, but there are certain types they are specifically designed to manage.

“Typically, two-wire systems make economic sense for projects that are constructed in phases over any given amount of time,” Parker says. “Large estate residential, light commercial and commercial projects are well suited for two-wire systems, as well.”

Installers can cap the wire at the end of phase one and add to it in future phases. “With a traditional system, you have to plan everything out and wire it up from the beginning,” Azad says.

The systems are also ideal for large master-planned communities. “Instead of having multiple controllers,

NEWSPEED



JDL GROWTH

John Deere Landscapes (JDL) acquired AMC Industries, an irrigation distributor

headquartered in San Antonio, Texas. The deal added nine JDL locations in Texas and Oklahoma.

AQUA CENTS AWARDED
Fresno, Calif.-based

Aqua Cents Water Management, which makes organic hydrogels for turf irrigation, was recognized by the SBDC-UC Merced Network as the 2015 Technology Business of the Year.

FOR PROS

Rachio’s RachioPro offers landscape companies a way to manage all the Rachio Iro controllers they’ve installed from a computer or smart device.

PHOTO: MICHAEL GUTIERREZ

LESS IS MORE

Two-wire systems have long been attractive because they require less copper wire than traditional systems.

you can use a two-wire system and go in any direction—as long as you don't exceed its limits,” says Jon Kirk, irrigation efficiencies service manager for WaterCentric in Carrollton, Texas.

WaterCentric offers a variety of water management services such as irrigation installs, repairs and audits. The company has \$4 million in annual revenue and serves mostly commercial clients.

Additionally, two-wire systems can run longer on linear sites compared to traditional systems.

“It's still important to know the holding current of the valves being used and the number of valves being operated at one time as part of selecting proper wire sizing for a two-wire system,” Parker says. “Knowing customer and maintenance requirements is a big part of leveraging the control system.”

ADVANTAGES OF USING TWO-WIRE SYSTEMS

These systems may have cost and installation benefits.

A big reason for choosing a two-wire system is because they require less copper wire than a traditional system, and the price of copper continues to rise, Azad says.

“You're probably going to save 80 percent on wire with a two-wire system, compared to traditional,” Kirk says.

It also takes less time to install a two-wire system. “Rather than install a single pilot wire and looped common wire to each valve, a pair of wires is all that's needed,” Parker says.

Installers don't have to “tone” or “ring-out” wires when connecting the controller, Parker adds, because each valve has a programmed decoder with a corresponding number.

Some two-wire systems also can be added to existing wire already in the ground. “Other systems require jacketed and/or twisted pairs of wires, so it's important to educate yourself as part of your product selection,” Parker says.

Another advantage is the property manager can control the entire system from one station, instead of having to visit several.



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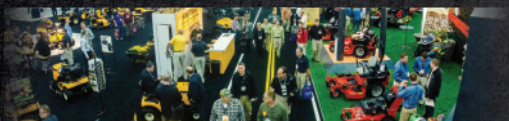
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UNDER CONTROL

There are controller-related advantages to using two-wire systems for contractors and property managers.

SYSTEM DOWNSIDES

There can be disadvantages to using two-wire systems, however.

For example, they require more grounding than traditional systems. "Some of the biggest problems I've seen are contractors either doing improper grounding or having no grounding at all," Kirk says. "If there was a static charge or lighting strike, it could ruin the whole system if you didn't have the right amount of grounding."

In some cases, that can mean adding ground rods and surge suppression decoders.

"Depending on how the wire path is laid out based on site conditions, the cost of grounding can diminish cost savings when compared to a multiwire system," Parker says.

Installers also have to be more careful with the wire, compared to traditional systems, because little cuts or nicks can cause communication problems with the system and even complete failure.

"To bring it to the masses, the technology needs to be redefined so that imperfect installation techniques don't affect the system," Azad says.

WHAT'S NEXT?


In the future, Azad says there will be more advanced diagnostic and troubleshooting features, along with improved surge protection.

Contractors also will see more system integrations with two-wire, Shannon says. For example, the irrigation and lighting systems could communicate with each other.

At some point, the industry will switch from traditional to two-wire systems altogether, Azad predicts.

"That will happen over a very long time," he says.

For two-wire systems to gain traction going forward, Kirk says it's going to take more education for contractors and customers.

"A lot of people don't install the system because they don't understand it," he says. "The installation portion is the simplest part. It's the repair and maintenance that gives them trouble. There needs to be more education on how to diagnose and repair the system." 

Dowdle is an Alabama-based freelance writer.

PHOTO: RAIN BIRD

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PAGE 64

BUSINESS BASICS: PLANNING

Keeping score of operations

Something magical happens when you keep score. Without any other changes, performance improves. It's truly an amazing phenomenon.

However, when we stop to think about it, the impact of keeping score on results shouldn't be all that surprising. All of us want to know how we're doing compared to our peers and competitors, even if we're not highly competitive by nature. We desire feedback. We hunger for information. We love metrics that are reliable, accurate and timely. In a nutshell, we want a scorecard.

Without a scorecard, we don't know if we're winning or losing, improving or declining. Simply keeping score makes a real difference, especially for process-driven activities, like those that occur in the operations area of a landscape company where small increases in results may have a dramatic impact on profitability.

There are a handful of excellent operations scorecard metrics. In this article, we'll take a quick look at three that are the most critical for

landscape operations. Think of them as a three-legged stool: efficiency, productivity and quality.

EFFICIENCY

Efficiency is a metric that's used to indicate how fast work is being done. It's a measure of speed. There are several ways to measure efficiency. One is to compare actual hours to budget hours. For example, if a job has a budget of 10 hours and the job actually took eight hours, the efficiency rating is 125 percent.

$$(10/8)*100=125$$

An efficiency rating over 100 percent is good. The faster work is completed, the better. Efficiency keeps score of this metric.

PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity is the next metric on the scorecard. It measures how much time is spent producing work versus how much time is spent doing something other than producing work. For example, let's assume we have a person who gets paid for a 10-hour day. During this 10-hour day, six hours are spent on a job site producing billable work.

The other four hours are spent in meetings, performing equipment maintenance, driving to and from the job and doing other nonbillable tasks. In this example, this person's day is 60 percent productive because only 60 percent of his or her time was spent on a job site producing billable work.

$$(6/10)*100=60$$


It's not to say the other tasks aren't important. They may have been extremely important. However, the fact remains that only 60 percent of his or her time was productive from a revenue-producing point of view.

QUALITY

Without measuring quality, efficiency and productivity will increase at the expense of excellence or meeting expectations, which is never a good thing. There are many different ways to keep score of quality. One of these is to use a property-auditing system that scores the quality of the site in an objective and consistent manner. Scoring quality is a proactive and professional approach, valued by customers and essential to ensure customer satisfaction.

SUMMARY

A weekly operations scorecard is a highly effective management tool to improve performance, increase transparency and create accountability. There's an investment of time and resources to develop and maintain an operations scorecard, but the benefits far outweigh the costs.

How is your operations team doing? Are they winning? If you had an operations scorecard, you would already know the answer to this question. 



BY PHIL HARWOOD

The author is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at phil@mypmcteam.com.

WEB EXTRA

Download operations scorecard and property audit templates in the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net



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LET'S GROW

Be a sales superstar



BY JEFFREY SCOTT

The author is owner of Jeffrey Scott Consulting, which helps landscape companies grow and maximize profits. Reach him at jeff@jeffreyscott.biz.

The economy is heating up. Have you altered your sales style to take advantage? The following proven approaches will help you become a sales superstar.

BUILD EMOTIONAL BONDS

At the heart of it, people make emotional decisions and use facts to rationalize their choices. Your job is to help prospective clients realize—from an emotional point of view—why they need your company and its solutions. By selling on emotion, you can remove yourself from price competition.

There are two ways to sell on emotion: 1). Uncover and explore the anticipated pleasure your prospect will gain by hiring you; and 2). Uncover and explore the problems your prospect will solve by hiring you.

This second way is usually more powerful than the first, depending on your client's triggers. However, salespeople often focus on the wrong problems. Mistakenly, they focus on the landscape problem instead of focusing on the personal problems that are being caused by the landscape problem. Once you uncover the personal problems, you can explore the pain they're causing your prospect and help your clients make emotionally motivated decisions.

WASTE LESS TIME

Sun Tzu, the ancient Chinese general and author of the influential war strategy text *The Art of War*, is credited with saying: "The battle is won or lost before it's ever fought." This idea applies to all of us who have to travel to make a sales call. You want to be set up for sales success before you ever step foot on a prospect's property. Arm yourself with the tools and attitude needed to reduce wasted time from bad leads and unnecessary follow-up appointments.



ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

A sales superstar is not someone with the gift of gab. Rather, it's someone with the gift of listening and asking the right questions. You need your clients to do most of the talking—between 51 percent and 75 percent—but you don't want to lose control of the conversation. You find balance by being the person asking the right questions. Think of it like a talk-show host interviewing an important guest. The guests are flattered, and yet the conversation is controlled by the effective questioning skills of the host.

MEASURE AND MANAGE SUCCESS

It's been said that, "If you measure it, you can manage and improve it." In sales, this concept means you can improve your success by measuring and holding yourself accountable to certain sales indicators. Most landscape contractors are so busy chasing leads they feel too busy to stop, measure and reflect on how to improve their numbers.


At a minimum, you should track your win/loss ratio. Many contractors accept far too low of a win ratio. How can you raise the bar? Identify your win ratio and compare your results with high-achieving companies in our industry. There's a big difference between industry averages and above-average performance. Anything is possible, when you see how others are doing it.

DON'T OVER-RELY ON YOUR STRENGTHS

You've spent your life developing landscape skills, like design, horticulture or hardscaping. These skills have helped you make sales and win new clients. But they've also helped you lose sales and lose new clients. When people become highly trained, they tend to over-rely on their skill set—maybe even showing off those skills to new prospects. A sales superstar understands how his strengths can get in the way of building rapport and uncovering the core customer needs. Remember, clients don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care about their issues.

ASK FOR THE SALE

No matter how good you are at building rapport and showing value, you need to master the process of "asking for the sale." It's difficult for many salespeople, and it's often done incorrectly. Salespeople will put off asking for the sale, and even put off talking about price, for fear of being rejected. But it's in hearing your prospective clients' objections that you learn their assumptions and misunderstandings. You can't close a sale until you learn about and address the doubts.

There are four ways to measure sales success: 1). More sales of the right kind; 2). Higher sales margins; 3). More efficient selling (higher closing ratio); and 4). More free time. The latter you can use to spend more time with your current customers, with your family or networking with new prospects. When you analyze your approach, look for opportunities to improve in all four areas. If you do so, you will become a sales superstar. 

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CASE STUDY: PROBLEM SOLVER

Scheduling solutions

As design/build business picked up, one company found a better way to manage and communicate its installation schedule. **BY CASEY PAYTON**

THE PROBLEM: As the housing market rebounded and business picked up for Ross NW Watergardens, the Portland-based company found itself scheduling jobs as far as 10 to 14 weeks in advance. Managing this kind of demand was no simple feat. If a project was unexpectedly delayed or expanded, other projects could get help up. By the time a job actually started, it became difficult to remember small details that were discussed during any back-and-forth discussion of the job. Without a system in place, getting a handle on things almost felt unmanageable.

THE TEAM: Managing the schedule mostly falls on the shoulders of Ben Bowen, the company's head landscape designer and manager. But to devise a solution, Bowen and his father Ross Bowen, the company owner, worked together to put steps in place.

THE SOLUTION: As it became difficult to manage a heavily booked schedule, the company opened the lines of communication with clients. Clients had to understand that the start date was only a target, says Bowen, adding that "clarity" and "transparency" are critical to ensure clients understand and don't feel strung along. In the end, clients typically appreciate the flexibility allows them to make possible changes of their own once it's their turn.

"Clients know that we allow them to add extra work while we're on site, and they appreciate that can mean projects

run long," Bowen says. "I assure them that even though the start date might delay, it will not be because we added a project in front of them. Clients appreciate that we have a fair system we stick to."

The second key piece to the puzzle is a deposit, which locks in the order of projects. Once a client makes a down payment, his place in line is set. Taking a deposit is an important consideration for any company that's scheduling work more than three to four weeks in advance, Bowen says.

"This ensures that only serious and committed clients get a slot," he says. "Our design/build project funnel brings us a lot of projects, but they don't always go from initial consultation to contract quickly. If someone cancels just before we're supposed to start, that can also affect the schedule."


Bowen was initially nervous about requiring deposits, but it has helped prevent last-minute back-outs, and clients understand it holds their space in line. A typical deposit is \$1,000 for any project over \$5,000.

A third part to the solution came in the form of building "flex time" into the schedule. Every four to five weeks Bowen schedules a "catch-up week."

"That week may be eaten up by extra work at a project," Bowen says. "Other times a crew will be able to help another crew on their project to help keep things on schedule. Sometimes we can just move people up a week—which always makes the client happy."

Finally, to help remember those small details that were getting forgotten between booking and execution, Bowen now accounts for review time in his own schedule the week before starting a new project. He will take 15 to 20 minutes of his day to read through all the email correspondence on a particular job—which sometimes has been as many as 100 emails. By doing so, he's able to recall exactly what the client expects—even if he or she added a detail at the last minute that wasn't in the contract.

Today, Bowen says the system is working well. The company runs two installation crews and is able to effectively manage the schedule and keep clients happy, even when they're booked a few months out. Plus, he says the crews appreciate working for a company that remains so busy.

"Crews love it," Bowen says. "They view it as job security." 

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.



Ben Bowen

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: Ross NW Watergardens

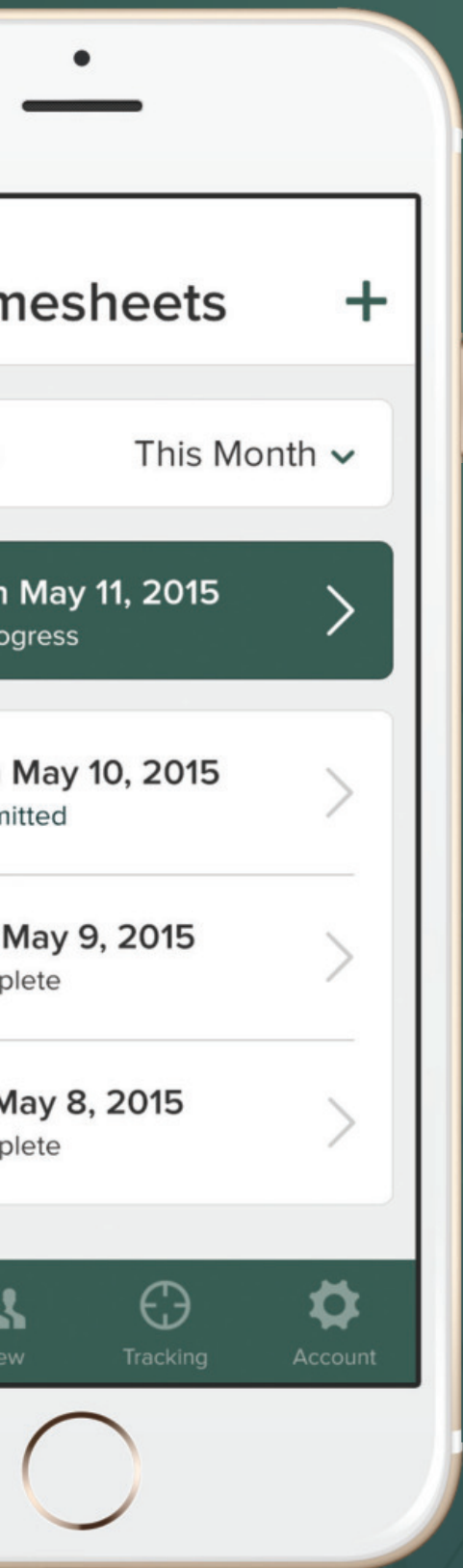
LOCATION: Portland, Ore.

ANNUAL REVENUE: Not disclosed

SERVICE MIX: 80% design/build + installation; 20% mowing + landscape maintenance

CLIENT MIX: 95% residential; 5% commercial

EMPLOYEES: 11



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WALK-BEHIND MOWERS



VELKE PISTOL GRIP HYDRO MOWERS

COMPANY: Wright Manufacturing

URL: WrightMfg.com

With deck widths of 32, 36, 48 and 52 in., the Velke can be operated as a walk-behind or paired with Wright's Velke foldaway sulky for ride-behind convenience. The mower has an integrated latch system for easy deployment and stowage of Wright's patented Velke sulky. With the complete Velke system, you can back in and out of tight spots and make turns quickly.



WHP SERIES

COMPANY:

John Deere

URL: Deere.com

The WHP Series offers a 5.8-gal. fuel tank, standard electric start and standard electric power take-off (PTO). The pistol grip controls allow for easy adjustable tracking, and each model has 7-gauge fabricated float-ing decks. Deck sizes include 36, 48 (pic-tured), 52, and 61 in.



TURF TRACER X-SERIES

COMPANY: Exmark

URL: Exmark.com

Available in 52- or 60-in. UltraCut Series 4 cutting decks, the redesigned walk-behind mower series now features a single-belt deck drive system and heavy-duty, electro-magnetic power take-off (PTO) clutch. Lazer Z-style belt shields provide tools-free access to the deck drive system. It's available in carbureted gasoline, electronic fuel-injected (EFI) gasoline or EFI propane.

21-IN. COMMERCIAL HEAVY-DUTY MOWERS



COMPANY: Toro

URL: Toro.com

The mower's rear bagging system holds 2.1 bushels and features a wide-opening, ramped-tunnel and easy-empty design. The corrosion-resistant aluminum-alloy deck is designed for durability, and the replaceable steel wear plates protect select models against bottom and side impacts. Kawasaki and Honda engines are available.



PURSUIT SERIES

COMPANY: Dixie Chopper

URL: DixieChopper.com

The Pursuit comes with an 18-hp professional series engine from Briggs & Stratton. Choose either a single- or dual-drive model and select from three compact deck sizes (32, 36 and 44 in.)—built to fit into tight areas that require precise maneuverability. Dual-drive models come standard with a light kit to finish the job past sundown.





FW35CC MOWER

COMPANY:

Ferris

URL: Ferris

Mowers.com

This new, dual-

hydrostatic machine was built

from the ground up. It offers 48-, 52- or 61-in. mowing decks and centralized control handlebars. Dual commercial Hydro-Gear ZT-3100 transaxles with 7-in. cooling fans are standard. A deck-mounting system makes leveling the deck a simple process, and a quick-adjust handle allows the operator to change cutting heights from 1.5 to 5 in.



PRO-WALK HYDRO LP 48 AND PROSTANCE 52 LP

COMPANY: Gravely

URL: AriensCo.com

These two walk-behind mowers round out a line of Gravely LP (propane) products, including the Pro-Turn 460 LP and the Pro-Turn 472 LP. In addition, Gravely dealers who are EnviroGard certified can convert several Gravely gasoline-powered models to propane with either factory-produced propane tank brackets or engine conversion kits.



SW35 WALKBEHIND

COMPANY: Snapper Pro

URL: SnapperPro.com

Available in 48-, 52- or 61-in. mowing decks, this mower features a drive belt system designed to provide uniform belt tension, which improves belt life and reduces maintenance. 20-in. tires enable climbing over curbs and rough terrain, along with reducing deck bounce for consistent cut. A two-year limited warranty on the machine provides unlimited hours the first 24 months.



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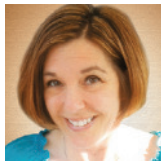
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SafetyWatch list of hazards

The list of hazards in this photo includes, but is not limited to:

- Short-sleeve shirt
- No gloves (depending on what product is in the tank)
- No eye protection (depending on what product is in the tank)
- Loose tank cap

What did we miss?

We invite you—as employers and workers in the landscape industry—to share your expertise. Email your responses to LM Editor Marisa Palmieri (mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net). We'll publish your responses with the online version of this story.



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BACKSTORY

INTERVIEW BY ALLISON BARWACZ



Matt Gramer

PRESIDENT
NATUREWORKS LANDSCAPE SERVICES
WALPOLE, MASS.

"Skiing is my vice. I've been fortunate to ski in South America. This past February, I was in Switzerland skiing with some friends. I've been helicopter skiing in British Columbia. It's my one, kind of, crazy thing."



"Hanging out with my family and going to their games is really important to me."
(Gramer with his wife, Michelle, and kids: Kyle, 13; Halley, 11; and Ashley, 6.)



BENTLEY
UNIVERSITY

"During that period of time, I organized my classes around my work schedule, so I could still run the business and maintain it throughout those four years."



"Exercise is really important to me. I think from a business perspective, it's hard to be disciplined and carve that time out of your day, but the benefits are so important for clear thinking, sleeping and making better decisions."

"I go to CrossFit at least twice a week."

EDUCATION

Walpole High School
Walpole, Mass.
Class of 1991

Bentley University
Waltham, Mass.
Bachelor of Science,
Business Management
Class of 1995

WORK EXPERIENCE

1993-1995
Envelope Stuffer
Fulfillment Express
Waltham, Mass.

1993-1995
Paperwork Filer
National Archives
Waltham, Mass.

1989-1995
Employee
T.G. Lawn & Landscape
Walpole, Mass.

1995-Present
President
NatureWorks Landscape Services
Walpole, Mass.

2000-present
Massachusetts Association of
Landscape Professionals (MLP)
Natick, Mass.
Member (2000-present)
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"My brother's a couple of years older than me. He started mowing lawns around the neighborhood, and I quickly joined as his helper. We learned early on the basic premises for winning clients' business."



"I was presented the award during last November's association dinner meeting. It was particularly special because, to my surprise, my family was invited to share in the event."

WORDS OF WISDOM "Get involved with your local and national landscape associations. This is a tough business to go at it alone." • "Think outside the box. This industry is pretty much run the way it has been for the last 30 years while things all around us are changing." • "Surround yourself with great people. You'll be amazed at what can happen."

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