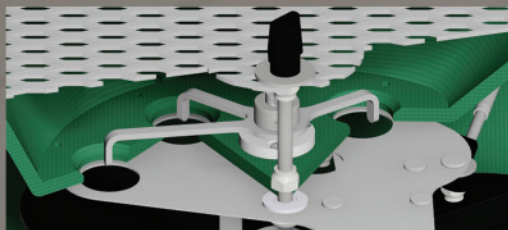


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LG Scott Landscaping & Tree Service Owners Luke Scott (left) and Larkin Scott III (right) with their mother and office manager, Dale Scott.



DOUBLE DUTY

What you can learn from a landscape company that survived the year both of its owners were deployed.



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Free educational resources

→ Did you know our Step by Step features (see page 10) are available as free downloads on our site? Our Step by Step archive offers a wide range of how-to green industry practices and procedures valuable to new hires and seasoned pros alike. Head over to **LandscapeManagement.net/StepByStep** to scroll through the topics and to download PDF versions to share with your team.



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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
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Ready to serve

I don't know how you did it when your husband was deployed," a coworker said to me the other day. His wife was out of town and he was fending for himself at home for the first time with their new baby.

Honestly, the year my husband was deployed to Afghanistan with the Ohio National Guard while I worked full time and had two young kids is mostly a blur. But the short answer to "how I did it" is this: I had a ton of help.

My parents were almost always on call, my sisters and friends provided a lot of support, and I knew every Wednesday evening my mother-in-law and my husband's siblings would be over to mow the lawn and bring me dinner. It was a huge relief. The truth is, I didn't "do it." Many people helped me.

In this issue you'll read about the many people in the green industry who are helping to relieve the stress placed on the families of deployed and disabled service members through the GreenCare for Troops program, which is part of Project EverGreen. (See the "GreenCare for Troops Guide" supplement that appears after page 40.)

I'm proud to support this program for a few reasons: I serve on Project EverGreen's advisory council and on its GreenCare for Troops committee, and I also know from experience what a difference it makes to remove a task from the to-do list of a Blue Star spouse.

Project EverGreen Executive Director Cindy Code has been known to ask, "What if every landscape or lawn care company signed up to help just one military family?"


The response to Cindy's question is many more families would know that

members of the landscape industry appreciate their service, and many more families would be able to enjoy their yards without the burden of caring for them while their loved ones are away.

Since the program's inception, 11,000 families have been matched with GreenCare for Troops volunteers. There are about 65,000 subscribers to *LM*, so if even half of you registered to volunteer, we'd triple the program's reach.

You don't need to live near a military installation to help. There are National Guard and Reserve soldiers all over the country who may be deployed and who lack the support services of having a base nearby.

In the cover story starting on page 36, Larkin Scott III and Luke Scott have quite a story to share about their family and peers helping them while they were simultaneously deployed with the Virginia National Guard. The brothers and co-owners of LG Scott Landscaping & Tree Service never thought they would be deployed at the same time, but when it happened, they were lucky to have their mom and office manager, Dale Scott, holding down the fort. Their dad, Larkin Scott II, who founded the company and sold it to them in 2008, jumped in to help and their brother, Levi, also pitched in. They offer a few lessons learned from a year away from their company and what they're doing differently now that they're home.

Maybe you won't ever be called away from your company for military duty, but the advice the Scotts share will resonate with anyone looking to step back from the day-to-day duties of running their business. 





BIG PICTURE

SCULPTURAL RENAISSANCE

LOCATION Houston

COMPANY McDugald-Steele
Landscape Architects &
Contractors

THE DETAILS A historic estate's new owners did an extensive renovation and expansion, including the gardens. The design emphasized the development of garden spaces that offered opportunities for entertaining and displaying notable garden sculptures. The architects and the McDugald-Steele team coordinated the garden design with the site's old and new architectural elements. A new swimming pool was located off the new pool pavilion's axis, while sculpture hedges provided settings for the garden art.

For the sculptural hedges to be mature for a December event, topiary forms were constructed and planted with star jasmine vines during the early months of construction. Protection and maintenance were required for six months by McDugald-Steele staff while the renovation was completed.

The project earned McDugald-Steele a 2016 Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

PHOTO Bluestone slabs create the entry motor court for guest arrival, with live oak and jasmine hedges in view.

See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture.



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NEWS HOW-TO'S

LANDSCAPE
INDUSTRY
TRENDS,
VIEWS
AND TIPS

RECOMMENDER

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PUNCH IN



Jonathan Orcutt, owner of Driven Landscapes in Norfolk, Mass., has saved at least two hours per week since discovering a cloud-based device that lets employees clock in and out by scanning their fingertips.

The scanner, Fingertec's TA200 Plus, compiles each employee's hours and automatically generates payroll.

Before incorporating the scanner in 2013, Driven Landscapes' employees reported their own hours to management, and Orcutt conducted payroll manually.

When the company started to grow, Orcutt knew he couldn't afford to spend so much time on something that could be automated.

"The one thing you cannot control is how many hours you have in the day," Orcutt says. "You need to find a way to maximize the hours you have."

In addition to saving time, the scanner eliminates the possibility of employee time theft and makes finding clock-in history easier when employees request a raise. It also allows users to deduct a set lunch period.

The scanner cost Driven Landscapes about \$800 initially with a \$60 monthly fee. The fee varies based on employee count. Driven Landscapes carries 20-30 people throughout the year.

Despite the cost, the investment was a no-brainer, Orcutt says, adding that it is just one of the initiatives his franchise program implemented to ensure scalability and efficiency.

"It's incredibly simple, and I would recommend it for anyone that has more than two crews in operation," Orcutt says.

“You need to find a way to maximize the hours you have.”

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JOHN DEERE

RECOMMENDER

What mower engines do you recommend and why?

Briggs & Stratton released the Vanguard Oil Guard System for its 810 cc EFI V-Twin and Big Block commercial engines, allowing for 500-hour oil change intervals.



DAVID PERRY
OWNER, MY LAWN CARE
POLAND, OHIO

"All my mowers have Kohler engines. (I've) had great luck with them and when needed, have had great warranty/service from dealers. Having the same engines makes maintenance simpler, and it is easier to notice if something is wrong."



MATT HYSKA
OWNER, BACKYARD KREATIONS
BRONSON, MICH.

"Kawasaki, but they all have pros and cons. Kawasaki loves oil, and we have found that Kohler cannot maintain power with vacuum systems. Every brand and setup is hard to determine."

ISSUE >>> BRIEF



BY MISSY HENRIKSEN

The author is vp of public affairs, National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP).

WORKFORCE EFFORTS

It may at times seem like there's no help in sight for the chronic workforce shortage that most industry companies face. But many groups and associations have been working on state and local initiatives to help attract new workers to the industry.

In October, the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) hosted 40 executives from industry trade associations across the U.S. and Canada to discuss how industry businesses can attract employees.

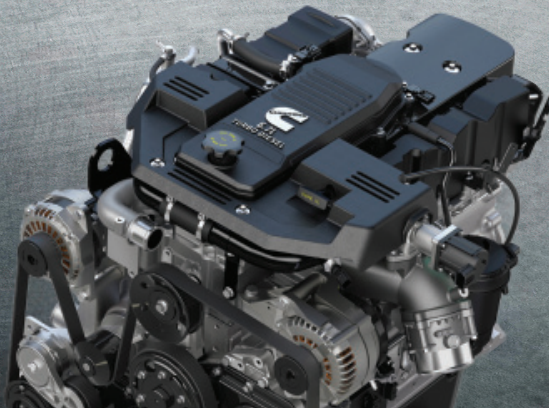
The group identified focus areas for the industry to work together on, including changing the narrative so the industry becomes the occupation of choice, not default, that attracts the brightest and the best; collecting wage, salary and benefits information to accurately represent compensation; creating a national TV presence to promote landscape and lawn care as a career; using certification and apprenticeship programs to promote our industry through skilled trade programs; looking to the future by educating children about the industry; and creating a community for recruiters to share ideas.

It's important for every landscape and lawn care company to spread the word about the industry's great career potential. Aside from just recruiting at job fairs, you can work with young students, offer apprenticeships and learn about the workforce issue at your state association. You also can support NALP's Industry Growth Initiative, which seeks to attract candidates to the national LandscapeIndustryCareers.org job board. For us to solve this problem—or to some, a crisis—it has to be an all-industry initiative. 



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STEP BY STEP

How to do an effective turf conversion

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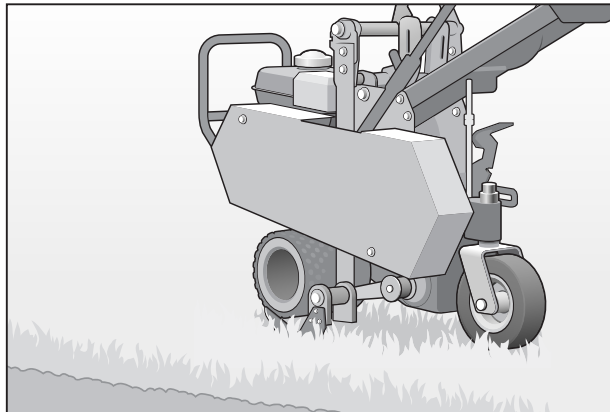
As droughts continue to plague regions throughout the country, more contractors face the challenge of keeping their clients' lawns green and healthy while using less water. Landscape watering can account for nearly 30 percent of the average residential water bill, and performing a turf conversion is one way to reduce water use. Turf conversion is replacing selected sections of turfgrass with drought-tolerant, native plants or other landscape materials. Some municipalities offer rebates or other benefits for reducing turf areas on both residential and commercial properties.

The average client is accustomed to the look of lush, green grass, and turfgrass makes sense in areas where people will sit or play. Contractors should ask themselves and their clients if it's necessary to have turf in areas such as parking strips, islands or on south-facing slopes. Is it worth it to retain turf in these hard-to-maintain areas? In some regions, it's not.

Contractors should start with a design that includes drought-tolerant, native plants that attract pollinators and beneficial insects and create wildlife habitats. It's common to include rain gardens and water features. Next, contractors should modify or replace the property's irrigation system, using the most efficient techniques to accommodate the site's current and future needs.

Follow these steps to perform a basic turf conversion. 

SOURCE: EcoLandscape California; Terracare Associates

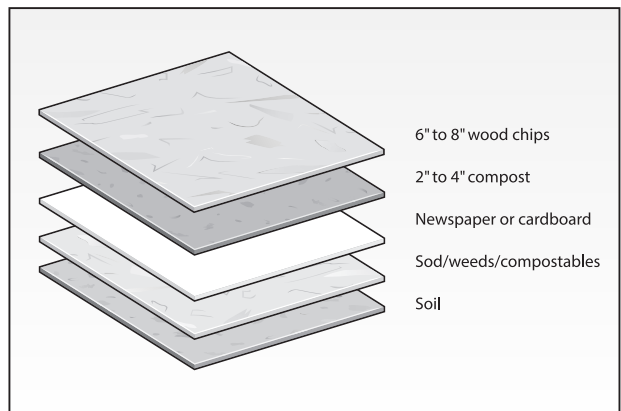


← STEP 1

Remove the sod using hand tools or a sod cutter. If working with a flat surface, use this opportunity to regrade the landscape, building berms and swales to capture and infiltrate stormwater into the soil.

→ STEP 2

Sheet mulch the soil to kick-start its development and kill any remaining turf or weeds. Saturate the area and cover it with ½ inch of corrugated cardboard or newspaper and 2-4 inches of compost. Top it with 6-8 inches of mulch. Water the area and keep layers moist.



← STEP 3

Take note of the different hydrozones (i.e., shady, full sun, moist, dry) in the landscape and install appropriate plantings and other landscape elements. Maintain the new landscape as necessary.



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NEW STUFF

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**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.

1. WEATHERTRAK OPTIFLOW XR

COMPANY: HydroPoint Data Systems

URL: HydroPoint.com

HydroPoint Data Systems released its WeatherTRAK OptiFlow XR, a technology that optimizes how, when and where watering takes place within defined water windows. It allows controllers to share information in the cloud without wires or local radios and users to share flow information from a single or multiple flow sensors across multiple controllers. The device features an extended resolution capability, providing high-resolution flow rates down to one-minute intervals. It comes with a 10-year warranty.

2. MTT 3600 TOP HANDLE CHAINSAW

COMPANY: Efco

URL: EfcoPower.com

Efco's MTT 3600 top handle chainsaw features a two-stroke engine delivering 35.4 cu. cm/2 hp. It includes an on-board clutch, a snap hook, an adjustable aluminum oil pump, a nylon air filter and an air purge. The saw's Always On ignition switch returns to the "on" position after each stop, and its Easy On starting system ensures smooth, quick starts, Efco said. It's available in bar sizes of 12, 14 and 16 in.

2



3

**3. PROFLOWFX ATTACHMENT**

COMPANY: SnowWolf

URL: SnowWolfPlows.com

SnowWolf's redesigned ProPlowFX attachment is capable of snow removal and light dirt moving and is designed for use with machines weighing up to 8,000 lbs. It is 9-1/4 in. shorter than the previous version, features a semifloating torsion system, a trip-lock-out feature, a shorter blade-to-machine distance and automatic oscillation, which allows the attachment to rise or fall up to 5 in. on either end. Backed by a two-year warranty, the attachment is available in options of 5, 6, 7 or 8 ft.

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SAFETYWATCH

AVOID WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Workplace violence is defined as physical force, an attempt at physical force or a threat of physical force by someone against a worker in a workplace that causes or could cause harm to the worker.

Keep in mind, things don't have to become physical to be considered violent.

If you are dealing with an agitated person, remember that getting out of the situation is your highest priority.

Follow these tips if a situation escalates:

- Interrupt firmly but politely.



WATCH AND LEARN Visit LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch to view a video about avoiding workplace violence.

- Advise the person that you don't like the tone of the situation, you will not accept abusive treatment and you will end the conversation if necessary.
- Tell the person that you will ask him or her to leave, or that you will leave.
- Leave immediately if the behavior continues.
- **In many cases, you might be able to diffuse the situation. In those cases, make sure you:**
 - Focus on the person.
 - Speak slowly, confidently and simply.
 - Listen carefully.
 - Encourage the person to talk.
- Remain open-minded and objective.
- Use silence as a calming tool.
- **Make sure you do not:**
 - Glare or stare at the person.
 - Interrupt.
 - Situate yourself in a way that blocks your exit.
 - Pose a challenging stance (i.e., crossed arms, hands on hips).
 - Fight.

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VEG OUT

Vegetation management can be a lucrative add-on for LCOs.

▶ PAGE 16

Another way to spray

With the right products, knowledge and equipment, vegetation management can be a lucrative add-on service for lawn care operators. BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Mark Black has some words of wisdom for his fellow lawn care operators: “Remember, one part of your business is to make it clean and green,” says the owner of Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists in South Roxana, Ill. “The other side is to kill everything.”

While “killing everything” might sound like an LCO’s worst nightmare, there is one sector of the lawn care industry where it’s actually good for business. Vegetation management, also known as industrial vegetation management, or IVM, is the control of invasive or unwanted plants and weeds in often-overlooked areas, such as along highways, railroads and pipelines, and on utility and industrial sites. Vegetation management also can occur in gravel areas, along fence lines, curbs and landscape beds, and in hardscape cracks and crevices. This type of work is primarily done with the goal of a “bare ground” or “total plant control result.” It includes herbicide treatments and mechanical control through cutting and hand weeding.



Mark Black



BARE GROUND
A Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists team member performs industrial vegetation management.

“Vegetation management could be considered a sister service to lawn care, addressing weed issues in areas other than turf,” says Dwayne Hess, vegetation management services division manager for Rentokil Steritech, a pest control company that provides vegetation management, headquartered in Chatham, Ontario, Canada.

Hess says operations for traditional lawn care and vegetation management are similar because LCOs are working in a similar environment using similar equipment and techniques and are targeting the control of unwanted plants. But unlike traditional lawn care, vegetation management can be

Continued on page 29

PHOTO: COUNTRY CLUB LAWN & TREE SPECIALISTS

NEWSFEED

NFP ADDS LOADING RAMPS

National Fleet Products released several versions of its WM System loading ramps,

which can be used with a wide array of vehicles. The ramps stow vertically just inside rear- and side-access doors

and take up approximately 8.5 inches of depth when folded and locked, the company said. The ramps include a built-in spring-assist feature and sturdy side handles.

NEW INSECTICIDE BY BAYER

Altus insecticide, designed for landscape ornamentals, offers broad-spectrum control of many sucking pests, including whiteflies, aphids, leafhoppers,

mealybugs, psyllids, scale and lace bugs. It is classified by the Environmental Protection Agency as a reduced-risk product and can be applied at any stage of plant development.

A SUPPLEMENT TO



**LANDSCAPE
MANAGEMENT**

The background is a dark night scene featuring a fountain. A large, dense spray of water is illuminated from below, creating a bright, shimmering cone of light that tapers towards the top. The water droplets are captured in mid-air, creating a fine mist. The surrounding area is dark, with some greenery visible at the bottom.

**IRRIGATION +
LIGHTING
PRODUCTS
GUIDE**

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SMART SERVICES

What to know before purchasing landscape lighting or irrigation products. BY LAUREN DOWDLE

Landscape lighting and irrigation services have some differences. Electricity and water don't exactly mix. But contractors who offer these services have a few things in common: They both want to provide customers with the best coverage while conserving resources.

That hasn't changed, although the products for these services have evolved. Both are becoming more efficient and tapping into the advances in technology to provide contractors and their customers with better results—whether that's by reducing water usage or lighting up a home using less wattage.

A few lighting and irrigation professionals shared what they've seen with product updates and their approach to purchasing these products.

Landscape Lighting: Product Upgrade

ANDREW COLEMAN

McKay Landscape Lighting • Omaha, Neb.

Halogen bulbs continue to make their exit from the industry as more professionals turn to LEDs for their lighting services.

Staying ahead of the curve with lighting can give companies the edge—something that's important in today's market, says Andrew Coleman, outdoor lighting designer at McKay Landscape Lighting in Omaha, Neb. The company offers lighting design, installation and maintenance services to about 90 percent residential and 10 percent commercial clients.

For the past three years, McKay Landscape Lighting has strictly used LED lights, making the switch from halogen. The company continues to service its existing customers who use halogen, educating them on the benefits of converting to LED.

As a company that has provided landscape lighting services for 25 years, the team looks for products it's proud of to represent the McKay name, Coleman says. The staff wants something that's reliable and doesn't burn out prematurely, so it tested LEDs with some willing customers and on their own properties before changing over completely.

"If we didn't make the switch and continue to educate and do research on our own, we'd get passed up," he explains. "We knew LED was coming full force."

As part of the education efforts, McKay has invested in professional photography to show clients the before and after shots of halogen versus LED lights, and it's much brighter.

There have even been upgrades from one generation of LED to the next. As LED lights have evolved, some of the fixtures have become smaller and sleeker, allowing Coleman and his team to reach areas, like soffits, they previously couldn't with LEDs or halogens. "That can make a pretty big impact," he adds.



Andrew Coleman

IRRIGATION+ LIGHTING PRODUCTS GUIDE

These fixtures also have grown in capability, with 20-watt LED lights that are now comparable to 120-watt halogen bulbs.

The McKay team used them to light up a historic campus building early this year, and it was able to light up four stories with the LEDs.

“That’s exciting for us,” Coleman says. “We were able to do some things that we weren’t able to do with halogen or even the first versions of LEDs.”

He says it’s important for owners to do their homework when purchasing lighting products. They should focus on developing relationships with suppliers, instead of only looking at the price.

“Find a fixture and manufacturer you’re comfortable with, and do business together,” Coleman says. “Don’t just hop around and look for the best deal. It’s more about the relationship.”

McKay is tasked with taking care of its customers, so the team wants a manufacturer who will do the same for them, providing support if there’s a product issue.

Landscape Lighting: Illuminating Technology

TY ROSSER

Landscape Lighting Pro of Utah • Midvale, Utah

As the desire to create and expand outdoor living spaces continues to grow, so does the need for landscape lighting. Contractors have to find products that will provide both the practical and “wow” factors.

“The trend right now for landscape lighting is to provide an aesthetic backdrop oriented around people’s outdoor living spaces,” says Ty Rosser, lighting designer at Landscape Lighting Pro of Utah. “The goal is to provide people with functional light without sacrificing beauty.”

And that’s what the team focuses on at Landscape Lighting Pro of Utah. Located in Midvale, Utah, the company provides lighting design, installation and maintenance services to residential customers—in addition to a few light-commercial projects each year.



Ty Rosser



Lighting products are becoming more refined and customizable to keep up with tech-savvy consumers.

Beyond just the aesthetics, lighting products are also offering refined control options, smartphone app controls and the ability to give clients customization options. Consumers continue to become more tech-savvy and want instant options, and that trend is impacting how they want to interact with their lighting systems.

“It’s incredible the way that the end user, the homeowner, can customize (his) lighting effects and enjoy (his) lighting when and how (he) wants,” Rosser says. “Smart app technology has really opened up a world of new possibilities. We’ve seen a lot of neat new advancements over the years that continue to become more refined and end-user oriented.”

While some of the latest features and technology are catching both his and his customers’ attention, Rosser says the company continues to turn to trusted, consistent options when it comes to product selection.

“We try to avoid the new flash in the pan products when they crop up,” Rosser says. “In our mind, the only true test to know if something is going to be dependable is the test of time.”

Rosser encourages contractors not to cut corners when purchasing lighting products: “Use products that are going to fit your designs—and not the other way around—know your product’s value and use products that are built for life,” he says.

And when looking for a manufacturer, Rosser says his company turns to one that meets its design needs and specifications. The partnership has to be the right fit to be successful.

“The goal is to provide people with functional light without sacrificing beauty,” says Ty Rosser.



PHOTOS: MCKAY, LANDSCAPE LIGHTING (TOP); LANDSCAPE LIGHTING PRO OF UTAH (BOTTOM)

Irrigation: Remote Control

JOSIAH BALL

Native Land Design • Austin, Texas

Conservation continues to be a hot topic throughout the irrigation industry, but implementing digital tools is also gaining ground on both commercial and residential properties.



Josiah Ball

“Irrigation products are moving heavily into the world of smart technology,” says Josiah Ball, irrigation manager at Native Land Design in Austin, Texas. “Systems that can be controlled by your personal computer or cell phone are rapidly growing in popularity, with both individual residential systems, as well as the larger commercial systems.”

Being able to turn systems on/off, adjust programs and troubleshoot diagnostics remotely and in real time with a touch of a screen is the direction products are going. These functions allow contractors to provide a more rapid reaction time to issues and requests from the client, Ball says.

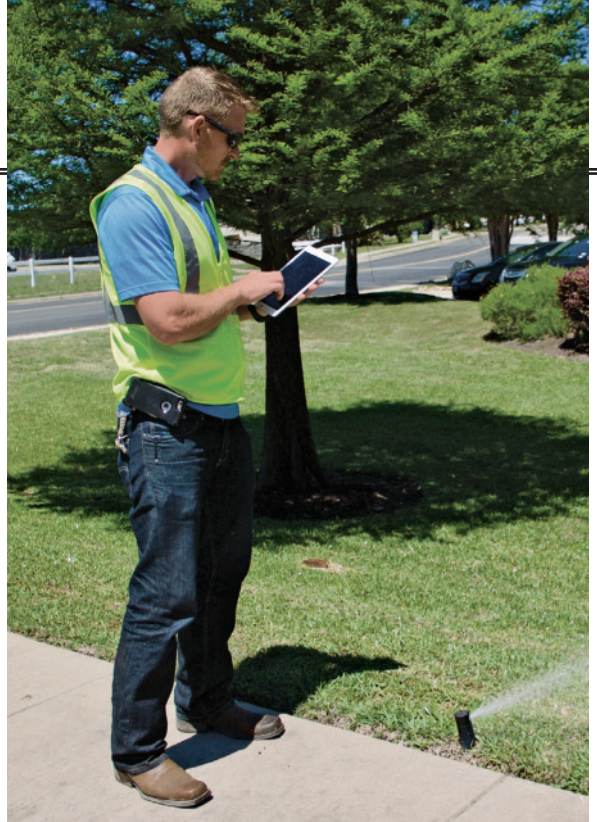
Another growing trend in the commercial sector is the growing use of two-wire systems, he adds. They can help make contractors more efficient with their time and resources, adding to their appeal.

“The two-wire systems allow for the entire property to be wired in the early stages of the property development and then tied in individually as the property grows and expands—and also allows for a drastic reduction in the length of wires needed for a site,” Ball says. “This, in combination with advances made in programming options, troubleshooting and tracking water conservation, is adding to the growing popularity of the two-wire systems.”

As for new irrigation products and systems hitting the market, Ball says ones that can be easily programmed to different plant types, elevation changes, soil types and other factors can make a big difference in the quality of the landscape and water conservation.

“It’s always exciting to see the technology advances of products growing and making work more efficient and effective,” Ball says.

Implementing products that assist with conservation efforts is especially important in areas like where Native Land Design services. With offices around




Texas, Native Land Design is accustomed to working with drought conditions and water restrictions.

The company provides commercial landscape design, construction, enhancements, maintenance, water management and irrigation services and has an annual revenue of \$15 million.

When it comes to purchasing irrigation products, Ball says they look for manufacturers with a long history in the industry that are making advances with the product technology. He also prefers working with vendors that have knowledge of the systems and parts he’s purchasing.

Although there are regularly new irrigation products and companies, Ball says it’s important to do business with one that’s qualified and available to give advice. Or, “an issue can quickly turn into a nightmare with a suffering landscape and unhappy client,” he adds.

It’s important for the manufacturer to have a network of suppliers and regional support technicians for the brands of systems he works with, as well.

“When you know you can trust not only the price you’re paying for your products, but also the advice and recommendations from the vendors that you’re buying them from, it adds a peace of mind and assurance that what you’re buying is needed and correct,” Ball says, “and that the quality of the products you’re purchasing (is) worth the cost.” 

Irrigation products that can be programmed to environmental conditions make a big difference in landscape quality and water conservation.

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Nashville.

ETwater

ETwater has over a decade of experience working with the country's largest businesses, municipalities, and HOAs to reduce and optimize water consumption.

ETwater is a patented smart irrigation system that centrally processes all environmental data about a landscape, including plant types, soil and slope conditions, and more, to calculate a scientific watering schedule for its line of smart controllers. ETwater then continuously, automatically adjusts the schedule by zone/station based on forecast and the prevailing weather conditions to verify watering accuracy. Advanced monitoring features are available to provide alerts for broken valves, clogged or broken pipes.

ETwater smart controllers connect to the internet with reliable, anywhere-connectivity over 3G and 4G wireless networks, with no cables or WiFi necessary. ETwater offers three smart irrigation controller models with quick set-up for remote management and real-time monitoring from any computer, tablet or Smartphone.



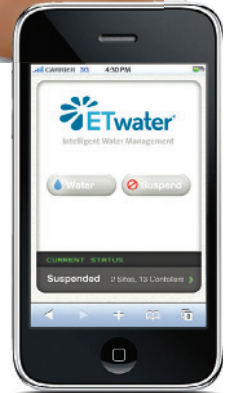
The ETwater SmartBox is designed for new construction or when an old system needs to be completely replaced. Available in configurations for 8-48 zones/stations.

The ETwater Smartworks Replacement Panel upgrades old controllers where the enclosure and valve wiring are still good and can be installed into existing enclosures, with no need to rewire the valves. SmartWorks panels are compatible with both wall and pedestal mount configurations for models of Irritrol, Rain Master, and Rain Bird.

ETwater HermitCrab is a patented retrofit smart controller that instantly converts to smart irrigation an existing conventional 'clock' timer by plugging into the remote control port. It's compatible with over 50 different host controller models, including Rain Bird, Rain

Master, Weathermatic, Irritrol, Superior, Toro and Hunter. Single-platform simplicity allows management of multiple controller brands across sites, saving labor and unnecessary site visits.

All ETwater smart controllers are FCC approved and EPA WaterSense certified. For more information, call 888-685-5505 or email info@etwater.com. Welcome to the Smart Outdoors®



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Netafim's Techline® HCVXR is the only landscape dripline that infuses Cupron copper oxide directly into the mold of each emitter to provide a chemical free, long lasting, non-toxic root barrier for subsurface drip irrigation systems. By embedding copper oxide into the material used to create each emitter during the manufacturing process, the dripline's root resistant properties will not wash off or migrate out of the emitter after years of use.

HCVXR is unparalleled in functionality, as it combines the superior features of Techline® CV with many of the same features and attributes found in Netafim's agricultural-grade driplines. The result is a solution that professionals and end-users can trust to endure the challenges of today's diverse and dynamic landscapes.

The only dripline with a 15-year warranty against root intrusion, the HCVXR emitters are engineered with a physical root barrier, extra large bath area, continuous self-flushing mechanisms and raised outlets to prevent fine feeder roots or sediment from inhibiting water flow in the dripline.

In addition, Techline HCVXR features a high check valve to ensure that each emitter turns on and off at the same time, maximizing application uniformity and holding back up to 8.5' of water when installed on sloping landscapes. Each emitter is also equipped with a built-in anti-siphon feature that



Cupron
copper oxide

Netafim's Techline HCVXR is the only landscape dripline that infuses Cupron copper oxide directly into the mold of each emitter to provide a chemical free, long lasting, non-toxic root barrier for subsurface drip irrigation systems.

seals the emitter outlet during system shutdown, preventing debris from entering the dripline after irrigation. Available in four different flow rates to accommodate any application, Techline HCVXR is pressure-compensating, flexible and UV-resistant, and laser-etched for easy identification of model, flow rate and emitter spacing. Also available for non-potable applications.



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REMOTE ACCESS

Galaxy-RT™ is accessible 24/7 via the Signature Share™ cloud-based communication portal from any internet capable computer or mobile device. Remotely control and monitor one site or an infinite number of sites from anywhere in the world. All programs are stored in the controller once downloaded, and are available 24/7 on our secure server.

COST EFFECTIVE

Galaxy-RT™ requires no expensive desktop software purchases. Eliminates the need for a dedicated irrigation computer. Abolishes time consuming software upgrades and related programming. Due to water savings and time savings afforded by the capabilities of the



Signature
Galaxy^{RT}

Galaxy-RT coupled with Signature Share, the Return-On-Investment (ROI) is usually less than 2 years.

EASY TO USE

Galaxy-RT™ requires no extensive backups; we handle all upgrades, support and maintenance. Upgrades are automatically uploaded seamlessly so that when you log on they are ready. Menus are user friendly and intuitive using a graphical user interface.

WEATHER-BASED IRRIGATION SCHEDULING (ET)

Galaxy-RT™ uses real-time weather data (ET) and transmits it to each controller. Smart-Water programming allows the controller to precisely irrigate each micro zone individually by programming all agricultural attributes of the irrigated landscape, saving water, time, and expense.

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VOLT Lighting

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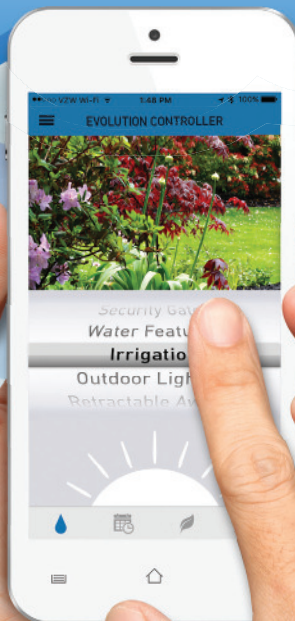
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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Continued from page 16

more of a year-round operation since herbicide treatments can be applied to plants in a preemergent state and during the active growing season.

Before offering vegetation management services, LCOs should be familiar with their state's certification and licensing requirements.

When it comes to selecting products for vegetation management, Jay Young, herbicide product manager for PBI-Gordon, a supplier of lawn care products headquartered in Kansas City, Mo., says most LCOs use a non-selective herbicide that offers residual control. These products can control all unwanted plant life with one application for long periods of time and are not often used in other areas of the professional lawn care market due to their nonselectivity.

"LCOs should go with these products because they are trying to control everything with one application," Young says.

"They want that control to last six to eight months and be done with it."

While the equipment necessary to perform vegetation management is similar to the equipment used for traditional lawn care, it can differ based on the depth of vegetation management services provided. Hess recommends that separate spray tank systems be maintained when offering selective turf weed control versus nonselective total bare ground applications to avoid misapplications and potential damage.

"Also, herbicide labeling needs to be considered in relation to the worksite location and could result in the need to utilize different labeled herbicides to control the same weeds," he adds.

Black has steadily grown the vegetation management division of Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists for the past 10 years, and it now com-

prises about 5 percent of his total business. He services commercial and industrial sites ranging from 2,000 square feet to 25 acres. Country Club is a \$3 million company that offers 70 percent lawn care, 10 percent tree/shrub care, 7 percent snow removal and 13 percent "other" services (including vegetation management) to an 85 percent residential, 15 percent commercial clientele.

Like Hess, Black views vegetation management as a supplemental service to traditional lawn care. He reserves specific equipment for vegetation management and makes sure the tanks and sprayers are never used in a residential setting to prevent cross contamination, which he says is one of the biggest challenges when working with nonselective products. While only three of his technicians perform vegetation management, Black says more than half of them have received their Right-Of-Way Vegetation Management Certification through the state of Illinois. Black says most of the techniques and calibrations overlap with traditional lawn care procedures, but the extra knowledge is beneficial to his crews.

"If an LCO has the luxury of having someone slotted for service (calls) versus a route technician, he would be able to offer vegetation management. Vegetation control application timing will fill in when service calls are light," Black said. "We do it for the additional revenue, and it has been a great fit."


GETTING THE WORD OUT

Hess says there are several benefits to vegetation management that lawn care companies can market to potential clientele. For example, thorough vegetation management on commercial sites can create a more inviting facility appearance that improves brand image. Vegetation management also adds to the overall safety of a facility by improving lines of sight and reducing slip, trip

and fall hazards, which can reduce the risk of worksite injuries. Controlling vegetation also reduces fire hazards and eliminates habitats for biting and stinging insects, rodents, snakes and other unwanted pests. Effective vegetation management also may provide better access to a facility's HVAC systems, outside storage, inventory and fuel stations.

"Vegetation management provides proven cost savings with safe, properly applied herbicidal control of vegetation versus more costly options such as frequent manual cutting and pulling of unwanted plants by hand," Hess says. "Marketing these benefits as solutions is a key selling and management strategy."

Other than listing the service on his company's website and using Google AdWords, Black does not market his vegetation management services. In fact, he says they practically market themselves to the many industrial site managers in his area who have found him online. Country Club Lawn & Tree Specialists is located near six oil companies with tank yards. Black says "the sky is the limit" for LCOs in industrial areas who decide to actively promote their vegetation management services. Black also has considered bidding on vegetation management jobs through governments and municipalities, but he chooses not to go this route because these jobs are typically won by the lowest bidder.

"There is a possibility that we could get more into this service in the future, but right now, our best-case scenario is that this is a gap filler and easy revenue to generate," he says. "Lawn care and vegetation management do overlap. Spraying is spraying, but you do have to know what you're doing, why you're doing it and what your target is." 



Dwayne Hess



Jay Young

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

MOWING+LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE



Challenges of change

Doug Duschene discusses the top three challenges he faced when switching to propane-powered mowers and how he overcame them.

BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

A gray, smoggy sky over Salt Lake City inspired Doug Duschene to think twice about the pollution emitted from his fleet of landscape vehicles and equipment.

“We have all these mowers, trucks and equipment that just burn fuel,” says the owner of Bozeman Site Services in Bozeman, Mont. “I thought, ‘There has to be a way to reduce all of the pollution we’re putting out.’”

After doing some research, Duschene learned that propane-powered machinery can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 15 percent and carbon monoxide emissions by 40 percent compared with gas-powered equipment.

So prior to the 2015 season, the company converted

16 mowers—nearly its entire fleet—to operate on propane, becoming one of the first landscape companies in Montana to do so.

“We live in a town where people absolutely get on board with anything that benefits the health of the environment,” Duschene says. “We get phone calls specifically because we offer propane and are trying to be more environmentally friendly.”

Duschene used the Propane Mower Incentive Program offered by the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), which gives a \$1,000 incentive to applicants for each commercial propane mower purchase and \$500 for each qualified conversion kit. In exchange, Duschene provides data to PERC that documents his propane equipment use at the end of each season. Bozeman Site Services provides 35 percent maintenance,

← ‘THERE HAS TO BE A WAY’
Doug Duschene turned to propane to help reduce mower emissions.

35 percent snow removal, 15 percent lawn care and 15 percent irrigation services to a 60 percent residential, 40 percent commercial clientele.

Duschene shared with *LM* the top three challenges he faced when switching to propane and how he overcame them.

FINDING FUEL

The biggest challenge Duschene faced was accessibility to the propane needed to fuel his equipment each day. The closest fueling station was 10 miles from his facility. For Duschene, it didn’t make sense logistically to travel that distance daily.

“Unlike gas stations, there are not propane-fueling stations all over the place, especially in small towns like Bozeman,” he says.

As a solution, Duschene worked with his propane provider, Northern Energy, to have a 1,000-gallon propane tank installed on-site. He also leases more than 35 propane cylinders from them, and he negotiated low rental costs for the propane infrastructure and cylinders because of the high volume of fuel the company uses. Northern Energy also provided training to Duschene and his crews on how to operate and fill the tanks. This tactic has improved productivity because his crews spend less time refueling at gas stations because empty cylinders can be replaced in the field.

“We built this into the deal before I even bought the conversion kits because access to propane was nonnegotiable for me,” Duschene says. “We are able to just fill up at the shop and go. My crews can take all the propane they need for the day on the trailer.”



Doug Duschene

NEWSFEED

SLT SOLAR-POWERED SYSTEM

Super Lawn Technologies unveiled its solar-powered charging system for battery-

powered equipment, which is designed to power a three-man crew’s commercial-grade equipment for a

full day of work using nothing but the sun.

YELLOWSTONE EXPANSION

Yellowstone Landscape, headquartered in Bunnell, Fla., expanded with a new location in Austin, Texas.

The Austin branch provides commercial landscape maintenance and enhancement services.

BIG DATA FROM BRIGGS

Briggs & Stratton launched InfoHub for

Commercial Turf, designed to help landscape pros schedule jobs, prepare bids, and deploy crews and equipment efficiently by tracking where equipment is and how it is being used.

PHOTO: PERC

MANAGING MAINTENANCE

Figuring out how to service and maintain his new propane mowers was another challenge for Duschene because there were no local service technicians who had experience with these machines. After communicating this concern to his propane conversion kit provider, the company sent representatives to Bozeman Site Services to teach the crews how to properly service the propane mowers, and they are now able to do routine maintenance and repairs in-house.

“Propane providers are beginning to come into the community and train people on how to work on propane mowers, so they are kind of solving this problem,” Duschene says. “But initially, it was more of a request on our end to make sure more mechanics are certified, so if we need work done, someone knows how to do it.”

At the same time, since switching to propane, Duschene has seen his maintenance needs decrease. Because there is very little carbon in propane, the mowers don't experience carbon buildup in the oil, which nearly doubles the lifespan of an oil change, he says. Before the switch, Duschene says he experienced ethanol contamination in his gas-powered trimmers and blowers, which required replacement of their carburetors once a year.

“Our experience with what ethanol was doing to all of our other equipment helped us to choose propane as our fuel source, so our mowers wouldn't fall prey to the same devastating effects,” Duschene says. “It was only a matter of time until we would have started needing to repair mower carburetors constantly, and we didn't want that headache.”

“We have definitely extended the service life on our equipment,” he adds. “It's running longer than ever before.”

PERFORMANCE PERCEPTIONS

Despite the time and effort Duschene put into making his propane dreams a reality, he acknowledges he was still skeptical that his propane machines



PERFORMANCE
Bozeman Site Services crews can't tell the difference between the propane and gas-powered machines.

would operate as efficiently and as powerfully as their gas counterparts. After experiencing ethanol contamination and hearing about the difficulties the automobile industry had trying to convert vehicles to propane, Duschene had a fear in the back of his mind that he could potentially damage his entire mower fleet. But after using the propane mowers, Duschene says they run as good as or better than gas-powered machines. In fact, his crews still run one gas-powered mower that wasn't able to

be converted to propane, and operators can't even tell the difference.

“You know gasoline's performance—every time you fill it up, it's going to perform,” Duschene says. “But everything has risk to a certain degree, and at some point, you just have to weigh the risks versus the rewards.”

“I feel like propane is the real deal,” he adds. “I'm hoping that it's the wave of the future.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

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Wild and free

Zech Strauser revived his passion for the green industry by embracing his love for natural, sustainable landscapes.

BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

About four years ago, Zech Strauser suggested that one of his commercial resort clients do something a little different with a large, unused green space next to its basketball courts. The project, completed by Strauser for free, turned 8,000 square feet within a 2-acre space into a sustainable plant paradise. It includes native grasses and wildflowers that attract butterflies and hummingbirds, and it provides attractive displays of color from spring to fall.

"It's absolutely beautiful," says Strauser, president and CEO of Strauser Nature's Helpers in East Stroudsburg, Pa. "In the first year or two, you get a lot of perennials, but as time goes on, the grass species start to take hold and



they are the winning factor in the long run. The client loves it and we have since introduced more areas like this around the property."

That project was a turning point in Strauser's career and helped reignite his passion for the green industry, which he entered 20 years ago when he started mowing overgrown foreclosed properties with a borrowed push mower. Strauser Nature's Helpers has since become a \$3 million to \$4 million company that provides 75 percent maintenance and 25 percent design/build services to a 20 percent residential, 80 percent commercial clientele. The company employs 15 to 20 year-round team members and another 20 to 30 seasonal and part-time employees, depending on the severity of the snow season.

PASSION REIGNITED

After about 15 years of steady growth,

Strauser began to feel as though he'd lost his way. He says he believed there must be more to the landscape than green grass and mulched beds.

"As my company grew, I fell into a trap of following the status quo and the traditional idea of what our industry is," Strauser says. "I asked myself, 'Why am I inspired to be in this industry?' and I couldn't find any reasons. I'd started to lose the passion behind it, and we were just driving to make another sale."

Strauser reflected on the reasons he entered the landscape industry initially, such as his love of the outdoors and being able to get some dirt on his hands. He recalled his nontraditional upbringing as a home-schooled student and the way his family "lived off the land,"

↑ REEVALUATE
Zech Strauser says there is more to the landscape than just green grass and mulched beds.

PHOTO: STRAUSER NATURE'S HELPERS

NEWSFEED

KUBOTA UNVEILS MOWERS

Kubota Tractor unveiled two new commercial mowers—the Z700 family of

zero-turns and a new 21-inch commercial walk-behind mower. The mowers will be available at Kubota

dealerships beginning in December 2017.

NH COMPACT EXCAVATOR LINE

New Holland's new line of mini excavators includes six models (E17C, E26C, E33C, E37C, E57C

and E60C) ranging from 1.7 to 6.0 metric tons. Features include extended life components, an anti-theft engine start limit system and lower noise levels, according to the company.

TAKEUCHI LAUNCHES TL6

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Zech Strauser

spending countless hours working in their large gardens. Those experiences prompted him to reevaluate the direction his company was moving in and think of how he could do things differently to better align with his core values.

Some companies in the industry are actually “ungreen,” Strauser says, pointing to chemicals, emissions and other outputs that can be harmful if handled improperly or left unchecked.

“At the end of the day, are we creating inviting, environmentally friendly landscapes to be in?” he asks. “Not really.”

So Strauser implemented a four-part approach he calls “A Better Way,” which breaks down the components of a landscape project. He looks at each project’s environmental rewards, finan-

cial and aesthetic benefits, and how people can have more interaction with the landscape. His goals include decreasing lawns by 30 percent and replacing them with organic, native plant mixtures

and reducing mulched areas by 60 to 80 percent by filling beds with plants. Strauser says a tremendous amount of resources goes into creating and maintaining large green spaces that he sees going unused. Landscapes that incorporate native plantings can be low impact and require less mowing and fewer chemicals to maintain, while creating wildlife habitats, he adds.

“Most properties have vast lawn areas that, by thinking differently, can be transformed into areas that can benefit the environment and the wildlife at the

same or lower costs,” Strauser says. “These practices aren’t new—they are basically going back to what good gardening is. We are trying to introduce these ideas to clients who are used to that clean, neat appearance.”

Strauser spreads his message through his involvement with organizations such as Come Alive Outside, a nonprofit that works with landscape professionals and other groups to inspire communities to enjoy outdoor spaces, and the Chesapeake Bay Landscaping Council, which recently introduced the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Certification, a formalized set of sustainable landscaping standards for the region’s landscapers. Strauser says 180 contractors—himself included—will receive the certification by the end of this year.

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GET SCHOOLED
Education is key to getting both contractors and clients on the sustainable landscapes bandwagon.



“It’s really exciting that there is a certification for the direction we are going,” he says. “It’s nice to see Pennsylvania get on the bandwagon.”

Strauser says getting more people on this bandwagon is one of the biggest challenges to changing the public’s perceptions of outdoor landscapes. Education will play a huge role in getting contractors and clients alike to understand and become receptive to the idea of converting unused green spaces to prairies and meadows. Since landscapes are largely driven by building developers, Strauser says they, too, need to be educated about the ins and outs of natural landscapes to ensure they are being implemented correctly from the start.

“The average landscaper is not trained in what we are talking about, so how can they sell it?” Strauser asks. “Even if the contractor is trained on speaking about native plants and their lesser impacts, the client likely has never heard of it and won’t want to turn (his) property into a nature sanctuary. How do we narrow down this broad world into actionable goals? I believe these challenges are changeable and we can influence both sides. But it’s going to take time.”

In light of all his efforts, Strauser wants to make one thing clear: “By no means are we this 100 percent green company that is only doing really exciting things. We still have accounts and take care of many sites that don’t have anything to do with what we are talking about,” he says. “But at the same time, that work helps support and fuel our true initiative, and hopefully we can inspire others to go in this direction too.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

Smart startup

A recent grad nabs funding and takes his soil moisture monitoring idea to the ‘Sharks.’

BY MERRITT MELANCON

Landscapers and irrigation contractors understand that remote soil moisture sensors and smart irrigation systems have the potential to revolutionize the way people use water.

University of Georgia (UGA) College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences (CAES) horticulture student Jesse Lafian has secured more than \$60,000 in grant funding to develop a soil moisture sensor that’s accurate and affordable. He pitched his concept during GIE+EXPO in Louisville, Ky., during “Shark Tank, The Landscapes 2017 Edition!” to a panel of green industry experts including Judy Guido, chairwoman of Guido & Associates; Jim McCutcheon, CEO of HighGrove Partners; Mike Rorie, CEO of GoLawn; and Doug York, CEO of Ewing Irrigation & Landscape Supply. Several “sharks” expressed interest in potentially investing in his technology.

Today, most automated irrigation systems are controlled by timers, regardless of soil moisture. A conventional tensiometer, a type of soil moisture sensor, isn’t used to control irrigation systems because it requires continual supervision. Lafian’s tensiometer does not. His sensor enables irrigation control based on the availability of water to plants. Sprinklers only engage when plants have restricted access to water and run as long as it takes to restore adequate moisture.

“What makes my tensiometer different is that it is virtually maintenance-free,” Lafian said. “Regular tensiometers are impractical for large-scale use because they fail when the soil becomes too dry. They must be checked often to ensure they are still working correctly. If a landscaper had 100 regular tensiometers on

100 different job sites, it would be impossible to check them all every few days.”

The technology is being tested as part of Lafian’s startup, Reservoir, a business he launched in early 2016. He moved to Athens, Ga., to work as a research assistant in the UGA College of Engineering in 2014 after receiving his associate’s degree from Tompkins Cortland Community College in Dryden, N.Y., and completing a National Science Foundation-funded oceanography internship. He began pursuing a bachelor’s degree in horticulture in fall 2015.

“When I started this project, I wanted to create an accurate and affordable way for researchers to measure plant-available water in soil,” Lafian said. “Fortunately, it has expanded into an opportunity to reduce water usage, pollution and expenses for other customers as well.”

Lafian has applied for a patent on his sensor and plans to sell it to landscapers, farmers, golf course superintendents, scientists and homeowners.

“Jesse’s sensor works fundamentally differently from the sensors I have used in the past,” said Marc van Iersel, a professor of horticulture at UGA, smart irrigation pioneer and Lafian’s adviser. “The soil moisture sensors I have been using measure how much water is in the soil but not how tightly that water is held in the soil. Some—or much, depending on soil type—of the water in the soil cannot be extracted by plants because the soil holds it too tightly. Jesse’s sensor measures exactly that—how tightly the water is bound to the soil. That tells us whether the plants can actually use that water.”

Lafian thought of creating the tensiometer in fall 2015 while taking a “Soils and Hydrology” course. In spring 2016,




INNOVATE
Jesse Lafian poses with an early version of his soil moisture sensor, which is the basis for his startup, Reservoir.

he turned his idea into a business, and in the fall, he participated in the Idea Accelerator program run by Thincat UGA and Four Athens, a local technology incubator.

“During the Accelerator program, I interviewed 45 potential customers, and I got the best response from landscapers who install and warranty trees,” Lafian said. “Besides improving survival of trees, landscapers need a way to check soil moisture remotely so they can reduce travel to job sites. Reservoir is currently working to integrate our tensiometer with an app and a website to meet this need.”

Lafian is using the grants he secured to develop and test his technology so that field trials can begin. Several institutions at UGA have supported his work, including the Office of Sustainability, the Center for Undergraduate Research Opportunities, the Terry College of Business and CAES through its newly launched FABricate entrepreneurship program.

Lafian has hired two UGA engineering students to fine-tune the tensiometer’s electronics, website and app. He has collaborated with the UGA Instrument Shop to build several prototypes to be tested on UGA’s Athens campus. 

Melancon is a writer for *Southscapes*, a semiannual publication of the UGA College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, where a version of this article originally appeared. Additional reporting by Marisa Palmieri.

LG Scott
Landscaping
& Tree Service
Owners Luke
Scott (left) and
Larkin Scott
III (right) with
their mother and
office manager,
Dale Scott.





What you can learn from a landscape company that survived the year both of its owners were deployed.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

DOUBLE DUTY

“OH BOY, WHAT DO WE DO NOW?”

Larkin Scott III recalls having this thought in the summer of 2015 when he found out that he'd be deployed for the third time in his role as a Black Hawk pilot with the Virginia National Guard. His worries were those of any soldier being deployed to a place like Iraq. After all, he would be away from his family for a year and even miss the birth of his second child.

But his concerns carried an additional weight. He knew his brother and business partner, Luke Scott, a fellow member of the National Guard, also would be deployed at the same time, albeit with a different unit. The pair co-own LG Scott Landscaping & Tree Service in Providence Forge, Va. They bought the company from their father, Larkin Scott II, in 2008.

Members of the Reserves and National Guard can be called up at any time, so the family always knew this situation was a possibility, but they still didn't expect it.

“For a while, Luke was in a unit that didn't need to deploy, and I had already done two

deployments, so it didn't seem like it would ever happen,” Larkin Scott III says.

But it did. They could have requested not to deploy, but they thought it might hurt their Guard careers. Besides, they joined the service knowing they may have to serve overseas.

“We wanted to do our duty, so we said, ‘Let's figure this out,’” says Larkin Scott III.

Luke Scott, who serves as an infantry scout squad leader, deployed in May 2016 to Qatar, and Larkin Scott III departed a month later to Iraq. They left the business in the hands of their mom, Dale Scott, who had served as office manager since the company was founded in 1997. They also promoted a key employee to general manager. They created a comprehensive operations manual and spent a few months working on a plan for the business to run while they were gone.

Before they left, the brothers thought they were well prepared, but they learned they could have done a better job setting up the company for success during their

time away. The company survived, but profitability faltered.

They returned earlier this year—happy to be home safely, grateful for their family's help and motivated to build and grow a profitable business that's less reliant on its owners.

BUSINESS BREAKDOWN

COMPANY: LG Scott Landscaping & Tree Service

HEADQUARTERS: Providence Forge, Va.

FOUNDED: 1997 by Larkin Scott II; purchased by Luke Scott and Larkin Scott III in 2008

REVENUE: \$575,000 (2016); \$665,000 (projected 2017)

EMPLOYEES: 7

SERVICE MIX: 40% design/build+installation; 35% mowing+landscape maintenance; 12% turf+ornamental care; 10% tree service; 3% other

CLIENT MIX: 95% residential; 4% commercial; 1% percent government

“It’s not impossible to run a business remotely, but it comes down to systems and the people that implement them,” Luke Scott says. “You can’t do it with just systems, and you can’t do it with just people. It has to be equally strong on both sides.”

THE PEOPLE PIECE

When it comes to family support, Luke and Larkin Scott III recognize how lucky they are. Their father, Larkin Scott II, who sold them the company and retired in 2008, stepped in.

“He just jumped in and started helping out to make sure things that needed to get done got done,” Larkin Scott III says. “We were very fortunate.”

Their younger brother, Levi, who has a career in a different field, also helped as needed with equipment repair and other duties.

Their mom and office manager, Dale Scott, shouldered much of the

“WE WANTED TO DO OUR DUTY, SO WE SAID, ‘LET’S FIGURE THIS OUT.’” —LARKIN SCOTT III

burden while they were gone—especially when the general manager they had promoted started dropping the ball on duties like overseeing the shop and equipment maintenance. When he quit in January, several months before either owner was slated to return from overseas, Luke Scott got released early to come home to keep the business going.

“I couldn’t do it by myself,” Dale Scott says. “I’m not very good with a tractor.”

The family also got support during the deployment from the members of their Leader’s Edge Peer Group, operated by consultant Jeffrey Scott.

“The peer group was like having a board of directors to help

out,” Larkin Scott III says. “My mom was able to contact them for advice on things, and they would take as much time as needed.”

Despite all the support, having both owners gone for the better part of a year created some people problems in the company.

With the owners gone, the company’s lack of systems and accountability came to light, Dale Scott says.

“We had in the back of our minds that we needed systems, but because of the hustle and bustle of everyday business, we never got around to it,” she says. “Because we had always been family owned and operated, everything always revolved around the owners.”

For example, employees always had been trained in an “apprenticeship-type” program on the job by an owner—Luke Scott on the installation side and Larkin Scott III on the maintenance side. They assumed their general manager would take over those duties while they were away, but it didn’t happen, so new employees didn’t have training to fall back on.

The lack of an onboarding system created problems for current employees, too.

“We wound up with a lot of turnover and turmoil for our employees that stayed with us the whole time we were gone,” Larkin Scott III says.

Since returning from deployment, the owners quickly implemented a formal training program, using manuals from the National Association of Landscape Professionals. The company also created a program for internal certifications and testing.

To increase accountability, which was another problem that arose when the owners were away, they have implemented a five-point incentive program that assesses employees

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PITCHING IN

From left: Dale Scott, Larkin Scott III, Luke Scott and Larkin Scott II. Dale and Larkin II pitched in to help LG Scott Landscaping & Tree Service survive the time their sons were both deployed.

They've identified—and are working to fix—a few areas where they were “sloppy” or are underutilizing people and resources.

While they were gone, communication was incon-

sistent. Larkin Scott III was hard to reach and often didn't have internet. Luke Scott had access to a phone and internet connectivity, and he spoke with his mom and the general manager a few times a week. Dale Scott also sent her sons a weekly report including cash flow and any major issues. In hindsight, Luke Scott says he would have wanted more details. Today, reporting and monitoring information has become a priority for the company.

During the owners' time away, there seemed to be a lot of lost time, Luke Scott says. The company has used Service AutoPilot as its primary software for several years, but it realized it wasn't vigilant about entering data properly.

based on the company's core values: excellence, loyalty, integrity, teamwork and efficiency.

These items used to be “just a sign on the wall,” but now employees are evaluated and given feedback on them weekly. Crew leaders and crew members can earn an extra \$4,500 and \$3,500 per year, respectively, by meeting key performance indicators associated with the core values.

“We've incentivized good behavior, like showing up on time, being honest and coming in on budgeted hours,” Luke Scott says.

They've also tried to build their company with a military team mentality. It's nothing formal or fancy, Luke Scott says, but he's tried to instill in the

core staff that it's their job to give feedback on one another—not to “tattle,” but to ensure they have a strong team.

“It's helped the esprit de corps,” he says, adding the employees started a weekly breakfast on their own at Waffle House. “I don't have enough employees, but the ones I have all like each other.”

SYSTEMIZING THE BUSINESS

Since the brothers returned from their deployments, the company is “systemizing” other areas of the business, as well. It's all an effort to improve profitability and reliance on the owners.

“For us, sales haven't been an issue in years,” Luke Scott says. “(The problem) is keeping as much money as possible at the bottom of the P/L.”

PHOTO: TONY VENTOURIS

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“Like any program, it’s garbage in, garbage out,” Luke Scott says. “I would pull reports, but they would be terrible because nobody had clocked in and out properly for two weeks.”

Now, the company has a weekly meeting where it focuses on safety and the importance of recording information accurately in the software system. Each crew has a cellular-enabled tablet and clocks in and out of tasks via the software’s app.

“BECAUSE WE HAD ALWAYS BEEN FAMILY OWNED AND OPERATED, EVERYTHING ALWAYS REVOLVED AROUND THE OWNERS.” —DALE SCOTT

Having good data leads to better job costing and, ultimately, profitability.

“If you work hard all month and then you see you didn’t have much of a profit, it gets you motivated about recording information,” Luke Scott says.

The company also has learned to better leverage GPS

fleet tracking, which it added through a service called InTouch. At \$25 per month per vehicle, it’s a quick return on investment, Luke Scott says.

“The lowest amount I bill out is \$50 per man-hour, so if it saves me half a man-hour a month, it pays for itself,” he says. “If you have any vehicles on the road that you’re personally not in, you can’t afford not to have it.”

Adding GPS has eliminated speeders, idling and lost time due to stops at convenience stores. If a truck enters a convenience store, the owners get an alert.

“It’s not because I’m that miserable of a boss,” Luke Scott says. “But time gets lost easier when guys stop. Our policy is everybody brings lunch to work. With GPS, they’re more inclined to abide by our policy, which cuts down on unbillable time.”

The owners also are working to streamline their duties and communication to be more efficient.

One area they immediately addressed was clearly defining roles for all employees, including Dale, Luke and Larkin III.

“Before we deployed, there was a lot more excessive communication and overlap,” Larkin Scott III says. “I think that’s a mistake a lot of people make when they’re growing.”

They’re also better at using a component of their software system that allows them to assign one another “to-do’s” and lets others see and comment on these items.

“We’re really working to keep everything we do inside of one software system as much as possible,” he says. “That, along with very defined roles, allows us to get a lot more done than we used to.”

All three of the company’s managers acknowledge it wasn’t an easy year for their family or their business. Dale Scott, in particular, is happy to have her sons home.

“It was a difficult year,” she says. “It was very nice to get them back.”

GETTING BACK INTO SHAPE

Returning from deployment to learn their business needed some work was daunting, says Larkin Scott III, owner of LG Scott Landscaping & Tree Service.

He took solace in the advice of consultant Jeffrey Scott (no relation), who runs the Leader’s Edge Peer Group to which the company belongs.

“When we joined the peer group (in 2013), we were essentially going out of business very slowly,” says Larkin Scott III. The peer group helped the company turn things around. Prior to both owners deploying with the National Guard in 2016, they were getting quarterly profit checks “and life was great.”

The company survived the deployment, but profitability slipped, which was discouraging to the owners.

“(When we returned), Jeffrey Scott said, ‘You were in a rough spot before, so do it again.’ If you’ve ever been in shape, you know how to get back into shape,” says Larkin Scott III. “Those were probably the best words of encouragement. We’ve done it before, so we can make this work again.”

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SALUTE TO SERVICE

Nonprofit initiative GreenCare for Troops gives the gift of green space—and peace of mind—to military families in need.

BY ABBY HART



Who will mow the lawn? Who's going to shovel the driveway and the sidewalk in the winter? Last year, Carla Nichols asked these questions, among many others, as her husband, Jon, a technical sergeant in the Air Force, prepared for his deployment to Germany.

Carla Nichols was particularly concerned because, with a full-job time as a physical therapist assistant, a young daughter and a dog to keep her busy, she had also recently discovered she was pregnant with her second child. Suddenly, yardwork plummeted down her list of priorities.

GreenCare for Troops (GCFT) came to the rescue for the Nichols family. The national program provides free lawn care, landscape and snow removal for the families of deployed military personnel for the duration of their service period, which is typically nine to 12 months. In the case of multiple deployments, families can sign up for every deployment. GCFT also provides the same free services for post-9/11 veterans with a service-connected disability for a maximum of two years.

Carla Nichols discovered GCFT through the Airmen & Family Readiness Center at Offutt Air Force Base in

Omaha, Neb. The liaison at the center enrolled Carla Nichols in the program as part of her husband's deployment package, and a few days later, she was matched with Sun Valley Landscaping. She contacted the company to schedule services, and her lawn was mowed and leaves removed as scheduled.

It made a huge difference in her new daily routine. "It was extremely helpful," says Carla Nichols. "My husband has been deployed before and this was the first time I had this service. I had a 2-year-old at the time, I was pregnant and working a full-time job. Doing yardwork in the small amount of time that I had was not going to be the easiest thing. It was a lifesaver."

FROM THE GROUND UP

Since GCFT launched in 2006, more than 11,000 military families and disabled veterans nationwide have registered to receive services. The project's volunteer base has grown to 6,000 lawn and landscape professionals in all 50 states who have provided upwards of \$8 million worth of services to military families.

GCFT is managed by Project EverGreen, a Cleveland-based national nonprofit aimed at creating, renovating and revitalizing green spaces, and educating the public about their importance. Project EverGreen's mission is to "bring people together to make a difference in how our yards, parks and communities create a greener, healthier, cooler Earth."

Executive Director Cindy Code says that GCFT fits into this mission by maintaining green spaces, while having the added benefit of helping military families.



PHOTO: ©ISTOCK.COM/ANTHONYROSENBERG ON THE COVER: PHOTO: ©ISTOCK.COM/MARILYN NIEVES

DO THE RIGHT THING

As a business owner in a military community, Bill Lillie sees his fair share of families and disabled veterans dealing with hard times—trying to juggle basic daily tasks, such as grocery shopping or shuttling kids to and from school. As a longtime volunteer for GreenCare for Troops, he wants to help take lawn care off that mile-long list.

Along with his wife, Linda, Bill Lillie co-owns Sprigs & Twigs, a landscape company in Gales Ferry, Conn.

He discovered GreenCare for Troops (GCFT) in 2009, at a GIE+EXPO in Louisville, Ky.

He signed up on the spot, received an onboarding package in the mail a few days later and began providing services for military families in need. There is no shortage of families to help in his area since his business is located in southeast Connecticut, near Naval Submarine Base New London, the Navy's first submarine base.

Helping military families hits close to home

for the Lillies since in Linda's first marriage, she was a young Navy wife. "A lot of them are just starting out managing a household or managing a young family for the first time. There's a great opportunity to help them out and help them get some chores done," says Bill Lillie.

His wife founded Sprigs & Twigs in 1997 as a part-time venture, and in 1999, she made it her full-time job. Bill Lillie retired from his job in the defense industry in 2005 and joined the business.

Today, the company has 20 employees and is projected to hit \$2.25 million in sales this year on almost entirely residential clientele. Landscape design/build and installation comprises 60 percent of the company's business, while maintenance accounts for the remaining 40 percent.



Bill Lillie



The Sprigs & Twigs team handles lawn care for five or six GreenCare for Troops families each year and transitions those families to snow removal during the winter months.

The Sprigs & Twigs team gathers for a company party.

Though keeping up with the scheduling of the military families might be challenging in addition to a full slate of clients, the company's volunteer coverage area adheres to its regular coverage radius of 30 miles of southeastern coastline and 10 miles inland, which allows it to work the military families into its regular routes fairly easily.

Bill Lillie is very proud of Sprigs & Twigs' relationship with GCFT and wishes he could promote its volunteerism more, but he's hesitant to do so because of the demand in his area. "I let Ki (Matsko, program manager for GCFT) handle that, and we're kind of like the silent partner," he says. "It's almost defensive that I don't talk about it. I would get so many calls if I advertised that I volunteer, and I have a problem saying no."

He's grateful that the company he built can assist at least a few families each season. "It's very easy to give back to people who have given back to us," he says. "They are the ones sacrificing their lives, supporting the country, and their spouses are supporting them. It's the right thing to do."

"Landscape contractors love working outside, so it's a good way to give back and share the gift of green space with those in the military," says Code. "It's a small thing that we in this industry can do to give back."

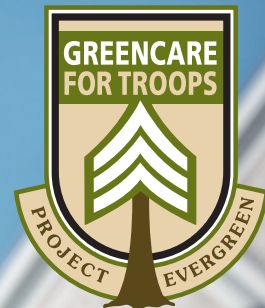
Den Gardner is a member of Project EverGreen's board and is its former executive director. Gardner helped transition the organization from its original name, EverGreen Foundation, which was a legacy group from the Professional Lawn Care Association of America in 2002, and he managed it from 2003 to 2010. In 2004, the foundation became Project EverGreen. Gardner recalls that the seeds for GCFT were planted in 2006,



Cindy Code

when Phil Fogarty, a master franchisor at Weed Man Lawn Care in Euclid, Ohio, mentioned to Gardner that his company started offering free lawn care services for families whose primary breadwinner was deployed overseas.

Fogarty wondered if it was possible to turn this idea into a larger service project. Gardner returned to the Project EverGreen offices, then located in Minnesota, and began to work with the board and his staff to create GreenCare for Troops. He hired a part-time manager to handle the day-to-day operations of the initiative with financial support from Cub Cadet.



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GREENCARE FOR TROOPS GUIDE

Today, Nufarm, the presenting partner, and The Toro Co., the platinum partner, provide funding for the program.

SnowCare for Troops was added to the project in 2011, and since its creation, more than 5,000 families and veterans have registered to receive snow and ice removal from 1,500 contractor volunteers. Boss Snowplow is a supporting partner of SnowCare for Troops.

The efforts of Project EverGreen and GreenCare for Troops have not gone unnoticed. In 2012, through the Joining Forces Community Challenge, the White House recognized Project EverGreen and the work of GCFT as one of the top 20 volunteer military programs in the U.S.



Ki Matsko

GROWING GREENCARE

Despite its nationwide reach, GCFT is a small operation.

Until recently it was run by Program Manager Ki Matsko along with Code in her role as executive direc-

tor. "The volunteers absorb everything—the gas, labor, supplies—so I think it's critical to develop relationships," says Matsko, who has been with the organization for three years and has her own military connection: Her oldest son is a cadet at West Point.

With 6,000 volunteers, it seems impossible, but Matsko does her best to stay in contact with each volunteer. "It keeps them connected to Project EverGreen, which keeps them wanting to take on more, which is huge for us," she says.

START SOMEWHERE

For business owners and individuals alike, part of the difficulty of beginning a volunteer activity might be getting over the initial intimidation. Paul Fraynd, co-owner of Sun Valley Landscaping in Omaha, Neb., has some useful advice. "Just start," he recommends. "Giving back is hard until you get there, and then you're glad you did it."

The company started its relationship with GreenCare for Troops 10 years ago when Fraynd attended an industry event in Louisville, Ky., and signed up for the program.

Each season, Sun Valley Landscaping serves up to 10 military families with either lawn care or snow care services. The company employs approximately 50 people and this year projects to earn \$4.6 million in revenue. The business is split evenly between design/build work for residential clients and maintenance for 85 percent residential and 15 percent commercial clients.

According to Fraynd, the most rewarding part of the program is when families visit the shop. "The first time a family came in, they brought us cookies and a card, and the card was about the family being outside and enjoying it together, instead of worrying about mowing the lawn," he says. "Which is exactly our purpose for our work: to allow others to enjoy the outdoors. They just embodied what we're trying to do." Several veterans also have gifted the crew with U.S. flags they've flown on their missions overseas.

Sun Valley Maintenance Sales & Account Manager Matt Menard acknowledges there could be one issue with volunteering. Since the company takes on a significant number of military families, who are all situated near Offutt Air Force Base, for convenience's sake, one crew completes GCFT jobs on one day during the week. "It's not that difficult, but it can be hard to make a profit on that one day for that crew," he says.

Another issue is potentially taking on too many families because Sun Valley is one of a few GCFT volunteers in the Omaha area. In 2015, the company sent out an email to its contractor list, urging them to volunteer, and a local news station helped promote Sun Valley's work with GCFT. The coverage included information on where local landscaping companies could register for the program.

General Manager Ashly Neneman credits the success of Sun Valley's volunteering to GCFT's assistance, which includes communicating with military families about the specific services that volunteers can provide.

"They've been so great to us, with the guidance we've received over the years," she says. "We probably wouldn't be able to take on so much if they weren't there to help keep us organized."

"We talk about raising the perception of the landscaping industry and being a good example for the community," says Fraynd. "We're already out there mowing lawns, and I think these guys respect the fact that we're investing in the community and the people that give back to all of us with their service."



Paul Fraynd



Sun Valley Landscaping serves up to 10 military families each season.



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Grow a better tomorrow.

GREENCARE FOR TROOPS GUIDE

The Troy Clogg Landscaping Associates team with Lauren Bowen and her children (left).



FREEDOM ISN'T FREE

Troy Clogg's father was a World War II veteran, and this fact drives his participation with GreenCare for Troops and other military nonprofits. "Freedom isn't free," says Clogg. "It's taken for granted what people give so that we can worry about whether the grass is cut or a tree is planted right. I have a lot of respect for the people who serve."

Clogg's company has been a volunteer with GCFT since 2010, and the crew serves two to three military families each season. He began Troy Clogg Landscaping Associates in the early 1980s with a push mower. Today, the Wixom, Mich.-based company employs 70-80 people in the summer and 150 in the winter and expects to hit \$12 million in revenue this year. Winter maintenance comprises 60 percent of the company's business, design/build work accounts for 25 percent and summer maintenance is 15 percent.

Through a GCFT connection, Clogg heard of an opportunity to take on more than his usual slate of volunteer work. In April, Administrative Assistant Beth Savastano spoke with one of the GCFT Marine Corps veterans the company served, and he told her about a young Marine widow and mother of two.

Lauren Bowen's husband Geoffrey, a rifleman in the Marines, suffered from PTSD following his two tours of duty in Iraq. In 2016, he committed suicide. The Bowens lived on one-and-a-half acres of land in Brooklyn, Mich., which had become difficult to manage after Geoffrey's death. Bowen hoped to sell the house and move the

couple's 2-year-old son, Augie, and 9-month-old daughter, Tanner, closer to her family in Saline, Mich.

Savastano found that military widows do not qualify for services under GCFT, but asked Clogg if there was anything the company could do for her. "Troy said, 'Call her, get information, we're going to take care of her,'" she says.

Twenty-five of Clogg's employees arrived at Bowen's house at 9 a.m. on Saturday, April 22. They repaired the front steps, graveled the driveway, moved a massive firewood pile, rebuilt a fire pit, cut down a tree and landscaped the area around the house. The crew also finished a sandbox Geoff had begun building for Augie and filled it with fresh sand.

The employees donated their time, some even driving two hours to work on the project. Clogg paid for food and supplies, and Savastano manned the grill, cooking for Bowen, her kids and parents and the volunteers.

The morning the crew arrived, Bowen had a panic attack. "It can be overwhelming having people care so much," she says. "I feel undeserving—sometimes I think other people need help more."

Bowen recently received an offer on her house and hopes to move soon. She finds it difficult to express her gratitude to the volunteers, but she's certain about one thing: "I think Geoff would be able to rest easy knowing people like Troy are taking care of me and the kids," she says. "He would be really grateful for what they've done for us."



Troy Clogg

Code says it's not easy to accomplish the organization's goals with a small crew. She estimates that for the last few years, GCFT has averaged a thousand families matched per year, but "the biggest priority is to match more military families—to provide more green services to as many families as possible," she says.

A recent donation from Nufarm will go a long way to help those efforts. In August, Nufarm announced it was donating \$150,000 to the program. Sean Casey,

Nufarm's vice president of sales, turf & ornamental, is a member of Project EverGreen's board.

"For as long as I've been involved with GreenCare for Troops, I've always thought that it's a brand that had national reach and that everyone should be involved in it," says Casey. "We were always struggling to meet budgets and get contributions. We were spending more time on trying to find money for the project than we were spending on the actual project."

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GREENCARE FOR TROOPS GUIDE

Though Nufarm was once a general supporter of Project EverGreen, this donation will go specifically to the GCFT initiative. GCFT is using the contribution to hire another staff member, Nici Trem, as well as expand volunteer recruitment and provide more communications support for military families registered for the program.



Sean Casey

Beyond Nufarm's donation, Casey is committed to supporting GCFT and helping build up its volunteer pool. "Sometimes, you find there's a defensive side of the business, and you're constantly explaining why you do what you do," he says. "This is the feel-good side of the business. I firmly believe in the work they do."

Wanting to bring that positive energy to his company, Casey introduced a challenge to his Nufarm sales team: help GCFT find more volunteers. His 21 turf and ornamental sales reps are now equipped with slide decks that outline the importance of GCFT. Other teams at Nufarm want to join in the effort and have requested those decks for their salespeople.

A VALUABLE SERVICE

So how can a company get involved? What are the challenges of providing services for a military family or two? Matsko and Code both agree that the process for volunteering is simple by design, so volunteers can focus on taking care of families. See the sidebar at right for information on how you can get involved.

Carla Nichols, the military mother of two, wants volunteers to know, "It's invaluable to the families of the deployed that receive those services."

Her husband, Jon, agrees. Before the Nichols family knew about GCFT, they were considering hiring a landscape company or enlisting friends and family to help. "It was a huge stress relief having this taken care of and knowing Carla wouldn't have to do any manual labor (during her pregnancy)," he says.

Military spouses are "fiercely independent, and we don't want to worry the deployed spouse," says Carla Nichols. "Knowing that it was a done deal, it's easier for us to accept, and we can take care of other things. Just knowing that you've helped a family is more than you could ever ask for. There's no question about that when you spend a half hour sending a crew out." 📧

GET INVOLVED

Considering becoming a volunteer for GreenCare for Troops or SnowCare for Troops? Here's what you can expect from the process.



Learn about the program.

Visit ProjectEverGreen.org for specifics and answers to frequently asked questions about the GreenCare for Troops and the SnowCare for Troops initiatives.



Register to become a volunteer.

Fill out the program form on the website. You'll be asked to provide parameters for your volunteer service, including:

- the services you are willing to provide (mowing, landscape, snow removal, etc.);
- the distance you're willing to travel to a military family; and
- the number of military families you're willing to serve.

Project EverGreen will provide you with a promotional toolkit, which includes customizable news releases, talking points and infographics, so you can share your participation in GCFT. Inform your staff and answer any questions they have.



Await your match.

Once you're matched with a family, the database will send you an automatic email notifying you of a match. To protect the privacy of the family, these emails will not include contact information; GCFT provides your company information to the family, who will then contact you directly to schedule services at their own convenience.



Discuss the details.

- The military family contacts your company to discuss their lawn care needs.
- Schedule your services. Your crews add the service appointments to their routes and perform services as scheduled.
- At the end of the deployment, prepare to wind down. As the military member's scheduled deployment end date approaches, you'll receive an email from GCFT. Since deployment dates are subject to change, be sure to contact the family directly to ensure the deployment has actually ended before you close out your volunteer service appointments.



Watch your inbox.

Keep an eye on your email for your next match from GCFT!



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to growing your
business: developing
a good system.

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5 year-end accounting tips



BY DANIEL GORDON

The author is a CPA who caters to landscape and lawn care firms. Reach him at dan@turfbooks.com.

Soon we'll be ushering in the new year. The decisions we make for the upcoming year will be based on the results of 2017 and the many things we learned this past year. Since we base many decisions on information found in our financial statements, we need to ensure the data is clean and accurate and that we have the cash to implement our plan for next year.

Here are five questions to ask to ensure you have good, clean data and that your financial house is in order.

1 Is your profit and loss statement (P/L) accurate? Your P/L is a storyboard depicting revenue, expenses and profit. It measures the quality of these items against past or budgeted results and often against industry benchmarks. A clean P/L is maintained by choosing an accounting convention such as accrual basis while respecting time periods or cutoffs. For example, the revenue you produced for a month should be offset by the expenses incurred to produce that revenue and should be coded to that same month. Does your accounting respect period cutoffs?

Does your gross margin (revenue minus direct costs) look accurate? If it's too low or too high, it can be a sign of a great year or a terrible year. Or, it can be a sign that your revenue or expense coding is bad.

Your P/L will give you clues to how you performed and where you succeeded and failed—only if your transactional coding is proper. So, spend some time drilling down on specific P/L line items to ensure they're accurate.

WEB EXTRA
Visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net to get Gordon's tips for postponing income and accelerating deductions.

2 Does your balance sheet (B/S) make sense? The B/S shows the financial position of a firm on a given date (i.e., assets, liabilities and net worth). An easy way to distinguish the P/L from the B/S is to think of the P/L as a statement showing how our business did in terms of revenue, profit and growth for a given period. The B/S shows us what our firm has because of cumulative P/Ls, owner distributions and financing activities in the past. Most business owners are more focused on the P/L than the B/S. If you have a problem interpreting the data from your B/S or want to make sure it's accurate, talk with your accountant.

3 Are your accounts receivable (AR) clean? AR management is an important area of financial management. A business that doesn't have control of its accounts receivable will almost always have poor cash flow and have trouble meeting its expenses on time. AR management starts with laying out a formal procedure for collections. This procedure starts with an AR aging report. At each point along the way, you should make a collection effort (i.e., at 30 days, a phone call to the customer; at 60 days, a letter; at 90 days, perhaps a stronger effort). In any event, the company shouldn't allow a large percentage of its receivables to go over the 60-day column. The older a receivable is, the more difficult it is to collect. Have an effective collection process and be firm when deciding to put a customer on credit hold.

4 Have you done your year-end tax planning? Are you showing a large profit? Most savvy business owners are doing their tax



planning now (before year-end). This is the time to create the facts about your 2017 tax situation. Early 2018 is the time to report on the facts created and pay taxes based on those facts. In other words, now is the time to work to reduce your 2017 taxes; waiting until 2018 filing season is just looking into the rearview mirror and reacting. Tax planning can be summed up in four words: "Postpone income; accelerate deductions."

5 Have you created a budget for 2018? Budgeting is nothing more than formulating a coherent financial plan for a period in the future, usually one or two years. As the plan is implemented, we can rate our efforts compared to the budget we created. Budgeting allows us to predict the number of technicians, vehicles, equipment and more that we'll need based on our revenue projections. Keys for a successful budget include:

- Creating realistic sales and expense forecasts;
- Making realistic goals based on current income and expenses; and
- Looking at your budget often and adjusting it to achieve your goals.

Closing out the year can be a huge task from an accounting perspective. By focusing on the above five items, business owners will have a clearer path to success in 2018.



BY KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kevinkehoe@me.com.

The secret to growing your business

The secret is not really a secret. Like the secret in life is “hard work,” the secret to sustainable growth is “the system.” There are at least 90,000 landscape maintenance, snow and construction businesses in the U.S. and Canada. Fewer than 10 percent of these ever grow larger than \$1 million in annual revenue. There’s no crime in that, as there is no requirement to get bigger. Many contractors like to operate smaller lifestyle businesses that provide a good living.

But for those who want to grow—and grow beyond the level of \$2 million in annual revenue (and there are more than 15,000 of you out there), the challenge is not in delivering services. The challenge is running an organization. This requires a system that delivers services and does it efficiently.

Think about McDonald’s—not whether you buy or like its burgers. Think about the repeatable systems the restaurant employs to deliver burgers and do it efficiently.

Or think about Vince Lombardi’s Green Bay Packers. Lombardi’s teams were not complicated. They ran fewer than a dozen unique plays. Yet, they ran them well almost all the time. This simple system created the opportunity for people to “keep it simple” and make good decisions. This approach gave rise to the “run to daylight” concept. The goal was not to run off-tackle but to execute a scheme and adapt to the defense and run to daylight. That was the goal—gain yards to win.

THE SYSTEM

It’s the system, dude, as they say on the coast. It provides the platform for growth. Yes, you must have good

people. But good people plugged in to a good system can become really good. A system has two primary components: the playbook (simple and consistent methods) and reporting (performance numbers to drive accountability and improvement).

Building a football team or burger joint is not so different from growing a contracting business. Leadership is essential, of course, but it must be married to a system. In today’s contracting business:

- The **playbook** is integrated business software. It provides the standard operating system driving repeatable and simple business procedures managing the way your people prospect, estimate, sell, on-board, service, upsell, renew, plan, schedule, purchase, route, track labor, invoice and collect money.
- The **reporting** comes from the business management system. It provides analyses of all these procedures with numbers about sales, job costs, accounts receivable, purchases, payments, service delivery, forecasts and customer performance, just to name a few.

Together the playbook and reporting are essential for growing bigger than \$2 million. Is \$2 million the magic number when a contractor needs a system? In my experience, yes.

GROWTH WITH LESS PAIN

Growth creates “growing pains.” We all have heard this. To reduce this pain, start with accountability.



To grow a contracting business, you need a system that has two primary components: the playbook and reporting, Kehoe says.

Accountability requires reporting. People must know when they are winning, doing the right things, doing enough of them and achieving goals. Reports drive accountability. Accountability drives responsibility. Responsibility drives thinking.

McDonald’s knows exactly how many burgers it’s sold. Lombardi knew who was doing the job right. Both kept it simple, used the system and monitored the results. These things are essential when the game starts because, as Lombardi said many times, at that point, his job was done. It was up to the team.

Can a business grow without a management system? Yes and no—but mainly, no. No, because the number of moving parts and people outgrow anyone’s ability to control the delivery of a result.

Your business plan must allocate significant investment dollars and time in a system. Yes, trucks and facilities are important investments and always required. But investing in a system to build your organization makes it possible to employ those trucks and facilities in a way that services your customers, reduces costs and breeds the kind of sustainable culture you need to win. 🏡

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COMPANY: Rain Bird
URL: wifi-pro.rainbird.com

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BACKSTORY

INTERVIEW BY LAUREN DOWDLE



Kirk Brown

PRESIDENT
KIRK'S LAWN CARE
LIMERICK, PA.

EDUCATION

Owen J. Roberts High School
Pottstown, Pa.
Class of 2010

WORK EXPERIENCE

2008-2008

Intern
Hallman Landscaping
Spring City, Pa.

2008-2015

Front-end supervisor
Kmart Corp.
Phoenixville, Pa.

2003-Present

President
Kirk's Lawn Care
Limerick, Pa.



"I always enjoyed being outdoors and had all of the basic equipment already. I started mowing a couple neighbors' lawns, and it grew from there."



"We are not a large company, but we try to give back to local causes and initiatives whenever we can to better those who have helped us so much."



"I am a firm believer of always remembering your roots."

"My high school's horticulture class taught me skills that have been useful day to day in my business. The class confirmed my early belief that I wanted to pursue the green industry."

"Find a way to stand out from the rest and market your differences."



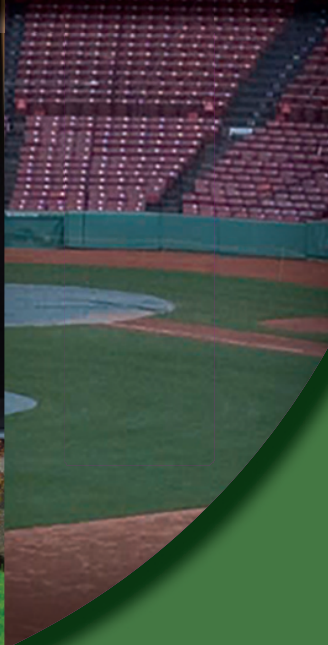
"I like to run with a local track club. Running is my stress reliever."

WORDS OF WISDOM "Think of nontraditional ways to attract and incentivize employees." • "I think being younger allows me to see business and marketing practices on the horizon and quickly adapt to them before my competitors." • "I periodically check online software directories like GetApp or Capterra to see what's new. I have been able to discover and start using great software when they were at their infancy." • "I try to mentor and teach others some of the skills and mistakes I have learned along the way."

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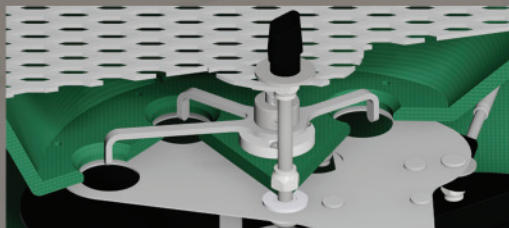
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