Cutthroat competition is understandable.

"It's fun doing those projects because they have the money to do it the right way," Wall says, grinning at the thought of a homeowner spending $100,000 on landscape installation. "It gives the foreman a great sense of accomplishment."

The company does no maintenance work. But Wall will prepare a fertilizer and spray program for customers who don't know the proper procedure.

"I get upset when an owner invests three-quarters of a million dollars on a project and I drive by six months later and it's brown," Wall sighs. "It's a real shame."

**Future plans**

Tree Land’s nursery carries about $5 million in inventory. The company's future plans include further specializing in plant materials, with an emphasis on more salt-tolerant plants for oceanfront landscapes. Down the road Tree Land also plans expanded mechanization. The company already boasts more than 100 pieces of equipment, including hydraulic cranes, front-end loaders and water trucks. The company has purchased its own service truck.

The company recently opened its second landscape contracting office in Orlando.

The design and contract divisions rarely work together on a job. When they do, the sister divisions often create masterpieces, like the Radice Corporate Center.

Of course, million dollar figures can be a real motivator to a company. But when you can landscape for some of the world's richest people, it would just be boring to work any place else.

—Heide Aungst

**Landscaping luxurious Palm Beach homes is all in a day's work.**

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**BEST IN THE NORTHWEST?**

Northwest Landscape Industries is enjoying success in 'The Silicon Forest' by keeping many high-tech clients 'in the chips.'

When you look for quality in the landscape industry, look to the Pacific Northwest, home of Northwest Landscape Industries.

A trendsetter from its birth 15 years ago, Northwest remains one of the nation's finest large-scale operations, thanks to a skilled work force and management with vision.

General manager Jim Wathey and president Rich Akerman became partners 14 years ago and have watched the operations grow with vigor each year. Today, revenues total $6 million.

"Our overall goal for this company is to be in the $10 to $14 million range," says Akerman. "We don't want to get too big because it's fun now. We've gone through hard growth that has wiped some young kids out. Bigger is not always better."

Northwest has main offices in Tigard, Ore., a Portland suburb, and Seattle, Wash., and smaller offices in Portland and nearby Beaverton.

High-tech companies dominate the Portland area (Akerman calls it "The Silicon Forest").

"Here in the Northwest, we have something a lot of people don't realize—water," says Akerman, a native of California's arid San...
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From the turf care group at Union Carbide.
Northwest Landscape Industries maintains the Tektronics campus located along Rte. 217 in south Portland, an area teeming with high-tech operations.

Fernando Valley region.
Northwest revenues come from two sources: landscape construction and industrial landscape maintenance.

A unique business
Northwest’s growth is a result of attention to the little things.
Like using only reel mowers. “We set the trend,” Akerman says, noting that just about everyone else in Portland also uses reels. Northwest has invested in Ransomes 70-inch triplex and Toro 58- and 70-inch triplex mowers.
Akerman makes cold calls on clients to find out how his crews are performing, and watches over equipment efficiency like a mother hen.

Also, the company publishes a quarterly newsletter, “4 Seasons”, as an educational tool for existing clients, former clients, real estate developers, universities and trade publications.

On sending the publication to former clients, Akerman says, “We want our past clients to know if they want to come back they can. We want our name in front of them at all times.”

At the end of each year, Northwest personnel meet and discuss company strengths and weaknesses. “We pick out our three worst weaknesses and try to make them strengths in the future,” says Akerman.

Wathey, Akerman and staff then look at the economy and project what they can sell over the next year.
Northwest workers believe in teamwork, a concept Akerman learned as a 5-11, 267-pound offensive guard for the University of Oregon in the late 1960s and early ‘70s. Two notable teammates were San Diego Charger quarterback Dan Fouts and NBC football commentator and former NFL star Ahmad Rashad.

Dedication
“Our company is dedicated to providing quality products and services to our clients in the landscape industry,” says Akerman.
Northwest is everywhere. Nike,

Another impressive Northwest job—
the Oregon Graduate Center research facility in Beaverton, Ore.
Daniels. "We've never been a company to dwell on anything. We just go after something else."

Daniels is a proponent of team management. And he has assembled a good team: chairman Art Davis, vice-president Scott Forrester, secretary-treasurer Scot Davis, contract administrator Dan Tamminga and vice-president David Lindorfer.

"Our people have to be the tops," Daniels says. "We can't settle for less. Those guys have pushed me to my limits. When my alarm goes off at 5:45 a.m., I know there's 30 or 40 managers' feet hitting the floor at the same time."

Top managers at Davis work 10 to 12 hours a day, five days a week. That kind of a schedule might burn out many executives. But not the people at Davis.

Tamminga, who is married and has one son, does like it, though, when things get a little slower. "You have a higher frustration rate with the long hours," he says. "And the family puts a lot of pressure on. But what keeps me going is that I know there's a breather at the end of the..."

Fairview Park, where Davis crews must cope with turf, tree, shrub and water management.
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Circle No. 117 on Reader Inquiry Card
I sort of re-evaluate in the slow season." Lindorfer, a newlywed, says, "We all approach the burnout, usually in the fall. If this was a 12-month season, we wouldn't handle the pace. January and February are the two most important months, when everybody can get recharged."

$1 million, 3 trucks
The Davises and Daniels started the company in Harrisburg, Pa. in 1980 with a $1 million budget and three trucks. Gradually, the company's sphere of influence widened to Hilton Head, S.C., Gaithersburg, Md. and Raleigh, N.C.

The turning point was when Davis was awarded the $300,000 Shady Grove Metro project in Rockville, Md. "We overcame, perhaps, the strictest and most complex governmental specifications in order to complete the job on time and within budget," notes Lindoerfer. "The competition was expecting us to falter, but we didn't."

By 1984, sales exceeded $2.3 million at the Gaithersburg branch alone, and $3.4 million for the entire company.

A working philosophy
Bases of the company's working philosophy are quality, fair price and performance.

"We always keep our word," notes Scot Davis. "If I have to pull a crew out of Harrisburg to make a deadline in Washington, D.C., I'll do it. And I have."

Davis—called DLC by its employees—has a personnel recruiting program geared to high credentials. More than 45 employees have college degrees. Six are certified landscape architects and five have horticulture degrees.

"But," Daniels notes, "DLC also has a lot of fantastic employees who don't have college degrees. The executive, white-collar and blue-collar mix in this company is very balanced. More importantly, we promote from within, so most of our employees know what it's like to have been at the end of a shovel at one point in their lives.

"We sell opportunity."

Growth like DLC's means, obviously, some radical financing. Daniels says that the company's strong track record—from the very beginning—of predictability and
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Circle No. 152 on Reader Inquiry Card
Eldon Dyk left school to join Allen Keesen Landscaping. It was like ‘graduating,’ and Dyk is not sorry he made the switch.

Eldon Dyk felt trapped. After 15 years as a teacher, coach and assistant principal on the high school level, he felt he wasn’t getting anywhere. It was, he admits, his “mid-life crisis.”

At the same time, Allen Keesen of Allen Keesen Landscaping, Denver, Col., was toying with adding a maintenance division to his already-successful design/build division.

Five years ago, Dyk and Keesen found each other. The result has been a growing company.

Dyk, who grew up on a Montana farm, visited Joe Marsh and Rod Bailey, both successful landscape contractors, before he even sat behind his new desk. The market was not easy to learn, but he had a head start because he knew how to deal with people.

“I’m a people person in terms of dealing with labor and clients,” Dyk notes now. “That’s something I did as a teacher, coach and assistant principal.”

Most of the clients own office buildings, though the list includes some homeowner associations and three residences.

“Homeowner associations are the hardest to deal with,” Dyk notes. “They complain about the little things, picky things. But if they’ve got a good strong president or one person who will really take charge, we don’t have much of a problem. None of those picky things get to my door.”

Not very many of the landscapes are large, but all have irrigation.

Because land is so expensive in the fast-growing Denver area, business owners hesitate to buy much more than they need, hence a minimum need for landscape maintenance. “I bid things by the square foot, not the acre,” Dyk observes.

A lack of rain around the “Mile-High City” also creates the necessity