

What is the future of the ANLA Clinic?

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The conclusion of ANLA's successful 2012 Clinic has been surrounded by industry buzz asking, "What's next?" Rumors ranging from a new location to the end of the Clinic's four decade-long run as the industry's premier education event have circulated at tradeshow and in the trade press. According to Skip Shorb, ANLA Treasurer, and Chairman of the Board of American Plant garden centers, "Clinic was, by most measures, a resounding success. It remains the top event where our industry's owners, top managers and future leaders gather to learn, strategize and share the ideas that make our businesses successful. Clinic remains relevant and important to the future of our company and those of my peers."

Shorb clarifies that Clinic cannot move forward exactly the way it is today. "The Clinic we know and love, at the Galt House in Kentucky, is built for 750-1100 attendees. Our industry is not supporting that right now and the meeting has to change, just as we have changed our garden center to reflect the current economy."



ANLA President, Bob Lyons, owner of Sunleaf Nursery, adds, "ANLA also has a new partner in OFA — The Association of Horticulture Professionals. Clinic 2013 needs to reflect that partnership and serve the educational needs of our joint memberships."

During Clinic's closing general session in Louisville, ANLA executive vice president Bob Dolibois stated, "Clinic today looks very different from Clinic two years ago. We have radically changed the format to meet the rapidly changing needs of our attendees. Clinic 2013 will again differ from Clinic 2012. What will not change is the creativity, innovative education and community — the strong sense of family — that makes Clinic so unique, and so special to our industry."

What is next for ANLA's Clinic? ANLA and OFA's boards of directors are meeting jointly, later this month. Their goal is to come out of that meeting with a framework for a new meeting that allows the organizations to engage their memberships in building a new event for 2013. Stay tuned.

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ValleyCrest makes changes to top executives

CALABASAS, CA — ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., the largest integrated landscape services company in the U.S., announced the promotions of two senior-level executives, and the addition of another executive to its leadership team. Effective May 1, 2012, Richard A. Sperber will be promoted to Chairman of the Board of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. This change will allow Sperber to focus on charting the vision and direction of the family of companies, while remaining involved with client and employee growth and development strategies. As part of this transition, Roger J. Zino will be promoted to Chief Executive Officer of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., and will remain President of ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance. Additionally, Andrew J. Brennan will re-join the company as Chief Operating Officer of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. effective January 16, 2012, a newly created position reporting to Zino.

“The driver behind these changes is to keep ValleyCrest strong and on course for the next 62 years,” said Sperber of the family of companies



From left: Richard Sperber, Roger Zino, and Andrew Brennan.

founded by his father, Burton S. Sperber, in 1949.

“I am truly excited about what’s ahead for ValleyCrest in 2012 and beyond. These are smart changes because they put in place solid underpinnings and structure to support our long-term goals. I’m confident these changes will fuel and sustain ValleyCrest’s continued growth and position the company strongly for the future.”

In promoting Zino to CEO, ValleyCrest is drawing a strong and respected leader from within its deep management team to continue moving the company forward. Zino joined the company in 2001 and oversees more than 120 maintenance branch offices across the United States.

“I am deeply honored to lead a world-class organization whose mission today is to build on the vision established by our founder, Burt Sperber, more than 62 years ago,” said Zino. “For him, it started and ended with an intense focus on our customers and our people, and that dual focus will never change.”

Zino joined ValleyCrest following 10 years in the Los Angeles office of McKinsey & Co., where he served as a principal and one of the leaders of the firm’s Service Operations Practice.

Brennan’s focus will be to continue to improve the basics of the business by aligning corporate and divisional resources with customer and branch needs.

PHOTOS COURTESY: VALLEYCREST COS. (LEFT); YELLOWSTONE LANDSCAPE GROUP

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Austin Outdoor continues to grow

BUNNELL, FL — Austin Outdoor, a commercial landscape services firm, has acquired the landscape management division of Cornerstone Solutions Group.

The merger of Cornerstone's operations with Austin Outdoor's already substantial Florida presence has created a diverse organization capable of serving commercial clients with statewide operations. Edward Schatz, Jr., Austin's founder and current president of the Southeast region for Yellowstone Landscape Group, which acquired Austin in 2008, explains: "The merger of Cornerstone with Austin Outdoor is a natural fit. Between the values they share and reputation they both have for high quality, these two organizations complement each other perfectly. The result for our clients will be even more resources and seamless service across Florida."

Cornerstone Solutions Group steadily developed since 1984 under the value-based leadership of John Faulkner. He built a substantial landscape business in Tampa, Sarasota, Orlando and Jacksonville on a foundation of superior quality and dedicated service that mirrors Austin Outdoor's approach. About the merger, Faulkner says: "This a great move for Cornerstone because it allows us to reach our goals of building a great, nationally-recognized company founded on principals of quality, integrity and culture. For the past several years the economy has been increasingly dictating the options available to us. We feel that there are still tremendous opportunities in markets that we couldn't fill quickly enough. With this merger, we'll be poised to jump to the next level in the landscape industry."

Ed Schatz Jr., Austin Outdoor's founder and current president of the Southeast region for Yellowstone Landscape Group.



For Cornerstone, the focus has always been on building strong relationships with customers. Faulkner explained that "We have always felt that our clients are our partners. With this merger, they will instantly have access to the vast resources that a large regional company offers, bringing more value and depth to the services that we provide."

Austin Outdoor maintains many premier commercial properties in the markets it serves. William Dellecker is Austin Outdoor's president and has guided its operations since 2002.



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PROGRESS



At a fast clip

With the focus now on speed and productivity, bare-bones mowers are a thing of the past.

When it comes to advances in mower technology, “I don’t even know where to start,” says Brian Anundsen, product marketing manager for Ariens. From the first cast-iron mowers and engine-less reel mowers to the high-tech zero-turns of today, mowers have evolved dramatically, and the trend will continue.

Mowers have come a long way since their early days, but older models continue to inspire. “There were a lot of good ideas that have come and gone,” says Steve Brinkman, Husqvarna’s global director of ride R&D. “There’s a lot to be learned from looking backward. It becomes interesting, just like cross mowers of the past are back in vogue again.”

In the past, the way a deck was mounted to the machine was a relatively complex process, says Exmark Marketing Manager Daryn Walters.

“It took time, a lot of parts, and you had to make a lot of adjustments in the deck.”

Today, the focus is on combining pieces and parts and simplifying the design, he says, thereby creating easier machine maintenance.

Customers seeking speed and performance

“Most of the time you have two people working, and they don’t want to come home and sit on the tractor for three

or four hours at a time,” Anundsen says. “Now the zero-turn saves them a lot of time.”

Sean Dwyer, Husqvarna’s global product manager for zero-turn mowers, says the zero-turn “opened the door for increased productivity and it started a revolution.”

That “revolution” brought much improved maneuverability, faster speed, better performance and better durability. The combination enables contractors to finish their work in far less time than they used to, Dwyer says. And for contractors, his Husqvarna counterpart Brinkman says, “it’s all about ‘how fast can I get the job done?’”

Anundsen bought his first zero-turn in 2006. He was torn between that and a riding tractor. “I’m definitely glad I went with the zero-turn,” he says. “I cut an acre and half in an hour and 20 minutes. Prior to that it was three or four hours on a riding tractor.”

It’s true that zero-turn tractors cut faster than traditional lawn tractors, and that has changed the whole shape of the industry, Exmark’s Walters says. “But it’s not just about speed now. It’s about the quality of the cut, operator comfort, safety, discharge, all of those things are at the forefront of landscape contractors’ buying decisions.”

Walk-behinds to stand-ons

Walk-behind mowers aren’t as popular as they once were, Walters says, but Exmark has noticed that the company’s wide-area walks, big commercial mowers, are selling well. “They can go up to deck sizes of 60 inches,” he says. “They’re big machines, but they allow contractors to cut in places that are difficult,” such as steep hills.

“Over the years the market has flattened in this category, but it’s still popular because of its safety performance and quality of cut,” he says.

Dwyer says stand-on commercial mowers are beginning to make some movement in the market.

They’re much shorter than a typical rider, so contractors can fit more in their trailers and finish jobs more quickly.

Stand-ons have many advantages, says Anundsen. “If you can stand on the mower, you can go faster than you could with the walk-behind. You can access smaller areas and wetter areas.”

What the future holds

Going forward, mower manufacturers will continue to focus on making machines even more productive, safer and more durable. “And you would not have to look very far to see that environmental manufacturing is going to be at the forefront,” Walters says.





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Who knew? Winning is fun!

It finally happened! It took two decades, but I eventually won the outlaws' (in-laws') McNamara Fantasy Football League this year! Strike that. Actually, *we* won it — “we” being our oldest son, Mickey (17), me (the clueless Old Man helping run the front office) and the talented team we drafted, refined and fielded on a weekly basis.

A perennial bench warmer for the voracious St. Mark Lions in grade school, this nerd is obsessed with fantasy football.

Admittedly, part of my love of this fantasy game stems from unfulfilled childhood dreams. But the main reason I can't wait for fantasy football to begin each summer is it enables me to hone and measure my leadership skills without having to bear the risks and sleepless nights that typically accompany such a role.

Fantasy football teaches me “The Big 5” building blocks most winning business leaders excel at:

1 Recruiting — Only the best make the cut. If you don't want to watch the competition take home the prize, then hire and develop the best and brightest.

I've been playing fantasy football for 20 years. The first year, we picked our players out of a hat because so few of us knew how to separate the wheat from the chaff. Some in our league would argue that's still the case for me.

How is your recruiting? Is it hit or miss, or are you consistently attracting today's top talent?

A few notes to keep in mind:

▶ Unlike fantasy football, in the real world rarely do we get a clean hiring slate every year.

▶ No staff is set for life. Players move from team to team, up and down depth charts and on and off the waiver wire.

▶ Attracting all stars is a great start, but it's just Step 1.

2 Uniting — If you assemble the best players available and they don't gel into a true team, it means nothing. Case in point: Last year's Miami Heat. “The Dream Team” of Dwyane Wade, LeBron James and Chris Bosh were the talk of the NBA, but when the final shot clock registered 0, the trio had earned the same number of championships together.

3 Coaching — Spin gold from straw: Develop and direct each individual within your organization in such a way that he or she consistently performs to his/her full potential. And then do the same for your team as a whole.

4 Planning — No coach was ever criticized for being too prepared. Know your team's and your competitor's strengths and weaknesses — and devise plans to capitalize on them.

5 Execution — As the first head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, John McKay suffered through a 26-game losing streak — an NFL record that still stands 35 years later! After one of those losses, when a reporter asked McKay how he felt about his team's execution, he quipped, “I'm in favor of it.”



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Talkin'



Tech

with Jerry Corbett

Quali-Pro Technical Services Manager

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IM CAMPANELLA HAS a simple goal. He wants to be the dominant lawn care provider in his region.

“The Northeast, that’s our footprint right now,” says Campanella, owner of Nashua, NH-based Lawn Dawg.

Lawn Dawg, which operates in four states, has made four acquisitions since 2009 — the most recent one just last month. And Campanella is certainly not alone in the merger and acquisition market.

“2011 was a pretty good year for mergers and acquisitions in the industry in a lot of ways and kind of off in other ways,” says Ron Edmonds, president of The Principium Group.

It was good because of the deal that led to the sale of TruGreen Landcare.

“That was sort of a cloud over the industry in a sense,” Edmonds says. “Nobody knew what was going to happen. Having some resolution there really helped.”

While some of the larger Green

Industry players sat on the sidelines during 2011, many deals were completed. And while there are always more buyers than sellers, the gap narrowed.

“There are a lot of contractors kicking the tires on ‘what is my business worth?’ I’ve had more contractors ask me that question in the last year or two than in the previous five years,” says Jason Cupp, a Kolbe Certified Growth Consultant, former landscape business owner and a past president of the Professional Land-care Network (PLANET).

Whether it’s the economy pushing owners toward seeking the next stage in life or simply time to retire, many contractors are looking at ways to exit their enterprises. And plenty of people are interested in what they have to offer.

“The larger independents have become more active buying,” says Jim Mello, owner of Massachusetts-based Professional Business Consultants. “One of the reasons is some of the offers from the larger companies have

been a little bit less.”

Campanella and his equity partners have been quite active on the acquisition front, but the organization has been strategic about its candidates.

Campanella could meet his goal of becoming the Northeast’s most dominant lawn care company through time and organic growth, growing the customer base, slowly expanding into new areas or opening branches in new territories. But that’s not as easy as it once was.

“With the implementation of the federal Do Not Call Registry, it really rendered telemarketing ineffective. And it makes it much more expensive to start up from scratch,” Campanella says. “If we can acquire our way into a new market area, that gets you past that initial growth curve and gets us into a market with some stability.”

Growth is one reason to acquire a company. Providing new services or entering a new market are others.

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TAILOR-MADE GROWTH

“Any financial benefits a company hopes to gain will be eroded if there isn’t cultural compatibility.”

— JASON CUPP

Mergers and acquisitions provide business owners a way to strengthen their operations by stitching together complementary companies. BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

THE PERFECT FIT

(From left to right) Dan Cisz Jr. and Mark Kelbacher, 50/50 partners in Lush Lawn Service, sold their business to Jim Campanella earlier this year.



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Brickman entered the Southern California market in a big way, snapping up the Dworsky companies during the summer of 2010.

"We were in a number of different locations in California that they weren't in yet," says Dave Dworsky, owner of Dworsky Facilities Services. "It was an opportunity to take the company one step further in its market share. Divided we were somewhat conquerable, but together in a collected effort we were stronger."

Financing

One of the challenges to sealing any deal is figuring out how to pay for it. A company without pristine financials is going to have a difficult time getting money from a bank.

"It's a sign of the times. Everybody is more cautious," says Mello. "Banks are not lending to people to buy anything. They never did much of that in this business anyway."

But not all is doom and gloom for contractors seeking assistance. While

most small businesses aren't singing the praises of the current administration, one thing the government did do as part of its stimulus program was to prop up Small Business Administration loans.

Campanella tapped a pair of equity partners in 2009 to help with his expansion plans.

"They're very active in the process," Campanella says. "It's a team effort, and a team collaboration on making the decisions and reviewing the documents. They look at everything that I gather during the process."

According to Mello, the buying price is pretty wide, anywhere from 50% to 110% of gross sales. Many variables go in to deciding what that purchase price will be.

"To get the high end, that would be an unbelievable company with good pricing in a prime market," Mello says. "It also could be somebody who's not in a particular market as opposed to a (larger company) looking to buy it as a tuck in."

Other factors that affect the sale price include profitability, the manage-



Dave Dworsky (left) worked with Brickman's Mike Bogan to complete the sale of Dworsky's \$15 million-plus landscaping business, which gave Brickman entry into the Southern California marketplace.